

UNDERSTANDING MENNONITISM: A VISUAL
ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE BEACHY AMISH
MENNONITES OF LOTT, TEXAS

by

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DEDICATION

To the Yoders and the families of Faith Mennonite Fellowship
who welcomed me into their homes and their lives.

ABSTRACT

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The University of Texas at Austin, 1994

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Although Mennonites have lived in the United States for over 300 years, they are commonly misunderstood. Their desire to live apart from the social mainstream, and unique lifestyle invite the curiosity of outsiders. The purpose of this thesis is to promote a greater understanding and awareness of Mennonite religion and culture by studying one community in detail. This project combines documentary photography with historical research, participant observation and informal interviewing to create a visual ethnography of the Beachy Amish Mennonites of Lott, Texas. Finally, this study discusses the survival of Mennonitism and the Beachy Amish of Lott, as well as the ethics and effectiveness of photography in ethnographic fieldwork.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures	vii
Introduction	1
Chapter 1 Review of Literature: Photography as a Research Tool	7
Chapter 2 Methodology	17
Chapter 3 Anabaptist History: Origins of the Mennonite Movement	28
Chapter 4 Origins of the Beachy Amish Mennonite Fellowship Churches	34
Chapter 5 Theories of Mennonite Colonization	42
Chapter 6 Early Texas Colonies: Temporary Opportunities	45
Chapter 7 Faith Mennonite Fellowship: The Beachy Amish Mennonites of Lott, Texas	52
Chapter 8 Conclusions	103
Bibliography	110
Vita	115

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1	The author quilting with the women	27
Figure 2	Faith Mennonite Fellowship Church	56
Figure 3	Ministerial team for Faith Mennonite Fellowship	57
Figure 4	Holy Kiss	60
Figure 5	Church Service	61
Figure 6	Greeting others following the service	62
Figure 7	Singing hymns to nursing home residents	64
Figure 8	Reading the Bible with a nursing home resident	65
Figure 9	Edith Mullet and foster son, Rico	66
Figure 10	Russell Pennington and his son, Quinn	68
Figure 11	After school at the Yoder's house	72
Figure 12	Peter and Esther Schrock from Ohio	73
Figure 13	Mary Beachy	74
Figure 14	Paul Beachy and students	76
Figure 15	Students checking their work	77
Figure 16	Recess at school	78
Figure 17	Games at the school picnic	79
Figure 18	Softball game at the school picnic	80
Figure 19	Quilting: Pauline Hershberger, Aida Miller and LaVerda Shetler	83
Figure 20	Children picking flowers during the quilting	84
Figure 21	Children playing during the quilting	85
Figure 22	Rosita Zimmerman learning to quilt	86
Figure 23	Janel Hershberger quilting with girls	87
Figure 24	Hostetler family at the wedding of Norma Hostetler and Tim Friesen	90
Figure 25	Peter and Esther Schrock with their grandchildren and Cathy Miller	91
Figure 26	Wilma, Monica and Mary Beachy	92
Figure 27	Group of children	93

Figure 28	Rosa Smucker and Rosita Zimmerman	94
Figure 29	Three brothers	95
Figure 30	Young children playing church	96
Figure 31	Titus Yoder	98
Figure 32	Cathy Miller	99
Figure 33	Gabriel Beachy	100
Figure 34	Iddo Yoder, dairy farmer	101
Figure 35	Maria Yoder	102

INTRODUCTION

The Mennonites and the Amish share a religious heritage dating back to the 16th century Anabaptist movement in Europe. Although both groups have lived in the United States for over 300 years, they are commonly misunderstood. Their desire to live apart from the social mainstream, and unique lifestyle invite the curiosity of outsiders. Unfortunately, the outsider's image of the Mennonites and Amish is based not on first-hand experience, but on popular misconceptions and stereotypes which have been perpetuated, though not necessarily generated, by the popular media.

The Old Order Amish, because they are the most conservative and least assimilated of the Anabaptist or "plain" groups, attract great interest and tourism. The motion picture *Witness*, which misrepresented Amish life and was protested by the Lancaster County Amish, familiarized the public with the Amish and significantly increased tourism to their area (Kraybill, 1989, pp. 223-227).

Comparatively speaking, Mennonites are less well known and experience less tourism and public attention, even though many of them live in urban areas among non-Mennonites. However, because the Amish and Mennonites share a common history and outwardly appear very similar, many of the stereotypical images of the Amish have also been applied to the Mennonites.

The Mennonites have fallen victim to several prevalent Amish stereotypes, the first being the belief that they avoid the outside world, not only because of its overwhelming sinfulness, but because they might "like it too much" and be lured away from the community. Secondly, the Amish are often depicted as a backward society based on ignorance. According to Loudon (1991), this can be interpreted in two ways, either positively or negatively:

On the one hand, the Amish are viewed by many in a positive way as living in a bucolic, child-like state of innocence, blissfully ignorant of the somewhat dirty, complicated, yet technologically advanced larger world which surrounds them. This contrast of the blissfully ignorant, isolated Amish versus the seamier, yet more familiar outside world is most aptly portrayed in the movie Witness. On the other hand, the assumed Amish ignorance of the social mainstream is often seen negatively by outsiders, who view the Amish as stubborn, narrowminded and abnormally restrictive (pp. 113-114).

Finally, there is a tendency for outsiders to over-romanticize or "over-exoticize certain aspects of the Amish lifestyle to the point of innaccuracy, often in a nearly dehumanizing way" (Louden, 1991, p. 112). All of these misconceptions have a shade of truth to them, but the exaggeration of certain lifestyle characteristics overlooks the sophistication of Mennonite society and oversimplifies the philosophical and spiritual bases of their lifestyle(s).

For instance, Mennonites choose to separate themselves from the social mainstream, not because of its inherent sinfulness or luring potential, but because the scripture tells them to avoid worldliness. Therefore, as a means of preserving their traditional lifestyle, they limit and select their interaction with the rest of society, thereby avoiding influences which do not support the beliefs and doctrines underlying their religion.

Outsiders who believe Amish society is based on ignorance might cite, as a reason, the Amish educational system which limits formal education to only eight grades. However, much of the education children and young adults receive comes informally through first-hand work experience outside of school. At an early age, children begin learning necessary life skills for homemaking and trades by assisting others with work. Young adults, after years of watching, learning and doing, develop into competent and responsible individuals.

Religious education, in the home and at church, is extremely important and also begins when children are very young. This early training lays the foundation for a lifelong study of the Bible and service to God. The emphasis placed on religious education overshadows formal education, which is not emphasized beyond what is needed to perform a particular trade.

Finally, it cannot be disputed that Mennonites have a unique and interesting lifestyle. They lead simple, honest, loving lives in emulation of the early Christians. As conscientious objectors, they oppose all wars

and refuse to bear arms against anyone. Instead of military service, they have often performed alternative service as hospital workers, etc., in times of war. However, stereotypes which romanticize their lifestyle are unrealistic because they depict Mennonites living free of hardship and suffering. Such exaggerations also neglect the individual personalities of Mennonites.

Most Mennonites are aware of the misconceptions and stereotypes concerning their culture and lifestyle. They desire to be better understood because their association with the outside world is increasing in several ways: their community is expanding, their missionary system is growing and their economy is changing.

Community expansion and the growth of their missionary system are both attributed to an increase in the Mennonite population. These are desirable changes for the Mennonites because they denote the continued survival of their religion and the progress of evangelism. On the other hand, a less desirable transition affecting some Mennonite communities is the changing farming economy. Limited farming opportunities are forcing some men into trades, which increases their association with and dependence on people outside of their community.

Although the Mennonites and the Amish share many of the same stereotypes, a greater need may exist for understanding Mennonites because they have closer interaction with and dependence on the larger society. Whereas the Amish avoid proselytizing and lead a somewhat more socially independent existence, Mennonites are more

involved outside of their communities for economic reasons, and through evangelistic and missionary efforts.

Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to explain and describe the cultural characteristics of a single Mennonite community in hopes of promoting a greater understanding and awareness of Mennonitism as a religion and culture.

The community studied for this project is called Faith Mennonite Fellowship, a small Beachy Amish Mennonite congregation located in Lott, Texas, 96 miles northeast of Austin. Its members belong to the Beachy Amish Mennonite Fellowship, one of the more conservative groups in the Mennonite family. The community is an interesting representation of Mennonitism because the lifestyle and religious beliefs of its members fall between two extremes. The Beachy Amish are neither fully assimilated with the social mainstream, nor are they as strict as the Old Order Amish, the group from which many of their families converted.

This project is significant because Faith Mennonite Fellowship is the first and only Beachy Amish Mennonite community in Texas and no detailed study exists which visually documents Mennonite colonization in Texas.

Personal Motivation

My interest in Mennonite culture and religion originates with my Mennonite ancestors who lived in Holland in the 16th and 17th centuries. Subsequent generations moved to the United States and settled in Connecticut, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Kentucky, Virginia, Tennessee and Missouri.

The last Mennonite in my family was my maternal great-grandmother, Lettie Ann Holcroft. She married a non-Mennonite man, Arthur Bell Jennings, and soon after they moved from a rural, Missouri town to Oklahoma City. At that time, Oklahoma City did not have a Mennonite church and my great-grandparents began attending a Brethren church instead. Lettie and Arthur Jennings had seven children, one of whom is my grandmother, Lottie Lucille Wynne. Despite their religious upbringing, none of the children ever became members of the Mennonite church.

I selected this topic because I know very little about the history of my family. This project gave me the unique opportunity to study and be involved in a community of people whose lifestyle and values are similar to those of my ancestors. Finally, I chose to create a visual ethnography of this community in order to combine my professional interests as a photographer with my academic interest in Mennonite culture.

Chapter 1

Review of Literature: Photography as a Research Tool

The purpose of this thesis is to promote a greater understanding of Mennonite culture by combining photographs with explanatory and descriptive text. Although additional methods were used to complete this thesis, I have limited my literature review to studies pertaining to the use of photography in research. The following information was used as a guide in designing the research method used in this thesis.

Introduction

The use of photography in a social science project enables the researcher to not only record the behavior of subjects but to more effectively supplement the use of other qualitative and ethnographic research methods. The potential of the camera as a research tool goes beyond its mere function as a recording device. It becomes a means of preservation, of those events we cannot see and words alone cannot fully describe. According to Sorenson (1975) visual records:

...capture subtleties and complexities of social interaction and neuro-muscular movement unobtainable in any other way, but they also record unappreciated and unanticipated data,

thus providing the possibility of sustained reevaluation of earlier deductions. (p. 463)

Most of the literature devoted to the use of visual records in ethnographic research is concerned with both still photography and film. It is necessary to include some of the literature relating to ethnographic film because film shares with still photography similar usage, interpretation and meaning.

John Collier and Projective Interviewing

According to John Collier Jr., photography can be of great importance in anthropological research because the visual image is so easily understood both interculturally and cross-culturally. His studies of photography and film evaluate the potentials and limitations of the camera as a research tool.

In his early study of photography, Collier (1957) tests the effects of visual stimuli on controlled interviews, both photographic and non-photographic. His study reveals that photographs, as an interviewing aid, reduce reticence and create more focused and emotional responses from the participants. These results forced critical anthropologists to reexamine the inductive power of photography.

In fieldwork studies, Collier (1967) emphasizes the strength of collective interpretation, or projective interviewing, in the evaluation of photographs. By asking subjects to explain the content of photographs, the researcher can compare his or her own perceptions with those of the

participants; thereby producing a more accurate and objective record of the event.

In a later work, Collier (1975) lists four kinds of information gathered through photo-interviewing which can be essential to the study of human organizations and activity.

1. Precise identification of people - name, status, role, personality
2. Identification of place - political, ethnic, and tribal boundaries; ownership and agricultural patterns
3. Identification of ecological elements - explanation of processes and technology; explanation of ceremony
4. Historical happenings associated with people or places - contrast of present and past

Collier suggests that the knowledge gained through photo-interviewing will be made more valuable by the researcher's emotional involvement with the community or group being studied.

Photographic Ambiguity

Consistent throughout Collier's essays, is the criticism that photography, as a research tool, provides information that represents only a slice of reality and may be too complex and uncontrollable for analysis. The readability of the still photograph is impeded by, what Collier calls, the "bouquet of culture" presented in each image.

Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson (1942) faced the problem of photographic ambiguity in their landmark, two-year study of Balinese culture. The project was among the first to utilize still photography as

the primary tool for investigating other cultures. The documentation yielded over twenty-five thousand images, which were subsequently edited down to 759 and thematically grouped for their publication in Balinese Character.

According to Collier (1967), this type of photographic conglomeration falls victim to questions of interpretative controllability and validity. Photographic data should be rejected if uncontrollability is discovered. Collier also points out the advantages of using a set of photos:

Using photographs in this saturated way can give the anthropologist authentic and new empirical impressions that trigger insights that could otherwise be obtained only by the anthropologist him(her)self returning to the field. (p. 76)

Science, Selectivity and Truth in Photography

Sorenson (1975) stresses the need for visual documentation of vanishing cultures as a means of studying the range of human adaptation. He explains that modern technology has forced man into a period of cultural convergence, limiting the range of human variation. Without visual records of these disappearing societies, Sorenson feels we may impede our own adaptation to future ecological and economic changes.

According to Jablonski and Sorenson (1975), the theoretical

format underlying research filming relies on three basic strategies: (a) seizing the opportunity we "see," (b) taking advantage of the collective knowledge of our culture, and (c) looking into the unknown. These parallel three elements of scientific inquiry: (a) the significance-recognizing capability of the human mind, (b) a justified body of knowledge, and (c) the desire to learn.

Sorenson refutes the claim that selective interest prevents anthropological film from being scientific. All scientific inquiry is influenced in some manner by selectivity and special interest. The validity of visual records as a scientific or humanistic resource depends upon methodology, interpretability and verifiability. Records of naturally occurring events should be gathered as accurately and comprehensively as possible.

Karl Heider (1976) identifies the need for selection and omission in ethnography and film. He says the value of a work should not be judged on the basis of its omissions, but on the appropriateness and treatment of the included material. Accuracy and the goal of truth are essential features of ethnography. Asen Balikci (1988) believes that truth is the moral responsibility of the ethnographer to record and interpret culture with a maximum of empirical fidelity.

Reflectivity and the Conflict between Visual and Verbal Communication

The discussion of selectivity and truth in ethnography inevitably leads to the question of subjectivity and its impact on ethnographic research.

