

ECONOMIC PRAGMATISM: THE IOWA AMISH AND THE VISION OF COMMUNAL COHERENCE IN LATE 20TH CENTURY AMERICA

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how members of one Amish settlement in southern Iowa have attempted to broaden their economic activities in an effort to maintain their religiously based community. The Amish dress in a plain 19th century style and rely on horses for their work and transportation needs, and, on the surface at least, eschew the modern ways of the world. Though it is readily apparent that the long held perception of a cloistered life is a myth. The Amish have managed to push their communal strictures to the limit. At the same time it is apparent that it has been a daunting task at best for the Amish to attempt to maintain their cultural homogeneity in an economy dominated by sweeping technological and social changes. The Amish frequent many of the same retail stores as their "other world neighbors," have availed themselves of modern means of transportation to travel great distances to visit relatives or to attend funerals and weddings, and in the winter some, especially the elderly, spend the harsher months in Florida as do their "English" counterparts. Within Amish communities there have been signs of conflicts that have had less to do with theological questions but more with efforts to cling to old customs. As the paper points out, the Amish have been wedded to an impossible exegesis given the modernizing influences of the surrounding world.

The very mention of the word Amish conjures up an image of a quaint folk leading a secluded communal and pastoral existence. To many minds the Amish, or Pennsylvania Dutch as they are popularly known, reside in and around Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. The truth, however, is that the Amish, who continue to dress in a plain 19th century style and rely on horses for their work and transportation needs, and who on the surface at least, eschew the modern ways of the world surrounding their neatly tended farmsteads, are found in numerous colonies across the United States, Canada, central and South America. The Amish can be characterized as family based, ethnically and religiously homogenous, tending towards subsistence agriculture, inclined to technological development, innovators of agricultural techniques, having moderate to good levels of literacy, favoring early marriage, and enjoying a statistically insignificant divorce rate, high levels of fertility, low infant mortality, and long life spans. They do not participate in the political life of the surrounding community nor that of the society in which they find themselves, but instead adhere to a fundamental religious dogma which calls for a closed religious community presided over by the Bishop who in turn is assisted by a group of elders. This, at least, is the way things are supposed to be. The reality, though,

is that it has been recognized for some time now that it has proven to be difficult, at best, for the Amish to maintain their distinct way of life.

This paper will examine the attempt by members of one Amish community in southern Iowa to broaden their economic activities in an effort to maintain their religiously based communities. At the outset, one needs to understand that the long held perception of a cloistered life is a myth. The Amish have managed to push their communal strictures to the limit. At the same time it has been apparent to some outside observers and many Amish themselves that it has been a daunting task to attempt to maintain their cultural homogeneity in an economy dominated by sweeping technological and social changes.¹ The Amish have frequented many of the same discount and grocery stores as their "other world neighbors," and have availed themselves of modern means of transportation to travel great distances to visit relatives or to attend funerals and weddings, and in the winter some, especially the elderly, have in recent decades begun to spend the harsher months in Florida much like some of their "English" counterparts. Within Amish communities there have always been signs of strife and contradictions, especially when it involves the "Ordnung" or religious standards. However, these seem to have become more pronounced in recent decades.

These conflicts did not have had their genesis in theological questions but have all along been tied to efforts to cling to old customs. It might seem to some, that by sanctifying old customs the Amish have formalized the wrong things.² One could argue that they have become wedded to an impossible exegesis given the modernizing influences of the surrounding world. Yet outsiders continue to think of them as a people imbued with a stern religious ethos. This, though, is part of a mythos, which evokes a golden age, which exists less as past fact than future promise leading to blurred secular and religious understandings. Historically, then, the Amish community of faith should be viewed more as an ideological mode rather than a theological reality.

