

THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA  
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THE AMISH OF THOMAS, OKLAHOMA: A STUDY  
IN CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY

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degree of  
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BY  
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THE AMISH OF THOMAS, OKLAHOMA: A STUDY  
IN CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY  
A THESIS  
APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY

BY

Glenn Williams  
Phyllis M. Williams  
William A. Fitch, Jr.

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## DEDICATION

To my parents and to my husband,  
without whose encouragement and  
assistance this work would not  
have been possible.



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THE AMISH OF THOMAS, OKLAHOMA: A STUDY  
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Amish Mennonite sect, a religious group, is unique in Custer County and, in fact, to the state of Oklahoma. There are many Amish Mennonites in the United States; therefore, clarification is needed to point out the reasons why this group differs from other Amish congregations. "The work of the Mennonite Church is applicable throughout to the Amish Mennonites whereas the Old Order Amish do not associate in religious work with other bodies. . ."<sup>1</sup> The group located near and in Thomas, Oklahoma, is unlike other Amish Mennonite sects in that they are more closely allied with the Old Order Amish in dress and religious beliefs, but the newer Mennonite ways of living are commonly found.

The term Amish Mennonite is employed for designation of those at Thomas chiefly to distinguish them from the Old Order Amish, of

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<sup>1</sup>U. S. Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of the Census, Religious Bodies: 1906. Part II, Separate Denominations (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1910), p. 414.

which they were once a part. As will be pointed out later, the Amish of Custer County changed from the Old Order by permitting the use of a church building and automobiles. In essence, the Amish in the vicinity of Thomas have retained some of the Old Order Amish beliefs and, at the same time, adopted some ways of the more liberal Amish Mennonites. Hence, they are presently at a point somewhere between Old Order Amish and Amish Mennonite. Some descriptive title or name is needed for reference to the group, and Amish Mennonite seems more practical since churches and cars are such radical changes away from the Old Order Amish.

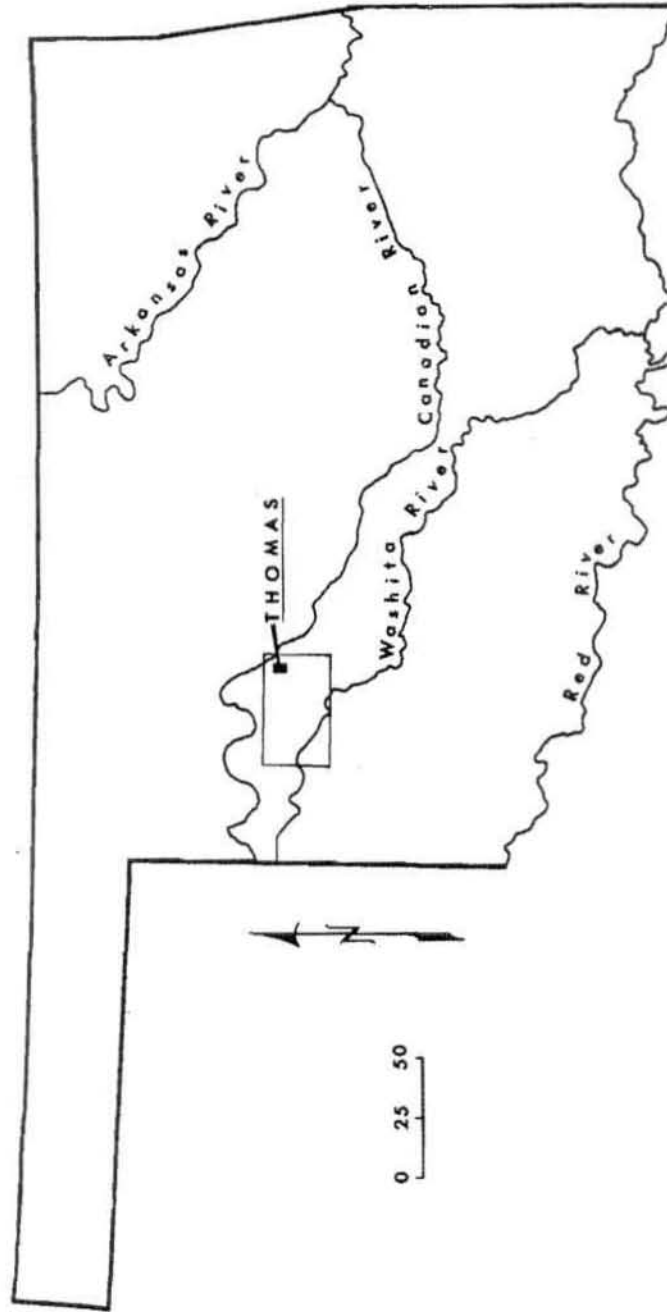
#### Physical Situation

The land which these people occupy is situated in the northeast corner of Custer County and is primarily devoted to agriculture (Fig. 1). Custer County is in the west central portion of Oklahoma and is entirely within the Gypsum Hills physiographic province. "The Gypsum Hills lie at the bottom of the great geo-syncline between the Arbuckle and Ozark mountains on the east and the Rocky Mountain uplift on the west."<sup>2</sup> Much of the county is included in the outcropping of the Greer formation which consists mainly of shales with some harder gypsum and dolomite. These harder rocks are not as easily eroded as the shales and form low,

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<sup>2</sup>L. C. Snider, "Geography of Oklahoma," Oklahoma Geological Survey, Bulletin No. 27 (September, 1917), p. 86.

Fig. 1: LOCATION OF STUDY AREA



KB/RP

rounded hills and buttes.<sup>3</sup> The hills are not close together, but form a rather sporadic dotting of the area.

The terrain as a whole is flat to rolling and the red clay soils are usually quite fertile. The land is used intensively for cropland, and irrigation is employed to raise the quality and quantity of production. There is also considerable dry-farming within the area.

Drainage, especially in the northeastern part of the county, is into the Canadian River and Deer Creek. Deer Creek, a tributary of the Canadian, does not enter that river in Custer County but makes its confluence to the east of the county boundary. The Canadian flows generally northwest to southeast and travels a path which passes approximately five miles northeast of Thomas. Deer Creek passes between Thomas and Custer City to the west. "These are typical plains streams with sand-choked channels and broad belts of sand dunes along their courses."<sup>4</sup> In western and central Oklahoma streams do not often carry large volumes of water and during the extensive dry periods the water will sink below the surface sands.

The climate of this portion of Oklahoma has a continental influence with pronounced annual ranges in temperature and precipitation

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<sup>3</sup>John W. Morris, Oklahoma Geography (Oklahoma City: Harlow Publishing Corporation, 1961), p. 32.

<sup>4</sup>Snider, loc cit., p. 88.



during the various seasons. The western half of Oklahoma is higher in elevation than the eastern part of the state and promotes somewhat drier and cooler conditions in western Oklahoma.<sup>5</sup>

Summers in the Custer County area are characterized by high temperatures, clear skies, and dry, moderate winds blowing from the southwest. Rapid evaporation is not uncommon during the days when high temperatures and high wind velocities predominate. The annual range in temperature is great with the mean temperature for the summer being approximately 45° higher than that for winter. Droughts of several weeks duration are sometimes destructive to crops and duststorms are frequent during the drier periods. The duststorms do not ordinarily cause extensive damage.

Winters are not excessively severe or long. Snow falls during December, January, and February, but does not accumulate to any appreciable depth. Winds from December through February are northerly in direction and sometimes quite strong in force. Although cold temperatures prevail, Oklahoma winters have a considerable amount of clear days with sunshine.<sup>6</sup> The first killing frost of the fall comes at a convenient time for the cotton farmer (Table 1). By killing the leaves the frost

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<sup>5</sup>U. S. Department of Agriculture Yearbook, Climate and Man (Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1941), p. 1073.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 1074.

leaves the cotton ready for easy mechanical picking or stripping.

TABLE 1

Station: Weatherford	
Location: 35° 32' North Latitude	
98° 42' West Longitude	
Elevation: 1639 feet	
January Average	37.5°
July Average	82.3°
Maximum Temperature	115°
Minimum Temperature	-14°
Last Killing Frost of Spring	April 1
First Killing Frost of Fall	November 3
Length of Growing Season	216 days
Annual Rainfall	28.45"

Source: U. S. Department of Agriculture Yearbook, Climate and Man (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1941), p. 1066.

Rainfall amounts to approximately 28 inches annually and the land use is closely correlated with precipitation (Table 2). Rains usually occur during the spring and early summer. Using Table 2 as an example, the ample amounts of precipitation occurring in April, May, and June make the soil moist for wheat ground plowing in June. Also, many feed crops are planted in April and May. The six inches of rain in June and

TABLE 2

## AVERAGE MONTHLY RAINFALL

Station: Weatherford	
Location: 35° 32' North Latitude	
98° 42' West Longitude	
Elevation: 1639 feet	
<u>Month</u>	<u>Amount</u>
January	.80
February	.98
March	1.71
April	2.96
May	4.60
June	3.75
July	2.54
August	2.45
September	3.08
October	2.66
November	1.78
December	<u>1.14</u>
Total	28.45

Source: U. S. Department of Agriculture Yearbook, Climate and Man (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1941), p. 1066.

TABLE 3

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Station: Weatherford  
Location: 35° 32' North Latitude  
98° 42' West Longitude  
Elevation: 1639 feet

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<u>Year</u>	<u>Total Precipitation</u>
1951	26.40"
1952	16.02"
1953	22.97"
1954	15.04"
1955	34.13"
1956	13.88"
1957	36.56"
1958	24.19"
1959	43.69"
1960	32.50"

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Source: U. S. Department of Commerce, Weather Bureau, Climatic Summary of the United States, Supplement for 1951 through 1960 (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1965).

July enable the farmer to plant cotton during the month of July. Moisture falling in the latter part of the summer and the early fall months is more localized and often uncertain.<sup>7</sup> Referring again to Table 2, wheat ground often lies idle during the summer and soaks up any precipitation that may come. Ideally, the moisture falling in August and September is most important to the wheat grower. The 5-6" of rainfall during these months is adequate for the wheat's winter growth. The precipitation during October aids the young plants and carries them through the drier months of November-February. Seventy-five per cent of the annual precipitation occurs during the growing season for this agricultural region.<sup>8</sup> Soil conditioning for planting and germination of winter grains, however, is fostered by rain during September and October.

Most of Oklahoma lies within the soil group of reddish prairie, reddish chestnut, and reddish brown soils. The Amish-owned land between Thomas and the Canadian River lies within the soil association known as Vanoss-Minco-Yahola. This soil type forms a narrow band on both sides of the river. The alluvial nature of the soil is the fundamental reason for its fertility and the high value placed on it for cropland. Vanoss and Minco are deep, silty soils occurring in old alluviums and wind deposits adjacent to the river floodplains. They are most commonly found under tall grasses, are slightly acid, and leached of lime. Vanoss

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<sup>7</sup>U. S. Department of Agriculture Yearbook, op. cit., p. 1074.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

soils are dark brown to reddish loam subsoils. Yahola is a reddish silt loam or sandy loam bottomland soil and is often associated with sandy loam substrata.<sup>9</sup> All of the Amish farms are located within the area of the Vanoss-Minco-Yahola soils; a fact which to some degree accounts for the excellent crop yields on Amish-owned or operated land.

The major activities of the county include agriculture and grazing with cotton, grain sorghums, and wheat comprising the chief crops.<sup>10</sup> The Thomas vicinity is primarily concerned with wheat. In the spring and summer one can look over the flat land around Thomas and see nothing but field after field of waving wheat. Other areas of the county raise some cotton, but practically none is harvested around Thomas. Most of the cotton is found to the south of Thomas. The second most important agricultural activity is the raising of beef cattle. It is because of the cattle, primarily Herefords and Black Angus, that the maize and sorghum are grown. These are converted to silage for feeding during the winter months. Other crops include corn, small grains, and peanuts.

#### Cultural Composition

Custer County is an agricultural county with industry and

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<sup>9</sup>Oklahoma State University Experiment Station, Miscellaneous Publication MP-56, "Soils of Oklahoma," 1959, p. 40.

<sup>10</sup>Morris, op. cit., p. 32.



Fig. 2.--The annual wheat harvest is a busy period for the Amish.

manufacturing being limited. That industry which does exist usually caters to the agricultural activities supporting the people. Thomas has no manufacturing and commercial activities are designed for the people in the immediate area.

The total population of the county in 1960 was 21,040,<sup>11</sup> while that for the town of Thomas was 1,211.<sup>12</sup> The population is sparsely distributed throughout the county with Clinton being the only town with over 5,000 residents.<sup>13</sup>

The cultural environment for the area around Thomas is in

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<sup>11</sup>U. S. Bureau of the Census, U. S. Census of Population: 1960, Vol. I, "Characteristics of the Population," Part 38, Oklahoma (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1963).

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

several ways similar to many small farming communities in western Oklahoma. The people are farmers or their business depends largely on farm families. The number of people with college degrees is small in proportion to the number that have a high school or, in the case of the Amish, an eight-grade education. One factor that does lend a certain uniqueness to the town is the influence of religious affiliations. Besides the Amish, the Brethren in Christ, also a Mennonite denomination, Baptist, Methodist, Church of the Brethren, Roman Catholic, and Christian congregations are found at Thomas. The largest membership is that of the Brethren in Christ. There is only one other Brethren in Christ church in Oklahoma. The Brethren in Christ, like the Amish, tend to cluster at Thomas.

Perhaps the religious make-up of the community is one reason why a town of this population has a newspaper, a hospital, a large shopping area, and two banks, but no theaters. One did exist many years ago, but lack of business forced its closing.

Thomas is also a town situated in the heart of an area of advanced farming technology. Much of the investment of the farmer is in modern machinery and better feeds, seeds, and livestock. Of the town's citizens, the Amish are considered to be the most conservative in terms of habits. However, they are as progressive as any farmer in the entire county in matters concerning new farming innovations.

Many factors contribute to the total environment of the town of



Thomas and the result of these influences is a friendly Oklahoma farming community. The Amish are exceedingly proficient in all that they attempt and promoting the friendliness of the town is no exception.