It has been said that "photographs don't lie." Unfortunately, whether they are conscious of it or not, photographers lie all the time through technical and physical manipulation of their subjects. According to Banta and Hinsley (1986), the objectivity of photography is jeopardized by the fact that technology relies on human guidance.

Armed with the camera, anthropologists can probe, scan, magnify, reduce, isolate, contrast, debase, or idealize their subjects. Through photography, they can create, disseminate, and forever seal in time their own interpretations of humankind. (p. 23)

Paul Byers (1966) refers to the subjectivity of photography in his article, "Cameras Don't Take Pictures." He contends that the key to unlocking the meaning in photographs lies in the careful examination of the three people involved in photography - the photographer, the subject and the viewer. Each person involved in the process influences the meaning of the image. The complexity of potential influences makes detection of subjectivity even more difficult.

In an article which explores the increasing distrust of visual data in ethnography, Collier (1988) justifies the use of photography;

recalling its longtime use in scientific research. He says the most common criticism of film research is reflectivity, the projection of value judgments into the cultural record. Collier recognizes the consequences of selectivity in film, but underscores its importance in ethnography.

Reflectivity is humanly part of the rapport bridge over which fieldwork is accomplished. The human transference so essential to interpersonal as well as cross-cultural communication certainly affects the film-photographic relationship. But without this transference, photo-recording with any humanistic depth cannot be made. (p. 76)

Collier maintains that the solution to controlling reflectivity in fieldwork is the appropriate use of methodology. Werner and Schoepfle (1987) specifically state:

The only safeguard against such distortion is to submit all observations to native consultants for comment. Ethnographers' observations become legitimate ethnographic data only after the text in their journals, based on observations by the ethnographers in their language, is augmented by a text based on comments by native consultants in their native language. (p. 286)

A more recent criticism of photography and film (1984) is contained in an article by I. C. Jarvie which claims the content of visual records limits their reliability. He asserts that the information has

contextual limitations, lacks supportive details and cannot rival the legitimacy of the written word.

Collier (1988) refutes the assumption that fieldnotes are less manipulable than the camera. He attests to the camera's ability to record not only the values of the researcher, but the hidden values of the subject, and important circumstantial data. Visual records also have the advantage of secondary analysis.

Methodology

Although there is not a standard methodology, ethnographic research should always incorporate the ideals of accuracy, interpretability and reliability. The nature of ethnography calls for methods which individuate each project. Therefore, "the ethnographer should use whatever channel is most productive in providing information that directly contributes to the aims outlined in the research plan" (Werner & Schoepfle, 1987, p. 286).

There are some guidelines which can be applied in designing a research method. Kirk & Miller (1986), for example, tell us that there are four phases to qualitative research:

1. Invention - phase of preparation or research design
2. Discovery - data collection
3. Interpretation - processing and evaluation of information
4. Explanation - phase of communication and producing the message

All four phases must be employed and completed in the proper sequence.

McCarty (1975) divides the photographic process into three distinct phases. The first phase is a period of adjustment and acculturation. The camera can be revealed to accustom others to its presence, but shooting is usually discouraged. This is a topic of debate because some researchers believe the initial phase of research, when the culture is not fully understood, produces the most objective work.

The second phase is characterized by an abundance of general shooting. The researcher is still adapting to the culture and establishing rapport with the natives. In-depth, personal shooting occurs in the final phase, after trust has been established and access granted.

Photographs can be used in a number of ways during the "discovery" phase of research. Don Rundstrom (1988) lists six techniques for utilizing images:

1. Interview with images
2. Using images as a mnemonic device
3. Using images gained through various media approaches for comparative feedback
4. Using visual images to reconstruct: events, processes, objects, and techniques
5. Using images to elicit a narrative
6. Using images for illustration

The techniques should be selected according to the type of research being conducted. They can be used together or separately, depending on the situation.

Once the data has been collected, the period of interpretation begins. The goal of this phase is to move from visual images to scientific conclusion.

According to Collier (1967) some elements that should be kept in mind when categorizing the visual information are: (a) spatial elements and body movement, (b) status and role orientations, (c) symbolism and (d) the processes of events.

Conclusion

The use of photography in ethnographic and anthropological research has encountered criticism and mistrust. Critics have argued that photography is too superficial, "real," ambiguous and subjective. Despite such criticism, photography remains a powerful fact-gathering and interpretive research tool.

Chapter 2

Methodology

The methodology used to complete this project was entirely qualitative, combining documentary photography and historical research with participant observation and informal interviewing. Documentary photography was used to record people, places and events and visually describe characteristics of their lifestyle and religion. Historical research provided an understanding of the origins of Mennonitism, the Beachy Amish Mennonites and early Mennonite colonization in Texas. This historical framework forms a context for studying the current value system and religious practices of the Beachy Amish Mennonites. Participant observation and informal interviewing were fact-gathering techniques used to gain further insights into their culture.

Introduction

It was initially difficult to locate a Mennonite community in Texas for my study because there are few records documenting their existence. I discovered the Beachy Amish community in a 1988 newspaper article in the Dallas Public Library. I called directory assistance in Lott and asked for the number of one of the family names

mentioned in the article. A few minutes later, I was speaking with 50-year-old, Viola Yoder, explaining my project and asking if I could visit her community.

After a brief conversation, she said, "I think that would be fine. Will you be staying the night?"

Site Selection

This welcoming attitude, something I experienced throughout my visits to their community, was a primary reason for accepting this site for my project. An equally important factor was the members' willingness to let me photograph within their community. Their approval of photography was essential because a primary purpose of the project was to produce a body of documentary images.

Other issues affecting my decision were the size of the community and its proximity to Austin. Although the number fluctuates, there are approximately 100 people, church members and their children, living in the community. I felt this size would be conducive to the type of photo project I wanted to develop: small enough that I could establish relationships with many of the families and large enough to allow for diversity.

Finally, the proximity of the community, 96 miles from my home, was convenient, enabling me to organize visits around my school and work schedules.

Initial Method

My original method was designed to incorporate photography and participant observation with formal interviewing and a lengthy questionnaire to be given to each of the families.

On August 11, 1991, I made my first trip to Faith Mennonite Church. After attending Sunday School and the church service, I was invited to Iddo and Viola Yoder's home for supper. After we ate, I sat down in the living room with Iddo, Viola, their two daughters, Maria and Miriam, and their two sons, Titus and Timothy. At this time, I began asking Iddo and Viola questions from the list I had made.

Although the Yoders knew I would be asking them questions, it was immediately obvious that this method was not going to be very successful. Not only was it too formal, but it created an awkwardness between us. I am not sure how uncomfortable the Yoders felt, but I was nervous and uneasy conducting the research this way.

Fortunately, qualitative and ethnographic methodologies are flexible and allow researchers to modify their methods to achieve the desired results. Consequently, I began employing a more informal approach to my fieldwork, eliminating the use of a formal questionnaire and relying on participant observation and informal interviewing. These two methods yielded better results because they are more social and informal, and because I felt more comfortable working under less rigid conditions.

My next few trips included a visit to the school, a women's quilting and an overnight stay with the Yoders. During these visits, I realized how limited my understanding was of their lifestyle, behavior and beliefs. Although I had done some preliminary research on Mennonitism, I was unprepared for the confusion I felt in many situations. This lack of understanding led me to shift the focus of the thesis to a more explanatory and descriptive project.

After these initial visits, I also modified my appearance so that I looked more like the Mennonite women. I began wearing solid colored dresses or skirts, pulling my hair back in a bun, and avoiding the use of make-up or jewelry. These were not big changes for me, except that I usually wear my hair down and often wear pants, especially when photographing. By dressing in a simpler fashion, I felt more comfortable about my appearance and hopefully, put others more at ease around me.

Fieldwork

Beginning in the fall of 1991, I stopped trying to arrange visits with different families and began attending church services as often as I could. I did this for several reasons. First, everyone in the community is normally present at Sunday School and church, so I was immediately able to meet a lot of people. Next, many of the questions I had concerning their religious beliefs and practices were answered through the sermons that were given.

Finally, the community observes Sunday as a day of rest and people are more relaxed and social. Following the service, the majority of the congregation remains in the churchhouse to gather in groups, introduce visitors and make plans for lunch, or "supper" as they call it. During this time, it is common for families to extend invitations to other families, relatives or guests for supper.

Following Sunday suppers, the women clean up and then everyone spends an hour or more socializing in the living room, discussing current events, politics, the content of the morning's sermon, or whatever topic was of interest.

These Sunday visits were invaluable to me, not only because of the information I learned from the services and conversations, but because of the relationships I was able to cultivate. Although I interacted with the men, I made more friendships with the women because we had more in common and spent more time together. However, I found that when I needed to ask questions of the men, Sunday afternoons were my best opportunities.

Finally, an important result of these Sunday trips was that they often led to invitations for future visits: overnight weekend visits with different families, Tupperware parties, quiltings, house cleanings, school picnics, fellowship dinners and even weddings. I was surprised by these invitations at first because I was an outsider to the community. However, their offers were genuine and I realized they were just as interested in getting to know me as I was in getting to know them.

Work Schedule and Notetaking

My fieldwork continued for approximately a year and a half, although I did not follow a consistent schedule. I visited when possible, both on weekends and during the week. Sometimes I would drive there for the day or a particular event; on other occasions I would stay the night with different families over the course of several days. Throughout my fieldwork, I maintained a journal documenting my visits, phone calls and correspondence to friends in the community. I kept notes about the people I met, various events I participated in, and the content of conversations I had with people. I took notes in church and tried to write down quotes whenever possible. Sometimes notetaking was not possible or was inhibiting to a conversation. In those instances, I would wait until the evening or when I got home to try and rewrite conversations and thoughts.

Photographic Method

Photographing within this community was the most enjoyable and yet, most difficult part of this project for me. It was enjoyable because the project was very personal and inspiring. On the other hand, I found it very difficult because of ethical considerations which overrode my desire to take, what may have been, many wonderful photographs.

Entree and Method Development

I began shooting on my second visit to Lott when I spent the day with the children and youth at Faith Mennonite School. This was an appropriate place to begin because the children were less conscious of my presence and presumably, more comfortable in front of the camera than many of the adults. I shot three rolls of film that day, more than any other day during my fieldwork.

During my next visit, which was to a quilting, I gave some of the women 5x7 prints of photographs taken at the school. Although it was not my intention, I believe this gesture was an important means of establishing my entree into the community. Throughout my fieldwork, I made it a habit to bring prints for people each time I visited.

I began taking my camera with me on each visit, but I did not wear it on me or always use it. Instead, when a photo opportunity arose, I would ask permission, and then, if appropriate, take my camera out and begin shooting. Sometimes even when I had permission, I would refrain from shooting because the camera would make someone shy or nervous. In most situations, I let my conscience be my guide and more times than not, I abstained from shooting.

I also discovered that people did not understand when I took more than a couple shots of one subject or situation. They felt that one or two shots should suffice. This was contradictory to my photojournalism training which emphasized shooting as much and as fast as you can in order to get the best shot.

In order to accommodate their feelings about photography, I learned to wait and be selective about the photographs I took. When I did shoot, I would take only one or two photographs of a situation and hope that I got something I liked.

Shooting Frequency

During my early visits, when I was meeting people and establishing relationships, I would shoot about a roll a day, in the hopes of shooting more as I became more accepted in the community. As it turned out, the more time I spent in the community, the more important it became for me not to offend anyone by taking what might be considered an inappropriate photograph. Consequently, my frequency of shooting remained at a roll a day throughout my fieldwork. However, the process of photographing became easier over time because I had a better sense for what was suitable subject matter and for which people felt comfortable being photographed.

Another issue which affected my shooting frequency was my participation in activities. Frequently, I would become involved in an event or situation and either forget to photograph or not want to because participating seemed more important.

Photo Content

The majority of the photographs taken for this project are of people, specifically women and children. This was a natural result of my

research because community roles of men and women are clearly defined and I spent considerably more time with the women and children. I do not consider this to be a limitation of the project because the photographs were never intended to stand alone or comprehensively explain Mennonite culture. Instead, the photographs supplement the other methods, and form a permanent record of moments, people and events that words could not fully describe.

Equipment and Photographic Style

All of the photographs produced for this project were taken on 35mm film using a Nikon FG-20 camera and either a 28, 35 or 50mm lens. I chose to use this camera because it was small and relatively quiet, and therefore less distracting. Moderate to wide lenses were used because my subject matter was almost exclusively people. These lenses allowed me to remain close to my subjects and still capture environmental details.

I used available light to produce all of the photographs except for those taken at Norma Hostetler and Tim Friesen's wedding. Flash was used for these photographs because the interior of the church was dark and other photographers were present and using flash units.

I chose to use natural light because I wanted to maintain a pure documentary style, as well as keep the people and settings as realistic looking as possible. Also, flash would have been highly obtrusive in most situations.

I used several types of film during this project. In most situations, I tried to shoot Kodak Tri-X, a black-and-white film with an ASA of 400. I prefer this film over other black-and-white films because it is fast enough to use indoors without flash and produces negatives with good contrast.

For some indoor shooting, I was forced to use an even faster film because the lighting was too dark to use Tri-X. In these situations, I used Fuji Neopan 1600, which produced grainy negatives, but enabled me to continue shooting using natural light.



Figure 1 The author (dressed in black) shown quilting with the Mennonite women in the schoolhouse.

Chapter 3

Anabaptist History: Origins of the Mennonite Movement

Most Mennonites of North America trace their origins to the 16th century Anabaptist movement in Switzerland and southern Germany during the time of the Protestant Reformation (Schlabach, 1988).

The early Anabaptist ancestors of the Mennonites, commonly referred to as Swiss Brethren or just Brethren, were contemporaries of Ulrich Zwingli, a Swiss preacher who like Martin Luther sought internal reform of the Roman Catholic Church (Schwieder & Schwieder, 1975). The Brethren embraced many of the beliefs espoused by Zwingli, but became increasingly frustrated by the slowness of reform and Zwingli's refusal to promote certain other changes.

In 1525, the Brethren split from Zwingli because of differences concerning several issues, in particular the separation of church and state, and adult baptism (Schwieder & Schwieder, 1975). This split signified the beginning of the Anabaptist movement, a new religious ideology which was neither Protestant nor Catholic.

