

Old Order Mennonites, Amish Lead Simple Lives

WASHINGTON. When William Penn invited Amish and Mennonite people to settle in his New World colony more than 250 years ago, there were no electric lights, telephones or automobiles.

Step into the homes of those who faithfully cling to their European religious roots today, and it seems as if these modern conveniences were taken for granted had not been invented. Their use is forbidden.

Old Order Amish and the most conservative Mennonites live the plainest lives imaginable. In this horse and buggy world, days are still measured out in planting and harvesting the land, family activities and church worship.

Clustered in Lancaster in southeastern Pennsylvania, these plain people have been blessed with rich soil and an ideal climate for farming. Rural Lancaster County is the most productive agricultural county in the East.

Follow Father's Footsteps

The driving ambition of most of the Old Order farm boys is to follow in their father's footsteps, and farm the land.

Perhaps the most important principle laid down by the 16th Century Dutch Anabaptist leader Menno Simons, from whom the Mennonites took their name, is one calling for a spiritual community living apart from the world and close to the soil. Anabaptists believe in adult baptism.

In the late 17th Century, Jacob Ammann took his followers, the Amish, out of the Mennonite church, primarily because it no longer shunned non-conforming

members in daily life as Simons had taught.

Among people for whom privacy is a part of their faith, it is rare to get an inside look at their lifestyle. Outsiders, whom the Amish call 'English', are avoided. However, writer Douglas Lee and photographer Jerry Irwin were allowed such an inside look for an article that appeared in the April issue of National Geographic.

On the Old Order Amish farm of the Stoltzfus family, the men found six-year old Samuel Stoltzfus already adept at steering a mule straight down the furrows of the family garden. Samuel's 17-year old cousin, Lloyd, was guiding the harrow. Lloyd lives and works on the farm as a 'hired boy.'

An arrangement used on many farms, the hired boy system provides needed labor for the farmer and work for the boys who are old enough to be out of school, but too young to farm or work full-time jobs. Formal education for the Old Order children ends with the eighth grade. The hired boys' wages are paid directly to the parents who start bank accounts for their children when they are born. Money in the accounts is turned over to the boy when they come of age.

Rumsprings For Teenagers

When neighbors gather to harvest wheat on an Amish farm, "the big ones pitch it up, the middle ones stack it and the little guys ride," a "middle one" explained to Lee.

In the middle of an Amish kitchen, lighted only by a butane lantern, a 16-year old girl presses a dress she made herself, using an iron heated

on a propane stove.

At her age, 'rumsprings' or 'running around' begins. This is the term for the freedom the Amish allow teenagers before they are expected to join the faith, marry and begin their life 'in church.'

On a family farm of a Wegner Mennonite member of a conservative congregation, 13-year old Ella Shirk hadn't had her picture taken except for formal family portraits until photographer Irwin arrived. Many Old Order people avoid posing for photographs because they fear they might seem proud rather than plain in the eyes of others.

When a Reidenbach Mennonite boy becomes 17, he starts going to hoedowns; gatherings in church members' homes where young boys and girls sing and square dance to harmonica music. The boy's father buys him a 'courting buggy' and a horse and pays his expenses until he reaches 21 when he is expected to marry someone from the church and settle down in the area.

The unhurried Old Order world is being pressured by Lancaster's growing industry and housing developments, a booming tourist market that brought some 5,000,000 visitors to the county last year and by higher land prices.

Many Old Order farmers who try to bid for nearby land for their children are forced to subdivide or watch their children move away from home to take jobs.

Success for the plain people of Lancaster, Lee concluded, "means children who join the church and carry on raising the most important crop on the farm—the next generation."



By Jerry Irwin
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Astride the family mule at age 6, Samuel Stoltzfus is already old enough to do chores on an Old Order Amish farm in Pennsylvania's Lancaster County. His 17-year-old cousin Lloyd guides the harrow. On Old Order farms tractors are not used for field work, and boys are expected to follow in their fathers' footsteps and farm the land.

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Calendar Of Church Events

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Father Graves To Be Honored

There will be an informal pot luck luncheon celebrating Father Andrew Graves 50th anniversary of ordination into the priesthood. It will be at the Jesuit Residence in Hot Springs on July 7, between 1-5 p.m. For more information, call 656-8295 or 649-3290.

