

THE OLD ORDER AMISH COMMUNITY

AT

STUARTS DRAFT, VIRGINIA

A Community Study

Prepared for Sociology

Paul Feachy - Instructor

Moses Beachy
May 29, 1954

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

I. Community Setting

A. History

B. Material Environment

1. Size of the Community

2. Geographical Setting Topography

3. Natural Resources and Their Development

C. Human Setting

1. Population

2. Occupational Pattern

3. Class Structure

II. Institutional Framework

A. Family

B. Church

C. Education

III. Evaluation

INTRODUCTION

I was hoping to make this paper a detailed study of the Amish people at Stuarts Draft , but because of lack of information and time, I will not try to do that. I do hope give a general idea what the community is like, how the community came into being, where it is located, and how it functions.

I want to give special thanks to the Noah Mast family who helped me in getting some of the facts and gathered a lot of information on this community. I also want to thank all those who answered questions which I asked.

The Old Order Amish Community At Stuarts Draft, Virginia

I. Community Setting

In understanding this community correctly it is important that we understand why this community was started, what the background is of the people who make up the community etc. I will try to develop an understanding of these things as I briefly consider the Community's

A. History

In 1942 some of the Amish people of Norfolk, Virginia decided they would leave their community and look for another location. There might be various reasons for this decision but the major reason was because the majority of the people who lived in the Amish Community at Norfolk, decided in favor of some of the modern conveniences which had been gradually getting their foot-hold in the thinking of the people. Here the automobile was a big item. They had started a dairy industry, which made it very difficult to operate without automobiles. Since the automobile had so many advantages, especially in the business they were in, most of the church members were in favor of becoming car owners. So this church at Norfolk united with the "Beachy Church".

Now back to our story, the members who lived in this community who felt that this was a change in the wrong direction began to look for another location. First they were in

HL TERM PAPER

4

Mecklenburg County in the area of Chase City, later they were in Wythe County in the area of Wytheville and neither of these two places were approved by their scrutinizing eye. After some more searching it was decided to settle in Augusta County in the area of Stuarts Draft. Simeon Yoders were the first family to move into this new area on July 4, 1942. They were soon followed by Sammy Peachys from Belleville, Pennsylvania, then Pete Kinsingers, Ed Masts, Noah Yoders, Ben Troyers, and Simon Schrocks from Norfolk. Simeon Yoder and Simon Schrock were both ministers, the latter being a Bishop. For the first while it appeared as if not many more people would move in, but soon families began to come in from other communities and by April of 1944 there were already sixteen Amish families living in this community and it has increased until today there are fifty-eight families. Sixteen of these have come into existence from the community itself. The rest of the families moved in from the following fourteen communities: twelve families from Norfolk, Virginia, nine from Dover, Delaware, six from Bellville, Pennsylvania, three from Custer County, Oklahoma, two from Geauga County, Ohio, two from Kalona, Iowa, two from Garnet County, Kansas, two from Somerset County, Pennsylvania, one from Mc.Minnville, Oregon, one from Plain City, Ohio, one from Wayne County, Ohio, one from Mayes County, Oklahoma, one from Topeka, Indiana, and one single man from Authur, Illinois who got married to a Stuarts Draft girl. By this brief survey we see that the Stuarts Draft Community is made up of people from fourteen different communities and

and ten different states. Each one of these communities has its own church regulations and therefore most of those who moved in had some adjustments to make, Not only is this true in church life but also in farming. Most of them find it different from what they were used to.

It would be an interesting study to find out why all these people moved to Stuarts Draft. I can only give a general answer to this, but I think most of them were dissatisfied with the spiritual conditions of the church and the low moral standards upheld in their own community. Cheaper land and a few more modern conveniences might have also added to the attraction of this community.