At this time, the term "Anabaptist," meaning "rebaptizer" or "to baptize again," was introduced and attached to the Brethren by their adversaries (Redekop, 1989). The Brethren rejected this label, insisting

that they baptized only once and only those who, as adults, voluntarily requested to be baptized. The Anabaptists believed that:

... a person could not become a Christian, a true disciple of Jesus, except by a decision which was personal and voluntary. Believing that no one could "make" Christians by force or by baptizing babies, the Anabaptists baptized only persons who were old enough to decide and apparently had decided to be Christian. (Schlabach, 1988, pp. 19-20)

According to Dyck (1985), the Anabaptists also believed that the Scriptures did not support the baptizing of infants because "the work of Christ had sufficiently atoned for any sin that might remain in a child until it reached the age of personal accountability" (p. 64).

As the Anabaptist movement spread, a group called the Obbenites developed in the Netherlands (Yoder, 1987). Led by two brothers, Obbe and Dirk Philips, the Obbenites were similar in their beliefs to the Swiss Brethren (Schwieder & Schwieder, 1975). In 1536, a former Roman Catholic priest named Menno Simons became the Obbenite leader, and his followers became known as Mennists, then Mennonists, and finally Mennonites (Schwieder & Schwieder, 1975). Simons was very influential, leading many other groups with similar religious principles to accept the name Mennonite as their own.

The continued growth of the movement led to the emergence of groups in northern Switzerland, Holland, northern Germany, Moravia, Italy, and Prussia (Redekop, 1989). Although this grouping of

movements varied regionally, a common ideology developed among them. In addition to the rejection of infant baptism, Anabaptist doctrines included nonconformity to worldly practices; the complete separation of church and state; the practice of nonviolence, including the rejection of military service; and the establishment of a pure church through strict discipline and shunning or excommunication of members (Redekop, 1989).

From the outset of the movement, the doctrines held by Anabaptists were considered by other Christians to be heretical and seditious, and therefore threatening to both the church and state.

Anabaptists thoroughly frightened Europe's people of power. Many were outspoken and missionary about their faith, and insisted forthrightly that European society and institutions were not really Christian. To authorities they seemed sectarian and divisive. Their worldview pitted the faithful remnant of true Christians in hard struggle against the established churches and against a vast majority of "Christians" who did not live righteously. So churchmen and rulers, both Catholic and Protestant, considered them dangerous to social solidarity and order (Schlabach, 1988, p. 20).

As a result, there was great opposition to the Anabaptists and their ensuing persecution was severe. According to Schlabach (1988), for "decades many, many Anabaptists were brought to trial, imprisoned, tortured, and frequently executed by drowning or burning. Such

persecution taught them and early Mennonites another point: to be faithful meant to suffer" (p. 20).

Anabaptist oppression varied regionally, and religious toleration was slow to grow. Consequently, many Anabaptists became exiles or fugitives and were forced to seek refuge by migrating to safer areas.

The movements of these early Anabaptists was thus occasioned by a very complex mixture of evangelistic effort and escape from persecution, and it is difficult to give one motive or the other preeminence as the cause. Among the leaders, evangelism and nurturing the scattered flocks were obviously the greater sources of motivation, but for the rank and file, persecution may have been the predominant force (Redekop, 1989, p. 15-16).

The intense persecution and dispersment of Anabaptists led to the dissolution of many of the small groups or movements. According to Yoder (1987), "only three groups were able to survive beyond the mid-sixteenth century as ordered communities: the 'Brethren' in Switzerland and south Germany; the Mennonites in the Netherlands and north Germany; and the Hutterites in Moravia" (p. 37-38).

However, throughout the 16th and 17th centuries, regional toleration and acceptance of Anabaptists and Mennonites led to congregational resurgence, as well as diversity among many scattered groups. This diversity was not only regional, but theological and practical. The Amish, for example, emerged in the late 17th century as a result of disagreements with the Swiss Mennonites over several issues

concerning church purity and separation (Redekop, 1989). Followers of the Swiss minister Jacob Ammann, the Amish advocated stricter use of shunning of excommunicated members as a method of church discipline and a means of maintaining a pure church (Lind, 1990). In 1693, after attempts to resolve the dispute failed, the Amish split from the Mennonites, becoming an independent religious movement (Schwieder & Schwieder, 1975). (For more information on the Amish, including related groups, see John Hostetler's *Amish Society* and Donald Kraybill's *The Riddle of Amish Culture*.)

By the end of the 17th century, the Mennonites and Amish began migrating in large groups to America, initially settling in Pennsylvania, and gradually moving into areas of Maryland and Virginia (Schlabach, 1988). The impetus for their migration was twofold; to escape continued religious persecution in Europe and to buy land which would allow them to live in compact settlements (Schwieder & Schweider, 1975). At the invitation of William Penn, the first Mennonites migrated from Germany to America in 1683 (MacMaster, 1985). William Penn was a Quaker who received Pennsylvania and Delaware from English King Charles II as payment for a debt (Schwieder & Schwieder, 1987). For similar religious, political and economic reasons, other Anabaptist groups began migrating to North America including the Amish to Pennsylvania in the early 1700s and the Russian-German to Canada in the late 1800s (Redekop, 1989). Throughout this period of migration, it is believed that almost eight

thousand Anabaptist Mennonites, from Russia, the Netherlands, and Switzerland migrated to America and Canada (Redekop, 1989).

Subsequent expansion of Mennonites throughout the United States, Canada and Mexico was influenced by church growth, through evangelism and reproduction, as well as a variety of religious, political and economic factors (Redekop, 1989). Mennonite dispersement was also greatly affected by numerous schisms within congregations, resulting in a wide variety of lifestyle, religious and economic practices among the different subgroups (Schwieder & Schwieder, 1975).

Chapter 4

Origins of the Beachy Amish Mennonite Fellowship Churches

As previously mentioned, the history of Anabaptist expansion was affected by schisms within various congregations. These divisions, and the new groups they created, were commonly the result of disagreements over issues concerning lifestyle, social practice, discipline or the interpretation of church doctrine.

One of the more recent major schisms in Anabaptist history was the 1927 Beachy Amish split from the Old Order Amish congregation in the Casselman River district of Somerset County, Pennsylvania (Yoder, 1987). The events which led to this division are complicated and disagreements remain as to the true motivations for the split. The following is an abbreviated discussion of the major events and issues which affected the division and led to the emergence of the Beachy Amish Mennonite Fellowship.

June 26, 1927 Emergence of the Beachy Amish Fellowship

According to Yoder (1991), the events leading to the 1927 division evolved from disagreements in the 1890s over the use of the strict ban, or *streng Meidung*, as applied to Moses Hartz, Sr. and other members who left the Old Order Amish church to join more progressive congregations.

The *Meidung* is a church discipline practice in which banned or excommunicated members are shunned as a means of preserving a pure church (Lind, 1990). Shunning is a form of social exclusion, which is largely symbolic, typically temporary and designed to redeem the errant, not drive them away permanently (MacMaster, 1985).

In the 1920s, similar disagreements concerning banning and shunning arose in the Casselman River congregations, which were divided by the Pennsylvania-Maryland state line. The Pennsylvania congregations of Somerset County, led by Bishop Moses M. Beachy, were affiliated with the Old Order Amish, a group more conservative than their Maryland neighbors (Yoder, 1991).

According to Beachy (1955), "the incident which brought the storm into the open was the withdrawal of a Mr. and Mrs. John D. Yoder from Bishop Beachy's congregation to the Maryland congregation, which in 1912 had affiliated with the [more progressive] Conservative Amish Mennonite Conference" (p. 120). When asked to explain their withdrawal, the couple "gave as their reason the use of the strict ban against those who left to join other churches when there was no other accusation against them" (p. 120).

In 1925, Bishop Beachy wrote to Iowa Bishop J. F. Swartzendruber, seeking advice on how to resolve the situation. According to Beachy (1955), Swartzendruber was troubled by the fact that Bishop Beachy's congregation, in 1895, had voted unanimously to apply the ban to all who left and joined the Maryland congregation. He noted, however, that

the thirty-year-old decision did not allow for those who might have a change of heart. Swartzendruber also noted that "Article 16 of the Dordrecht Confession intended to do away with the avoidance of those whose only offense was going to another faction" (p. 120). His final recommendation to Bishop Beachy was to attempt a compromise which would allow each member to follow their conscience in deciding whether or not to personally enforce the ban. The reasoning was that such a compromise would not pose a problem if the congregation remained unanimous on the issue of the ban.

Also in 1925, at the request of Bishop Beachy and his co-ministers Noah and Joseph Yoder, four Amish ministers from other congregations came to Somerset County to mediate. They, too, were concerned about the earlier vote, but agreed that "a blanket ban for all who left the Pennsylvania congregation to join the Maryland congregation was no longer workable" (Beachy, 1955, p. 122). The final recommendation of the four ministers was similar to that of Bishop Swartzendruber: "consider each case separately, and then decide what should be done in a particular case, rather than to abide by one ruling which was to be applied in every case" (p. 122).

Based on the advice he had received and the mixed feelings of his congregation, Bishop Moses Beachy decided he could not conscientiously continue to excommunicate and shun former members of his congregation who left to join the Maryland Conservative Amish Mennonite congregation (Yoder, 1991). Leading the opposition to this

decision were Beachy's co-ministers, Noah and Joseph Yoder, who favored a stricter position on the use of the ban.

Bishop Beachy tried for a full year to compromise with his co-ministers, but they were unyielding (Beachy, 1955). At a counsel meeting on November 14, 1926, Beachy again "told the members that he did not intend to place Mr. and Mrs. John D. Yoder under the ban, and that people must use their own judgment in their attitude toward the Yoders" (p. 126). It is important to note that at this meeting Bishop Beachy also stated he would not allow the use of automobiles by the members because it would estrange the Old Order churches (p. 126). Noah and Joseph Yoder refused to agree to the more tolerant view of the ban and Joseph suggested that there were issues, other than the ban, that should be investigated (p. 126).

While Bishop Beachy maintained his position, the opposition let their feelings be known by refusing to participate in the April 24, 1927, communion service (p. 127). Two months later, on June 27, 1927, after further attempts at reconciliation failed, the more conservative members of the congregation, led by Noah and Joseph Yoder, withdrew from Beachy's bishop district and joined other Old Order districts to retain their good standing with the Old Order group (Bender, 1990). "This division resulted in the Yoder (Old Order) and the Beachy congregations, both being named after their respective ministers at that time" (Schweider & Schweider, 1977, p. 42).

Other Issues: Sunday School, Electricity and Automobiles

It has been argued that the June 27th division was not a result of disagreements over the ban, but by arguments over the practice of Sunday school, the use of electricity and the ownership of automobiles. The following is a brief discussion of events related to these issues which may have affected the division.

Following the April, 1927 communion service, Bishop Beachy "apparently gave up hope of reconciliation and allowed some innovations which he had previously tried to hold in check" (p. 128).

On May 8, 1927, Bishop Beachy and his followers began organizing a Sunday School.

The fact that many of the youth were without a reading knowledge of German had long been a matter of concern to Moses M. Beachy. He reasoned rightly that the German language would have to be abandoned in the Amish worship service if the young were not instructed therein, and this was the chief reason for wanting to start the school. (Beachy, 1955, p. 128-9)

The next innovation to be accepted by Bishop Beachy and his followers was the use of electricity, namely electric lights and electric motors. The exact date permission was given for these conveniences is not known, but there was a discussion at the November 28, 1926 counsel meeting concerning the use of electricity, which "indicates that by that time some members of the congregation had begun to make use of these modern conveniences" (Beachy, 1955, p. 129). It is assumed that

electricity was approved shortly after the Sunday School was established.

The final innovation to be approved by Bishop Beachy was the use of automobiles. Although Bishop Beachy prohibited the use of automobiles at the November 14, 1926 counsel meeting, "this would indicate that while automobiles were not generally owned by members of the congregation in 1926, there was at least some agitation that they should be permitted to own them" (Beachy, 1955, p. 130).

On June 26, 1927, one day before the withdrawal of Noah and Joseph Yoder, the followers of Bishop Beachy voted, and a majority indicated they could do without automobiles at that time. In February, 1929, less than two years later, the members took another vote and unanimously approved the use of automobiles (Beachy, 1955).

From these accounts, it appears that Joseph Yoder's earlier concerns about "other issues" may have been well founded. Years later, in a letter, dated March 2, 1950, Eli Bontrager, one of the four mediating ministers, recalled that when they [the ministers] visited Somerset County, Noah Yoder expressed concern over issues other than the strict ban (Beachy, p. 128). Bontrager says that "in his opinion what N. M. Yoder wished to convey was this: that M. M. Beachy wanted unrestricted use of electricity, automobiles, and perhaps a few other things" (Beachy, 1955, p. 128). A similar opinion was expressed by Bishop Joseph J. Yoder in a letter dated March 3, 1950 (Beachy, 1955).

In response to the two letters written almost 25 years after the split, Beachy (1955) comments:

Probably neither Bontrager nor Yoder is quite fair in saying that Beachy wanted unrestricted use of electricity and the automobile prior to the communion service of 1927. After that date, however, innovations occurred in Bishop Beachy's congregation with such swiftness that it seems incredible to suppose they had not been under contemplation by some of his members beforehand. (p. 128)

A view supporting the Old Order position is offered by Schwieder and Schwieder (1977), who contend the "conflict centered around the use of electricity, the ownership of automobiles, and the practice of Sunday School" (p. 42). On the other hand, Lind (1991) and Yoder (1987) cite the differences over the use of shunning as the central issue which initiated the division.

Finally, Beachy (1955) maintains that the cause of the split was "the insistence of Joseph and Noah Yoder that the strict ban be used on all who left to unite with the Maryland congregation" (p. 127).

Noah M. and Joseph J. Yoder must bear much of the responsibility for the final division. It was they who with their followers withdrew and not Beachy who expelled them. Furthermore, their withdrawal came at a time when Beachy was still in the mood to compromise on the use of automobiles. (Beachy, 1955, p. 131)

Emergence and Growth of the Beachy Amish Mennonite Fellowship

During the early 1900's, disagreements over the *streng Meidung* arose in other Pennsylvania congregations as well. Between 1909 and 1911, 35 families in Lancaster County left the Old Order Amish church and formed a group known as the Weavertown Amish Mennonite Church (Yoder, 1991). Under the leadership of John A. Stoltzfus, the Weavertown congregation joined with Moses Beachy's congregation and together, led the emerging Beachy Amish Fellowship for the next thirty years (Yoder, 1987).

