

THE RUSH COUNTY AMISH

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This is the 22nd article written to commemorate the Rush County Bicentennial. Forty-eight years ago I wrote a graduate paper about Amish education. The paper was entitled...The Educational Philosophy of the Old Order Amish in Rush County, Indiana.

In this current article I hope to examine the scope of Amish history in Rush County and to some degree how education may or may not have changed.

Since 1822 Rush County has been blessed with a variety of religious denominations that settled here. William Laughlin started the first Presbyterian Church in Rushville. The most numerous churches and worshippers were of the Disciples of Christ faith (Christian Church). There were also Baptists, Episcopalians, Methodists, Nazarenes, and Roman Catholics. One group of note was the Quaker faith (Friends). That denomination built meeting houses primarily in the western half of Rush County. The Quakers were extremely active in the Underground Railroad. Consequently an African American settlement north of Carthage established the first African American Methodist Episcopal Church in Indiana.

Then came the Amish. In 1969 a small group of Amish families investigated the idea of settling in southern Rush and northern Decatur counties. At the time land was available for \$380-\$400 per acre. By 1970 the Amish were moving to Rush County. They were farmers for the most part. They owned draft horses instead of a tractor, a horse and buggy instead of a car, and believed in providing their own power/lighting sources; not public utilities.



So, when did the Amish faith begin? The Old Order Amish faith was an outgrowth of the Reformation Anabaptist Movement in central Europe. Anabaptists in the 1500's were anti-Catholic and believed in a "rebaptism" in Christ. In 1535 Menno Simons, a former Catholic Priest from the Netherlands, became the leader of one group of Anabaptists that believed in the writings of Paul. They also believed in Jesus as the only "Herr". In 1692 Jacob Ammann revived Menno Simons beliefs in the midst of overwhelming persecution by Catholics in Alsace-Lorraine. Ammann stressed the need to shun those that had left the Anabaptist movement. So technically the Amish are named in tribute to both Ammann and Menno, the Old Order Amish of the Mennonite Church. Their beliefs are basically those of Menno Simons.

Barbara Yoder was the first to bring the Amish ideals to America. Her husband died on the way over, and she lived in America 28 years before more Amish immigrated. William Penn helped secure the first Amish community for her and others in 1727.

There were later some divisions of the faith. A division of the Amish in Ohio in 1876 came about over how to baptize believers in Christ. Most of the Amish that came to Indiana believed in sprinkling new members.

In 1984, A Rush County Retrospect article written by Laura Schmidt described some of the Amish convictions: “The young men do not enter military service but serve their time in civilian work, mostly hospitals. The Amish do not serve on juries, do not vote, and do not seek political office. They do not file lawsuits against others. They do not buy life or health insurance. They have their own church insurance where each member pays in a certain amount regularly. In case of a major fire or other disaster, a special or extra assessment may be made on each member.”

Schmidt went on to describe Amish education: “The Amish school in Rush County is much like schools used to be in Grandfather’s day. It has two rooms, a full basement which serves as a recreation room, and an upper story where the school books and school records are kept. They teach the basics including math, reading, English, vocabulary, health, history, social studies, and a few other subjects. German is always taught once a week. There are two teachers, one for each room. Christmas is always a big event for the school.”

In 2022 the Rush/Decatur Amish community has three church groups and three Bishops. The Amish still worship in the homes of its members, with worship services being held every week. Church services usually last three hours and are given in Pennsylvania Dutch, a dialect that may differ from one community to the next.

Other faiths are having problems filling the pews (benches). The same problem exists for the Amish. Those that leave the Amish faith tend to be younger adults under the age of 30. The apparent difference is when the Amish leave the faith they also leave a way of life.

There are recent allowances that were not used many years ago. Bicycles, cell phones, forklifts and Bobcats, and solar energy are now a part of everyday Amish life. One question sometimes asked is: “Do the Amish pay taxes?” The answer is yes, they pay taxes just like everyone else.



Today there are two Amish schools, both of them in Rush County. The curriculum has varied little in the last 50 years. But, the Amish Agreement with the State of Indiana now releases students from their compulsory education at the age of 15. So, each student has an eighth grade education, plus two years of vocational learning. Classes are conducted in the English language, but a class in German is still taught.

A three person board governs each school district. As is the case in most public schools, finding qualified teachers is difficult for Amish schools too. Consignment auctions are held twice a year to help offset the expenses of the two schools.

There are currently over 85 families in the Rush/Decatur Amish community. Amish families will average four-six children as compared to larger families in the past. In 1976 five families moved to West Union, Ohio. Then, a few years ago several Rush County Amish moved to Mays Lick, Kentucky.



Older Amish lament the good old days when they farmed with horses but know they can't grain farm big enough to be profitable in today's farm economy. Some Amish still raise cattle and farm a little, but most cash rent their ground.

Historically the breeding of Standardbred horses has been a part of the Amish economy. The Shrock family stood the stallion Whitefish Falls for many years, and the Coblenz family stood ABC Garland. Today Michael Detweiler is well known for breaking race horses, and his brother Marlin shoes Standardbred race horses for several stables.

Students from the Milroy Amish community have prepared a Milroy Amish community calendar for 2022. The calendar features several drawings of Milroy Amish businesses drawn by the students. Featured businesses are: Troyer's County Store, Scenic View Books and More, Detweiler Cabinets, Milroy Shoes, Wagler Furniture, Hoosier Vinyl Products, E.J. Welding, Hershberger Cabinets, Hoosier Pallet and Mulch, Benco Poly Film, Milroy Building Supplies, Sunrise Greenhouse, Tree City Metal Sales, and Emma's Flowers. The calendar lists the birthdays of the Amish community and also gives their year of birth. By my count 402 people are listed, and the largest birthday months are June, July, and January.

Other Amish businesses in the community include Rebecca's Flowers, Country Side Hardware, The Spindle Shop, Rush County Wood, and Milroy Pallet.

All in all, the future for the Amish community in Rush County looks promising. Keeping the faith may be a challenge at times, but that has always been the case. Those that keep the faith are to be admired.

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