B. Material Environment

These Amish people do not all live next to each other but they are not scattered out very far either. Going the way the crow flies no families live farther apart than eight miles. Giving a rough estimate I would say no Amish family lives farther than seven miles north, one and one-half miles south, one and one-half miles east, and two and one-half miles west of Stuarts Draft.

Stuarts Draft is just about centrally located in the state of Virginia as far as north and south is concerned but east and west it is closer to the western border than the eastern. It is located about twelve miles south and a little west of Staunton, about a fourth mile south of State Route No. 12. It is nearly

in the center of the beautiful Shenandoah Valley. It has a population of six hundred people. Even though it is such a small town it is important little community center. It has two grocery stores, two hardwares, two churches, two feed stores, two doctors, a bank, a postoffice, a garage, a drugstore, restaurant etc,. Since the Amish people do not have automobiles they do a lot of their shopping there. Waynesboro lies about seven miles to the northeast of Stuarts Draft and has a population of 12,357. The population of Staunton is 19,927.

The Valley of Virginia in which Stuarts Draft is located lies between the Blue Ridge Mountains on the east and on the west it is bordered by West Virginia and the rugged Allegheny Mountains. This area is from one-thousand to two-thousand feet above sea level. The average rainfall of Virginia is 42.62 inches per year with the greatest amount from April to September. The temperature and amount of snowfall compares well with that here at Harrisonburg.

This area around Stuarts Draft has a limestone soil. Quite a few of the stones come to the surface making it rather rough. The land as a rule is not real hilly neither is it level but is gently rolling.

The roads in this area are mostly hard surfaced but there are still some stretches of gravel road. Except for the U. S. and State roads most of them are very narrow and winding.

The soil is probably the greatest natural resource that they have. There is still one man I think who has a saw mill

but there is not very much lumbering carried on any more today. I might mention a few other natural resources in this area which are not being developed very much at the present but have been of some value in the past. These are gravel, limestone and clark quarries, and natural gas. These Amish farmers take good care of the soil and their land usually produces more after they have lived on it for several years.

The land does not lend itself to heavy farming, so much of it is left in blue grass. The land which is farmed is rotated regularly. Probably the commonest crops are corn, wheat, barley, oats, alfalfa, clover and Lespedeza. Most of the farming is done with modern farm equipment. In this community they use rubber tire tractors and the equipment which goes with them. This is probably a carry over from the Norfolk Community. There are only a few Amish Communities in the U. S. that have rubber tire tractors. This and some other modern conveniences which they have; at one time, almost became a barrier to them, as far as fellowshipping was concerned, with those who were more conservative in other communities.

Raising broilers is probably their greatest industry. Out of the fifty-nine families twenty-four are raising broilers. I have no idea how many broilers are raised in a year by all of them but the six biggest broiler raisers, it is estimated, raise around 332,000 in one year. Most of these are dressed locally, many in the Rockingham Dressing Plant which has a daily capacity of 15,000. Most of them are sold in the larger eastern markets.

Thirty-one of these families have dairies. These dairies range in size from a few cows to sixty. The most common breed of cows are the Holstein, than Guernsey, and then Jersey. This industry is a bit newer than broiler raising but is continually growing. The biggest Amish dairyman owns 60 high producing registered Holsteins. The eastern market for milk is very good. They sell mostly grade A milk. To do this it is necessary that they take a number of sanitary precautions. Their dairy barns are usually built exclusively for that purpose and are kept very clean. The milk house is usually built a few yards away from the barn. These people have electricity so they use it to run their coolers and milk machines as well as for lighting in general.

C. Human Setting

I have already stated the number of Amish families living in this community, but I do not have the statistics to show how many people live here including the children. The membership of the church is 156.

Of course, this church is made up of all white people but I might mention that they do have a few negro neighbors and I do not think that the Amish discriminate at all against their negro neighbors but rather they treat them the same as any of their other non-Amish neighbors.