Still the Amish have had champions such as Walter Kollmorgen and John A. Hostetler. In 1942 Kollmorgen hailed the Amish as the most stable community in America praising them in particular for their ability to withstand the destabilizing effects of technology and urbanization.³ Hostetler underscored Kollmorgen's optimism when he argued that the Amish serve as a model for rural stability.⁴ And while they were ignorant of economic theory, their agrarian principles were sound.⁵

Regardless of perceived stability, structural problems have been evident for much of their existence and compounding the problem is the fact that the Amish never developed a universal code of conduct to which each district must adhere. Instead the governance of each district is left up to the leadership of that district. The result of this can be seen in the variance of communal guidelines across the greater Amish community of faith. The case of Irving Gingerich an Amish transplant from an Indiana community to a southern Iowa community serves as an example of the regulatory diversity among Amish districts. In his former district in Indiana a number of Amish men worked in manufacturing jobs. They were allowed to ride bicycles to work or to the pick up point where the bus from the factory would meet them. In the church districts in and around Drakesville

ECONOMIC PRAGMATISM: THE IOWA AMISH

it was against the "Ordnung" from the very beginning to ride bicycles. That rule remains in effect today. The point is that Gingrich had to give up the conveyance when he moved to Drakesville, Iowa.⁶ This, though, is not an isolated case. In the Amish community in Florida, for example, three wheeled cycles are a common site. The reason is that many of the residents are part-time, winter residents. It would be awkward to maintain horses and buggies there for only part of the year. Not all the part-time residents who enjoy this privilege in Florida are accorded the same rights in their home communities. The upshot is that the Amish have had to be flexible in making the necessary adjustments when moving between communities.

Over time there have been changes, some subtle, others more apparent, which have brought many Amish closer to the ways of the modern world. Moreover, there has been the desire by the younger generation, and this is particularly true of a number of young people in the Drakesville area, to "go modern" when the old generation dies out. Some have been less patient and have moved up the ladder to join nearby Mennonite congregations. Indeed, there have been frequent departures, and sometimes whole families have made the transition from being Amish to becoming Mennonites.⁷ The latter opted long ago to adopt modern technology in farming and conveniences in their personal lives. This has proven to be enticing for some who were eager to adopt modern technology while retaining their Anabaptist connections. The movement upward, which the Old Order Amish term "gone high" has created a certain amount of tension between the Amish and Mennonites.⁸

Those who opted to adhere to the strict standards of the old order Amish, faced problems other than the seductive allure of modernity. Among these is the population density, not only within their respective communities, but also in the world around them. Amish farmers, much like their "English" counterparts have also been affected by market prices, fuel costs, and the lack of productive land. The consequence is that the Amish have had a hard time making ends meet by relying on farming as a primary means of income. Many have attempted to supplant their income by developing a cottage industry utilizing family labor. The result, though, was that farming began to provide a secondary income for many Amish families. Old timers such as Rob Schlabach, an Amish farmer from Millersburg Ohio, view this trend with dismay. Schlabach argues that it is not a "good thing" to have fathers leaving the home for nine or more hours a day.⁹ He is especially concerned about the tendency of some Amish enterprises to become industrialized and lose their smallness which, he maintains, will lead to a weekend mentality of "Saturdays of for fun." According to Schlabach this pursuit of material possessions while neglecting spiritual growth is a threat to the plain simple faith of the Amish because it strikes at the core values of "thriftiness, humility, simplicity and church order."¹⁰ The Amish need, so Schlabach insists, "honest God fearing couples who want to live and work with their children, maintaining simplicity and contentment rather than planning on how to build a small business empire and become a millionaire or be able to take life as easy as is possible and permissible for an Amish man!"¹¹ This kind of mentality represents a potentially dangerous individualism that has already begun to tear at the

ESSAYS IN ECONOMIC AND BUSINESS HISTORY (2002)

very fabric of Amish society. These seeming transgressions, however, have been symptoms rather than the cause of the problem. Greater reflection should show that the culprit has been human nature itself. It is the desire for material improvement, and an instinctive dislike of restraint, whether of one's personal conduct or one's freedom of thought or one's conscience that has undermined the foundations of the Amish Community of faith.