Characteristics of the Beachy Amish Mennonites

It is appropriate that the terms Amish and Mennonite are part of the Beachy name because influences of both groups are evident. Amish influence includes small, autonomous congregations, the sharing of ministry by several men (plural ministry), and belief in non-conformity, non-resistance and the separation of church and state (Yoder, 1987). Mennonite influence includes Sunday school, summer Bible school, revival meetings, and involvement in mission and service organizations (Yoder, 1987).

Chapter 5

Theories of Mennonite Colonization

Mennonites have a long history of colonization, dating back to sixteenth century Europe when the early Anabaptists migrated in large groups to avoid religious persecution (Redekop, 1989). According to Rose (1988), the "late twentieth century finds most Mennonites no longer persecuted for their religion or migrating in large groups" (p. 167). Less politically motivated, contemporary colonization is influenced by a variety of economic, religious and cultural factors: two prevalent impetuses being the need for better farming opportunities and the greater possibility for witness and service through expansion or colonization evangelism (Lind, 1990).

Before discussing early Mennonite colonies in Texas, it is necessary to explain the motivations, general characteristics and factors affecting Mennonite colonization. According to Fretz (1950), "colonization is the process by which a group of like-minded people separates from a parent body and transplants itself to a new locality with a separate organization" (p. 130).

The terms "settlement" and "colony" are often used interchangeably to describe Mennonite expansion. However,

The essential difference between settlement and colonization is that settlement may occur when individuals, families, and small groups, together or independently, transfer their permanent residence from one area to another, without deliberate effort to maintain the previous cultural patterns or group identity. The settler adapts his[her] life and customs to the environment around him[her], whereas the colonist resists adaptation to his[her] surrounding culture and tries to establish the familiar cultural patterns which he[she] has brought with him[her]. (Fretz, 1955, p. 644)

From this discussion, Mennonite expansion would best be defined as colonization because "the first inclination of daughter colonies is to reproduce in the new community the same institutions and patterns of life that are found in the parent colony" (Fretz, 1950, p. 130).

Mennonites colonize in a systematic manner because the preservation of their faith and culture is contingent upon the success of their colonies. Fretz (1955) suggests:

Colonization seems almost essential if Mennonite religious principles and culture traits are to survive. The very genius of the Mennonites is their living in closely knit religious-centered communities. Without the sense of solidarity and mutual edification that close settlement and frequent social contact affords, the ideals of Mennonites can scarcely be maintained. (p. 645)

The process of colonization often begins with investigative parties, which scout and evaluate possible sites, usually located in rural areas. Rural settings are desired for two reasons: Mennonite preference for agrarianism when feasible and the belief that the "penetrating forces of secularism do not seem to undermine and destroy a group's religious qualities as rapidly in the rural areas as they do in the cities" (Fretz, 1955, p. 645). Regarding site selection, Mennonites place importance on the "opportunity for all migrating members to be accommodated in compact settlements as well as for their children in the future" (Fretz, 1955, p. 645).

Although colonization is approached with great care, not all efforts have been successful. Fretz (1950) contends no single factor can be attributed to the success or failure of a colony, but rather, a number of significant factors. Fretz identifies four factors contributing toward successful Mennonite colonization: strong religious faith, the practice of mutual aid between brethren, the belief and practice of non-conformity, and governmental support of colonization. The absence of these factors could be cited as causes for failed colonization. Additionally, Fretz suggests several other explanations for failing colonization: the loss of group consciousness or concern for the group and its values, internal conflicts which create dissension within the group, a lack of leadership, and economic issues such as poor climate, crop failures and financial difficulties.

Chapter 6

Early Texas Colonies: Temporary Opportunities

Introduction

There are limited documents relating early Mennonite colonization in Texas. It is possible that records of Texas colonization may have omitted documenting Mennonite settlements because of the group's tendency to live apart from the world. Therefore, it is likely there were a number of Mennonite communities in the early 1900s whose existence went undocumented. More extensive genealogical research would be needed to accurately trace these lesser known communities.

The following discussion is not intended as a comprehensive history of early Mennonite immigration to Texas. It is provided as a contextual tool for studying other, more recent, Texas Mennonite colonies.

From the available literature, two major colonies were found and there is evidence of several others. Unlike more recent Mennonite and Amish settlers who came to Texas seeking temporary opportunities (Dyck & Martin, 1990), these early settlers made the journey hoping to establish permanent communities. They moved primarily for economic

reasons, namely the prospect of greater land resources in a new colonization area. (For information concerning Amish settlements in Texas, see David Luthy's *The Amish in America: Settlements That Failed, 1840-1960.*)

The drastic change in climate, unforeseen farming problems and the threat of conscription in WWI drove most of these first Mennonite settlers back to their original homes, dissolving the communities.

1906 Tuleta, Texas (Bee County)

Evidence shows that one of the earliest Mennonite colonies in Texas began in 1905 when Reverend Peter Unzicker, a Mennonite minister, brought a colony of Indiana Mennonites to the Bee County area, 60 miles northwest of Corpus Christi (Ezell, 1973). Reverend Unzicker purchased forty acres of land from the Chittim-Miller Ranch and founded the town of Tuleta, named after the daughter of J. M. Chittim (Ezell, 1973).

Although little is known about the social life of these Mennonites, they did have their own church, built in 1906, which doubled as a schoolhouse during the weekdays. The Tuleta Mennonite Church was a member of the South Central Conference and some of its early ministers were J. M. R. Weaver, D. S. King, D. Y. Hooley, C. L. Ressler and Adolph Nick (1923-25); Daniel Kauffman and Amos Horst (1928-29); and E. S. Hallman (1929-50) (Hallman, 1959).

Although the exact date is unknown, "at the height of the town's progress there were three churches - Mennonite, Presbyterian and Baptist. But many of the Mennonites returned to their former homes, and some died, leaving so few members that the church was closed" (Ezell, 1973, pp. 153-154).

The severe drought in 1917 was probably the instrumental reason for most of the Mennonites leaving. According to Hallman (1959), membership in the Tuleta Mennonite Church reached its peak at 104 and was at its lowest in 1957, with only 9 members.

Miss Amanda Stoltzfus

According to Camp Ezell's book, *Historical Story of Bee County, Texas* (1973), one of the most noteworthy residents of Tuleta was a woman named Miss Amanda Stoltzfus. Sometime between 1907 and 1910, she migrated from Tennessee to Tuleta with her parents, Mr. and Mrs. C. H. Stoltzfus, and several brothers and sisters. In Tennessee, Amanda and her father were recognized for their work in building the area's first consolidated school. Upon her arrival to Tuleta, Amanda took it upon herself to provide the same educational opportunities for the children of Texas.

In 1910, she was instrumental in establishing the Tuleta Agricultural High School and became its first principal. The school was the first of its kind in Texas, emphasizing sewing and cooking for the girls and manual training and agriculture for the boys. The school was

even equipped with dormitories so that students from other districts could take advantage of the facilities.

The success of the Tuleta school prompted the Extension Department of The University of Texas to hire Amanda to show other communities how to establish similar schools. She is considered a pioneer in education and became a Lecturer in Rural Education at The University of Texas. She died on October 11, 1930.

1914 The Littlefield Lands (Lamb County)

According to the book *Littlefield Lands: Colonization on the Texas Plains, 1912-1920* by David B. Gracy II (1968), another Mennonite colony began, in the fall of 1914, in an area of the Texas Panhandle called the Littlefield Lands. The first colonists, primarily from Kansas, were members of the Church of God in Christ (Holderman Mennonite), led by J. K. Esau and C. W. Toews, and the Mennonite Brethren.

Land had become scarce in the forty years following their colonization in Kansas, and Texas appeared to be a prime location for a new colony. The Mennonites selected about 26,000 acres for their congregation and by the spring of 1915, began attracting other Mennonites from California, Indiana, North Dakota and Manitoba.

According to Gracy (1968), "In heavily loaded 'immigrant cars,' they brought dairy cattle and chickens, expecting to meet living expenses by selling eggs and butter, while paying out their land notes from the crops" (p. 187).

As an incentive to colonize at Littlefield, the construction of churches, one for each group, was promised to the Mennonites when they had purchased 10,000 acres and enough of them had settled in the area.

The Mennonite Brethren fulfilled the conditions by May, 1916 and, at its height, had a congregation of approximately 100 members. Their first permanent pastor was J. J. Wiebe, followed by A. L. Schellenberg (Hiebert, 1957).

By December, 1916, the Holderman Mennonites also fulfilled the conditions and their church membership grew to about 60 members.

The year 1916 was an uncommonly dry one, but the Mennonites were optimistic and settlers continued to arrive in Littlefield through the fall. Unfortunately, weather conditions did not improve the following year. Records showed 1917 as being "the driest [year] on the South Plains since the United States Weather Bureau began keeping records in 1880" (Gracy, 1968, p. 85).

By the spring of 1918, the loss of crops and threat of conscription as the United States entered WWI forced many of the Mennonites to leave Littlefield and return to their former locations.

Many of the Mennonite Brethren remained in Littlefield until 1923, when their leader, Abraham L. Schellenberg, left to head a publishing house in Hillsboro, Kansas.

After their church building was sold, the remaining six or seven families of Holdermans worshipped in their homes until February 3, 1942, when they too, moved to join other congregations (Toews, 1957).

Descendants of Littlefield Mennonites in Lott, Texas

In researching the Mennonite colony at Littlefield, it was discovered that Peter and Anna Friesen, members of Faith Mennonite Church in Lott, are descendants of some of the Littlefield Mennonites. The Friesens are former members of the Kleine Gemeinde, a Russian Mennonite group that migrated from Canada to Mexico in the 1920's (Sawatzky, 1971).

Evidence of Other Possible Colonies

1905-8 Richmond, Texas

According to Gingerich (1959), the Mennonite Year Books of 1905-1908 list a Mennonite preacher named Bernard Kroecker in Richmond, located near Houston in Fort Bend County. Kroecker conducted services in a schoolhouse for seven members of the Nebraska and Minnesota Evangelical Mennonite Brethren (E.M.B.) conference.

1912 Salem, Texas

According to a book on Mennonite women by Elaine Sommers Rich (1983), a Mennonite missionary named Rose Lambert Musselman (1878-1974) moved to Texas around 1912 to manage a ranch with her husband, D. G. Musselman. The ranch was in a town called Salem, approximately 16 miles from Victoria. After her husband died in 1933, she continued to live in the community. She was a midwife and was

considered "the organizing center of the community" (p. 137). It is not known if Salem was a Mennonite community during this time.

1929 Coldwater, Texas

According to Lohrenz (1959), Abraham L. Schellenberg, one of the early pastors of the Littlefield Mennonite Brethren Church, retired to Coldwater, Texas in 1929, where he farmed and served as a minister in the Mennonite Brethren Church.

1930 Texline, Texas

In 1930, a congregation of 40 Church of God in Christ Mennonites organized in Texline, in the northwest corner of Texas, on the New Mexico border (Mininger, 1959). In 1932, a meetinghouse was built and H. J. Mininger was their first pastor. Unfortunately, "because of the drought and sandstorms, the members soon began to leave, and the congregation became extinct in 1940" (Mininger, 1959, p. 703).

Subsequent communities, beginning in the 1930s, were more successful in establishing permanent colonies. Today, there are more than 1,000 Mennonites living in communities throughout Texas (Dyck & Martin, 1990). Faith Mennonite Church in Lott is the first and only Beachy Amish Mennonite congregation in Texas.

Chapter 7

Faith Mennonite Fellowship The Beachy Amish Mennonites of Lott, Texas

In 1980, four Beachy Amish Mennonite families from the U.S. and Central America moved to Lott, Texas, to form a church outreach. They came to the small, rural town 30 miles east of Temple searching for a better climate and a smaller community to raise their children. They also wanted to establish a community that could serve as a stopping point for Mennonites travelling to and from their missions in Central and South America. Their congregation is called Faith Mennonite Fellowship.

Many of the families that moved to Lott were at one time missionaries in either Central or South America. Their arrival in Texas is consistent with the group's long history of expansion and evangelizing.

The local congregation now includes over 20 families who live in homes scattered throughout a 15 square mile area in and around Lott and the neighboring towns of Chilton and Rosebud.

The remainder of this chapter is divided into various topics, accompanied by photographs and explanatory text. The text is a

combination of my own impressions, the feelings and opinions of the members, and information obtained through sermons and research.

Faith Mennonite Fellowship Church

The church house, as a symbol, a meeting place and as a means of unification, has great significance within the Mennonite community. It is a place of worship and a symbol of their unity before God. Faith Mennonite Church (Figure 2) was built in 1986 by the men of the community and is adjacent to the school building. Prior to the construction of the church house, services were held in the school building.

A major difference between the Old Order Amish and the Beachy Amish is the use of a church house rather than individual homes for services. Also, Beachy Amish services are conducted in English, rather than German.

Paul Beachy, Andy Mullet and Elmer Smucker are the ministerial team for Faith Mennonite Church (Figure 3). The spiritual strength of the community relies heavily on the guidance of these men. They are highly respected by the members and have a great deal of responsibility. Very few decisions would be made in the community without first seeking their opinions. Among their ministerial duties, they conduct all of the church services, counsel families, lead prayer groups, prepare couples for marriage, perform baptisms and attend and speak at church revival meetings around the country.

Outside of their unpaid ministerial duties, they work as carpenters and wallpaper hangers to support their families. Paul Beachy

was also the voluntary teacher for Faith Mennonite School during 1991-1992.

