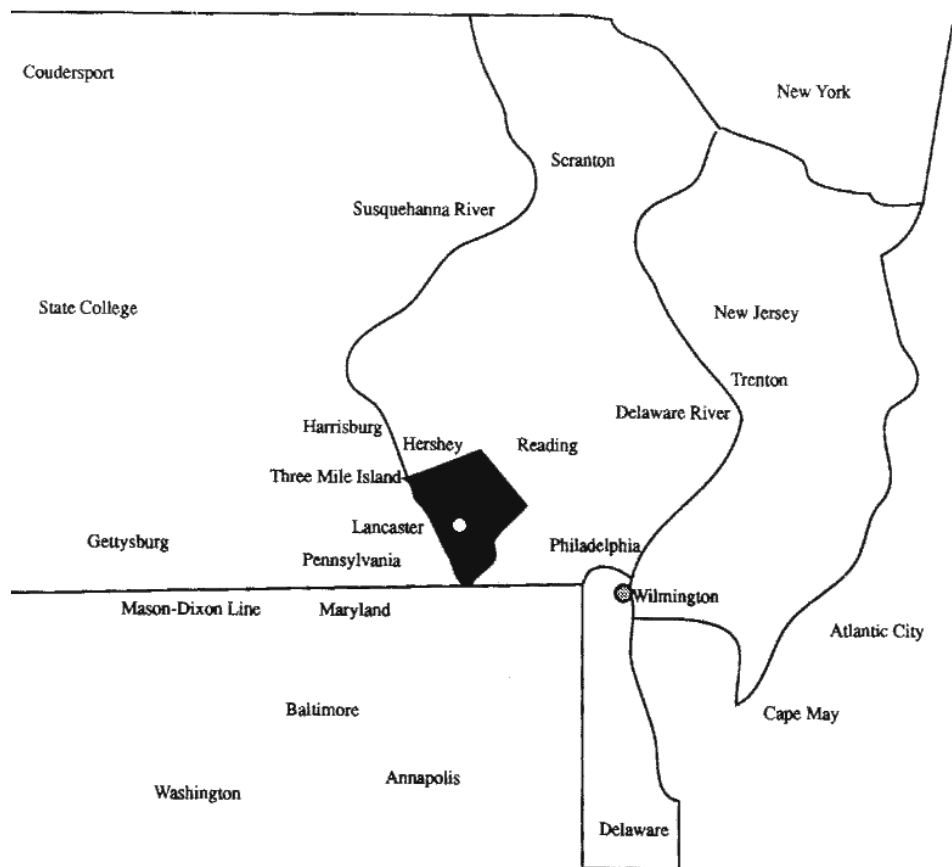


GUIDE TO THE
Amish
Country



GUIDE TO THE
*Amish
Country*

3RD EDITION

by Bill Simpson



PELICAN PUBLISHING COMPANY
Gretna 2003

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First edition, August 1992
Second edition, October 1995
Third edition, April 2003

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Simpson, Bill, 1950-

Guide to the Amish country / by Bill Simpson.— 3rd ed.
p. cm.

Includes index.

ISBN 1-58980-083-4 (alk. paper)