## CHAPTER II

### HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

The Anabaptists-Mennonites sprang from the Roman Catholic Church by denial of the scriptural validity of infant baptism. Menno Simons, a converted Catholic priest, began to organize the dissenters in Holland in 1536, and his followers were termed Mennonites (Chart 1). The newly formed Mennonite group was also against a union of church and state. Their persecution would have been much greater if William Penn's American colony had not been available to them.<sup>1</sup>

"The Lord's Supper is served twice a year in almost all Mennonite congregations and in most of them baptism is by pouring."<sup>2</sup> Other features of the Mennonite communion service include foot-washing, a kiss of peace, and separation of the sexes. "Mennonites baptize only on confession of faith, refuse to take oaths before magistrates, oppose secret societies, and follow strictly the teachings of the New Testament."<sup>3</sup> A worldwide relief service is provided through the

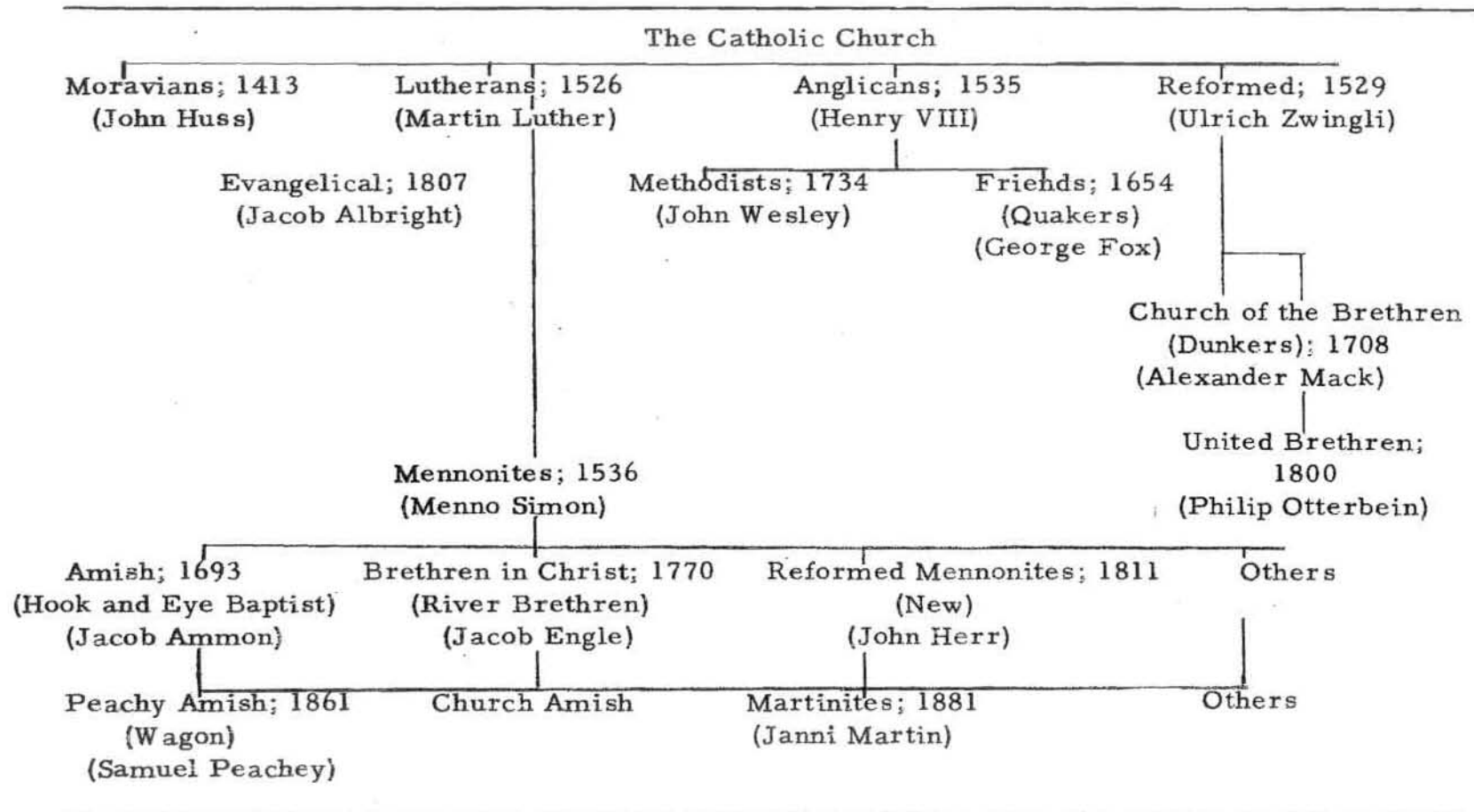
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<sup>1</sup>Frank S. Mead, Handbook of Denominations (Nashville, Tennessee: Parthenon Press, 1951), p. 142.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 143.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

CHART 1



Source: Ammon M. Aurand, Little Known Facts About the Amish and the Mennonites (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Aurand Press, 1938), p. 2.

Mennonite Central Committee, which has its headquarters in Akron, Pennsylvania.<sup>4</sup>

The most serious schism in the South German Anabaptist-Mennonite group was that of 1693 led by Elder Jakob Ammann, Canton of Bern, Switzerland.<sup>5</sup> Ammann's major motive for dissension was the slack use of the ban. When anyone was excommunicated from the church, it was common practice for other members to avoid or "shun" the rejected person. Among other things, Ammann advocated a much more rigid adoption of this practice of banning excommunicated members from Amish society and also favored uniformity of dress.<sup>6</sup>

#### Expansion in the United States

The first German colony of Pennsylvania was composed of Mennonites. Reaching the United States in 1683, this religious colony, pursuing their belief that God's work is best performed on the farm, purchased 5,000 acres of rich soil from William Penn. Their colony prospered and was named Germantown. Relics of this town still exist, particularly their first church building.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Mennonite Encyclopedia (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Mennonite Publishing House, 1955), Volume I, p. 90.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Elmer Lewis Smith, The Amish People (New York: Exposition Press, 1958), p. 21.

The Amish followed the Mennonites to Pennsylvania during the following few years as is indicated in the early pioneer records bearing Amish family names such as Zook, Beiler, Fisher, Lantz, and Yoder. The Amish and Mennonites were among the first to set up log cabins, sod shanties, and pioneer church congregations wherever they established themselves.<sup>8</sup>

The Old Order Amish Mennonite church was organized in the Americas in 1693. Some of their practices include the use of hooks and eyes as opposed to buttons, worship in private homes, and the disbelief in missions, benevolent institutions, and higher education.<sup>9</sup> The colony at Thomas has previously been affiliated with the Old Order Amish, but their changes toward more liberal living codes have led them to be called Amish Mennonites.<sup>10</sup>

In 1725 the Amish founded their still famous location in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. All of the Amish at this time belonged to what is now termed Old Order Amish. The Old Order Amish deviate the least from a strict literal interpretation of the Scriptures. In 1767, the Amish crossed the Alleghenies and this began their dispersal throughout the central and western sections of the United States. Between the years 1840 and 1870 many Amish families ventured into the territory now included in

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Mead, op. cit., p. 143.

<sup>10</sup>Interview with Mr. David Miller, Bishop of the Amish congregation, Thomas, Oklahoma. February 17, 1967.

the states of Illinois, Ohio, Missouri, Indiana, and Iowa. These states are still home for many Amish today. In 1873, a small sect of these people took residence in Nebraska and the 1880's saw a somewhat greater influx of Amish into Reno County, Kansas (Fig. 3).<sup>11</sup>

In 1890, ancestors of the Amish at Thomas migrated from Illinois, Indiana, and Pennsylvania to Mississippi. These agriculture-loving people were always looking for new land that would support an abundance of crops. Approximately 15 to 18 families left Indiana by train for Aberdeen, Mississippi. The Amish owned their own passenger coach and permission was obtained to attach the coach onto a southbound train. Family supplies and clothing were loaded onto the coach and all the families boarded the coach.<sup>12</sup> The Old Order Amish do not believe in using automobiles even today and it seems surprising to some that they would own a train coach or even travel by rail.

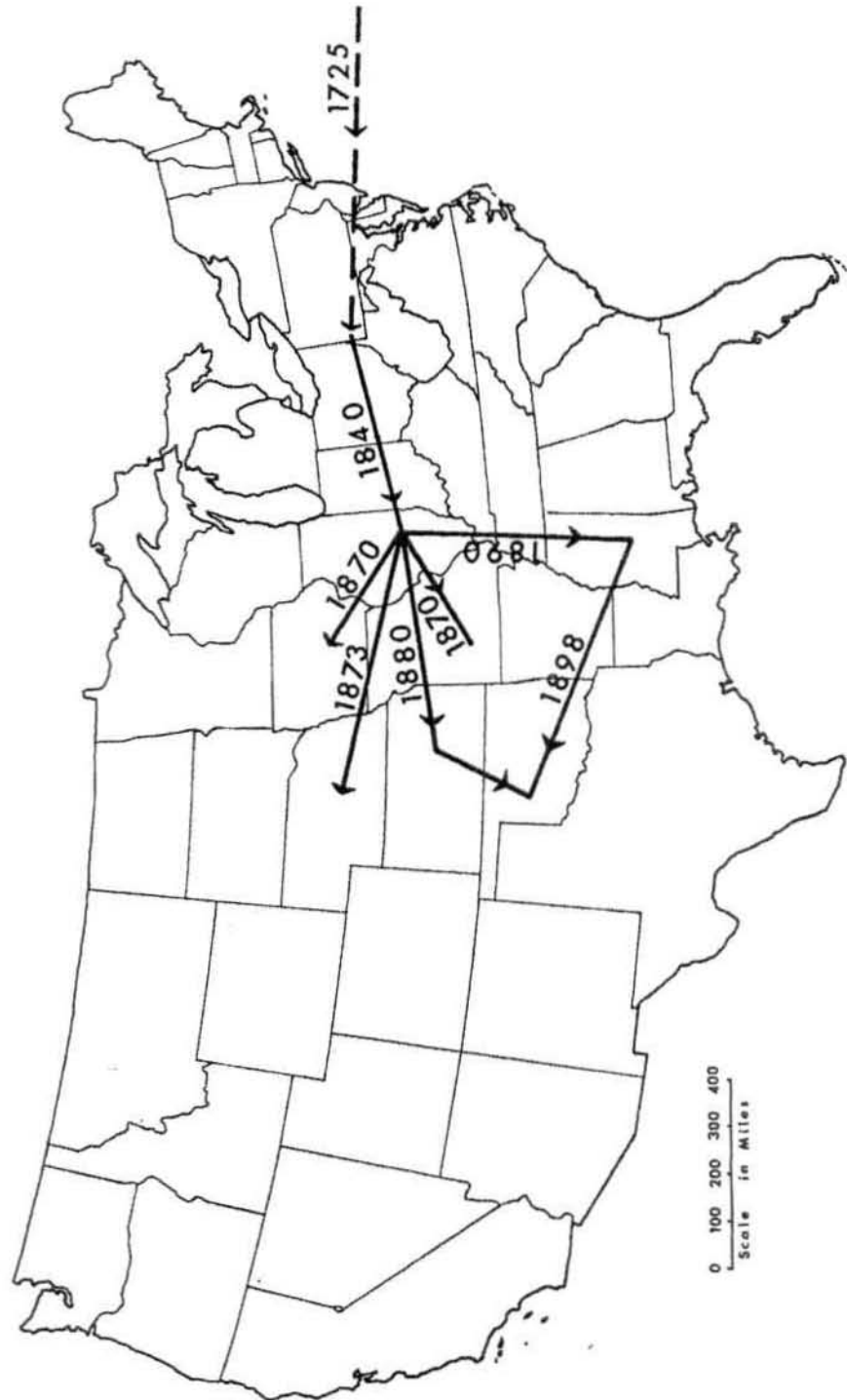
After reaching Mississippi, settlements were established near Aberdeen with a smaller colony located near Egypt. The families bought farms and planted crops soon after their arrival. Problems arose after a few years which discouraged the Amish. Amish-Negro relations were far from being cordial, which is contrary to Amish values of peace and friendliness. Possibly due to the climatic change, the Amish began to suffer

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<sup>11</sup>C. Henry Smith, Mennonites of America (Scottdale, Pennsylvania: Mennonite Publishing House, 1909).

<sup>12</sup>David Miller, op. cit., February 17, 1967.

FIG. 3: AMISH MIGRATIONS



heavily from malaria. Thus, the religious sect decided to move from their Mississippi home after having resided there for a period of eight years. The dispersal from the South began in 1898.<sup>13</sup>

#### Beginning of Thomas Colony

The members of the cluster each wanted to go separate directions; therefore, the passenger coach was sold. Some returned to their old homes in Indiana and Pennsylvania, but others either looked for Amish colonies still in the developing stage or sought unexplored lands. Those looking for evolving sects travelled into Kansas, near the present site of Hutchinson, and bought farms. The remainder journeyed to the vicinity of Thomas, Oklahoma where free land could be homesteaded by driving a stake.<sup>14</sup> This area is the location of many Amish families today.

Approximately three million acres of land remained for settlement after the Cheyenne-Arapahoe lands were allotted by the Dawes Act in 1887. The unassigned land in the Cheyenne-Arapaho Reservation was opened by run on April 19, 1892. Many Mennonites from Kansas and Nebraska entered Oklahoma Territory at the time of this opening and settled in Custer, Washita and Blaine Counties. The first Amish penetrated

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Roy Gittinger, The Formation of the State of Oklahoma (Norman, Oklahoma: The University of Oklahoma Press, 1939), p. 197.



the area the following year (1893).<sup>15</sup>

Settling in the area of the future town of Thomas, the Amish established the first church congregation of Custer County.<sup>16</sup> Emphasis should be placed on the word congregation to stress the fact that the Amish did not believe in church buildings at that time, but congregated in the homes of members. The first church building in Custer County was erected by the United Brethren, a Mennonite denomination.<sup>17</sup> The Amish population did not increase rapidly and in 1898 there were only six Amish families living in the vicinity.<sup>18</sup>

The Amish that settled in Kansas purchased a farmstead without difficulty for land prices were modest compared to those of the present. These farms were satisfactory for agricultural purposes, but after six years (1904) many of the Amish in Kansas desired to reside near their families and relatives in the Oklahoma Territory. Between the years 1904 and 1907 a sizable migration of Amish occurred, particularly from the vicinity of Hutchinson, Kansas, to the Thomas area.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Marvin Elroy Kroeker, "The Mennonites of Oklahoma<sup>to</sup> 1890-1907" (unpublished Master's thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1939), p. 50. <sup>1954</sup>

<sup>17</sup>History of Custer and Washita Counties (Clinton, Oklahoma: Clinton Daily News, 1937).