One of the earliest Amish settlers in Drakesville, Iowa and a good example of an attempt at establishing a diversified cottage industry is Menno Kuhns. He and his family migrated to Iowa from Missouri during the early 1970s. He was one of the first Amish carpenters to contract his services to outsiders. His primary income, at the time, was derived from his dairy herd. While he was employed away from home his family pursued other entrepreneurial interests. His wife baked goods, which she sold on Saturday mornings in Ottumwa, Iowa. Daughter Barbara, a schoolteacher, dressed chickens, and son John built buggies in his father's shop. Menno Kuhns' earliest projects took him to Ormanville, some 13 miles away, but within time he provided services in Ottumwa and ultimately some distance beyond Ottumwa. For each project he hired a number of young Amish carpenters. Initially customers were required to pick him and his crew up in Drakesville and bring them home again at night. By 1985 he, and other contractors as well, started to hire "English" drivers to deliver them to the site. There were other changes. During Kuhns' early days as a contractor he asked his customers to pay for the construction materials used on their projects as he purchased them. Payment for his services was due at the end of each week. By 1985, however, he provided customers with formal project proposals and he carried the financial burden of the contract until it was completed. Only then did he present the customer with an itemized bill. His reputation grew and over the years many of his customers hired him for additional projects. He frequently brought along one or two of his sons. Menno's son Herman and son in law Herman Gingerich ran a sawmill approximately 4 miles southeast of Drakesville. Whenever possible Menno Kuhns, expressing the Amish devotion to mutual aid, would purchase lumber for ongoing projects from their.

The number of Amish contractors has grown since Menno Kuhns first offered his services in the early 1980s. Among these are his son Jacob and a number of his erstwhile apprentices. In the early days the names of those offering construction services was spread by word of mouth, but in more recent years there has been a proliferation of business signs in Amish country. Among the numerous roadside advertisements are those advertising the services of Mid-West Truss, an Amish owned and operated pre-fabrication shop, or the modest sign advertising the services of Yutzy Construction, Yoder Glass and Windows, E & N Woodworking, Yoder Builders, Gingerich Trenching, Dutch Building Center, and Mast Vinyl Windows. The latter two each have recently added a telephone to their advertisements in local papers, though in both cases calls are processed by an answering service.¹²

In addition to erecting billboards many of these businesses began, as early as 1980, to sell name brand products. Gingerich Trenching acquired a distributorship for Chimtek, a high temperature masonry chimney system. Mast Vinyl Windows in addition to in-

ECONOMIC PRAGMATISM: THE IOWA AMISH

stalling custom built vinyl windows also began to sell Little Giant Folding and Extension Ladders. Dutch Building Center, an example of diversification among Amish retailers, opted to sell a variety of brand name products, among these Heartland vinyl siding, Westech vinyl fence, vinyl windows and certainted shingles.¹³

While some businesses opted to act as outlets for national brands, others sought to provide services beyond the community. Amish saw mills are an excellent example of efforts to tap a broader market. A number of mills have been in operation around Drakesville over the years, and while they have catered mainly to their brethren, Herman Kuhns discovered back in the early 1980s that he could make a good deal of money turning the finished lumber into pallets. These were easily sold to shippers in southern Iowa. To run such an operation required the use of forbidden equipment such as forklifts. To get around the church restrictions governing the ownership of self-propelled rubber tired equipment the Amish owner would take on a non-Amish partner who "owns" and operates the equipment. Herman Kuhns had acquired a forklift for his sawmill, but when church elders rebuked him for the purchase he hired an outsider and "transferred" ownership of the equipment to him. While it was not a *de jure* transaction, the elders of the church nevertheless appeared to be satisfied with the "apparent" transfer. In another sawmill, about 5 miles southwest of Drakesville the owner of the mill solved the problem of technology by mounting a crane on a flatbed railroad car running on a length of track. A winch on either end of the track pulls the contraption forward or backward. Similar, though more sophisticated, is the equipment put into operation by the sawmill west of Drakesville. The difference between the self propelled forklift and the railroad car assembly is that the latter runs on steel wheels and is moved by a stationary motor. The crane is attached to the car and therefore immobile. In many church districts stationary motors have been in use for several decades, but self propelled vehicles and wheels with rubber tires have not been allowed. The point is that the Amish have developed a penchant for technological innovation in order to circumvent the finer points of church law.¹⁴

While some Amish entrepreneurs have sought to take advantage of contracting and related opportunities, others opened retail and specialty businesses, such as Drakesville Fabrics, Grabers, Yoder Quilts and Crafts or Fox River Buggies. In these endeavors they catered not only the needs of their respective communities, but those of the "English" as well. Drakesville Fabrics, for example, was established by Elizabeth Kuhns in 1997. While it is a more recently established business it is an example of what some Amish have been doing for a great many years. The store operated by Elizabeth Kuhns offers fabrics, toys, shoes, mittens, Bibles, thread, vitamins, and the like. Her husband, who has retired from the contracting business, and her daughter Mary, frequently assist Elizabeth Kuhns. When asked about how others in the Amish community have reacted to her family's success, Mary admitted that the Amish had their problems with jealousy and the like, but said that they were human too.¹⁵