1. Amish Country (Pa.)—Guidebooks. I. Title.

F157.P44 S56 2003

917.48'150444—dc21

2002153158

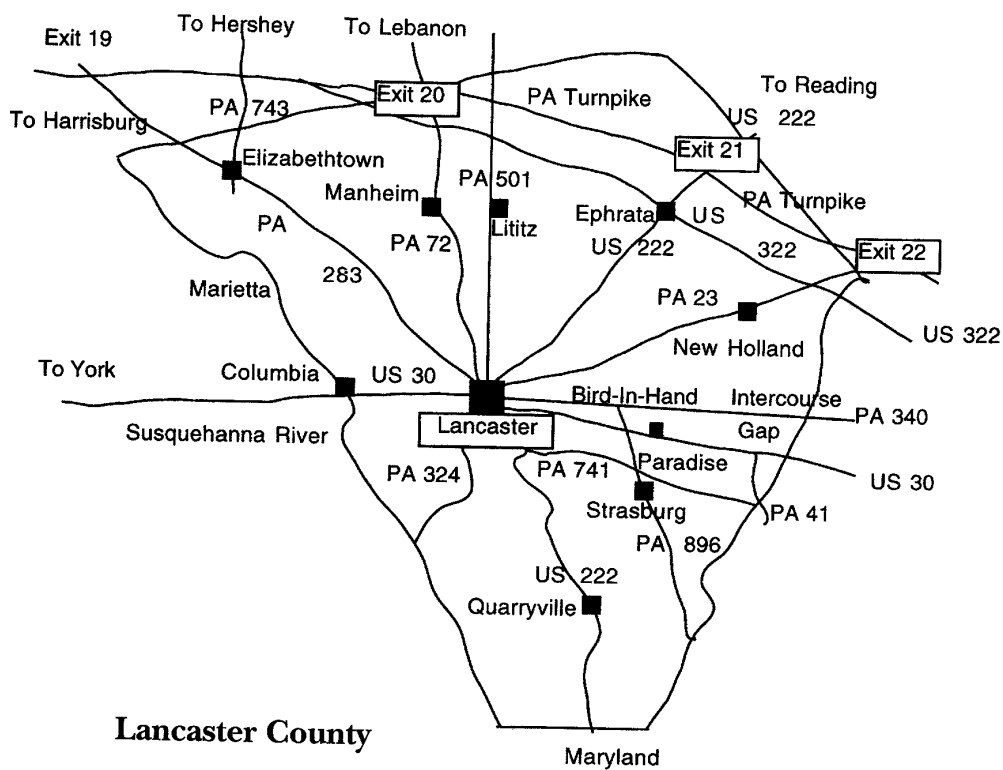


Printed in the United States of America

Published by Pelican Publishing Company, Inc.
1000 Burmaster Street, Gretna, Louisiana 70053

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Introduction

The Attraction of the Amish

In the world of tourist attractions, the Amish have a unique distinction. With the possible exception of the stars in Hollywood, the Amish are the only group of people who have become a tourist attraction. In other places, visitors come to see scenery, cities, beaches, theatres, shopping malls, amusement parks, mountains, and historical sites. In Lancaster County, visitors come to see the Amish people, and the Amish definitely aren't the stars of Hollywood.

The Amish don't dress like Hollywood stars, and they don't seek publicity. They avoid cameras because their religion teaches them that photography represents vanity. They do nothing to request attention, yet they've become a big tourist attraction. Given their choices, the Amish would choose not to be the objects of others' attention, but they're practical people, and they've learned to live with the attention and even to benefit from it.

Tourists represent a big market to which the Amish can sell their foods and other goods, which is somewhat ironic because the Amish religion forbids the acquisition of money and material, goods simply for the sake of having them or impressing one's neighbors.

So the Amish use their money to buy more farms and to

keep their families and communities together. God and family are the centers of Amish life, and it's their choice to focus on spiritual rather than material values that makes them so popular.

The attraction of the Amish lies in their strong faith, their seemingly simple lifestyles, and their selective use of much of the technology that defines life in modern America. Their lifestyle is different from the lifestyles of almost everybody else in the U.S.A., and that difference makes them interesting to other people.

Of course, it's not really accurate to say that they're completely different from other people. They dress differently and travel differently, but their goals are essentially the same as the goals of most other people: to live happily in this life and to do the same in the next life. They just happen to have chosen a road less traveled to reach their goals.

Their beliefs tell them that cars and other modern gadgets won't help them find happiness or salvation, but Amish life isn't about what they don't have. Instead, it's about what they do have. They have strong Christian faiths, strong families and communities, and their lives aren't really as simple as they may appear. The Amish still have bills and taxes to pay and families to rear, and they face the challenges of traveling in buggies in a world of fast cars and big trucks.

Amish lives still focus on God, family, and hard work, but their lives are definitely not the same as they were in the 1700s, as some writers like to romanticize. At the ends of many Amish driveways are little sheds that house telephones that they use for business. They use hospitals and doctors, and they do travel in cars, vans, buses, and trains. They just don't own cars, although even that statement comes with a caveat.

You might see a car or a pickup truck on an Amish farm, and it could belong to someone who lives there. The defining point of the Amish religion is adult baptism, so someone who has reached the legal Pennsylvania driving age of sixteen but who hasn't yet officially joined the church may own and operate a car or truck. On joining the church, however, the car must go.

The Amish are a totally religious society, but they do enjoy life. If your timing is right, you may see groups of Amish men playing softball at a park in Paradise. You'll know that it's an Amish team by the buggies around the field. On Whitmonday, fifty days after Easter, you may see the Amish playing croquet and not working at all. You may see them enjoying themselves at Dutch Wonderland Amusement Park or riding the Strasburg Railroad. The Amish work hard and pray hard, but they also enjoy their lives.

The Amish have a powerful work ethic, and because the farm economy is volatile and often weak, almost all Amish families have cottage industries—businesses that supplement their farm incomes. The most common of these businesses are woodworking and quilt-making, but you'll also find everything from metalworking to health-food stores on Amish farms. Because farms are expensive and scarce in Lancaster County, many Amish men no longer work as farmers. Instead, many work in manufacturing and construction.

A tip on buying directly from Amish businesses: You'll save money. Whether it's a quilt, a desk, or an order from a health-food store, you'll find lower prices on the farm than in the city or at the mall. *Example:* On a Saturday afternoon at Miller's Natural Foods on Monterey Road, the small parking lot often holds license plates from many states other than Pennsylvania. The people in those cars have found that they can save enough on their purchases to justify the trip to Lancaster County, and they can always enjoy some of the other attractions while they're in town.