<sup>18</sup>Kroeker, op. cit.

<sup>19</sup>David Miller, op. cit., February 17, 1967.

Many of the Amish that made the journey into Oklahoma Territory in the early 1900's came from Reno, Harvey, Marion, Woodson, and Butler Counties, Kansas. The habit was for a small group of families, usually three or four, to travel together. The most commonly used route extended south of Caldwell, Kansas, along the Rock Island Railroad line to El Reno, Oklahoma. From El Reno the Amish turned west, crossed the Canadian River, then proceeded to the eastern part of Custer County. The railroad could still be followed since the tracks were extended into Custer County in 1898.<sup>20</sup>

Besides the desire to be closer to families, another incentive was the fact that other Mennonite groups had settled earlier around Corn, Oklahoma, and had brought to Kansas reports of rich soil with an abundance of water. Mr. J. J. Kliever, founder of the Mennonite colony at Corn, was especially instrumental in carrying such information to other Mennonites in Kansas.<sup>21</sup> Many journeyed into Custer and Washita Counties as a result of Kliever's statements about prosperous farms. Even when the first Amish arrived there were a few Mennonite families of the Brethren in Christ denomination located to the west of Thomas. These Brethren in Christ were already actively engaged in agriculture.<sup>22</sup>

Most of the Amish came to Oklahoma Territory in covered wagons

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<sup>20</sup>Kroecker, op. cit., p. 41.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>22</sup>Interview with Mrs. Sam Switzer, Brethren in Christ Member and Thomas Resident, December 7, 1966.

and homesteaded. A few, however, virtually traded their farm and livestock in Kansas for another man's farm and livestock in the proximity of Thomas. Everything remaining that the family owned or needed was transported by covered wagon. Since farm machinery had not been developed at this time the bulk of the baggage consisted of clothing and household articles.<sup>23</sup>

The first settlers lived in dugouts and hastily built sod dwellings until houses could be erected.<sup>24</sup> Lack of money and the scarcity of timber and lumber in the surrounding prairie often prohibited the immediate construction of a house. The building of houses and barns was a cooperative operation and this is true of much of the work today. If a barn or house is burned or destroyed by some other means, all members of the clan pool their resources in what is termed a "frolic." The men all work together building the new structure while women supply food for everyone. Work is the major objective but an enjoyable day usually marks such an event.<sup>25</sup> If ever an Amishman needs help in his farming activities he can rest assured that the members of the local congregation will come to his aid.

Continuing the practiced employed on their Pennsylvania and Ohio Valley farms, these early Amish farmers planted corn, mile maize, kaffir

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<sup>23</sup>David Miller, op. cit., February 17, 1967.

<sup>24</sup>Mrs. Sam Switzer, op. cit.

<sup>25</sup>Interview with Mrs. David Miller, Amish Member, March 27, 1967.

corn, but only a minute amount of wheat. Somehow they had the idea that wheat would not grow in the area; unaware that they were dwelling in one of the country's richest wheat belts. Much of the grains and seeds were brought from Kansas in covered wagons along with the family possessions.<sup>26</sup>

The original farmsteads contained 160 acres but the agricultural aptitudes of the Amish guided them in expanding their holdings until some had sizable holdings of property. The average amount of land held by an Amish family ranged between 480 and 640 acres, all of which was productive and close to water sources. Later, divisions of land to provide for sons and high land prices caused many to decrease their acreages. The major problem for many who were unaccustomed to the territory was dust. One account was given of a group that arrived in Thomas one day, experienced a dust storm the second day, and returned to Kansas on the third day.<sup>27</sup>

The original site of Thomas was located one mile southwest of the present townsite. Consisting principally of a post office and a store, the town was established after the Cheyenne-Arapaho lands were opened. Within a mile of the original post office ran a rail line which later became the St. Louis and San Francisco Railroad. "In 1902, a group of promoters from Missouri, headed by George Rice, Henry W. Roe, and J. T. Riley,

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<sup>26</sup>David Miller, op. cit., March 27, 1967.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

bought the present townsite, and proceeded to sell, give away and distribute in various other ways, the land which they had obtained."<sup>28</sup> This group was known as the Oklahoma Central Development Company.

Wheat was formerly threshed where the townsite is now located and corn fields had to be cut to allow surveys to establish lot boundaries. The town's charter was received on August 22, 1902. At this time Thomas was served, and is still served today, by two main railroad lines; the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe; and the St. Louis and San Francisco. The Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe track extends along the north side of the town while the St. Louis and San Francisco tracks are along the southern edge of Thomas. The young village contained the usual enterprises: a hardware-implement shop, a saloon, one restaurant, a cotton gin built by a man who established several along the St. Louis-San Francisco Railroad in Southwestern Oklahoma, a bank, and a clothing store which had its dry goods sent from Kingfisher, Oklahoma.<sup>29</sup> In the 1920's the most thriving industries were the Farmer's Union Store, a country general store, and a movie house.<sup>30</sup> The movie did not prosper because the many Amish and Brethren in Christ who lived nearby believed movies to be antagonistic to their religious beliefs. One story was related about young Amish boys, being like other mischeivous boys, approaching the front of the theatre,

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<sup>28</sup>History of Custer and Washita Counties, op. cit.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

looking up and down the street to make sure none of the elder Amish were about, offering the ten cents admission fee, and darting into the building. They usually made their way to the balcony where they were less likely to be discovered.<sup>31</sup> Events such as this were probably not uncommon in a young Amishman's day; but once he was old enough to be a member of the church, few ever deviated from the strict way of life.

The neighboring towns in 1904 were Weatherford, the end of the Rock Island Railroad line; Custer City, erected in the middle of a corn field in 1902; and Independence, now extinct.<sup>32</sup> The absence of automobiles limited the shopping range and Thomas was the center of trade for the surrounding hinterland more so than today.

The Amish infiltration continued at somewhat slower rates from 1910 to 1930. The growth of the Amish colony and that of Thomas have closely paralleled each other. Thomas has grown steadily, rather than experiencing growth spurts or booms. At the same time, the town has never suffered any population setbacks. One possible reason for its even and steady existence is its reliance upon a farming industry situated on rich soil rather than mining or manufacturing activities.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Interview with Mr. T. Wilson Dunn, Editor, Thomas Tribune, February 18, 1967.

<sup>32</sup>Interview with Mr. Gilbert Parker, pioneer settler, December 7, 1966.

<sup>33</sup>History of Custer and Washita Counties, op. cit.

Growth and Decline of the Amish Colony

The peak of population in the Amish colony was reached in 1932 when a total of 72 families lived in the Thomas area.<sup>34</sup> Stretching in an almost solid line from Thomas to Hydro, the Amish were outstanding farmers possessing productive soil, and at the same time molding the pattern for the future of the region. The main crops were corn and wheat, with smaller amounts of cotton. The decline of cotton growing and the concentration of wheat growing caused the cotton gin in Thomas to close in the mid-1950's.<sup>35</sup> Today Thomas has no cotton gin, but towering above the town's buildings are three large wheat elevators, more than would normally be expected in a town the size of Thomas.

From 1932 to 1934, the migration of Amish from Thomas was kindled by dust storms, high land prices, and economic depression.<sup>36</sup> This decrease in Amish numbers did not affect the town of Thomas greatly. At the time of the Amish population peak in 1932 Thomas had approximately 1,200 inhabitants while its 1960 population figures show 1,500 occupants,<sup>37</sup> though there are only 16 Amish families left in the district.<sup>38</sup> The change in population types had some aftermath because the people replacing

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<sup>34</sup>Mr. David Miller, op. cit., February 17, 1967.

<sup>35</sup>Mr. T. Wilson Dunn, op. cit.                      <sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>U. S. Census of Population, 1960, op. cit.

<sup>38</sup>Mr. David Miller, op. cit., March 27, 1967.



the Amish who left did not undertake the same activities with the vigor which characterized the Amish. Two industries which flourished at Thomas at the time of the Amish domination that no longer exist were a creamery and a flour mill.<sup>39</sup> Amish coming from the Ohio Valley were oriented toward dairying, but their moving away and the growth of larger facilities in surrounding towns such as Clinton led to the closing of the creamery. The flour mill functioned until the early 1930's before ceasing operations.<sup>40</sup> Its demise was not due to the Amish as much as to the competition from larger, more efficient flour mills in Enid and Yukon. An industry which rose during the Amish population peak was the sweet potato plant. This firm formerly shipped a large volume of seed potatoes through the United States.<sup>41</sup> The activity of this business is not so great now, but it is still one of Thomas' thriving industries. The Amish never planted sweet potatoes as intensely as did many non-Amish farmers and today none of the religious group grows sweet potatoes.

#### Present Amish

The proper name for this group is Amish Mennonite, but they are commonly referred to as Amish. The two major divisions of Amish

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<sup>39</sup>Gaston Litton, History of Oklahoma (New York: Historical Publishing Co., 1957), Vol. II, p. 63.

<sup>40</sup>Mr. T. Wilson Dunn, op. cit.

<sup>41</sup>Kent Ruth, Oklahoma: A Guide to the Sooner State (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1957), p. 366.



are the Conservative Amish Mennonite Church and the larger Old Order Amish Mennonite Church. The Conservative Amish Mennonite Church, which in 1954 changed its name to Conservative Mennonite Conference, differs from the Old Order by use of church buildings and the conducting of services in English rather than in German. This sect began in 1910 at Pigeon, Michigan. But as mentioned earlier, the group at Thomas is unlike either division.<sup>42</sup>

Different groups have been formed from time to time and several have undergone name changes. One of the more recent of the new bodies is the Beachy Amish, who had their beginning in Pennsylvania (Somerset County) in 1927. Led by Bishop Moses M. Beachy, this group resembles the Old Order Amish in dress but worship in church buildings and support missionary work.<sup>43</sup>

The historical development of Thomas and the Amish has been marked by numerous incidents. Thomas has experienced a larger number of innovations because the customs of the Amish have held them to a rigid pattern of life.

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<sup>42</sup>Mennonite Encyclopedia, op. cit.

<sup>43</sup>Mead, op. cit.

## CHAPTER III

### CUSTOMS OF THE AMISH

At first glance the Amish appear to have been isolated from the rest of the world. Their wearing apparel and living habits are much like those found among American pioneers. Isolation is not the reason, for often the Amish live on the margins of cities, highways, and other modes of modern living.<sup>1</sup> The reason for these customs lies entirely in their religious beliefs. "The Amish are a devout, honest people, devoted to their families, mindful of their own business, and usually highly successful farmers."<sup>2</sup> The characteristics non-Amish commonly associate with the Amish are fine farms, well-fed livestock, and comfortable bank accounts, which are not exactly undesirable traits.

#### Occupations

One objective that has become a tradition with the Amish is maintaining life on the soil. The Amish feel that the most suitable place to rear children and to lead Christian lives is in the country. The estab-

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<sup>1</sup>Ammon M. Aurand, Little Known Facts About the Amish and the Mennonites (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Aurand Press, 1938).

<sup>2</sup>C. Henry Smith, op. cit.

lishment of a married son on a farm of his own by his father is one means of insuring that the family will continue an agriculturally-based livelihood. Life on a farm is not easy, and the Amish teach their children to enjoy hard work and to shun idleness.<sup>3</sup> One look at an Amish farm justifies the fact that they are fond of and take pride in their occupation. More than 60 per cent of all Mennonites in the United States live on farms and have agriculture as their occupation (Table 4).

TABLE 4

Religious Group	Per Cent Living in Rural Areas in 1952
Jewish	2.5
Roman Catholic	23.0
Presbyterian	37.6
Lutheran	40.5
Mennonite	62.1

Source: Wilbur Zelinsky, "Religious Geography of the United States," Association of American Geographers, Annals, 51 (1961), pp. 139-193.

High land prices and lack of obtainable acreage have forced some of the younger generation to begin new occupations such as carpentry, cabinetmaking, painting, machinery repair, and other skilled jobs to which

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<sup>3</sup>David Miller, op. cit., March 27, 1967.

the Amish readily adapt.<sup>4</sup> The Amish of the Thomas district who work in nearby towns continue to live in the country even though they may not own or till the land. To date, no Amish live in the city limits, but some do own lots and property within the town. One Amish man who had seven children stated that three did not farm, but that one worked in Weatherford as a carpenter; one in Clinton as a painter; and one in Custer at a machinery shop. However, all three continue to make their home in rural regions.<sup>5</sup>

### Marriages

Marriages are gala events for the Amish as they are for anyone. The Old Order Amish marriage "season" extended from November to February. During these months work slackened after the crops were harvested. Tuesday and Thursday were set aside for wedding ceremonies. Sunday was devoted to church, Monday was a work day to catch up on tasks neglected over the weekend, and Tuesday was a suitable day to take off for a marriage.<sup>6</sup> The Amish at Thomas no longer practice this custom. A wedding is a rare occurrence due to the smallness of the colony and may be performed at any time or on any day of the year. The young Amish are few in number, consequently many marry Amish from other states.<sup>7</sup> Also,

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<sup>4</sup>Elmer L. Smith, op. cit., p. 158.

<sup>5</sup>David Miller, op. cit., March 27, 1967.

<sup>6</sup>Elmer L. Smith, op. cit., p. 74.

<sup>7</sup>David Miller, op. cit., March 27, 1967.

marriages of relatives to relatives is a conventional procedure. This promotes an extensive intertwining of kinship and it appears to an outsider that all are kin to everyone else. "An analysis of 500 Amish marriages over the 15-year period, 1940-1955, showed a total of only 32 different Amish surnames among the 1,000 Amish involved in the Pennsylvania study."<sup>8</sup> The Amish visit their relatives in Pennsylvania, Iowa, and Indiana frequently, hence a large number have spouses from these states. The Amish do not allow their members to marry anyone outside the Amish church. This is obedience to the scripture, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers. . . ."<sup>9</sup> In fact, the Amish demand that both parties involved be members of the church before the marriage is permitted. Their reasoning for this practice stems from their desire to perpetuate their beliefs by keeping the members they already have. Also, the problem of separate churches does not arise after the two are married.<sup>10</sup>

The wedding is not an elaborate affair such as may be found elsewhere. Flowers and decorations are entirely absent. The average Amish wedding may last for several hours or all day with everyone in the colony present. The Amish do not believe in jewelry of any kind; consequently, no wedding rings are exchanged by the bride and groom. These and other

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<sup>8</sup>Elmer L. Smith, op. cit., p. 54.