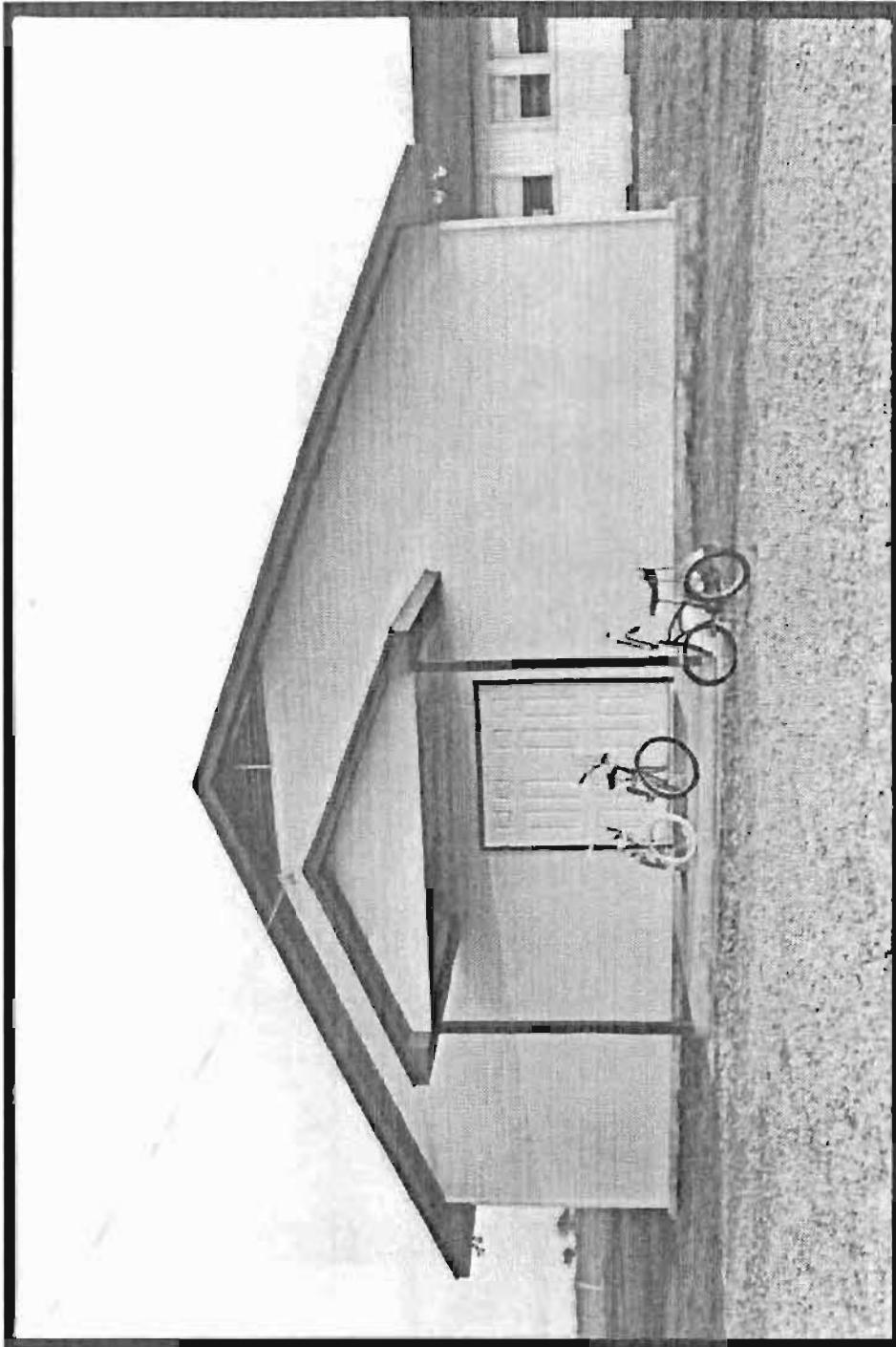


Figure 2 Faith Mennonite Fellowship Church



Figure 3 Ministers Paul Beachy and Andy Mullet, and Bishop Elmer Smucker

Church Services

Worship services are held for two hours on Sunday mornings and 90 minutes on Wednesday evenings. Additionally, two Sundays a month they have evening worship and on alternate Sundays they sing hymns and deliver sermons in area nursing homes.

The Beachy Amish believe in the ordinance of the Holy Kiss, a greeting shared between members of the same sex. This tradition is observed at each church service (Figure 4).

It is customary for men and women to sit separately during church services (Figure 5). This does not always hold true for young children who sometimes alternate between sitting with their mother and father. Weddings and funerals are exceptions to this custom and families sit together for those services.

The children attend all of the services and are taught at a young age to sit still and remain quiet. According to Elmer Smucker, the bishop of the church, "Children are disciplined the most when they are very young. Although they may not understand the sermon, it is important that they learn to sit still and listen."

Typically, the youth and unmarried adults sit together near the front of the church, adults and school-age children in the center pews, and parents of young children and infants in the back, near the cry room and nursery.

Following the service, families, friends and visitors greet each other and visit in groups before leaving for supper (Figure 6).

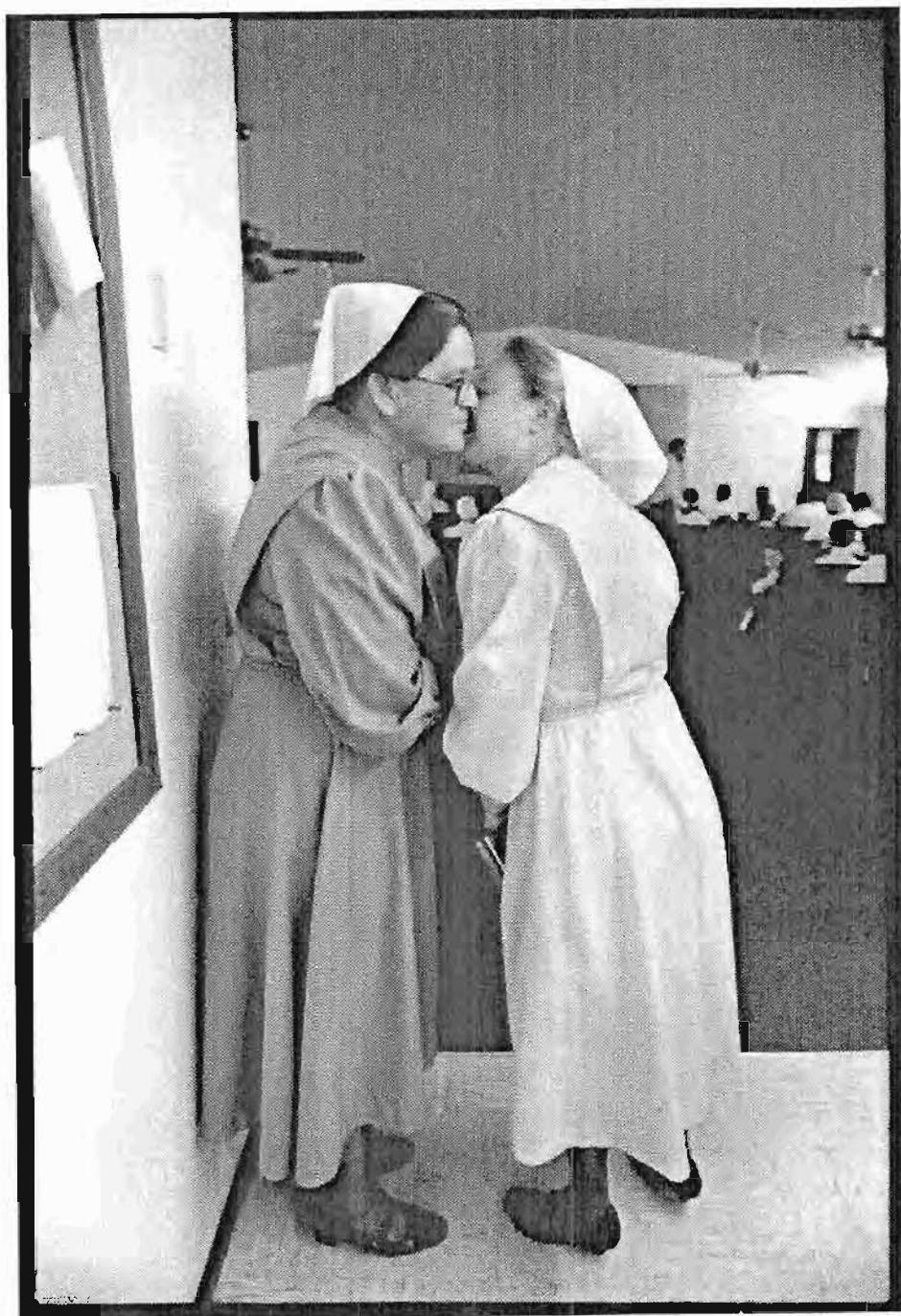


Figure 4 *The Holy Kiss is a traditional greeting shared between members of the same sex.*

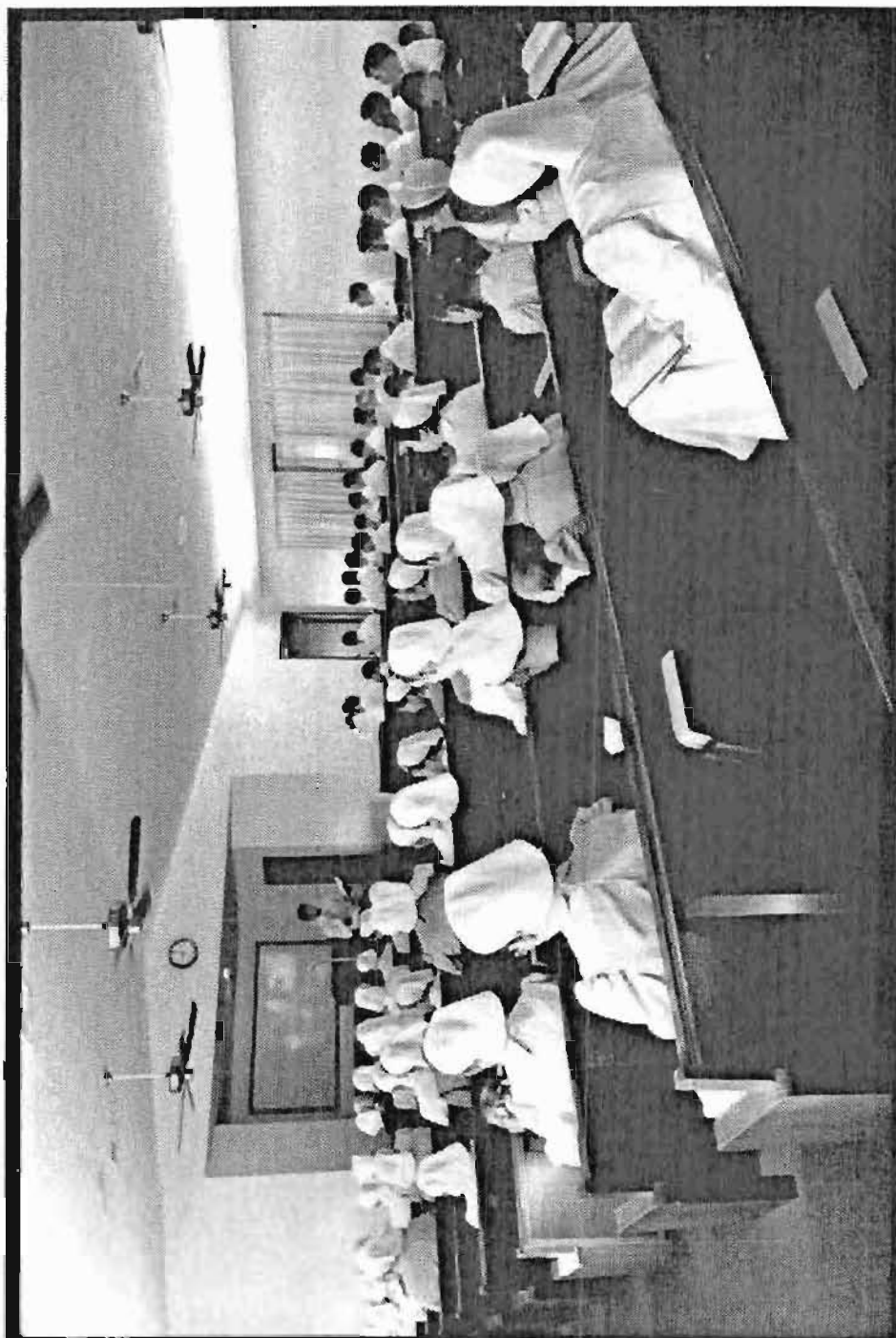


Figure 5 Men and women sit separately during church services.



Figure 6 Members of Faith Mennonite greet friends and visitors following the church service.

Evangelism and Good Works

The Beachy Amish Mennonites are evangelists who believe in salvation by faith and good works. In addition to their missionary and relief efforts, individual congregations try to "reach out by example" by working with non-Mennonites in neighboring communities. Faith Mennonite, for example, conducts services on alternate Sunday afternoons in nursing homes in the nearby towns of Marlin and Rosebud. A group of about 20 people will sing hymns, followed by the presentation of a sermon (Figure 7). Afterwards, the group will mingle through the crowd and introduce themselves to the residents, sometimes stopping to talk awhile (Figures 8). Although some of the children become shy or hesitant, they make an effort to follow others and greet the residents.

Members of the congregation also visit local prisons and deliver sermons to inmates. Some of the women, who were looking to take a more active role in helping the inmates, decided they could contribute their time by raising children of incarcerated mothers. This commitment was viable for the Mullets and Smuckers because they have teenage daughters who could be largely responsible for caring for the children (Figure 9).



Figure 7 Twice a month, families sing hymns and deliver sermons at nearby nursing homes.