The occupational pattern is rather regular as it is in most Amish Communities. Usually if the father is a farmer the son is one also. In some cases the father retires and the son takes over but where there is more than one son and the father

can not afford it, he usually helps to establish the older boys on a rented farm. If he has extra money he usually buys a farm for his son and the son pays it back as he is able. Not all Amish boys follow in their fathers occupation. Some go into the broiler business or some other industry which is popular in the neighborhood.

Concerning wealth, most of the Amish people at Stuarts Draft would come into the middle class. There are a few families who are a bit wealthy and few who are the opposite. But there is no extreme of either poverty or wealth. The poor are always helped with money and sometimes when their poverty is the result of poor management they are given some advice in this area. It is very ~~difficult~~ ^{difficult} in most Amish communities ^{to} ~~to~~ become so poor that they suffer for lack of food.

It is my opinion, that as a general rule, men who are chosen as leaders are usually those who are the wealthiest ones in the community.

II. Institutional Framework of

A. The Family

The average family at Stuarts Draft has 4.76 children. This is a very interesting figure when one realizes that sixteen of these families have been married less than nine years. To give a truer picture of the size of the average Amish family in this community, I will give further statistics showing that the average given above is not as large as it would be if these

families were all past middle age, so the following figures concern mostly the younger families. There are four families which have no children, eight who have only one, three who have only two, eleven who have only three etc. If one does not include these last twenty-two families it brings the average size of each family up to 6.37 which is probably a truer average than the one given above. In further checking the ages of the twenty-two families given above I find that they are not all young families as I had assumed but that about twelve of them are already in the older bracket. Even if this is the case I still maintain that my last average is nearer correct on the following basis: that those old families who moved to Stuarts Draft are in a sense a select group in that they moved out of their former community because they did not have so many strings attached and it was easier for them to move. In other words I believe that there were many more dissatisfied families ^{in other communities.} that would have liked to move out but because they had a large family too much was involved to make the change. In case my assumption is wrong if we would only take the average of forty-eight of the families, not including the ten younger families, the average family size is 5.35 which is a more conservative estimate.

These fifty-eight families have 276 children. One-hundred and forty-one are girls, or about fifty-one per cent. One-hundred and thirty-five are boys, or about forty-nine per cent.

The family at Stuarts Draft is a very stable unit. Much of their time is spent together. Many of the attractions of

the world which disrupt the life of the ordinary family in America has made little impact, if any, on the families in this community.

The clothes that are worn are practically all home made. Mothers teach their daughters how to cook and sew. Besides this, if the father does not have help, often the girls help with the lighter work on the outside such as milking, feeding the broilers etc.

The boys learn to handle the farm equipment at a young age. As a rule they take a very active interest in the farm. Often the fathers rely on the memory of their sons for minor details which they have forgotten themselves. If one is visiting in a home where there are a number of boys and chore time comes the father often stays in the house and the boys see to it that the work is done.

I think in general we can say that parents in this community have taken an active interest in their children, and are concerned very much for their welfare. Parents and children spend many happy times together in work as well as play.

This community of course, has no divorces. There are very few cases, if any where the parents do not get along well with each other. Parents think of children as a blessing and not a liability.

The father is thought of as the head of the home and the leader. Of course, there are exceptions to this. Generally speaking, I would say that the responsibilities of the home are a mutual concern.

B. The Church

When the people first came to Stuarts Draft they had their services at Bishop Simon Schrock's house until the church house was ready for services. The first service in the new church house was held on December 25, 1943. Since that time I think two additions have been made to the church house.

Church services are held every other Sunday. They start between 9:00 and 9:30. The churchhouse is located about a half mile north of Stuarts Draft. This is pretty near in the center of the community. Those living closest often walk to church. Others come with horse and buggies. There are about as many different types of buggies as there are people from different communities.