<sup>9</sup>II Corinthians 6:14.

<sup>10</sup>David Miller, op. cit., March 27, 1967.

items of jewelry are deemed unnecessary decoration. Wedding showers consist of household necessities, canned fruit and vegetables, and physical help in getting settled.<sup>11</sup> Photographs of the wedding or the newlyweds are forbidden by the scripture "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath. . . ."<sup>12</sup>

Fathers use to provide land, a house, and sometimes livestock for sons who married, but it has become all but impossible for this to be accomplished any longer. Now young couples will often buy a share of either the bride's or groom's parents enterprises. One can observe evidence of this by driving past an Amish farm. A large, usually two-story, house is the home for the parents, while smaller surrounding houses, usually from one to three, indicate housing that has been provided for married children. Amish families are usually large and not all the children continue at the parent farm. Also, the amount of land owned by one family is a deciding factor.

#### Funerals

Funerals are also group-shared and very plain. Before the use of a church building at Thomas was approved in 1959, funeral services were conducted in a member's home. One party in the area had an

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<sup>11</sup>T. Wilson Dunn, op. cit., February 18, 1967.

<sup>12</sup>Exodus 20:4.

especially spacious basement and many funerals were handled there. When an Amishman dies fellow Amish transport the body to the local undertaker in Thomas where the body is embalmed. The corpse is returned to the home where it may lie for a period of time extending up to four days. This delay in burial services allows the many hundreds of relatives in Pennsylvania, Iowa, Indiana, and Kansas to arrive. There are always more attending the service than can be seated. The male members construct the wooden coffin while the family awaits the relatives. No flowers are sent to the funeral or placed on the grave. The funeral service is conducted in a manner similar to that of a Sunday church session. As many as three ministers may be present and each may deliver a sermon.<sup>13</sup>

Burial is in the Amish cemetery which is located five miles south and three and three-fourths miles east of Thomas. Begun at the time of Amish pioneer settlement in the area, the cemetery is entirely maintained by the Amish sect and presently accommodates approximately 150 graves (Fig. 4).

#### Education

The Mulberry School which accommodates all the Amish children is a public owned and operated school of what is known as the Mulberry School District. Located three and one-half miles south and one mile east of Thomas, it maintains eight grades which are taught by two women

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<sup>13</sup>T. Wilson Dunn, op. cit., February 18, 1967.



Fig. 4. --The grass in the Amish cemetery is kept mowed but no flowers are placed on the graves.

teachers who drive from nearby Weatherford. Another lady goes to the school daily and prepares hot lunches for the children. The teachers are paid in the same manner as any public school instructor. No custodian is on duty; however, the building is small and is kept clean by the pupils and teachers.<sup>14</sup>

After the children finish the eighth grade, they do not continue their studies elsewhere. This is in conformance with Amish beliefs. Only one Amish person has previously attended high school in Thomas; being a cripple he could not be expected to engage in farming.<sup>15</sup> Presently,

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<sup>14</sup>David Miller, op. cit., February 17, 1967.

<sup>15</sup>T. Wilson Dunn, op. cit., February 18, 1967.



there is one Amish boy attending Weatherford High School. The children are picked up by an ordinary school bus with "Mulberry School District" painted in black letters on its side. This bus is also district owned.

Formerly there were two schools, one approximately a mile south of the other. The present Mulberry School was previously known as Jefferson School. The mailbox in front still bears this title. Mulberry was the name of the building one mile south of the school now being used. To please more people, the Jefferson school building was adapted for classroom use and the other school's name, Mulberry, was applied.<sup>16</sup> In the past, news concerning the Amish families was carried in the local newspaper under the heading "Jefferson Tidings."<sup>17</sup>

The school is a white frame structure with four rooms. Both inside and outside, the building is clean and well-kept (Fig. 5). Approximately fifteen children are normally enrolled. The only financial burden on the Amish is the payment of the taxes.

Before the children begin school attendance they do not speak English, but some English words are understood. The children adopt the German or "Pennsylvania Dutch" dialect of their parents; therefore, particular emphasis is placed on the teaching of English language usage. Otherwise, this school is similar in curriculum to any public elementary

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<sup>16</sup>David Miller, op. cit., March 27, 1967.

<sup>17</sup>Personal examination of Thomas Tribune.



Fig. 5. --The Amish children receive all of their education in the Mulberry school. Only Amish children attend this school.

grade school. Many of the classes and activities are oriented toward later Amish life and stress practical rural living. One issue of the Thomas newspaper that carried an account of the school news included such items as raising gardens of onions, cucumbers, tomatoes, lettuce, and peppers.<sup>18</sup> Amish women plant immense gardens and it seems proper that they should get some practice while in school. The vegetables grown in the school plot were used by the school cook in preparing student lunches. Also, the surplus was sold for a total of \$1.83 which was used to purchase an electric Bible quiz game.<sup>19</sup> Needless to say, the Amish are not wasteful! Other

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<sup>18</sup>Thomas Tribune, May 8, 1956.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

activities at the school included chicken hatching for a science class and making Mother's Day gifts.

The last day of school is climaxed by an all-day picnic attended by all the Amish families. A general visit and socializing are the prime features with a ballgame being the highlight of the afternoon.<sup>20</sup>

### Dress

In the past the Amish have always been characterized by black clothing having no buttons, but utilizing hook-and-eye fasteners. This is still true in most respects, but small changes have occurred recently.

Amish women normally wear dark solid colored dresses that are handmade at home. The dress does not have to be black, but it is not to be "flashy" in any manner. With the exception of black, the colors most frequently worn are grey, brown, and navy blue. The use of purple by some is drawing criticism from the more conservative. Buttons and zippers still do not appear on the Amish woman's apparel. The dress is worn approximately three inches above the ankle and may be largely covered by an apron of the same length. The dress has a full skirt, as opposed to a sheath style, and has full or three-quarter length sleeves. Younger women tend to wear more white aprons while middle-aged or elderly ladies are seen in aprons of black or made of the same fabric as the dress. However, white aprons are not forbidden to older women and

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<sup>20</sup>David Miller, op. cit., March 27, 1967.

many do wear white.<sup>21</sup>

Another article of clothing for practically every Amish lady is a pair of black, cotton stockings worn especially in the winter. Shoes are black and low-heeled, even for Sunday wear. No cosmetics are ever used and jewelry, with the exception of watches, is taboo. Those that require eye glasses buy the plainest of frames.

Probably the most distinctive apparel for the women is the prayer cap. Worn at all times, inside and outside the house, the head covering is constructed of starched white organdy fabric with two small strings that are tied under the chin when going out-of-doors to insure that the cap will not be blown off. After reaching a certain age, usually about twelve, all women wear their hair braided or coiled and covered by the prayer cap. This is in accordance with the scripture, "But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head. . . ."<sup>22</sup> Small girls wear their hair in braids at home but even a three-year old will display the white head covering at church on Sunday. When going someplace out-of-doors, such as grocery shopping or visiting, a larger black bonnet is worn. This headgear is bigger than the prayer cap and is placed directly over the latter, completely covering the prayer cap.

The Amishman's clothing is also discerned by the absence of

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<sup>21</sup>Mrs. David Miller, op. cit., March 27, 1967.

<sup>22</sup>I Corinthians 11:5-6.

buttons and the employment of hooks and eyes. Legends state the shunning of buttons stems from the idea that early military leaders used buttons to hold back their coat in order to display shining swords or other weapons. This is entirely contradictory to the Amish pacifist position.<sup>23</sup> The most common notion about buttons is that they are "worldly."

Work trousers are homemade from the blue denim similar to that of manufactured jeans. No zipper closing is made but a style similar to a sailor's front-fall pants is adopted. That is, large metal buttons are used at the sides of the trouser top. Recently, gray chambray and khaki shirts have been purchased; thus breaking the tradition of making men's shirts without buttons. Suspenders rather than belts are worn, and men are not seen without hats except inside the home or church.

Men shave until they marry, after which a beard is grown and maintained throughout life. Moustaches, on the other hand, are forbidden. Men may also wear or carry a watch, but they, like the women, do not don a wedding band.<sup>24</sup>

#### Mechanization

The change from Old Order Amish to Amish Mennonite came with the adoption of automobiles and electricity. The employment of these more

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<sup>23</sup>Elmer L. Smith, op. cit., p. 164.

<sup>24</sup>David Miller, op. cit., March 27, 1967.

liberal devices was one factor in the decreased size of the colony after 1956.<sup>25</sup>

In 1937, tractors were first purchased for farm use, although rubber tires were still forbidden. The Amish tractor utilized steel wheels instead. When World War II brought the restrictive uses of steel the Amish were forced to turn to the rubber tire, but only on the back wheels. The sandy soil of the area was particularly difficult to drive in with steel wheels and rubber tires on all four wheels became standard equipment in 1947.<sup>26</sup> Also, the adoption of tractors was a leading factor in accepting the automobile.

While the horse and buggy were the primary means of travel until 1956, the manufacture of tractors with a fourth gear caused some habit changes. A trip to town in a buggy took a considerable amount of time, but the improved farming machinery could be driven into town in a much shorter time. Saturday was set aside for shopping and business in the city when reliance was still on the horse and buggy, but those having new tractors might make three or four trips to Thomas in one week. This caused considerable controversy between the tractor owners and the horse and buggy owners.<sup>27</sup>

The next significant innovation was undertaken in 1957-58. This

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid.      <sup>26</sup>T. Wilson Dunn, op. cit., February 18, 1967.

<sup>27</sup>David Miller, op. cit., March 27, 1967.

was engaging the use of electricity. Prior to electricity, many types of power were tried to produce the desired effect, with wind-powered generators being the most common. One Amishman turned to using a gasoline-driven generator and this almost caused his expulsion from the church for a short period of time.<sup>28</sup>

Electricity is now prevalent in all Amish homes in the Thomas vicinity. In addition many chicken houses and barns have had electric devices installed. Even though alterations such as electricity are adopted, the Amish are normally restrictive and conservative in using the devices. Not so for electricity, for one can find on an Amish farm all types of electrical gadgets with the exception of a radio or television set. Lamps, kitchen appliances, clocks, telephones, and lawn tools are examples of electric articles now owned by the Amish.

The change from the horse and buggy to the automobile as a mode of living in 1959 was the great undertaking of the Amish toward a more liberal manner of life. Within the colony of Amish were several who wanted cars, as opposed to a small number who did not desire to make the change to the car. The Amish were then permitted to ride in a car, but could not own one. The desire by some, especially the younger men of the area, for automobiles could be detected by the large number who would hitch-hike rides to and from town with non-Amish folks. When those favoring the automobile began to buy and use them, others that were in

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<sup>28</sup>T. Wilson Dunn, op. cit., February 18, 1967.



disagreement with the practice moved away from Thomas. Most went to the Garnett, Kansas, area. There was not a large migration, but any sizable number leaving would greatly affect the already small group. The Amish who moved did not leave in anger. They feared that the adoption of automobiles would cause the turning away of the young people from the church, and their moving was primarily aimed at preventing this event. However, after moving to Kansas the younger members departed from the Old Order Amish ways and took membership with less conservative Amish sects who utilized cars and other items forbidden by the Old Order. Many of the Amish of Thomas have since talked with those that moved away. Since their motives for action were of no avail, several have desired to return to the group at Thomas,<sup>29</sup> but it is now impossible to purchase farms in the agriculturally-rich area where land prices have skyrocketed.

The standard procedure for purchase of a car by an Amishman is to select a used car, usually two to six years old, which is black in color. The colony at Thomas does not remove the chrome parts, nor do they paint them black as do some other sects, commonly known as the "Black Bumper Mennonites." Usually the automobile will be of a Chevrolet or Ford make (Fig. 6). The emphasis is on saving money; therefore, higher priced makes are not common. Also, several Volkswagens have been purchased. The better gas mileage of this small car is welcomed by the Amish.

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<sup>29</sup>David Miller, op. cit., March 27, 1967.





Fig. 6. --This black automobile is typical of the cars utilized by the Amish.

The black automobile is not owned by 100 per cent of the sect for occasionally a member will select another color. The car is not to be colorful or conspicuous and black is more often seen than any other hue. The same practice is also employed in buying pick-ups and farm trucks. New trucks are often bought but cars tend to be used when purchased. Pick-up trucks are often black, but more and more blue and green trucks are found on the Amish farms.

Although the Amish were slow in conforming to the use of the car as a method of travel, other transportation mediums were widely employed. Trips and visits via trains and buses were not rare, nor were they shunned by anyone in the church. In fact, the bishop of the Thomas congregation has made a trip involving mission work by airplane to Crete, parts of

Africa, and British Honduras.<sup>30</sup>

### Homes

While the Amish do not find pleasure in owning many of the items the average American feels is necessary for status, they do take tremendous pride in their homes. The typical Amish home is exceptionally large for two reasons. First, the house was built with the capacity to comfortably contain the church congregation since services were held in the home prior to 1956.<sup>31</sup> Secondly, the structure was to be home for a large family. The Amish in the past have usually had more children than the average American family; but the size of the Amish family is now decreasing somewhat.

When children marry, a smaller house may be erected near the larger home or a wing to house the couple may be added to the parents' home. Where this has been practiced as many as four or five wings may have been added to the already large house. Garages are usually separate buildings and in most instances accommodate only one vehicle.

The Amish houses in the Thomas district are not new but were well-built when constructed. This fact coupled with extreme care given the living quarters accounts for the excellent condition of these dwellings at present. All are constructed of lumber that has been painted white; none live in brick houses. The lack of brick structures is due to the period

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., February 17, 1967.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

of building; the cost, especially for structures of this magnitude; and the ancestry of the Amish. The houses are never in need of a coat of paint or repairs due to the extensive attention paid the buildings throughout the year. Concrete sidewalks, spacious lawns, beautiful flower beds, and handsome trees and shrubs adorn the grounds surrounding the home. Sprinkler systems, electric pruning shears, and a great deal of work keep the yards in a superior state.