Lavern Graber, whose establishment has been dubbed by some Amish as a mini Wal-Mart, deals in dry goods, can goods, some perishables, and hardware items. The perishables are kept in a refrigerator powered by a gasoline engine. The electronic cash

ESSAYS IN ECONOMIC AND BUSINESS HISTORY (2002)

register on the front counter is powered by a solar panel mounted on the roof of his store. Skylights provide interior lighting, as in other Amish establishments. Graber caters to an Amish and "English" clientele with some non-Amish costumers coming from as far as 30 miles away. Like many other Amish businesses he advertises in the *Wapello County Shopper*. It should be pointed out that the *Wapello County Shopper* serves Wapello County, Iowa. The significance is that the Amish never established themselves in Wapello County. To be sure, many customers who have responded to his advertisements over the years are non-Amish customers. By and large his prices have remained below those of his competitors in Ottumwa. His stock turns over in about a week's time. The reason that his prices have been lower is that the goods he purchased were usually part of cargo damaged in truck or railroad accidents. The quality of the merchandise, though, has not been an issue. Graber established himself in the retail business because he preferred to work near his home and recently noted that Schlabach had it right when he cautioned against becoming too worldly. Though he conceded that it was difficult to remain within the community when so much of the income over the years has been generated from without.¹⁶ His father, an elder in his church and one of the only Amish in the Drakesville area able to read high German, has been making custom furniture for over two decades. Though Graber never advertised, and runs his business from a shop behind his house. There are several other furniture businesses in the area all of which have developed an outside clientele. Items for sale, over the years, have included interior furniture, outside furniture, and small outbuildings. E & N Woodworking south of Drakesville limited is offerings to an array of outdoor furniture, while T-Corner Woodworking, owned by Irving Gingerich, located northeast of Drakesville stocked curio cabinets, dining room tables and chairs, hutches, bedroom furniture, end, coffee, and sofa tables; clocks, hall trees; lazy susans; quilt racks, wall hangings, children's rocking chairs, glider rockers and much more. The owner decided to advertise in the *Wapello County Shopper* in order to reach as many customers as possible. The contents of the advertisement changed from one edition to the next so as to reflect the items in stock at a given time.

One ought to note that not everything sold in the T-Corner establishment was crafted by the owner or his employees. Indeed, a good many items, especially the curio cabinets were obtained from outside manufacturers and offered for sale in the establishment. While this may not mean much to an outsider, there has been a long standing rule among the Amish that in southern Iowa they are to sell only those items they produced themselves. Menno Kuhns noted this in 1984 when he stated that a neighbor was selling Muscatine melons at a roadside stand. The problem, as Kuhns viewed it at the time, was that the young man in question purchased an entire truckload of melons from growers in Muscatine. This was vexing to some in the Amish community since the young man gave the impression that they were grown on an Amish farm. He never stated that he had grown them on his farm, but the fact that he failed to mention where he obtained them caused some to have grave concerns.¹⁷ The fact of the matter is that most Amish storeowners still sell items that they acquire from wholesalers. A scrutiny of the shelves at Drakesville Fabrics and the Graber store, just to mention a few, shows that the over-

ECONOMIC PRAGMATISM: THE IOWA AMISH

whelming majority of the items sold were mass produced in non-Amish factories and also available in stores in nearby cities.

Perhaps the most extreme examples of teaming up with outsiders are those of Ori Helmuth, an Amish farmer, who for a time ran a chicken feeding operation, and Titus Wagler, whose enterprises have taken him far beyond his community and the state of Iowa. Helmuth concluded an agreement with a chicken processing company whereby the company provided the equipment, facilities, electricity, and the chickens, while he provided the labor for the operation. Technically, Helmuth did not own the modern conveniences, but it serves as another example of how the Amish have found ways around church restrictions to make a profit.