Plus, shopping at Miller's is a distinctly different experience from shopping at the health-food store at the mall. At Miller's, all the workers are Amish. Sometimes they speak in Pennsylvania Dutch, a regional dialect that's a mix of German and English. And you'll find some interesting items at Miller's that you won't find in suburbia, such as Amish folk remedies and advertisements for live blood testing.

At some Amish businesses, you can pay by credit card. At

Riehl's Quilts and Crafts on Eby Road, Amish women weave quilts by hand, and customers arrive by the busload and pay with MasterCard. The Amish are very practical, and if accepting credit cards helps them earn money to keep their farms and their families intact, then they'll use credit cards.

As a rule, the Amish pass their farms down through their families, but when a family has many sons and only one farm, all the sons can't work on the same land, so some must either work off the farm or move to another area.

Because of the scarcity of land, the Amish from Lancaster County have been establishing new communities for many decades, in both neighboring counties and in other states. Lancaster County was the first Amish settlement in the country, so directly or indirectly, all Amish have links to Lancaster County.

Rumors occasionally arise that, because of the suburban sprawl in Lancaster County, the Amish are thinking of leaving en masse, but those rumors aren't true for many reasons.

First, Lancaster County is home. Like everyone else, the Amish have strong ties to home, and in their close community, the ties are extremely strong.

Second, it's good dirt. The soil of Lancaster County produces much better crops than the soil almost anywhere else. The climate is relatively mild, and in most years, rainfall is adequate.

The initial attraction to Lancaster County for the Amish was the soil. It's rich, limestone soil that produces bountiful crops, and the limestone also produces another major industry: quarries. Throughout Lancaster County, quarries produce large quantities of stone for buildings, highways, and many other uses, and the county has half a dozen streets named Quarry Road.

One unusual product made from Lancaster County stone is Diamond-Tex infield mix. Used on baseball and softball fields in many states, it comes from a quarry in eastern Lancaster County.

In Lancaster County, buying farms to keep them in agriculture is difficult because farmers often find themselves bidding against real-estate developers for land. Because suburban homes generally bring higher prices than corn and soybeans, developers often have deeper pockets than farmers do. Even without competition from developers, the Amish would have trouble finding enough farms in Lancaster County, simply because all the farmland is already in use. If you see a wooded hillside in a farming area, it means that the wooded area is too steep for farming.

Because of their powerful work ethic, Lancaster County Amish are relatively prosperous, and they can afford to buy more farmland. Unlike many Americans, they don't strive to earn lots of money so that they can sit around and do nothing. To the Amish, work is its own reward. It's one of the things that God put them here to do, and they do plenty of it.

So what's the attraction?

In the hectic world of modern America, a place where people travel at twelve miles per hour in horse-drawn buggies offers an opportunity to live vicariously at a slower pace. A place where barefoot children walk to one-room schools makes it easy to fantasize about leading a more relaxed life. A place where roadside stands overflow with produce directly from the garden and baked goods directly from the oven offers a food-shopping experience distinctly different from that of a suburban market.

For a visitor, it's easy to fantasize about life on the farm, but the reality of that life is long days of physical labor, which probably wouldn't appeal to people accustomed to the comforts of modern life.

Walking behind a team of horses all day is a life different from working at a desk, but the bigger difference between Amish life and life for most other Americans is philosophical. The Amish don't consider the acquisition of material wealth a worthy goal, and that's an idea that is foreign to most Americans.

The reality is that nobody joins the Amish. They're basically a closed society that grows not by recruiting new members but by having children. So it's intriguing and safe to look at them from the comfort of an air-conditioned car and to imagine leading their style of life. (If you want to get a true taste of farm life, try a farm vacation. Some farmers take in guests and let them see what the farm life really is. See "Lodging.")

Visitors don't make the conversion to the Amish religion, but the 1980s movie *Witness* portrayed a romance between an Amish woman and a non-Amish man. That's possible, but highly unlikely, and it's hard to imagine a sophisticated city guy marrying into an Amish family and moving to the farm.

So it's unlikely that any visitors will ever become Amish, but observing the Amish lifestyle is the attraction that draws visitors to Lancaster County and brings them back again and again.

The land itself is also an attraction. In summer, all is green, as the narrow country roads become mere asphalt ribbons through canyons of corn. The roads are winding and discourage fast driving, and on many roads, buggies and bicycles outnumber cars. In a seventy-miles-per-hour world, Lancaster County offers a pleasant twelve-miles-per-hour alternative.