The best word to describe the house interior is immaculate. Comfortable furniture sits atop light-colored carpeting or floors waxed to the point that they could be used for mirrors. Even the woodwork is given a coat of wax. Throw rugs are numerous and, much to an outsider's surprise, often are predominately brightly colored. The Amish do not believe in decorations for the home; consequently, items which meet the visitor's eye are Bibles in both English and German, dishes, and scriptures or prayers embroidered on wall hangings. Many Bibles are found in the Amish home. One family had four stacked on a small table in the living room; one King James version in English, one English-German translation, another entirely written in German, and an Old Testament in Lutheran translation. Hanging pictures on walls is prohibited, but calendars with very large, colorful pictures may be found as often as three in one room.<sup>32</sup> Such items as tablecloths and doilies are

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

made by the women and used extensively. The women use their "green thumbs" in the house as well as the garden as evidenced by the many potted plants and flowers that grow throughout the home. No curtains are permitted at the windows; consequently, paper shades are utilized to supply the necessary privacy. The idea concerning household items is that they are to be useful and not merely ornamental. To combine this belief with some beauty the Amish buy "highly ornate necessities."

The house in practically every instance has two stories. The top floor is primarily sleeping quarters, while the ground floor is devoted to family activities. The largest room of the first story is the kitchen,<sup>33</sup> where Amish women prepare huge meals with a German flair. Other rooms on the first level include a spacious dining area, living room, sewing room, and storage-utility space.

Activity begins in the Amish home about 5:00 to 5:30 a.m. Many necessary chores are performed before breakfast, and the women often do the laundry or their baking prior to the morning meal.<sup>34</sup> Once a day's work is begun it continues throughout the remainder of the day or until sundown at least, with the women being as busy as the men. An occasional trip to town is necessary, but does not occur every day. Saturday was the day the Amish travelled to town, but the use of cars changed this practice.

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<sup>33</sup>Elmer L. Smith, op. cit., p. 98.

<sup>34</sup>Mrs. David Miller, op. cit., March 27, 1967.

Work is performed by the immediate family. Hired labor is not common due to the cooperative nature of the people. Also, large families provide an ample work force.

### Children

Married children who reside on the parent's farm provide food, such as beef and pork, and services for the parents. Also the young couple may plant a garden large enough to adequately supply both families. The daughter will often include the elderly member's clothing in her laundry and assist in meal preparation. One Amish family, whose children had moved away, were still tending the farm in addition to raising approximately 5,000 chickens with the help of a hired Amish girl from Arkansas. She was employed for one year to assist in the duties involved with raising the chickens. After the year expires, the girl will return to her home and the elderly couple will hire someone else as a replacement or sell the chickens.<sup>35</sup> Although the girl was employed to care for the chickens, she also helped the woman in the home with chores such as cooking and ironing. The hiring of female help is not common, except in cases like that mentioned above or after childbirth.

Amish men help each other all they possibly can, but at times all are busy with their own work. The time of wheat harvesting is an example of a season when extra help must be obtained.

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

### Activities

Entertainment for the Amish consists of singings, visits, and church socials. The Amish are not passive to community affairs, but do not actively participate in amusements of the town.<sup>36</sup> Black telephones in the home are standard equipment, but a radio or television is never installed. Evenings may be consumed by reading of the Bible, newspapers, and some magazines. Every Amish family subscribes to the local newspaper. Also, evenings are the time when women do much of their sewing. The expert craftsmanship of the Amish ladies can be appreciated by the size of her sewing room. New electric sewing machines are popular and every Amish woman sews, embroiders, knits, crochets, and some produce needlepoint articles.

Although the Amish young people are restricted in their entertainment activities, they enjoy most of the social events of their parents. Since they do not believe in higher education, movies, dances, and other public attractions, they have little opportunity to meet others of their own age. On the other hand, this retards the number of marriages outside the church,

### Church

As previously mentioned, the early Amish in Oklahoma conducted religious services in the homes of congregation members. The method

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<sup>36</sup>T. Wilson Dunn, op. cit., February 18, 1967.

employed involved a rotation from one house to another on successive Sundays. Seating the audience was accomplished by utilization of wooden benches which were stored in someone's barn during the week and transported to the worship service on Sunday morning by horse and buggy.<sup>37</sup>

This procedure has been discontinued and a modified method substituted. The change occurred in 1959<sup>38</sup> as a result of the alteration of their disbelief in religious buildings. The Amish formerly believed the scripture "The Lord of Heaven and Earth dwelleth not in temples made with hands,"<sup>39</sup> prevented their engaging the use of a permanent worship site. The building selected to serve as the new church had, prior to this time, served as a Baptist church at Indianapolis, a rural area east of Arapaho, Oklahoma. The Amish bought the wooden structure and had it moved to its present location four and one-half miles south and two miles east of Thomas (Fig. 7). It is approximately one mile from the Amish cemetery. The church is small, but provides ample space for the small Amish membership. It is a wooden structure painted white, and like the Amish home, is in excellent condition, wanting no repairs. The members of the parish hire one of the women belonging to the sect to be in charge of the building's maintenance and janitorial duties.

The adoption of a fixed religious building had some adverse effects

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<sup>37</sup>Elmer L. Smith, op. cit., p. 24.

<sup>38</sup>Mr. Miller, op. cit., February 17, 1967.

<sup>39</sup>Acts 17:24.

just as the automobile had earlier caused dissatisfaction. However, few moved from the colony and differences were eventually settled. All of the 16 families in the Thomas area now attend church at the building. At least two families live twenty miles from the church but drive the distance each Sunday. No actual number of members is recorded, but young people usually join the church when about 16 years old.

Services begin at 9:30 a.m. and continue until noon. In large Amish settlements several ministers will conduct a sermon, but due to the



Fig. 7. --This small wooden structure serves as the Amish church.

smallness of the colony at Thomas, only one man is in charge of the discourse. The entire interlocution is delivered in German except on occasion when an outsider or visitor is present. At the time of this writing there is



a member living among the Amish who is a convert from the Baptist group, and who has not learned to speak the German dialect employed by the other Amish. This fact constituted the reason for much more English being employed than is common.

No musical instruments are found within the Amish church. They have their own hymnal and the singing has been described as a "dry, monotone of German syllables."<sup>40</sup> The songs have become somewhat of a custom and are sung over and over with fervor.

The present bishop, Mr. David Miller, has held his position for 29 years. It is a position which continues for life once it has been undertaken. Bishops are ordained by lot; therefore, the Amish believe God directs the best-suited man to choose the lot which employs him. The bishopship is a position which is not actively sought, but at the same time, one that is not shunned. The situation which develops on becoming bishop is one that requires much time, work, and study. The bishop, before his calling, has been a farmer, and he continues this line of work after acceptance of the position of religious leader. The man then is actually holding two jobs and the two together consume an immense amount of his time.<sup>41</sup>

The selection of the lot is conducted in various ways. One source related the method of placing three identical Bibles on a table, one of which

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<sup>40</sup>George P. Jackson, "The Strange Music of the Old Order Amish," The Musical Quarterly (July, 1945), p. 280.

<sup>41</sup>David Miller, op. cit., March 27, 1967.

contained a piece of paper. The man chosen to be the next bishop would, of course, pick the Bible with the paper within its pages.<sup>42</sup>

Sunday, besides being the day of worship for the Amish, is truly a day of rest. The chores which definitely have to be performed are taken care of in the mornings before church with everyone, including the women, helping to clear them away in a hurry. After lunch, nothing in the manner of activity is to be found in the Amish home for everyone is resting.

Even though the Amish church is in the country an automobile driver approaching the structure sees the familiar signs of "Slow, Church Zone." These signs, and others bearing sayings such as "God is the Way" are planted on both sides of the building. Religious signs similar to these are even more numerous along the highway approaching the town of Thomas (Fig. 8). Some of the posters have been erected by the Amish and others by the Brethren in Christ church.

For religion to be such an outstanding factor in the way of life for the Amish they do not have a fancy or ornate shrine for their religious rituals. May it definitely be emphasized that this fact is not due to the Amish being penniless; in fact, the situation is quite the contrary. The Amish Church like the Amish people is humble, steadfast, and without undue ornamentation.

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<sup>42</sup>Aurand, op. cit.

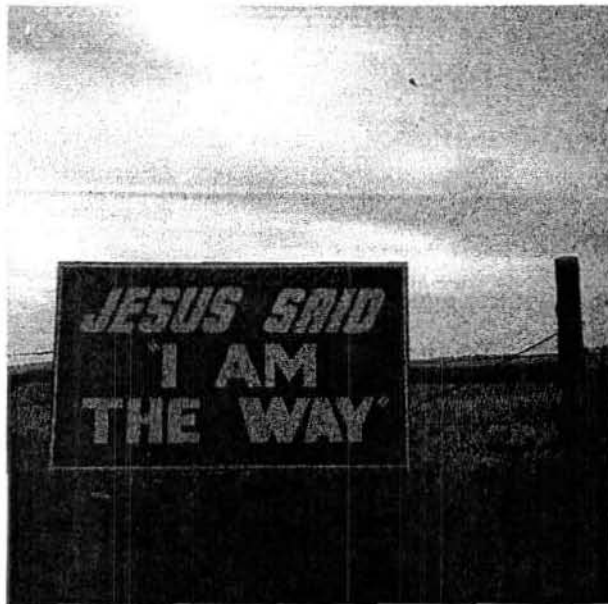


Fig. 8. --Signs such as this are numerous along the highways approaching Thomas and on fences near the Amish homes.

#### Military Duties

The Amish and numerous other Mennonite bodies are classed by the United States Armed Forces as Conscientious Objectors. This classification is due to their belief in pacifism and peace, and that war is not in conjunction with these beliefs.<sup>43</sup> This is not to imply that these young men are cowardly, rather, that their military duty differs somewhat from that of the common American soldier. They are drafted in a manner similar to that of any other young man, but their type of training is not the same. An Amish soldier never carries or uses a weapon of any

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<sup>43</sup>David Miller, op. cit., March 27, 1967.

type. They do not enter "active duty training" per se, but do take physical examinations and vaccinations. Because of their beliefs the Amish are channeled into military duties accordingly, such as office duties, aides, hospital, and rehabilitation work. One of the most common situations is that of sending Amish to areas which need rebuilding or mission aid. Whatever duties are designed for these men, they are readily acceptable and the Amish prove to be very efficient and adept at their jobs.

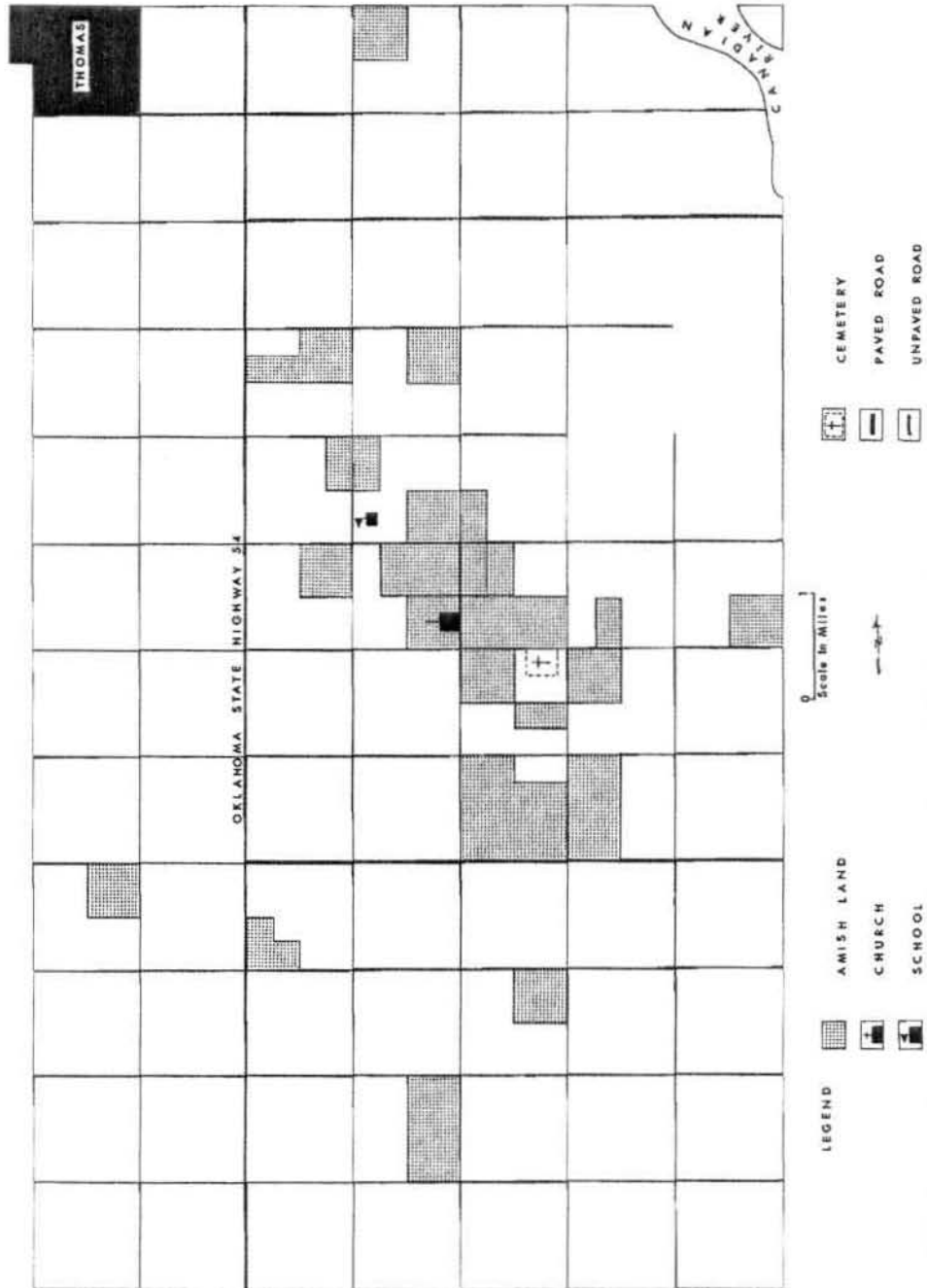
## CHAPTER IV

### AGRICULTURE AND RELATED ACTIVITIES

The land owned and/or operated by the Amish is located south of Thomas and east of Oklahoma State Highway 54 with the exception of one 160-acre plot west of the highway (Fig. 9). However, the owner of this quarter section does have his house located in the vicinity of the other Amish homes to the east. The Amish own approximately 5,000 acres in Custer County but operate many more acres, some outside of the county.