The case of Titus Wagler, however, is unusual for two reasons. The first is the fact that his enterprise extends beyond the borders of the state. The second reason is because of the way in which the business evolved. At the same time his success reinforces the notion that the Amish pursued business ventures as a way to maintain their way of life and that through it all they have remained devoted to mutual aid. Indeed, it points up the willingness of his neighbors in the Drakesville community and Amish communities in other states to stand ready to help him get back on his feet after he was paralyzed as a result of a diving accident in a farm pond. Wagler, an example of the quintessential Amish entrepreneur, wanted to become self-sufficient and looked to direct marketing ventures as a way to reach his objective. He started modestly by selling Buckley's Cough Syrup, which he imported from Canada. After this he took on a line of fire extinguishers. Before Wagler settled on a particular brand of extinguisher he wanted to be sure that the extinguisher had a Underwriter Laboratory listing and a rating of at least 10 B:C.¹⁸ Ultimately he chose to market a product produced by Amerex.

Initially Wagler considered selling Halon extinguishers, because, as he put it "they are very good... they are dependable, efficient, and effective."¹⁹ The only drawback was the price, which he said amounted to "about eight times as much as a comparable powder extinguisher."²⁰ When he searched for a less costly product he discovered the Amerex extinguisher, "a quality product [with] a U.L [listing]" and a guarantee [which] sold for \$55.00.²¹ The price was not too high and he was still be able to make a nice profit. Besides, customers, as his father noted, were getting a lot more for their money because the Amerex extinguisher is refillable.

Wagler set up meetings at various homesteads near Drakesville, and then in other states. At these meetings he sold to Amish and non-Amish alike. Each time he set up a meeting he also took along a supply of Buckley's cough syrup. Fire extinguisher sales went so well that he rose to the rank of direct distributor with Amerex. He subsequently added Meadowfresh, a group of products sold under a multi-level marketing plan, to his repertoire. Meadowfresh is a dried whey powder used for making a drink resembling milk, though it is lower in cholesterol than milk. It can also be used in baking. Meadowfresh also produces Sassy Six, a fruit drink made of 6 different juices. Wagler noted that this "is the real stuff, better than anything else on the market."²² He also decided to market a battery fencer imported from New Zealand. His reason for selling

ESSAYS IN ECONOMIC AND BUSINESS HISTORY (2002)

this particular brand was that it had “some definite advantages over those made in the U.S....[T]hey have a lower voltage and thus [are] less likely to short out...But they deliver a much stronger shock... One time is enough for most animals, they don't test them the second time.”²³ Another advantage, he pointed out, was “that they will kill weeds that grow up against the wire, without shorting out the shock.”²⁴ As his sales flourished and his reputation grew, representatives from a number of companies sought him out to take on their product line because his reputation, so they said, was a guarantee for sales. Wagler, however, was careful about which product he choose to market.²⁵

Many of the entrepreneurs in the Amish community around Drakesville were unable to resist the temptation of branching out, still there were some who sought to restrict the scope of their ventures and opted to remain closer to the ideal of selling products they produced. One, L & L Greenhouse is located southeast of Drakesville, another, Gingerich Strawberry Farm & Greenhouse operated by Herman Gingerich, located southwest of Drakesville, was established in 1992 and has enjoyed considerable success. It has been particularly popular with non-Amish customers, and in an effort to reach as broad a clientele as possible, the owner decided to advertise in local papers during the spring and summer. Recently Gingerich added two new greenhouses and a customer services area. While the business has done well, Gingerich, who is quite innovative but has been reluctant to surrender to modern conveniences, maintains a modest demeanor when discussing the growth of his enterprise. He continues to farm and has no plans to expand beyond the seasonal services he provides. Recently, though, he has added a line of hand crafted, old style, hickory furniture, among the items he sells are rockers, tables, and flower stands. He enjoys the fact that he can work at home and have the whole family involved. To his thinking, this is the way it should be among the Amish, and he is concerned about the expansion of some enterprises that take the men away from the home for longer and longer periods of time. As he put it, “hard work brings rewards in the end.”²⁶ His wife echoed similar sentiments when she said that the “secret to Amish success is hard work, family, and lots of help”²⁷ Menno Kuhns also laments the changes taking place. He worries in particular about what the future holds for his grandchildren. Kuhns recently stated that it will be hard for them to make it as a community of faith in a world that is fast encroaching on them²⁸

It has been difficult at best for the Amish to find a way to adapt to modern life because of the internal and external factors bringing about change. To survive economically they have had to make a number of adjustments, and then, too, they have found themselves, time and time again, at odds, especially over such issues as education, with the overarching state structure in their determination to maintain an independent way of life. Moreover, they are not exempt from paying taxes nor are they exempt from charging sales taxes for the goods and services they provide.