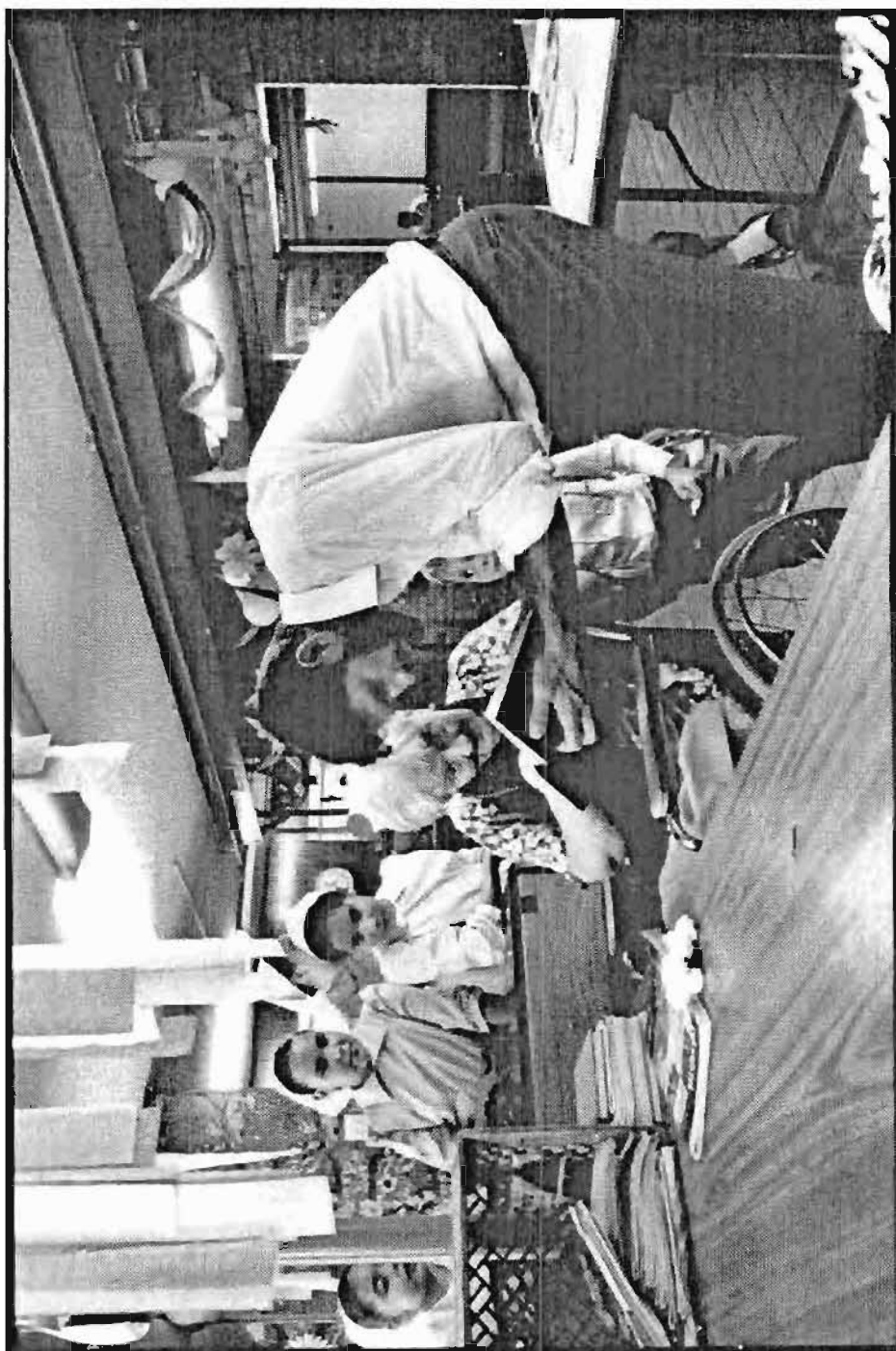


Figure 8 Reading the Bible with a nursing home resident.



Figure 9 Edith Mullet (shown) and her daughter, Theresa, raised four-month-old Rico, until his mother was released from prison.

Confession of Faith, and Baptism

The Beachy Amish believe that in order to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, a person must have a born again experience. They call this experience the "new birth" or confession of faith, which is followed by a six-month period of instruction, culminating with baptism and membership into the church. For persons raised Beachy Amish, baptism normally occurs between the ages of thirteen and seventeen. Although there is no formal celebration, baptismal ceremonies are significant, emotional occasions for the congregation, and especially the families of the new members.

For others who wish to convert, membership into the church comes after a year of studying and practice with the members of the community. Russell Pennington (Figure 10) and his wife, Regina, moved to Lott several years ago and were baptized by the Beachy Church, becoming official members. Russell works in a nearby hospital as a nurse, and he and Regina have three children.

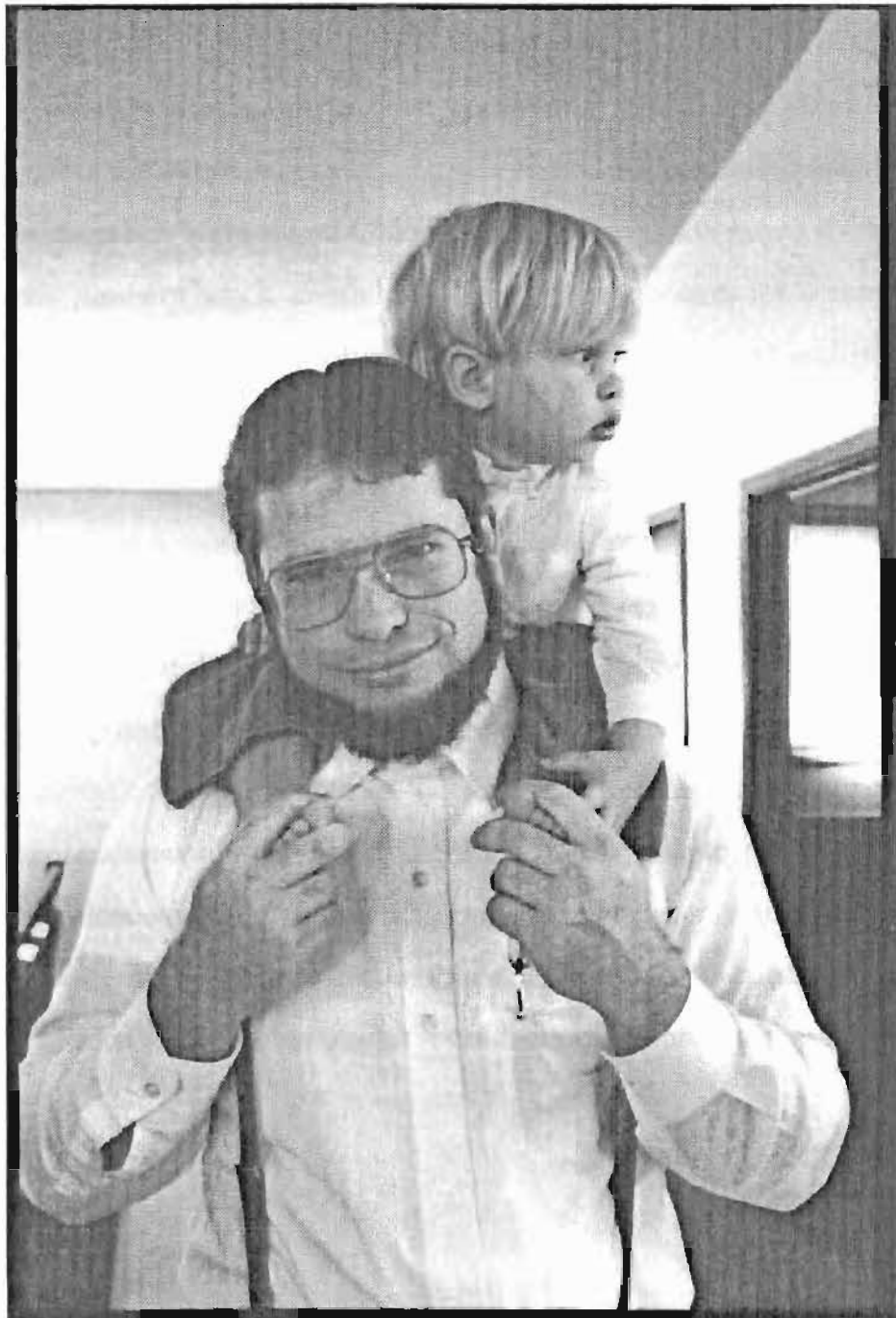


Figure 10 *Russell Pennington with his son, Quinn.*

Opinions Concerning the Old Order Amish

Within the Beachy Amish community, Old Order Amish influences are present because of their shared history, and because many of the members were raised Old Order Amish and converted to the Beachy Amish church as adults. They say their reason for converting was for a better, more spiritual Christian life, not for cars and other conveniences. A common opinion is that the Amish are overly concerned with being Amish, and less concerned with being Christian and helping others, though most Amish would take issue with this view.

In order to categorize Faith Mennonite Fellowship within the larger Amish and Mennonite families, it is necessary to look at the two groups separately. Beachy Amish preference for rural lifestyle and prohibition of television, radio, non-secular literature and other modern conveniences would categorize them as conservative in the Mennonite family. However, their frequent interaction with non-Amish or Mennonite people, use of automobiles, telephones, air-conditioning units and modern farming equipment would classify them as liberal Amish.

Separateness and Non-conformity

The Beachy Amish believe that you are either a part of the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Earth, but not both. For this reason, they believe in separating themselves from the outside world through their dress and lifestyle. "If we are like them, how can we help?" is the explanation given by Elmer Smucker.

The Beachy Amish have established standards of dress and lifestyle based on modesty and simplicity. The uniformity these standards create is a means of maintaining a unity of spirit within the community, which strengthens the potential of the church to be a witness in the community (Figure 11).

Plain dress is a requirement for men, women and children in the Beachy Amish Church. Women wear white head coverings, called prayer veils, and homemade cape dresses of solid colors. For church services, they wear dark stockings and black dress shoes with low heels. They do not ever cut their hair or wear makeup. Watches are the only allowable jewelry. Dress standards are important enough that girls begin wearing the head covering as young as age three.

Men wear plain trousers with belts or suspenders, solid colored shirts, and their hair must be kept short. Many of the men continue to wear the traditional Amish beard with no moustache.

Subtle differences between communities can be detected by studying a person's dress (Figure 12). For instance, women from more

conservative Mennonite communities are distinguishable by their large head coverings and opaque, black stockings. Smaller head coverings and lighter stockings would be characteristic of a more liberal congregation.

The Beachy Amish Mennonites are a moderately conservative group. The women wear sheer black stockings to church and their white head coverings would be considered average-sized when compared with other groups.

Men from different groups are distinguishable by the length and cut of their beard, the use of belts or suspenders, the type of jacket they wear to church and the use of buttons or hooks-and-eyes on their clothing.

The Beachy Amish also have standards concerning the decoration of their homes and the style of car they drive. Economy, moderation, and the avoidance of worldly designs are emphasized. Homes should be furnished in a modest manner: no lace curtains, fancy carpeting or displaying of personal pictures. The cars they purchase must be plain, solid colors, without vinyl tops. Vans are a common choice for families.

Finally, the Beachy Amish prefer a rural lifestyle because physical separateness is conducive to simpler living (Figure 13).

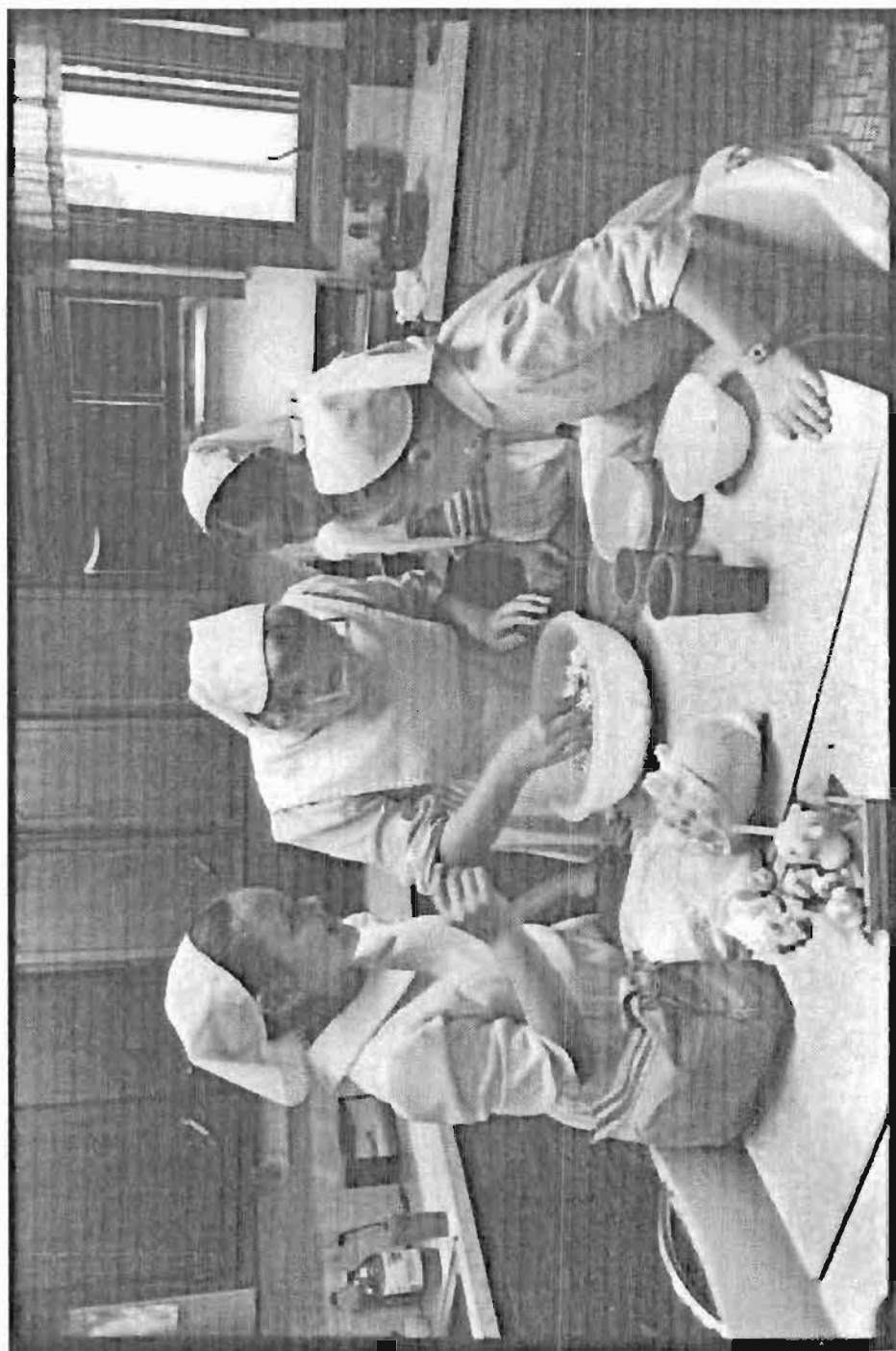


Figure 11 Uniformity of dress is not meant to suppress individuality, but to strengthen the unity of the church.



Figure 12 Anna Smucker's parents, Esther and Peter Schrock live in a Conservative Mennonite community in Sugarcreek, Ohio. She wears a large head covering and he wears suspenders instead of a belt.