The number of acres included in the individual farms which the Amish own, rent, lease, or in some way utilize range from 160 to 880 acres. This is somewhat misleading for often a man and his sons operate a much larger amount of land cooperatively, but the title to the land is not placed under one name. Much of the land has been purchased or rented from relatives who have moved from the area. In other words the Amish lands have been Amish lands for a considerable length of time. On the other hand, the increases in acreage now are primarily being obtained from non-Amish farms. The farms rented by the Amish belong, in most cases, to non-Amish retired farmers, non-Amish businessmen,

FIG. 9. AMISH LAND OWNERSHIP



or Indians who reside in various nearby towns. The size of the Amish farms do not indicate a man's financial means as closely as in the non-Amish society, but is correlated to the number of sons, or possibly brothers, that live nearby and operate the estate jointly. With a few exceptions, most of the owners are not young men; therefore, reliance is often placed on a son to manage the livestock and cultivated acres. If the children have moved to another state where there is, in many cases, a larger Amish settlement, then the father sells, rents, or leases much of his land. The Amish farmer seldom operates less than 160 to 200 acres, especially if he has children at home.

The importance of cultivated areas on Amish farms cannot be underestimated. Most of the Amish own livestock but it is commercial feeder stock and no native pastures are provided for year round herds. Between 65 and 95 per cent of the Amish land (total acres) is intensely cultivated (Table 5). This situation is a predominantly stable one, for only one man stated that he had increased his total acres of pasture in the past five years.<sup>1</sup> The remaining Amish farmers indicated that they had not significantly altered the use of any of their land in the past five years. This practice of cultivating most of their holdings is a tradition with the Amish. Few Amish are ranchers or primarily livestock producers, but tend to concentrate on grain, food, and fiber crops even

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<sup>1</sup>Interview with Mr. Harvey Yoder, Amish farmer, May 30, 1967.

though this type of farming demands considerable labor in preparation of fields and the harvesting process. On the other hand, the investment in seed, machinery, fertilizers, and possibly irrigation is weighed against the cost of livestock, feed and pasture, and often a few calls by a veterinarian. Often farmers permit land which is severely eroded or has soil that is relatively infertile lie idle. Rarely, if ever, is this situation seen on an Amish farm, for here every acre is cultivated and supports a crop which will either be harvested for seed or pastured for feed. (Table 5) The only exceptions are those plots occupied by buildings, roads, or waterways. (Fig. 10) Of the total 5,000 acres owned, 3,659.9 acres are in cultivation.

### Crops

The crops grown in this area are similar in percentage of total acreage farmed for all the Amish with perhaps two exceptions. Wheat is the major crop, followed by grain sorghums such as maize. Third in the rank of crops is cotton.

The government allotments which designate the acres to be planted to individual crops are based on previous years' acreages. Each farmer has a wheat allotment and many have a much smaller cotton allotment. Besides these acreage grants there are such items as grain bases, oats and rye bases, and barley bases. The term "base" implies that the particular crop under discussion may or may not be planted. A farmer



TABLE 5

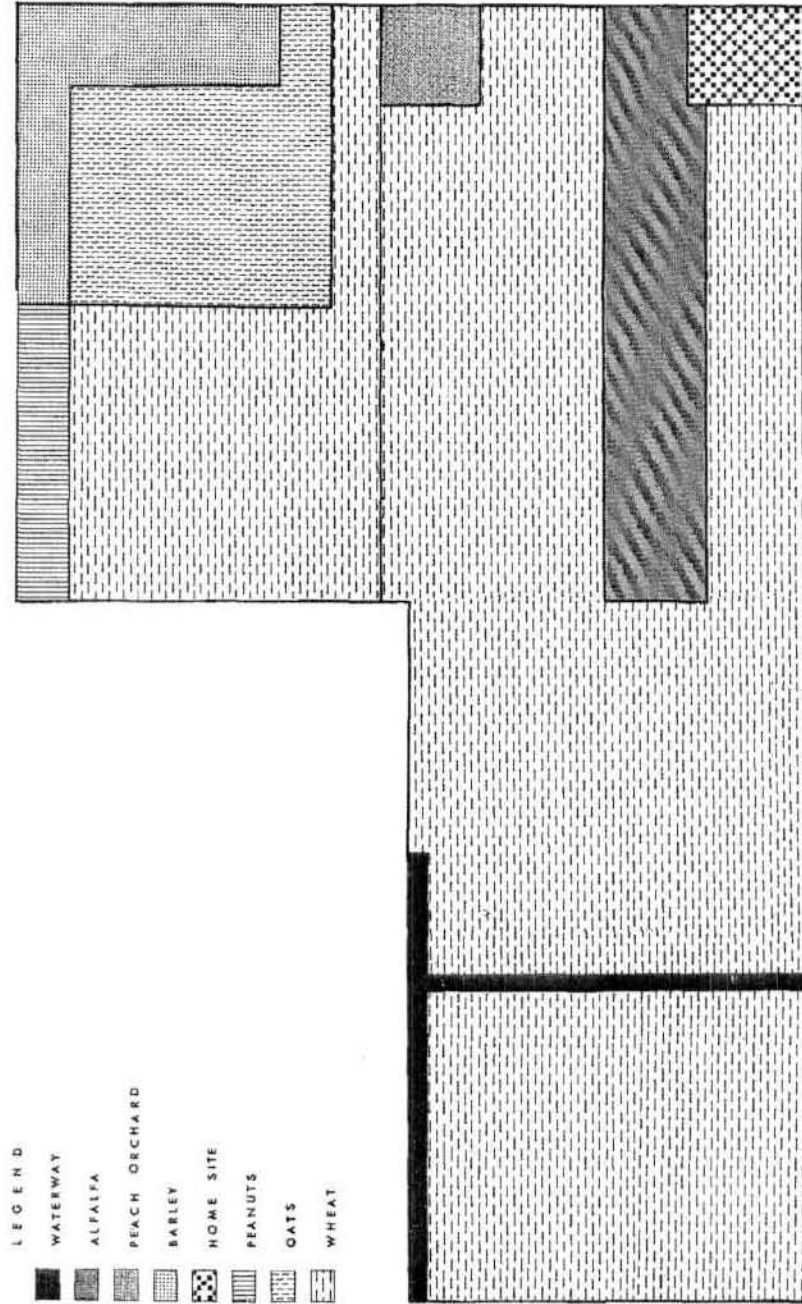
## SAMPLE LAND USE OF AMISH FARMS

Farmer	Total Acres	Total Cropland	Wheat	Cotton	Grain Sorghum Base	Peanuts	Conserving Base <sup>a</sup>	Barley Base
J L Mast	320	295.6	146.9	29.6	54	5.0	12	5
Harvey Yoder	160	140.6	79.1	7.7	29	0	3	0
Joni Schrock	160	145.2	62.8	0	27	2.4	0	0
Glenn Swartzen- druver	320 160 120	270.0 153.4 116.5	88.7 0 27.9	0 0 8.8	165 145 78	0 0 0	0 2 0	13 0 0
Levi Stuzman	240 80 160	221.3 59.8 121.8	52.4 18.4 39.3	0 0 0	145 0 11	0 0 0	1 4 8	0 4 0
Amos Miller	200	168.3	126.2	0	36	0	0	0
John B Mast	280	243.5	142.3	14.4	38	5.4	0	0

<sup>a</sup>Conserving base is used for a crop that can be pastured.

Source: Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service.

FIG. 10: LAND USE ON A TYPICAL AMISH FARM  
240 ACRES  
(NOT TO SCALE)



may use 80 per cent of his grain sorghum base, 100 per cent of the barley base, or 70 per cent of his oats-rye base for wheat acreage. Thus a farmer may increase his wheat allotment by planting one or all of the base crop acreages to wheat.<sup>2</sup> The practice for the Amish is to convert the barley and oats-rye bases to wheat, but the grain sorghum is used for various grains, usually maize and ensilage products.

Forage and cover crops are grown but these are not allotted per se. Besides the three leading crops, others include sudexes, vetch, peanuts, and corn. These latter crops do not compare in value or acreage to the wheat and grain sorghums. The two exceptions to this pattern, which were mentioned earlier, have exchanged wheat with grain sorghums in acreage and devote the majority of their farms to the sorghums. The reason behind this intensification of grain sorghum growing lies in the fact that these two Amish agriculturalists are owners of large livestock herds. They have sizable investments in huge mechanical silos which are filled each year with the harvest of the sorghums. Also, maize is an extremely hardy plant and less likely to yield a crop failure, thus adding some assurance to the Amish investments in livestock.

Every Amishman plants wheat and all utilize the Early Triumph variety. This kind of seed is also the favored type throughout this part of Oklahoma. Not only does the wheat, in most instances, serve as the

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<sup>2</sup>Interview with Office of Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation, Clinton, Oklahoma, May 29, 1967.

primary cash crop; but moreover, it serves a second purpose as pasture for livestock before the plant is allowed to form grain heads. In Custer County harvesting begins in early June and the process comprises the busiest season of the year; roads between Thomas and the farms are swamped with trucks transporting wheat to the elevators. Combines operate day and night to get the crop harvested as quickly as possible. The only time the machines stop is around sunrise when dew makes the plants tough and hard to cut. Localized rain, hail, and tornadoes are common during this period and one day's delay in cutting could mean disaster.

Cotton is not found on large plots even though Custer County grows a vast amount of the crop. There has never been extensive acreages of cotton in the Thomas area which offers some explanation for the closing of the cotton gin. The cotton production of the Amish is channeled into nearby cotton gins at Hydro, Weatherford, or Watonga.

Alfalfa is planted to yield feed for livestock. This crop is not usually irrigated and each farmer utilizes his own alfalfa rather than selling it. The huge Amish barns provide ample storage space for the bales of hay. Haygrazer is another crop grown to feed cattle herds, and is also an excellent forage crop.

The sudexes, vetch, rye, and corn are primarily planted and harvested for ensilage purposes. Sudexes are hybrid plants and the Amish feel these grasses are especially suited for feeds. The majority who grow

them have commercial feeder livestock. Vetch and rye are often mixed for feed. These two crops are doubly favorable due to their soil rebuilding characteristics. Corn is grown in rather large quantities for this area and much of it is on Amish property. The Amish raise great numbers of hogs and corn is one of the prime substances of the swines' feed. Corn and hogs were once the principal components of all Amish farmsteads at Thomas but corn has declined somewhat, giving way to the increase in wheat production. The former predominance of corn is one indication of the Amish who came to Oklahoma from the Corn Belt.

Peanuts comprise minute acreages in comparison with other crops. This crop is usually grown in conjunction with the huge gardens found near the Amish home and often surrounded by a white picket fence. The peanuts are processed for consumption by the grower or sold to a peanut firm. Both procedures occur at Hydro, a small community some fifteen miles to the southeast which also serves as a center for the larger peanut-growing region to the south.

The quantity and quality of production rather than the variety of crops grown by the Amish is the outstanding feature of the area. The smallest fields produce abundant yields per acre comparable to the huge, level expanses of the large-operation farmer. The wheat yield for non-irrigated Amish farms in 1966 ranged between 31-1/2 and 37 bushels per acre. This is not uncommon for this rich wheat-growing area; but the excellent attention devoted to their crops by the Amish enables them to

compare with non-Amish farmers who employ irrigation.

No exact figures for grain sorghum production are available due to the small amount that enters commercial channels. The Amish produce enough to fill their silos and maintain their livestock herds throughout the year. This is especially advantageous to those who prefer feeder stock arrangements. The value of the livestock, coupled with investments in feeding equipment and grain crops indicate that these Amish farms are high-value property. Although most of the Amish do not operate huge farms the quality of their crop production enables them to maintain a high density ratio of hogs and cattle per acre of land.

The market area for Amish crops, especially wheat, centers largely around the town of Thomas. The wheat yield is one of the town's primary economic concerns. After the grain is harvested it is sold and/or stored at one of the three grain elevators owned by MacNeill Grain Company (Fig. 11). Two of the elevators are on the southern edge of town adjacent to the St. Louis and San Francisco Railroad tracks. They have a combined capacity of 899,000 bushels. The third elevator is on the northern side of Thomas and situated alongside the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe rail line. The northern elevator serves as a depository for some 952,000 bushels of grain.<sup>3</sup> The rail lines connect with major southern ports and furnish sufficient out-going rail transport, but at present the

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<sup>3</sup>Interview with MacNeill Grain Company, Thomas, Oklahoma, May 30, 1967.



Fig. 11.--These grain elevators at Thomas provide ample storage space for the wheat of the area.

trucking rate is less than the cost of rail shipment. Therefore much of the wheat is moved from Thomas by independent truckers, most of whom live in the immediate surrounding territory but work elsewhere during the rest of the year. Nearly all of the wheat is transported to Houston, Texas, and then transferred to ships. The reason for the elevator's location is that the intense use of trucks for wheat conveyance began after the elevators were erected alongside the railroads.

Some years ago the government paid for wheat storage and would make arrangements whereby an elevator could be built and paid for during the first five years following construction. The farmer sold his wheat to the government through the local elevator operator and the government



then paid \$0.015 per bushel to store the wheat in the elevator. This was an excellent program to foster the building of new elevators which enabled them to pay for themselves in a relatively short time. However, this program existed for only a few years and when it ceased elevator storage decreased considerably and in subsequent years has remained static.<sup>4</sup> Increased storage capacity resulting from this program provides adequate storage facilities in Thomas and the Amish presently market or store their wheat in Thomas.

The marketing of cotton is a different situation since there are no cotton gins in Thomas. The acreage devoted to cotton results from the fact that the farmers cannot convert this allotment to wheat acreage and their grain sorghum base is adequate for their livestock needs. There is no need to increase the grain sorghum acreage since cotton represents a cash crop and it will pay the Amish farmer to haul the cotton to a nearby town. Of the total acreage cultivated, wheat constitutes 1,958.1 acres, the grain sorghum bases amount to 1,187 acres, and cotton occupies 89.8 acres.

To insure the finest yields from their crops the Amish utilize a number of conservation practices and crop-boosting techniques. Some of the soil conservation and enrichment methods employed by the Amish are subsidized by the federal government. That is, the government will pay a percentage of the cost of the operation; the amount paid depending

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid.



on the nature of the practice.