While the intrusion by state regulatory bodies has not been welcome, the impact of governmental regulations has had some beneficent effects. State authorities, for example, required that phones be installed in every Amish schoolhouse. There was little, if any protest, at what might otherwise be seen as a challenge to their autonomy. As it was,

ECONOMIC PRAGMATISM: THE IOWA AMISH

members of the community quite happily learned to make use of the telephones in the schools. The use of the telephone is indeed, a paradox. The Amish have been, and still are prohibited, by church regulations, from having telephones in their homes. This, so the reasoning went, would be too convenient. Still they adapted to the use of the telephone quite easily. Furthermore, as noted earlier, some Amish enterprises have telephone listings in area directories. These are primarily construction related businesses and the argument has been advanced that the telephone is essential in dealing with the factories they represent, to conduct business with non-Amish customers, and to provide easy access for Amish contractors, many of whom have cell phones within easy reach while on the job.

The proliferation of cell phones among the Amish has been a cause for concern to church leaders for some time. Menno Kuhns reluctantly admitted that a number of Amish carpenters made use of cell phones, though he was quick to point out that the phones belonged to the drivers who take the crews to the contract sites.²⁹ The Amish are not allowed to own automobiles and have always used outsiders to take them to the job site and to haul material for the various jobs they perform. Still, it is not quite certain as to whether the Amish contractor or the driver is the actual owner of the cell phone. For a long time the Amish used the telephones belonging to their customers in order to call suppliers and to contact prospective customers. This was not always convenient, so the argument goes, and led Amish contractors to purchase cell phones. In the Fall of 2000 the Bishop of one Amish church district forbade the use of cell phones. However, a clerk at the Drakesville convenience store insisted that some young Amish have not abandoned its use.³⁰ Elizabeth Kuhns noted that there were some young Amish men who thought they needed cell phones but that it was all in their heads. She stated that "people don't need to be in that kind of hurry," adding that she grew up without cell phones and did not see a need for them.³¹ It is not possible at the moment to ascertain the degree to which cell phones are still registered to any of the Amish in the Drakesville area, but one can state with certainty that the cell phone is never far away when the hired drivers are nearby. Jacob Kuhns recently stated that they are really an essential item when running a crew. Though he would not divulge who really owns the "verboten item" other than that the drivers bring them along.³²

There can be no doubt that over the last two decades the Amish have become increasingly dependent on modern conveniences to earn a living. It could be argued that at times, speed, as it is among the English, is of the essence. Yet it contradicts the premise upon which their communities were founded, that of hard manual labor and earning a living from the sweat of one's brow. Still, there are instances in which the Amish farmer has had to adapt modern methods to meet state regulatory or industry wide standards. Dairy farmers, for example, were forced to modify their operations to meet both the standards of the dairy industry and state regulators. One of the regulatory provisions requires that milk be kept below a certain temperature. To meet this standard Amish dairy farmers were forced to install cooling equipment. Since Amish farms were not connected to electricity, and their regulations forbade its use, they had to find another

ESSAYS IN ECONOMIC AND BUSINESS HISTORY (2002)

source of power to run the cooling machinery. The solution was to install generators large enough to provide the power needed to run the compressors involved in the cooling process. Once the generators and compressors were in place, it was discovered that they could be used in other ways. Generators have been used as a source for arc welders whereas compressors made it possible to utilize air powered tools. Indeed, the use of air power tools and small engines has become commonplace among the Amish. Rather than cut lumber by hand, for example, the Amish replaced electric motors on table saws with gasoline engines or when working for the outsiders, they have made use of their electric tools and electricity. More recently many Amish have acquired battery-operated tools. They justified these purchases on the grounds that the tools are not hooked up to electric lines. They are, however, more convenient than those requiring an external power source. As noted before, the Amish have been quite innovative in finding ways to get around their religious strictures.