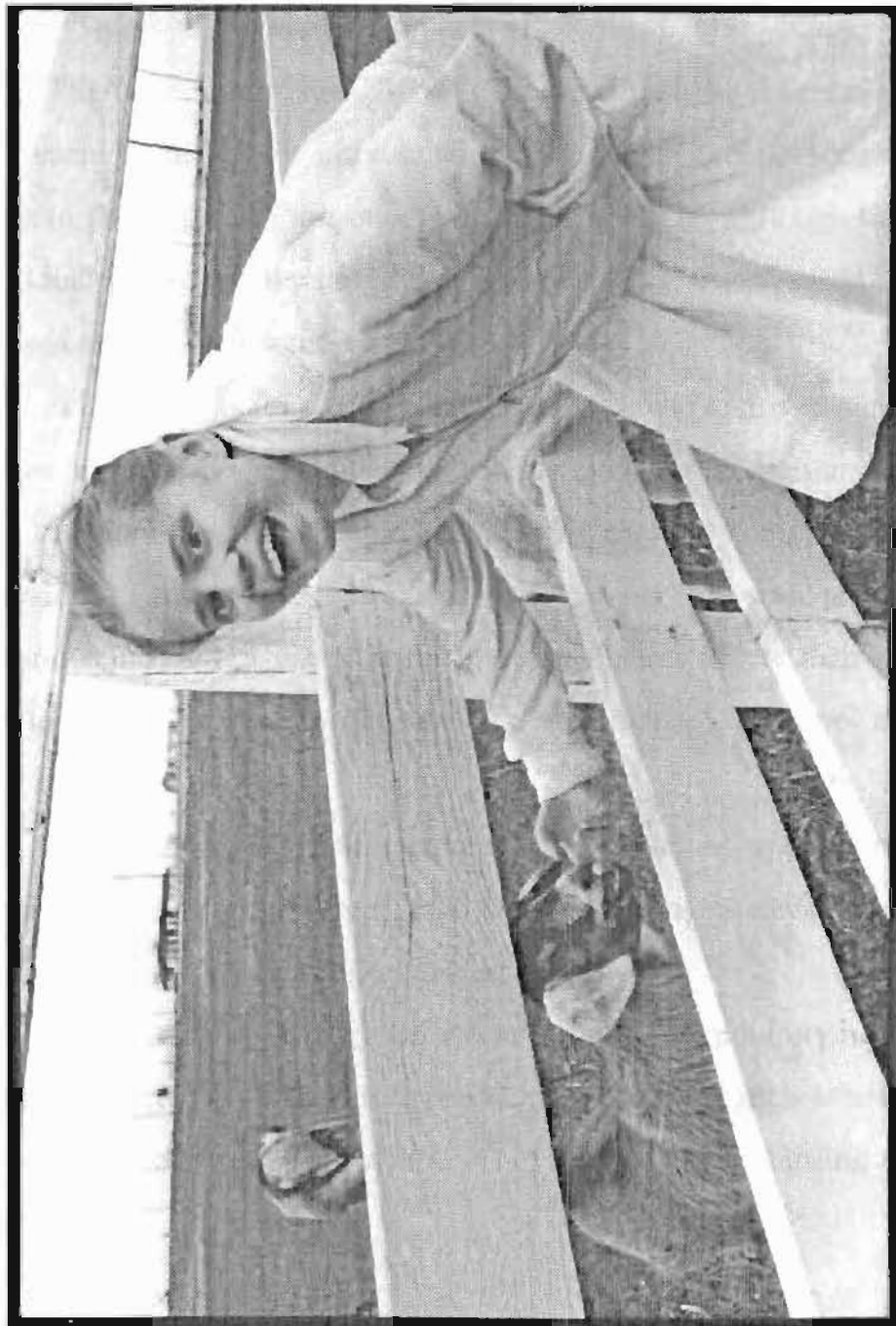


Figure 13 Mary Beachy's nearest neighbors are the Mulletts, whose house is seen in the background.

Education

The large, one-room schoolhouse was one of the first structures the Beachy Amish built after settling near Lott. Students ranging in age from six to sixteen are taught in the same room, although their individual spaces are separated by partitions. The school uses Christian textbooks and a self-paced curriculum.

School begins for children at age six or seven and is important because it reinforces the values and ideals taught in church and at home. Students graduate from school when they have completed the equivalent of the eighth grade. The Beachy Amish are wary of higher education and do not promote further formal study unless such knowledge and training is necessary for a particular profession, such as nursing.

Teaching at Faith Mennonite is a voluntary, unpaid position and any member of the community, man or woman, may request to teach when an existing teacher relinquishes the position.

In May, at the end of each school year, the community has a graduation ceremony and school picnic. A fellowship lunch is held in the schoolhouse, followed by an afternoon of softball and socializing (Figures 14-18).

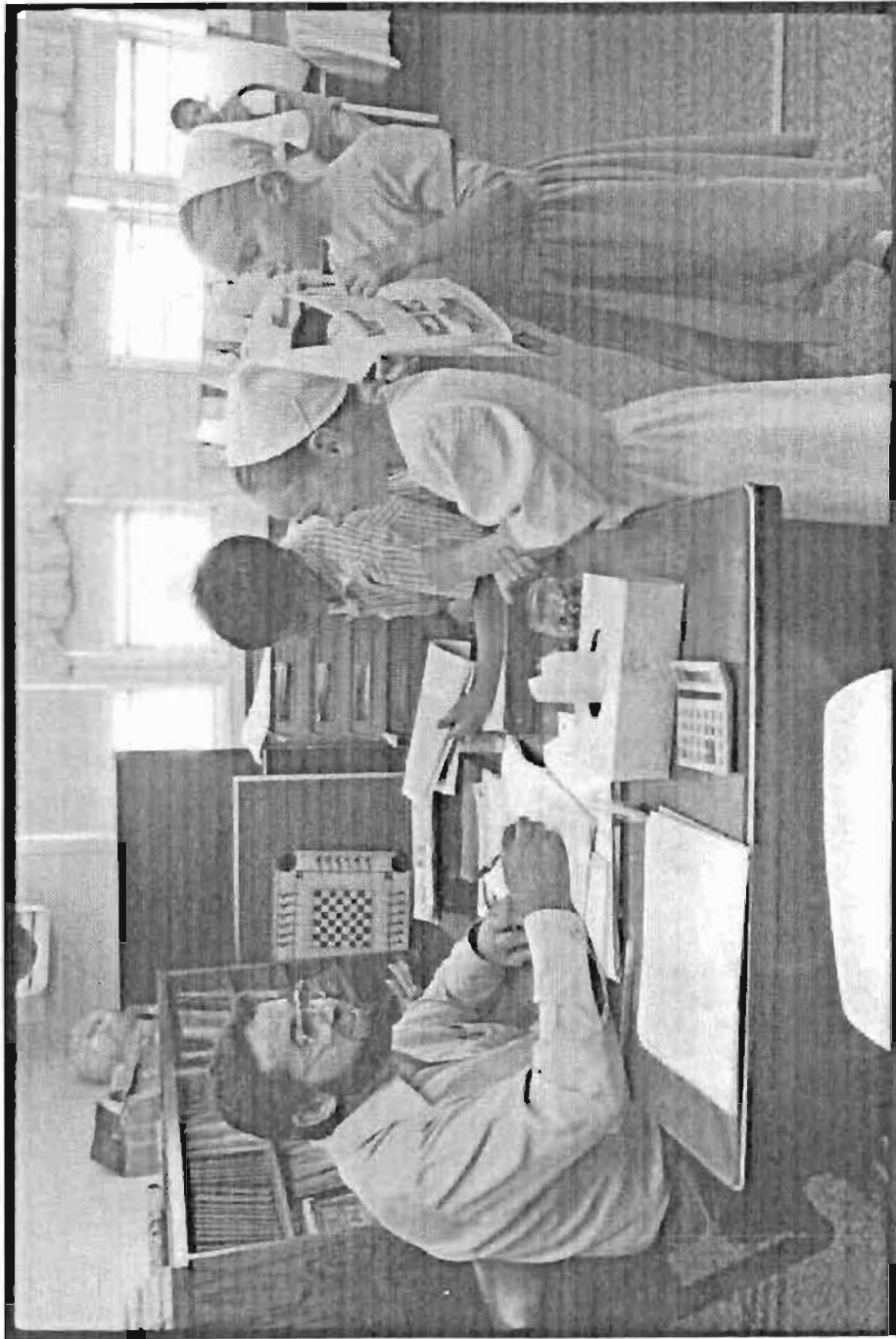


Figure 14 Paul Beachy and several students.

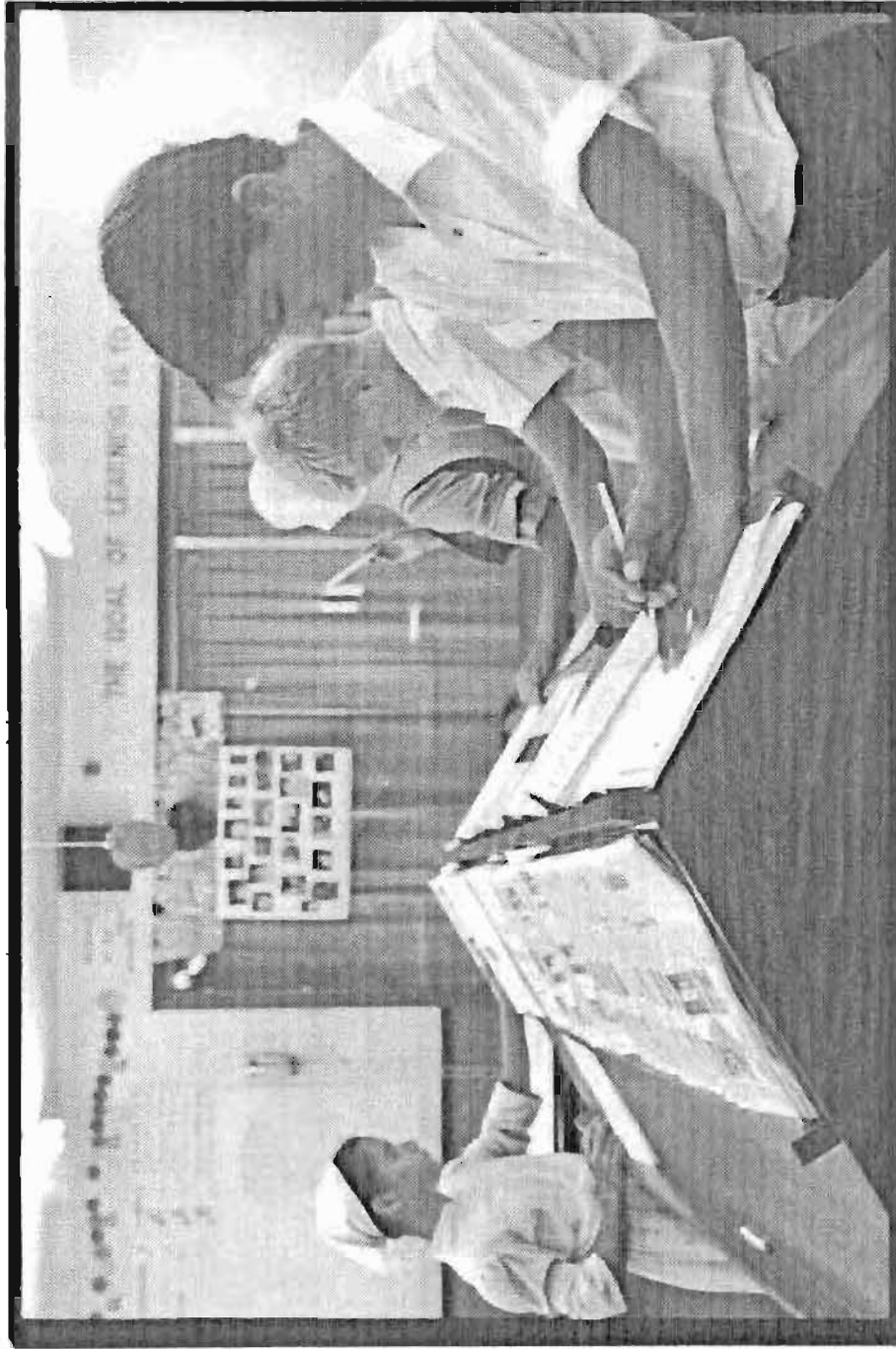


Figure 15 Faith Mennonite School uses a self-paced curriculum and students grade their own work.



Figure 16 Recess at school.



Figure 17 LaVerda Shetler playing games with the children at the school picnic.

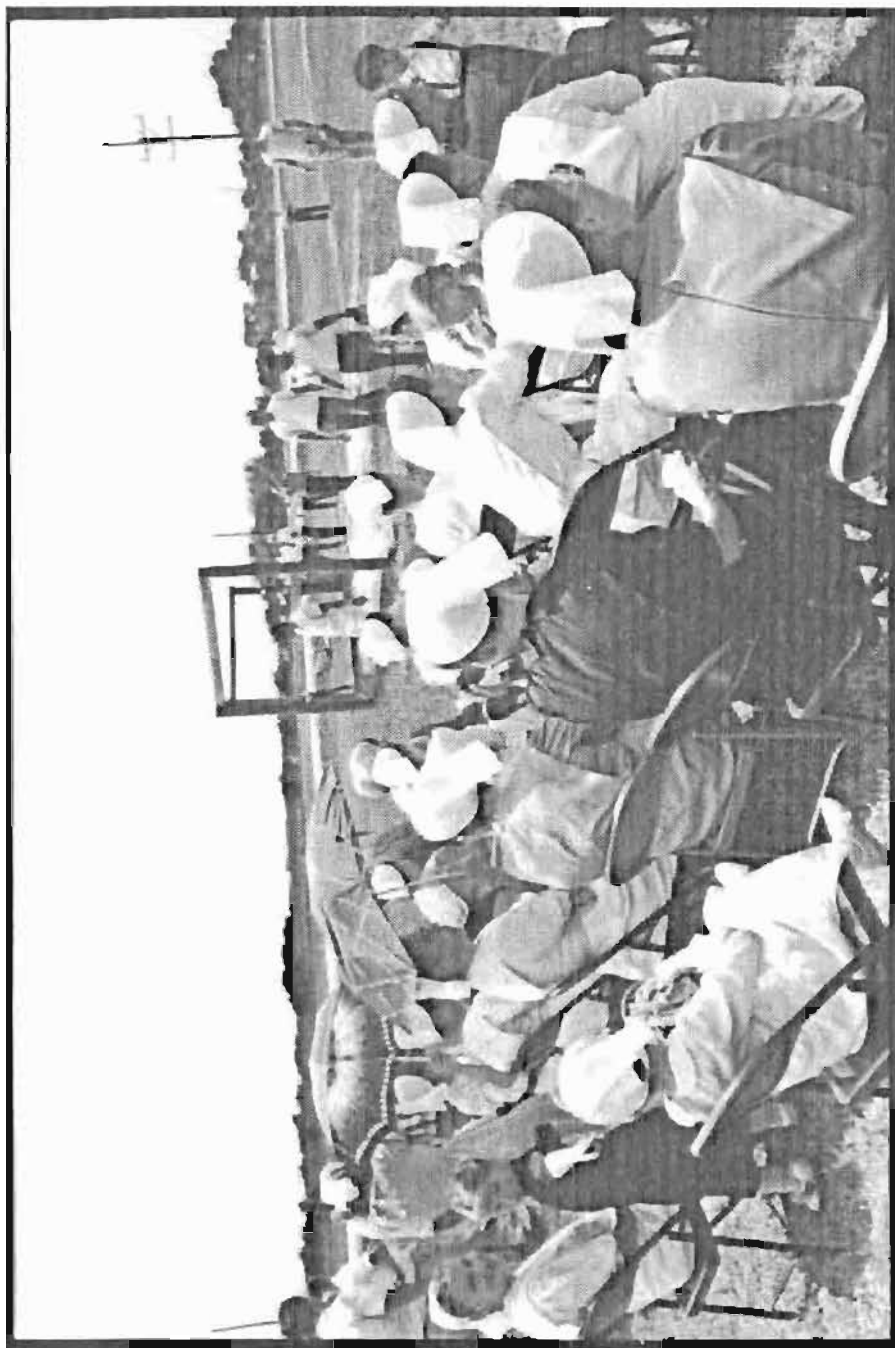


Figure 18 Softball game at the school picnic.