One item that the Amish employ is the terrace. All Amish farms have terraces except where wheat is irrigated. Many have lived on their farms for several years and their primary objective is to continue an active terrace rebuilding and maintenance program. Since terraces are constructed to detain or control the flow of water and to check soil erosion, the United States government will pay \$2.80 per 100 linear feet toward the building of standard terraces.<sup>5</sup> The government will also help finance the restoration of terraces provided they are 40 per cent below specifications.<sup>6</sup> However, the Amish seldom allow their terraces to become this badly dilapidated. The only instance whereby this latter program would benefit the Amish is in the acquisition of new property that has terraces that have been allowed to deteriorate.

Custer County is one of the western counties which is eligible for cost sharing in the erection of impounding-type terraces and enlargement of standard terraces. All the structures fashioned to obtain the cost-sharing benefits must meet the requirements of the technical standards and specifications for terraces established by the Soil Conservation Service.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>U. S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service, Agricultural Conservation Program Handbook for 1967. Oklahoma, p. 30.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

A second soil conservation structure built by the Amish is a permanent sod waterway designed to dispose of excess water without causing erosion. Waterways are found on many Amish farms particularly in connection with terrace and irrigation systems where the safe disposal of water is most important (Fig. 10). Once the waterway is formed, it is then provided with a vegetative cover such as Bermuda grass or various legumes. The government will defray the farmer's expense of construction at the rate of \$75 per acre. In addition, a payment of \$12 per acre for sodding or sprigging Bermuda grass, and \$10 per acre for other grasses and legumes is available.<sup>8</sup>

Irrigation of crops to promote the highest possible yields is found on rather small farms where peak production per acre is a necessity for adequate income. At present there are only two Amish farmers who have irrigation systems on their land. One owns 240 acres and the second owns 160 acres. Both have their water coming from wells drilled for the express purpose of irrigation and both utilize the sprinkler method of water dispersal (Fig. 12).

Another production aid, and one that is solely paid for by the farmer, is fertilizer. Every Amish farmer uses some type of commercial fertilizer on his wheat ground. There is a variety of fertilizers available and the Amish do not necessarily prefer one kind; however, that which is

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

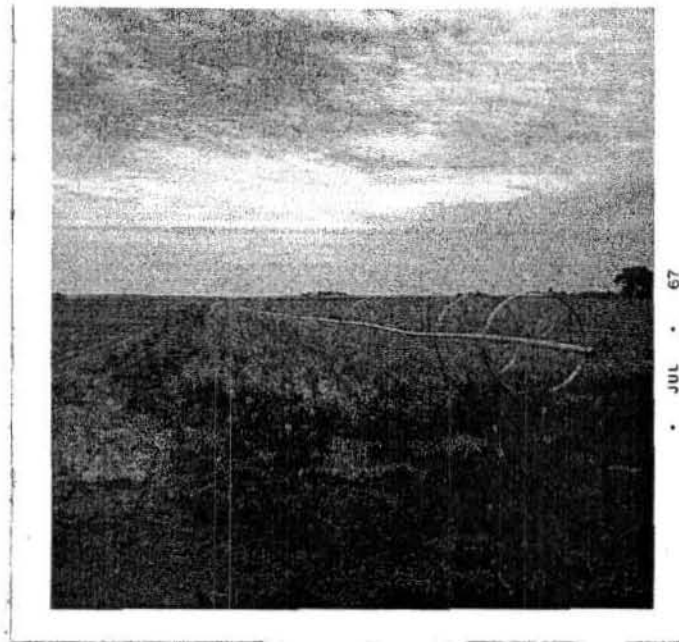


Fig. 12. --Self-propelled irrigation sprinklers mounted on large steel wheels provide water for crops.

purchased is in a dry form such as powder or pellets. The new liquid types, although introduced into the area, have not been adopted by many Amish. A new product usually has to prove itself before the Amish will accept it. One of the Amish farmers works for the Weatherford Co-op during the winter months where his job is the delivery of liquid fertilizer. He has not yet had many customers among his Amish friends.

Hybrid seeds are becoming more common each year. Improved hybrid varieties of corn have been in use by the Amish for some time, especially when used as feed for swine. The sudexes are a much newer hybrid. These are being planted to replenish silos with nutrient silage.

These are just some of the varied practices undertaken by the

Amish in their endeavor to obtain the greatest benefit from each cultivated acre. While remaining unchanged in their dress and living habits, the Amish actively seek new means of improving their crops. Thus far they have met with considerable success.

While some of the improvement devices practiced on Amish farms are subsidized by the federal government, this has nothing to do with their construction for the Amish formerly did not believe in accepting government aid for this type of project. Only in the past few years have any of the Amish accepted the government payments (Table 6). A record of the past three years, 1964-1966, shows that only five Amish farmers received government payments.<sup>9</sup>

Some of the farm improvement programs available to the Amish include establishment of a perennial grass cover, planting of trees for erosion control, construction of a well for livestock water, creation of waterways, erection of terraces, providing a winter cover crop on cropland, stubble mulching, and control of wind erosion by furrowing or listing.<sup>10</sup> The majority of these programs have been practiced by the Amish at different times. Although all the Amish affirm that they now accept government payments for new or improved practices, some undoubtedly never make the necessary report for such undertakings in

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<sup>9</sup>Taken from records held by the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Office, Clinton, Oklahoma.

<sup>10</sup>Agricultural Conservation Program Handbook, op. cit.

order to collect their payment.

TABLE 6  
GOVERNMENT PAYMENTS RECEIVED BY SOME AMISH FARMERS

Farmer	Year		
	1964	1965	1966
Levi Stutzman	none	none	\$ 346.16
Amos Miller	none	\$ 213.00	52.00
David Miller	\$ 148.00	none	none
Amos Schrock	1,476.80	400.00	none
J. L. Mast	none	none	none
Harvey Yoder	none	none	none
Johni Schrock	none	none	none
John B. Mast	none	74.00	none
Glen Swartsendruber	none	none	none

Source: Records furnished by Office of Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Office, Clinton, Oklahoma.

#### Livestock

Despite the fact that almost all of the Amish farms are devoted to cropland, livestock constitutes an integral function of the agricultural landscape. The dominance of one type or breed is not the prevailing custom among the Amish, but rather a diversity of livestock is the preference. While one or two of the land-owners may consolidate their

efforts toward a single animal group such as cattle or poultry, a greater percentage display an inclination toward ownership of an assortment of the more common farm animals (Table 7).

TABLE 7  
LIVESTOCK OWNED BY FOUR AMISH FARMERS

Farmer	Cattle	Hogs	Poultry	Sheep	Horses
David Miller	93	100	5,000	21	1
Harvey Yoder	31	18	16	0	0
Amos Schrock	400	0	20	0	1
Amos Stutzman	100	0	0	0	3

The prevalence of cattle in Custer County is in direct correlation with the beef industry of this portion of Oklahoma. The Amish, though definitely not ranchers, do raise cattle with the beef market providing the principal means of supporting their operations. Herefords and Angus are the most common breeds (Fig. 13). Some Holstein and Shorthorn are found intermingled among the herds but no dairying has been practised by the Amish for many years. Despite the fact that few of the Amish produce purebred registered stock, the animals are of excellent quality and bring high returns, particularly in local sale rings where the buyer is familiar with Amish agricultural proficiency.

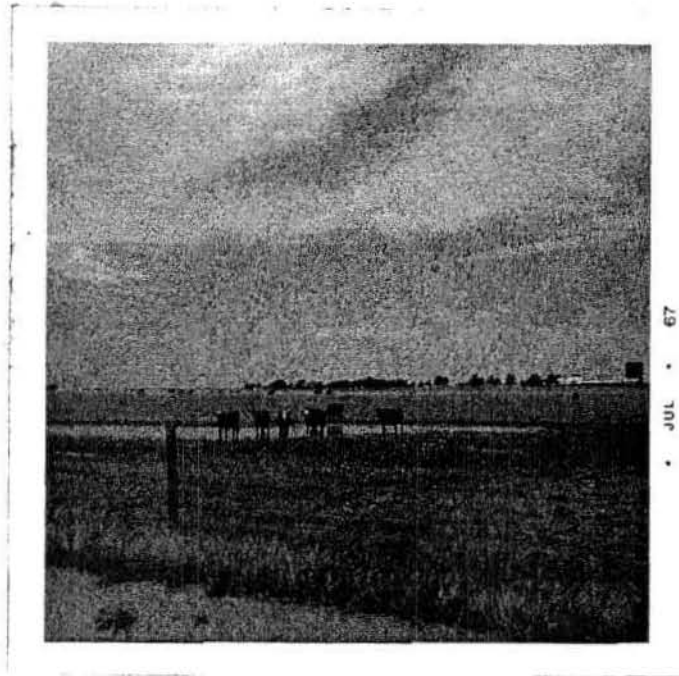


Fig. 13. --Livestock herds, consisting primarily of young, feeder stock, are common on Amish farms.

The herds consist primarily of steers with perhaps a few heifers. Heifers ordinarily can be purchased for three or four cents per pound cheaper than can steers, but steers gain weight better and faster. Consequently the steers bring a higher return when sale time arrives. Among the herds will also be found a few cows retained for calf production. These calves are often the source of the family's beef. This cow-calf operation is the major deviation from the regular feed-lot situation.

Feed for the cattle is derived from various sources; wheat pasture, alfalfa hay, grain sorghums, and cottonseed meal and cake are a sampling of the livestock diet. Much of the feed comes from the owner's farm with the exception of the cottonseed meal or cake which is purchased in either

Thomas or Weatherford. A small number of Amish also buy alfalfa hay for winter feeding purposes. Towering mechanical silos storing several tons of silage, usually of a sudex-maize-vetch combination, makes feeding less of a chore (Fig. 14).

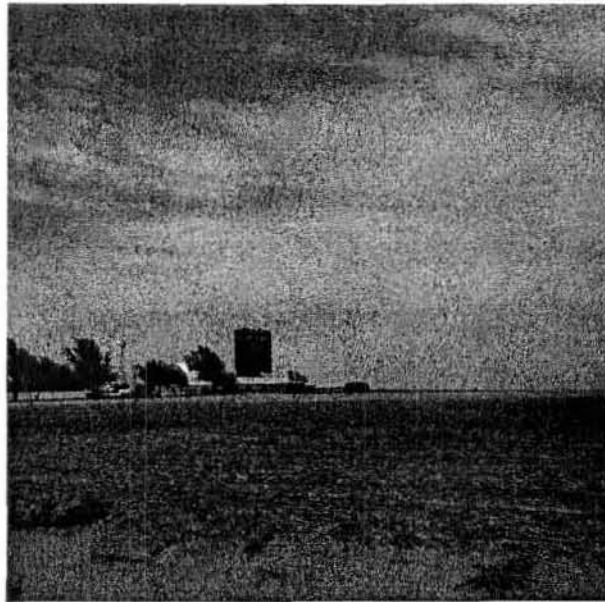


Fig. 14. --Large, mechanical silos, easily identified by their blue color, tower above the farm buildings.

Because large tracts of grass pasture are lacking on Amish farms, a great majority of the cattle owned is feeder stock. A number of the practices and procedures of the huge feed lots of western Oklahoma and Texas are not employed by the Amish but the principle is the same. Due to the other agricultural activities of the Amish, the feedlots do not consume as much of the Amishman's time as is the case on cattle ranches. The Amish do the greater part of their stock purchasing in the



spring and again in the fall, usually about October. These two periods of the year are the time of the peak cattle market and also constitute the primary sale months. The stock which is bought in October is fed on winter wheat pasture then sold in the spring. The common length of ownership of a regular feedlot steer is 90 to 120 days.

Hogs are not, as a rule, more numerous than cattle in the area but the ratio of Amish owned swine to non-Amish producers illustrates the fact that pigs are much more numerous on an Amish farm. Also, there are two Amish who are in the hog business commercially; therefore, swine greatly outnumber other types of livestock on these farms. There are a number of breeds of hogs on the Amish farms, but a striking feature is the fact that each farmer tends to raise only one kind rather than a herd of mixed breeds. Herds of Duroc, Hampshire, Poland China, and Spotted Poland China can all be observed while driving past the pens.

Neither the commercial hog owner nor the small herd owner buy and sell their stock specifically in the spring and fall months as do the cattle producers. Swine sales are correlated directly to market prices rather than weather or feeding conditions. A hog owner will keep his animals until the price is highest rather than selling at a specific time. The market for swine has been favorable during the past two years and many of the Amish have increased their herds considerably. The average number of swine on an Amish farm ranges between 25 and 50; however, a herd of 100 is not uncommon.

Feed for swine, like that for cattle, comes principally from the owner's fields. The leading grain feeds are corn, maize, barley, or a mixture of any of the three. Swine are fed and watered in much the same manner as cattle.

Chickens are one animal that a large majority of Amish farms maintain. A rather sizable percentage of the Amish have fewer than 50 hens, a flock size which indicates ownership specifically for family consumption. The one exception is the immense quantity of eggs produced on one farm that is in the commercial poultry business. Among the various Amish farmsteads there are two extremes; one family may not possess any chickens, while the commercial poultry farm houses approximately 5,000 hens.

With the exception of a few miscellaneous breeds, the fowls are largely leghorns, an outstanding egg producer, but not especially good for eating. The average farmer tends to have more of a variety of breeds and will keep the same chickens for a longer period of time; whereas the commercial producer has only a single type of hen and will sell the oldest chickens each year. Those owners who buy and sell regularly usually prefer to sell in the early summer and purchase new pullets in the fall. One reason for this is that egg production is often less during the warm summer months.

Feed for the greater part of the domestic fowls consists of grains, usually maize or oats, and any other items which may be gathered in a

scavenger fashion from the barnyard. Special feeds are provided to the commercial egg-laying hens to insure high production rates. These poultry rations are purchased in Thomas and Weatherford and comprise the essence of the hen's diet as they are not allowed to roam about the farm but are confined to their housing facilities.

Because of the number of hens owned by the commercial poultry farm, four hours per day are devoted to the gathering of eggs. When the flock is at its peak, the egg collection ordinarily extends from 2:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. A hired girl was formerly kept to aid the family in the poultry business.

Water for the chickens on the ordinary Amish farm is provided through small troughs or metal containers of various models. Other than the commercial producer, the Amish do not devote an enormous amount of time and energy to their few chickens.