Saturday Night Singing

The regular fifth Saturday night singing at the Shoal Hill Freewill Baptist Church will be held on June 30th at 7 p.m. The Rev. James Mason invites everyone to attend.

Decoration Service Set

The annual decoration of the J. Lee Henderson Cemetery on Davis Chapel Church Rd. will be held on July 8 at 2 p.m.

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UPS and DOWNS

A roller coaster is an amusement. Ups and downs can be thrilling when you're only along for the ride.

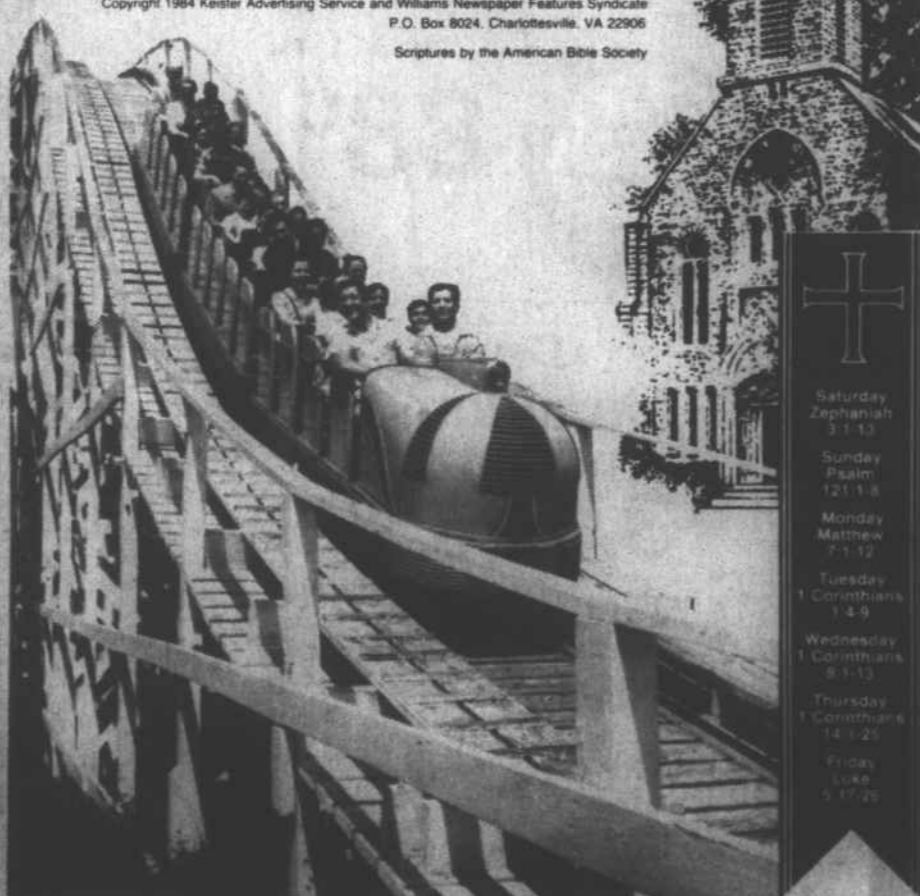
Life brings a succession of ups and downs. How we meet them is a rather accurate measure of that intangible thing we call character. Most people discover the ups aren't all fun—the downs never are.

For in this life none of us is simply along for the ride. We have obligations and responsibilities, opportunities and duties, challenges and concerns.

All of us need the spiritual enrichment that effectively molds strong character. Faith in God and its earnest expression through worship and Christian service prepare us for the ups and downs of life.

Be among the millions who are discovering the higher and deeper dimensions that really make life thrilling. This week attend the church or synagogue of your choice.

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Saturday
Zephaniah 3:1-13
Sunday
Psalm 121:1-8
Monday
Matthew 23:1-12
Tuesday
1 Corinthians 4:4-9
Wednesday
1 Corinthians 8:1-13
Thursday
1 Corinthians 14:1-25
Friday
Luke 5:17-26

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