The Amish are on the cusp of modernization, much of the farming equipment they own is of modern design. And this has been the trend for a number of decades. In February, 1984 an Amish crew worked in the Ormanville area. One evening they happened into an old outbuilding on the property where they were employed. They noticed some old tools, including an anvil and the attendant blacksmith equipment, a manual corn planter, hand saws, and a scythe with a broken handle. When the property owner asked whether the Amish knew of someone in their community who could fashion a new handle for the scythe they laughed, saying that no one uses that kind of stuff in their community anymore. The upshot is that customer's tools were sorely outmoded when compared to the tools used by the Amish. It is, for example, commonplace to see gasoline engine powered mowers and rotary tillers in use among the Amish, but no electricity to the house! When the Amish showed up for work at the Ormanville location, there were always one or two in the crew who scrounged for old motors to fix up. And they wanted them for free! It proved to be an embarrassment to the leader of the crew who would sternly rebuke them for begging again. Though one of the young men asked for something quite different one evening, he had seen a lilac bush and inquired if he could have some to take home to his wife.³³

The Amish, as noted earlier, are not allowed to utilize self-propelled vehicles but they are allowed to utilize motors that are stationary or mounted on horse-drawn equipment. A look around most Amish farms reveals tractor and other types of engines modified to run grain augers, feed grinders, combines and the like. When one looks into the house one discovers refrigerators and washing machines powered by gasoline or kerosene engines. The Amish, have in fact become as dependent on fossil fuels as their "English" neighbors. When the price of fuel increases, from time to time, operating costs increase for the Amish the same as they do for the English. Moreover, those engaged in retail operations see an increase in the cost of goods sold. The evidence clearly shows that the Amish remain intricately connected to the economic life of the society from which they have tried to stay apart.

In conclusion, one can argue that the Amish, using the analogy of Plato's cave, are far from trapped in a psychic prison. Instead, they have been rather ingenious at lending

ECONOMIC PRAGMATISM: THE IOWA AMISH

the appearance of being a modest, self-sufficient folk, adhering to established norms when the reality is that without the kinds of technological modifications mentioned earlier, as well as their interaction with the outside world, they would find it difficult to survive. Amish communities have, for some time now, been in a state of flux and transformation, and because of their economic activities they have been challenged by a growing number of paradoxes. Economic expansion, it must be understood, was never an attempt to modify their basic communal structure, but rather an attempt to preserve it. The result, some might say, was modernization for the sake of preservation.³⁴ In a larger sense the intended consequences of economic expansion were directed at ensuring communal coherence but the unintended consequences of daily contact with the "English" have counteracted the positive consequences as individuals began to establish networks outside of the community and more importantly became acclimated to and reliant on the use of modern technology.

While conducting research for this paper the author visited the Bloomfield, Iowa Public Library in search of material on the Amish in the surrounding area. Upon entering the library the author encountered three Amish patrons, one of these was working at a computer. The Librarian noted that lots of Amish patrons made use of the computers and that one of her regulars has informed her about phone programs on the internet where one could call for 30 seconds at no cost. He stated that one can say a lot of things in 30 seconds. She also noted that some of her Amish patrons are quite capable at using computers and that a few have even taught her things about surfing the net. The result of this expanded contact with the English, as Kraybill and Nolt point out, has been that the "broader consumer culture is making inroads among the Amish."³⁵ It will remain to be seen whether the 21st century Amish can withstand the encroachment and destabilizing effects of technology and urbanization in the same way their forbears were able to do. The greatest challenge, perhaps, to communal coherence has been the persistence of a seventeenth century ideology in a dynamic world. By attempting to stay change the Amish have been attempting the impossible. It has been difficult for them, at best, to escape the influences of the technological changes sweeping society, and while they sought to preserve their way of life through their various economic ventures the Amish have been swept along by a current of change.

Notes

1. An informative source on the Amish struggle with modernity is Donald Kraybill and Marc Olshan, eds., *The Amish Struggle With Modernity*, (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1994).

2. This point of view was already set forth in 1896 by Daniel Kaufman in "Our Iowa Field," *Herald of Truth*, July 15, 1986, 275.

3. An early defense of the Amish and the Amish way of life can be seen in Walter M. Kollmorgen, "Culture of a Contemporary Community: The Old Order Amish of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania (Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Agricultural Economics, 1942).