The commercial egg farm is the only Amish farm that markets its produce. The bulk of the production is sold to a business firm in Oklahoma City, but some local buyers, both Amish and non-Amish, come to the farm for their eggs. The Amish buyers are neighbors who do not own chickens; whereas the non-Amish buyers are largely from the town of Thomas. The Amish egg producer sells to patrons from the adjacent area at slightly lower prices than the local stores.

Only one Amishman owns sheep and his is a relatively small herd (21 head). Various kinds, such as Hampshire, Southdown, or York-

shire are raised. As the area does not support many sheep, special facilities for sheep production are uncommon around the farm yards.

Feeding is in conjunction with that of the cattle but differs to some degree. Sheep cannot be fed as much grain as cattle due to the fact that sheep bloat easily. This fact causes the sheep owner to mix his feed somewhat differently than that for his cattle. Sheep can be fed green substances and may be grazed on pasture with cattle or fed alfalfa hay. Sheep are not fed cottonseed cake as are cattle, but sheep and cattle alike can consume cottonseed meal and salt. Therefore, the sheep owner has some extra chores unlike those of cattle raising.

Sheep lamb in the spring and this is also the time of the year for the best sheep market. Shearing, the main task of the sheep owner, also occurs in the spring. Shearing in the spring allows the sheep to have less wool during the summer and then heavy growth develops by the arrival of winter.

### Facilities

Large pens enclosed by either wire or wooden fences are maintained by the farmers to house the fattening livestock. Because the pens are often the limit of the calves' roaming area, many of the Amish do not erect fences around their various fields. In addition to the pens, long low sheds with one completely open side give shelter to stock during inclement weather.

The large, automatic silos, known as Harvestores, deposit proper amounts of ensilage into homemade feed troughs. All the silos owned by the Amish are the round, tower type. Other feeds and grains are stored either in the immense barns or in separate metal granaries. The investment needed for the automatic Harvestores is so high that a large herd must be maintained to make such a purchase feasible. These structures retail for \$17,000 each.

A number of the Amish who own cattle also possess a combination feed mill and grinder (Fig. 15). This enables the stockman to grind his

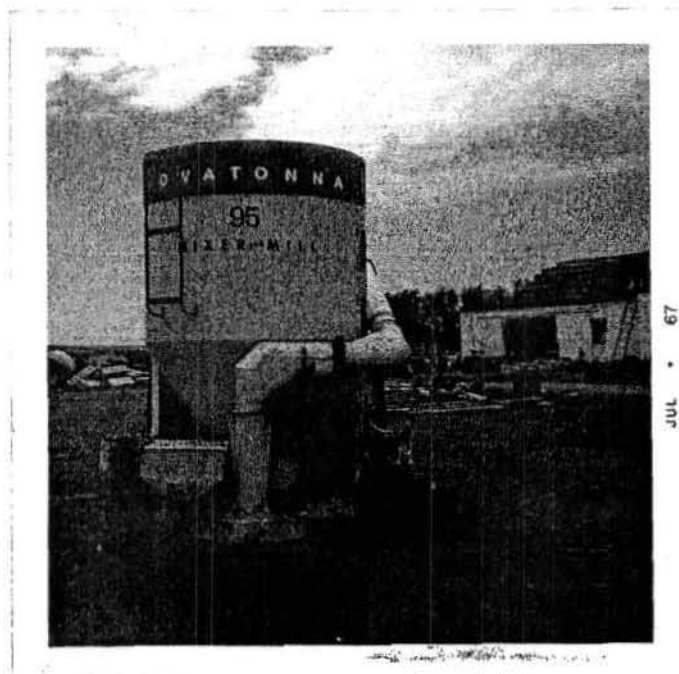


Fig. 15.--This type of machine is used to grind and mix the Amish grain crops.

own grain and also mix two or more feed substances together.

Windmill towers are found on all Amish farms and are the pre-

dominate power for filling stock tanks with the necessary water. Electric pumps are not yet common among the Amish for cattle watering purposes.

The Amish barn is the most conspicuous feature of the farmstead (Fig. 16). This building is a gigantic wooden structure built similar to those on Amish farms in Pennsylvania and are commonly termed "Swiss barns." The barn is kept freshly painted and its interior is as neat and orderly as that of a house. Most of the barns are three stories high and each story is devoted to a particular function. One Amishman has machinery



Fig. 16. --The spacious Amish barn is an important structure of every farm. This three-story one is equipped with an elevator.

and supplies on the first floor, chickens and feeds on the second and third levels, with an elevator providing easy movement between stories. Every

barn and all the remaining buildings are equipped with electricity and running water. The ground-level floor is usually spacious enough to accommodate the owner's tractor and pick-up truck if the need arises. Hay often occupies one entire story when the farmer owns a number of cattle.

A method for locating a commercial swine producer is detection of the small farrowing houses, usually placed in a straight line and encompassing a considerable distance (Fig. 17). These miniature sheds are pyramid shaped and designed to allow space only for the sow and her litter. The dwarfish buildings are constructed of lumber, customarily

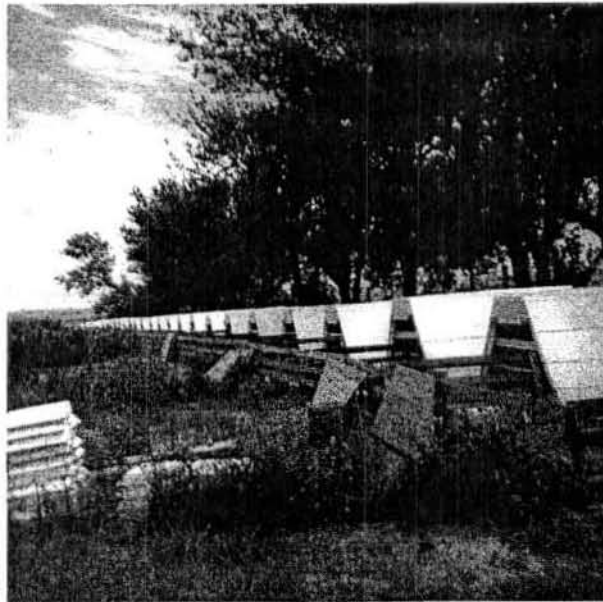


Fig. 17. --These small white structures are farrowing houses used by Amish swine producers.

painted white, and enclosed by a short fence of hogwire. The image projected by these structures is one of tiny white houses, each with its own



yard fence, much like an Amish home.

The sow is brought to the farrowing house before the pigs are born and remains there with the pigs approximately six weeks after the pigs are born. The building is constructed in such a manner to prevent the sow from rolling on the tiny pigs and crushing them. Heat lamps are often available if the farrowing occurs in the winter. The number of houses provided may be an indication of either how many hogs are owned or how many will farrow at approximately the same time.

Another indicator of the swine farm is the low fences of hog-wire erected around the fields used for pasturing the animals. This type of fence is also employed around any sheds or pens used for the hogs.

Equipment and housing for chickens on a regular Amish farm consists primarily of only a shed; however, some have built chicken houses. It is a different scene on the commercial poultry farm where the long, narrow shelters contain hundreds of chickens. Windows are made with pull-up canvas shades to allow the owner to regulate the amount of sunlight entering the houses. Electric fans and heaters prevent summer heat and winter cold from being a nuisance to the hens and foster a year-round egg production program. Automatic feeders empty into carriers which transmit the feed to the troughs where exact measured quantities are dumped to the hens. Chickens are also housed on the second and third levels of the barn and augers transport feed



from the ground floor to the feeders on the other levels. The long narrow pipes which contain water are regulated to keep the water at a specific level in the waterer and at a definite temperature.

The chickens are never allowed to leave the houses and cleaning the buildings is a regular chore. The structures are kept spotlessly clean and some of the woodwork is even waxed. The women do a great amount of labor in the chicken house; more so than other activities outside the home.

After the eggs are collected they are cleaned in automatic egg washers which are large buckets fixed to a rotating stand that swishes the eggs back and forth in water. Following the rinsing procedure the eggs are sorted by size and placed in corresponding crates ready for sale.

A truck from an egg-buying firm in Oklahoma City comes to the area once a week to pick up the produce. Between the time of collection and that of sale, the eggs are stored in spacious refrigerators designed especially for this purpose.<sup>11</sup>

#### Investments and Mechanization

The automation found among the Amish is astonishing when one considers the conservatism normally associated with these people. Some of the Amish machinery, besides being modern, is noticeably new and

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<sup>11</sup>Mrs. David Miller, op. cit., March 27, 1967.

exceedingly expensive (Fig. 18).

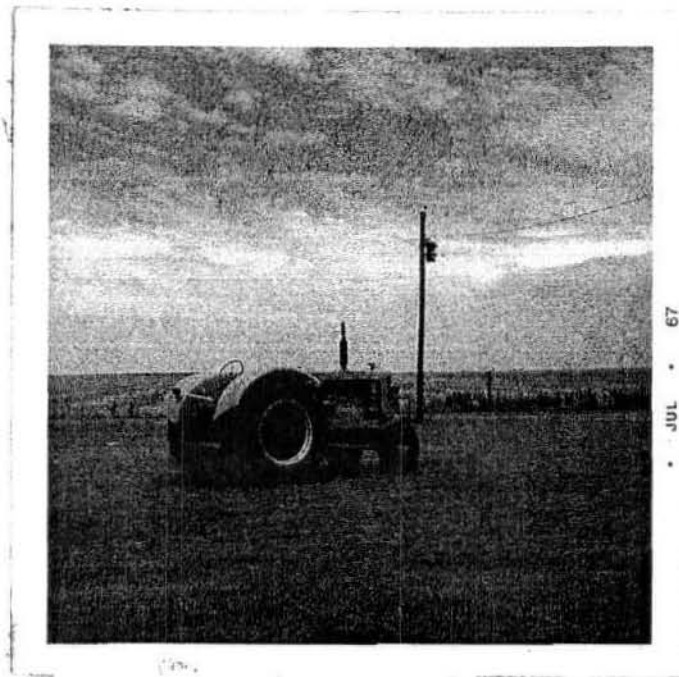


Fig. 18.--This tractor illustrates the nature of the Amish machinery.

The investments required of a farmer are great but that of the Amish farmer often surpasses that of two non-Amish farmers. Besides the usual cattle, feed, farm machinery, and buildings found in ordinary rural areas, the Amish have additional expenditures in the erection of three-story barns accommodated with elevators, automatic silos that retail for \$17,000 each, and feed grinders that also mix the grain. Irrigation wells equipped with a pump and pipe for a sprinkler system cost between \$12,000 and \$20,000. Much machinery is kept on hand, with only the newest and best found among the Amish (Fig. 19). Mechanization is not only characteristic of the agricultural activities, but also of the gardening and housekeeping duties as well. Massive garden plows and

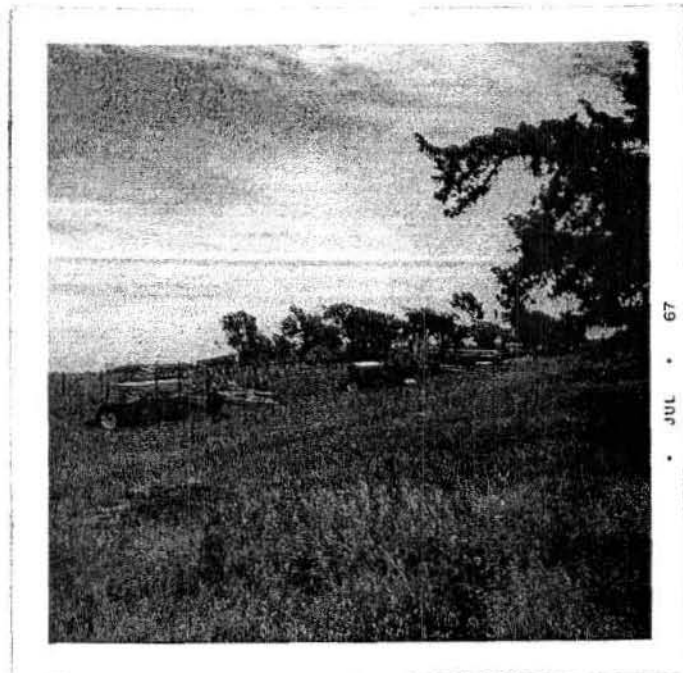


Fig. 19. --This long line of modern machinery is typical on Amish farms.

electric pruning shears are just examples of equipment found among the Amish that a non-Amish farmer does not commonly possess.

The Amish are conservative in their dress, their religion, and many aspects of their living habits. The contrast between the amount of money spent for clothes and entertainment and that expended for agricultural facilities and machinery is only one of the numerous features which reflect the uniqueness of the Amish.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

The small number of Amish now living in or near Thomas do not play the influential role held by these people some years ago. The Amish had earlier formed the agricultural framework for the vicinity and carried the image of highly proficient farming to the present.

Many of the businesses and facilities now available in Thomas began during the period when the Amish population was greater. The excellent agricultural practices introduced by the religious sect have served as profitable examples to other farmers and aided the town's growth by providing a nearby market for their agricultural products. The pattern set by the modern Amish farmers is still a molding force among all the landowners in the area despite the fact that there are few of the Amish left around Thomas.

If all the Amish left Thomas, there would not be a noticeable effect on the town as a whole. Non-Amish might take over the Amish land and raise good crops as long as they employed the efficient methods of the Amish, but how long these practices would be followed cannot be ascertained. Another change that might result would be the reduction

of cropland in favor of pasture.

The influence of the Amish on the community can be detected by Amish membership on such functions as the Board of Directors for the hospital and both banks. The enterprises utilized by the Amish are anxious to please these people and the Amish display adequate capability on the various supervisory positions. In addition, they support and donate to what they feel are important civic fund drives.

The future of the Amish at Thomas is uncertain. Should the younger members of the sect continue to move to Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, and other states, the group will dwindle until none are left. The Bishop feels that if the migration continues, there will not be any Amish left in the area within forty years.<sup>12</sup> The force opposing this destination is the ease with which the younger Amish men can obtain land or find work in the surrounding towns. The Amish prefer to farm and will, in all likelihood, rent or lease farms nearby if they remain in the Thomas area. Whatever the future holds for these people is dependent upon the younger members and the small farming community of Thomas will profit greatly if the Amish remain.

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<sup>12</sup>David Miller, op. cit., March 27, 1967.

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