Beyond the Amish

The Amish are Lancaster County's best-known and most visible attraction, but they're just one of many reasons why visitors flock to the area. Even without the Amish, Lancaster County has much to offer. It's a historically important region that has much to interest visitors, and in the past decade or so, Lancaster County has developed two new identities (theatre and shopping) that literally bring in visitors by the busload. In addition, Lancaster County has three excellent attractions (covered bridges, recreational bicycling, and outdoor recreation) that receive little publicity and thus attract few visitors. Add in railroads, antiques, and food, and you'll find plenty of reasons to enjoy a weekend or a week in Amish Country, even if you don't go looking for the Amish.

So whatever your pleasure may be, you're almost certain to find it in Lancaster County. (Well, the ocean isn't here.) So come and enjoy, but please be courteous. And remember, the Amish are real people leading real lives.

Visitor's Etiquette

The Amish would prefer not to be the objects of tourists' attention, but they've grown accustomed to it. Still, it's important to keep in mind that they're not actors, that their farms and businesses are workplaces, and that their homes are private.

Around Lancaster County, everyone has heard stories of tourists walking into an Amish home or becoming upset when the Amish wouldn't pose for pictures. Such incidents show a lack of understanding of who the Amish are and a lack of courtesy. Such an incident might also result in an injury, because farms, like many workplaces, can be dangerous. Farms don't have Employees Only signs, as some other businesses do, so visitors should always stay away from the working parts of a farm or a business on a farm.

Amish is a religion, and in that sense, the Amish are no different from Orthodox Jews, Hindus, or members of any other religious group who wear clothes that identify them with their religion. Few people would drive through a Jewish or Hindu neighborhood gawking and snapping pictures, but it happens all the time to the Amish.

Still, it's possible to be a polite visitor. Just treat everyone with respect and remember that the Amish frown on photographs that involve them.

Information Sources

Pennsylvania Dutch Convention and Visitors Bureau

501 Greenfield Road Lancaster (Greenfield Road exit of Route 30)

www.padutchcountry.com

This is the primary visitor's center in Lancaster County.

Amish Mennonite Information Center

Route 340, Old Philadelphia Pike, Intercourse

(717) 768-0807

Downtown Visitors Information Center

100 S. Queen Street, Lancaster

(717) 397-3531

Lititz Welcome Center

18 N. Broad Street (Route 501) (beside railroad tracks in restored train station)

(717) 626-8981

Mennonite Information Center

2209 Millstream Road, Lancaster (beside Tanger Outlets on Route 30 East)

(717) 299-0954, www.mennoniteinfoctr.com

Susquehanna Heritage Tourist and Information Center

5th and Linden streets, Columbia (at Route 441 exit of Route 30)

(717) 684-5249

Quick Facts

Emergencies—Dial 911

Time zone—Eastern

Alcoholic beverages—The legal age is 21. Bringing alcohol from other states is illegal. Taverns and distributors sell beer. Liquor is available only through state stores and by the drink in taverns and some restaurants.

Driving—Minimum age for drivers is 16.

Legal holidays— January 1, Martin Luther King’s birthday (third Monday in January), Presidents’ Day (third Monday in February), Memorial Day, July 4, Labor Day, Columbus Day (second Monday in October), Veterans Day (November 11), Thanksgiving, and Christmas

Note: Amish people do not celebrate secular holidays, only Christian ones.

Local Television Stations—Channel 8—WGAL, NBC; Channel 15—WLYH, UPN; Channel 21—WHP, CBS; Channel 27—WHTM, ABC; Channel 33—WITF, PBS; Channel 43—WPMT, FOX

Getting There

Lancaster County is close to most of the major cities on the East Coast. It’s 70 miles to Philadelphia and Baltimore, 110 to

Washington, and 160 to New York. The Pennsylvania Turnpike has two interchanges in Lancaster County and one a mile away. U.S. Route 30 is a busy road that runs through the county and provides easy access to Baltimore and Washington through its intersection with I-83 in York.

Amtrak serves Lancaster, and the county has an airport. Harrisburg International Airport, a much larger facility, is in Middletown, between Lancaster and Harrisburg.

Weather

Lancaster County has four distinct seasons, and the trend through the late 1990s and the years 2000-2002 was toward mild winters. The winter of 2001-2002 only brought 10 inches of snow, but the average is much more than that.

Winters can be very cold, and summers can be very hot. Basically, it's the same climate as there is in every other place at 40 degrees north latitude. Anything meteorological can happen, but overall, Lancaster's weather is pretty mild.

Colorful Names

How far is it from Intercourse to Paradise? In Lancaster County, it's about 3 miles, and the route will take you through a covered bridge.

Lancaster County has a collection of colorful names, such as

- Intercourse
- Paradise
- Blue Ball
- Bird-in-Hand
- White Horse
- Black Barren
- Fertility
- Pequea (not a colorful name but one whose pronunciation no one ever guesses correctly—it's *Peck' way*).

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