The services are conducted about same as any other Amish services. Most everybody is in before they begin. There are sometimes a few late comers. They usually sing two or three hymns before the sermons begin. The second hymn is always the "Lob Song". Here they do not sing it to the usual slow tune. While singing is going on, the ministers are in the "Abrote" where prayer is offered in behalf of the service and young people who are eligible for membership receive instruction and here it is decided who is to preach that day. After the ministers join the congregation, singing stops and the first minister makes about a half hour introduction for the main sermon. After this he leads the group in prayer which he reads from the prayer book while all are kneeling. After prayer all rise and

the Deacon reads a chapter from the Bible, and then all are seated. Now the second minister preaches around an hour. In the latter part of the sermon he reads a second chapter and makes a few comments as he reads. After this he leads the congregation in another prayer. After prayer he requests two others to give testimonies. The purpose of this is to verify that what he preached was in harmony with the word of God. Then the minister speaks again for a few minutes to admonish the people to give God the glory for any benefit that they might have received from his sermon and that all mistakes should be attributed to his weaknesses.

On the opposite Sunday they have Sunday School. The ministers are the superintendent. They are divided off into classes according to age. The younger ones learn the German alphabet and then they learn to spell and then to read. For their lesson all study the same chapter. The classes discuss the lesson and then afterwards one of the ministers goes over it again.

Sunday evenings the young folks have a singing in one of the homes. They sing for about an hour and after that a scripture is read and together they pray the Lord's prayer. The whole community has elected three men who are to have oversight at the singings. Each one covers a certain area of the community and when the singing is in his area he is responsible to be there and lead in their evening devotions. One sees no indecency at the singing. There is no smoking or drinking as is often the case in other communities. The young people uphold high moral standards in courtship. As a rule most of them marry between eighteen and twenty-two.

It is usually held that Amish people do not believe in missions, but they did go down to Gladys, Virginia where a new community was started in interest of mission work, to help put up the church house. They gave money in 1953 for some of the following causes: Polio Fund, Red Cross, Bible School teacher, Cancer Fund, German School teachers, M. C. C. for relief, Hospital Fund, Community Chest, Mexican Martyrs Mirror, Helen Keller etc. At the present time Sanford Yoder is serving his two year term in I. W. service under the M. C. C. at Brooklane Farm, Hagerstown, Maryland. A number of their girls have served at the Grace Memorial Hospital in Nebraska.

C. Education

The State law of Virginia requires that all children go to school till they are sixteen. The Amish people did not think that the things their children learned after they were through the seventh grade would be of much value to them, especially not the things that were being taught in the public high schools. So after their children were out of the seventh grade they kept them at home. The first seven years were offered at the school in Stuarts Draft, but from there on they would have to be hauled to Fisherville to the Woodrow Wilson High School. After the school officials decided to enforce the state law the Amish decided to organize their own school which was to take care of only those who had finished the seventh grade and were still not sixteen. They added another part on to their church building which can be closed off from the rest of the building by hinged doors.

The first day of school was on September 12, 1950. They had only the eighth grade the first year with seventeen pupils. The next year they had one more pupil and they added the ninth grade. In 1952-53 they had nineteen pupils and eighth, ninth and tenth grades. They do not expect to add any more grades but as their community grows they will have more pupils.

As a whole these people do not think very highly of education. By consent of the whole church they allowed their teacher to attend summer school at E. M. C. in 1953. But the next summer when she asked to come they did not think she should,

Much of the education which these children receive is not from books but of a more practical nature. They are taught to do the ordinary tasks on the farm and in the home, and the result is that most of them are very capable and good family supportors.

III. My Evaluation

This community does have its problems and difficulties, but I think it is one of the best Amish communities I have ever been in. The older people give recognition to the needs of the young people and the result is that their young people in general are very respectful.

Note from Elmer Spider
 351 Edison St. NE
 Hartsville, OH 44632

A notable omission of people moving to new community is Minister Elmer M. Spider and family - from Norfolk. He played a major role in making the decision. (I lived at Kempsville at that time).

April 20, 1986

(Added after reading the paper)