4. Another attempt to defend Amish practices is John A Hostetler, "Toward A New Interpretation of Sectarian Life in America," *Pennsylvania Dutchman*, June 15, 1951, 1-2, 7.

5. John Hostetler, *Amish Life*, (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1952): 10-11, 34; see also John A. Hostetler, *Amish Society*, 4th ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

ESSAYS IN ECONOMIC AND BUSINESS HISTORY (2002)

6. The owner of T Corner woodworking recounts that while in Indiana he rode his bicycle to work. He is one of the most outspoken members of the Drakesville Amish community and is often very critical of their unwillingness to move closer to a modern way of life.

7. Some years ago, after a lengthy battle with church elders about using self-propelled equipment at his sawmill, Herman Kuhns, his wife, and children left Iowa for Missouri and the Amish church for the Mennonite church.

8. On the movement from Amish to Mennonites see for example Paul Erb, "Mennonites and Amish," *Gospel Herald*, 5 June 1962, 507; Kraybill and Olshan, *Amish Struggle with Modernity*, 266-67.

9. *Plain Interests*, January 2001, 1.

10. *Ibid.*

11. *Ibid.*

12. See for example the *Wapello County Shopper*, April 11, 2001.

13. *Wapello County Shopper*, April 11, 2001.

14. This is characteristic of Amish communities in other places, see for instance Jerry Useem, "The Virtue of Necessity" *Inc* (December 1996): 80-82.

15. Interview Mary Yutzy, Drakesville, Iowa, Feb 7, 2001.

16. Interview with Laverne Graber, Drakesville, Iowa, February 7, 2001.

17. Conversation with Menno Kuhns August 1984. The author reminded Menno Kuhns of this conversation recently. The latter did admit that one could lie by omission and that this is not something the Amish would approve of.

18. B:C refers to the class of fire the extinguisher is recommend for. The number 10 signifies the number of pounds of chemical or liquid held by the apparatus. Class B fires involve *flammable* or *combustible* liquids such as gasoline, kerosene, and common *organic solvents* used in the laboratory. Class C fires involve energized electrical equipment, such as appliances, engines, switches, panel boxes, power tools, hot plates and stirrers. Water is a particularly dangerous extinguishing medium for class C fires because of the risk of electrical shock.

19. David L. Wagler, *Through Deep Waters*, (Bloomfield, Ia.: Titus Wagler, 1985): 185.

20. *Ibid.*

21. *Ibid.*, 186.

22. *Ibid.*, 193.

23. *Ibid.*, 197.

24. *Ibid.*

25. *Ibid.*, 201-205.

26. Interview Herman Gingerich, Drakesville, Iowa, March 9, 2001.

27. Interview with Mrs. Herman Gingerich, Drakesville, Iowa, March 7, 2001

28. Interview Menno Kuhns, Drakesville, Iowa, March 9, 2001.

29. *Ibid.*

30. During discussions with the Postmaster of Drakesville and the clerk at he convenience store on April 13, 2001, the discussion centered around phones, the use of answering services, and cell phones. Both were knowledgeable in general terms about phone usage but could not provide detailed information about specific individuals using phone services of one kind or another.

31. Interview with Elizabeth Kuhns, Drakesville, Iowa, April 14, 2001.

32. Interview with Jacob Kuhns, Drakesville, Iowa, April 14, 2001.

33. This happened in 1983 and 1984 when Menno Kuhns and his crew were doing some work on the Mahaffey place near Ormanville. During this time they made use of the electric tools owned by the family and the telephone to set up contracts with other customers.

34. The concept of Modernization Theory is not used here in the Ontological/Existential sense but rather speaks to the utilization of modern methods of production, communication, and doing business.

35. Donald B. Kraybill and Steven M. Nolt, *Amish Enterprise: From Plows to Profits* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

ECONOMIC PRAGMATISM: THE IOWA AMISH

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- Interview with Herman Gingerich, Drakesville, Iowa, March 9, 2001.
- Interview with Mrs. Herman Gingerich, Drakesville, Iowa, March 7, 2001.
- Interview with Menno Kuhns, Drakesville, Iowa, March 9, 2001.
- Interview with Mary Yutzy, Drakesville, Iowa, Feb 7, 2001.
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