Quiltings

Quiltings, a traditional activity of Amish and Mennonite women, are held on the second Tuesday of each month. They meet in the schoolhouse or at a different woman's home each month and usually sew for about six hours (Figure 19). The host of the quilting supplies the materials and the women complete two or three quilts by late afternoon. At midday, before breaking for supper, the women and children will sit in a circle and have devotion. At this time, one of the women will read a Bible passage, followed by a brief group discussion of its meaning. Unlike church services where the women are more reserved and quiet, devotions are casual and the women openly discuss their feelings and opinions. The devotion concludes with singing and prayer.

Once completed, the quilts are sent to an outlet in Pennsylvania, where they are separated and shipped to needy families, many in Romania and Central America. Occasionally, the women will make more elaborate quilts for wedding gifts or to sell and raise money. In the fall of 1992, Jason Yoder, the eldest son of Iddo and Viola, died unexpectedly. The Yoders were left with a large hospital bill they were unable to pay. The women were able to assist the Yoders by hand-sewing several large quilts which were sold in an Amish store in Pennsylvania.

Children, boys and girls, who are not yet old enough to attend school, will join their mothers at the quiltings. There is usually a large

group of children present and they play outside when the weather is good (Figures 20-21).

Some of the young girls are eager to learn how to sew and will help the women by cutting yarn, tying knots and stretching fabric. The girls learn by watching and imitating what the women show them (Figures 22-23).

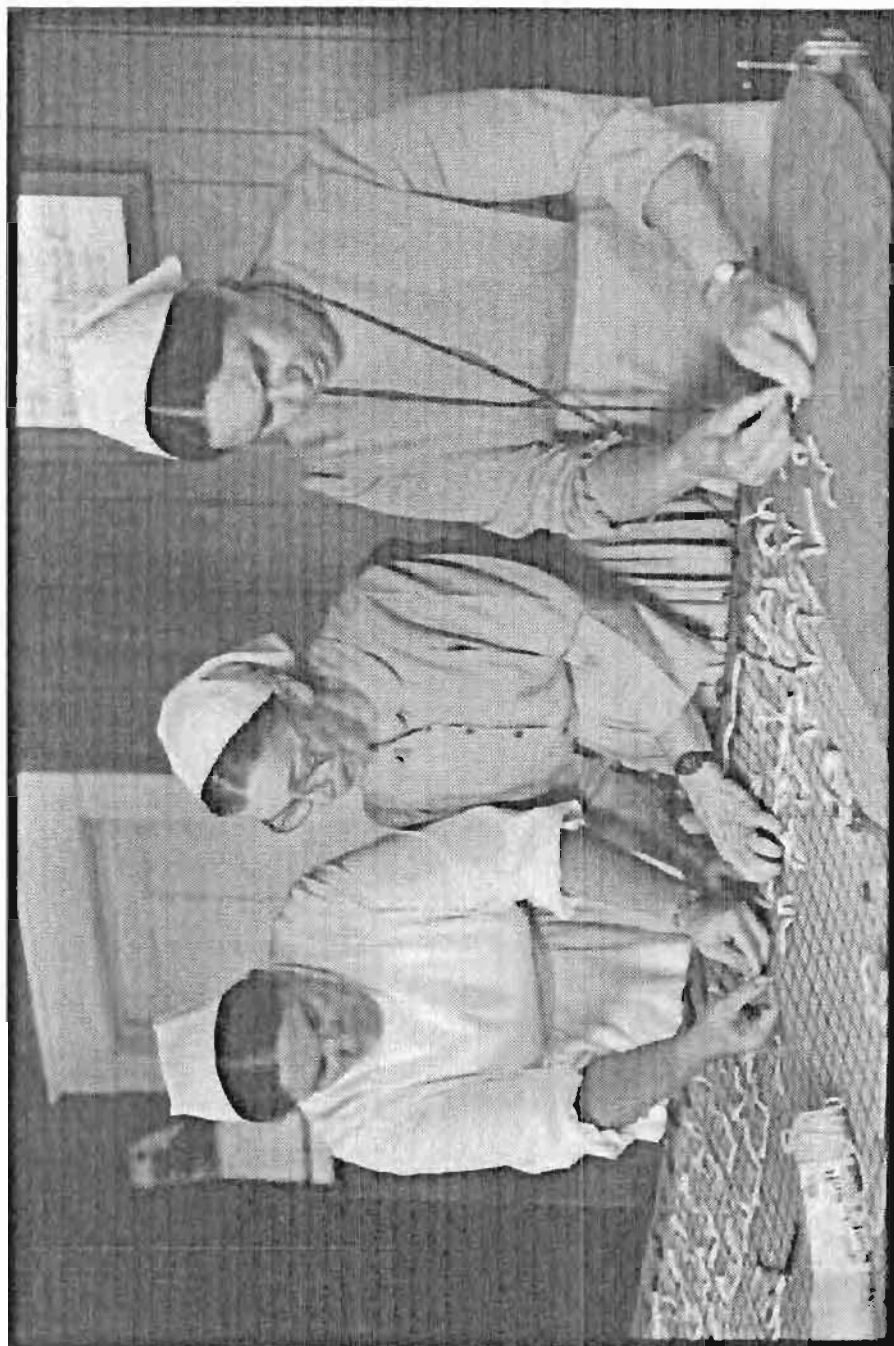


Figure 19 Pauline Hershberger, Aida Miller and LaVerda Shetler quilting at Viola Yoder's house.

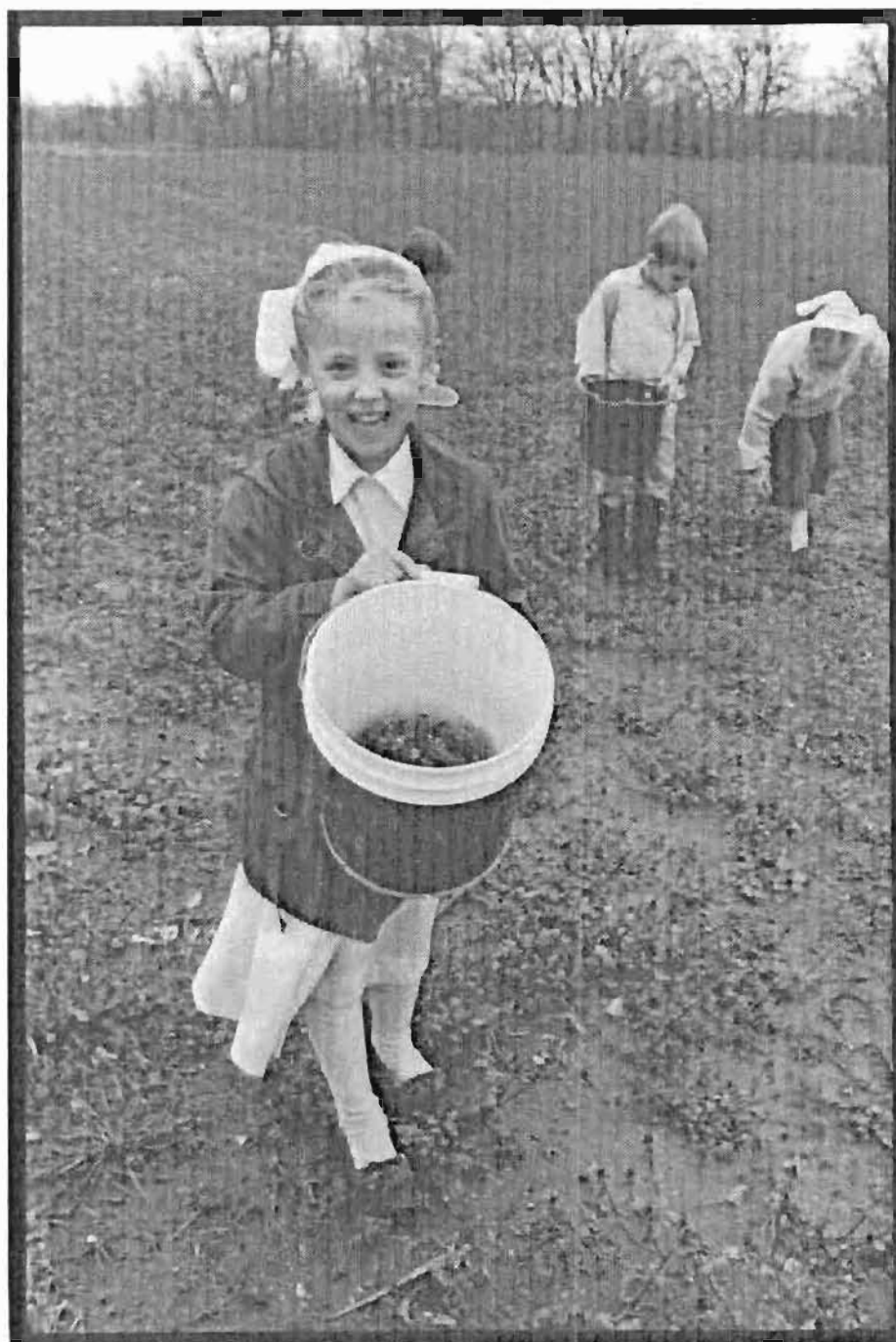


Figure 20 *Children picking flowers while the women quilt.*

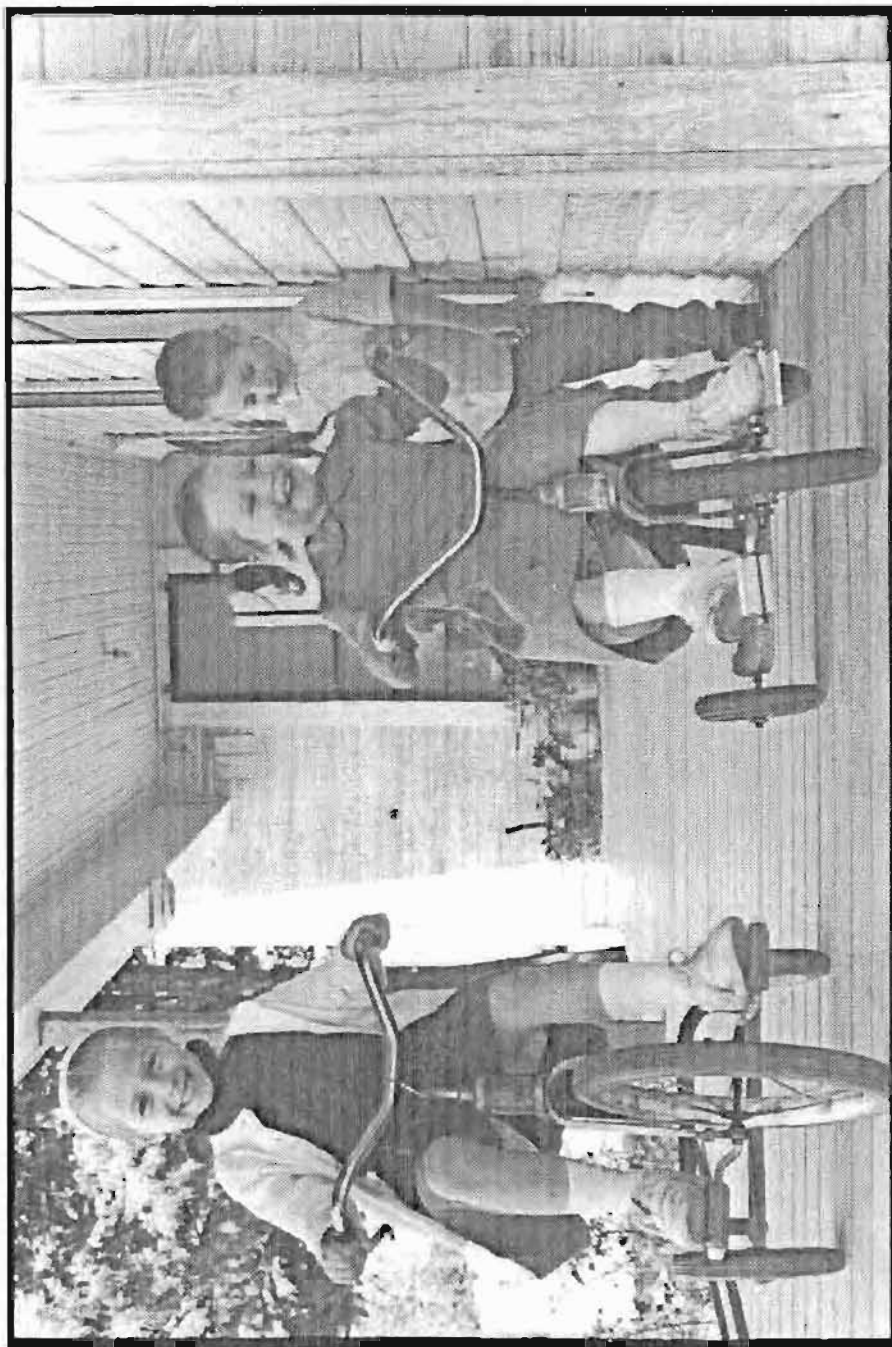


Figure 21 Children, who are too young to attend school, play outside during the quilting.

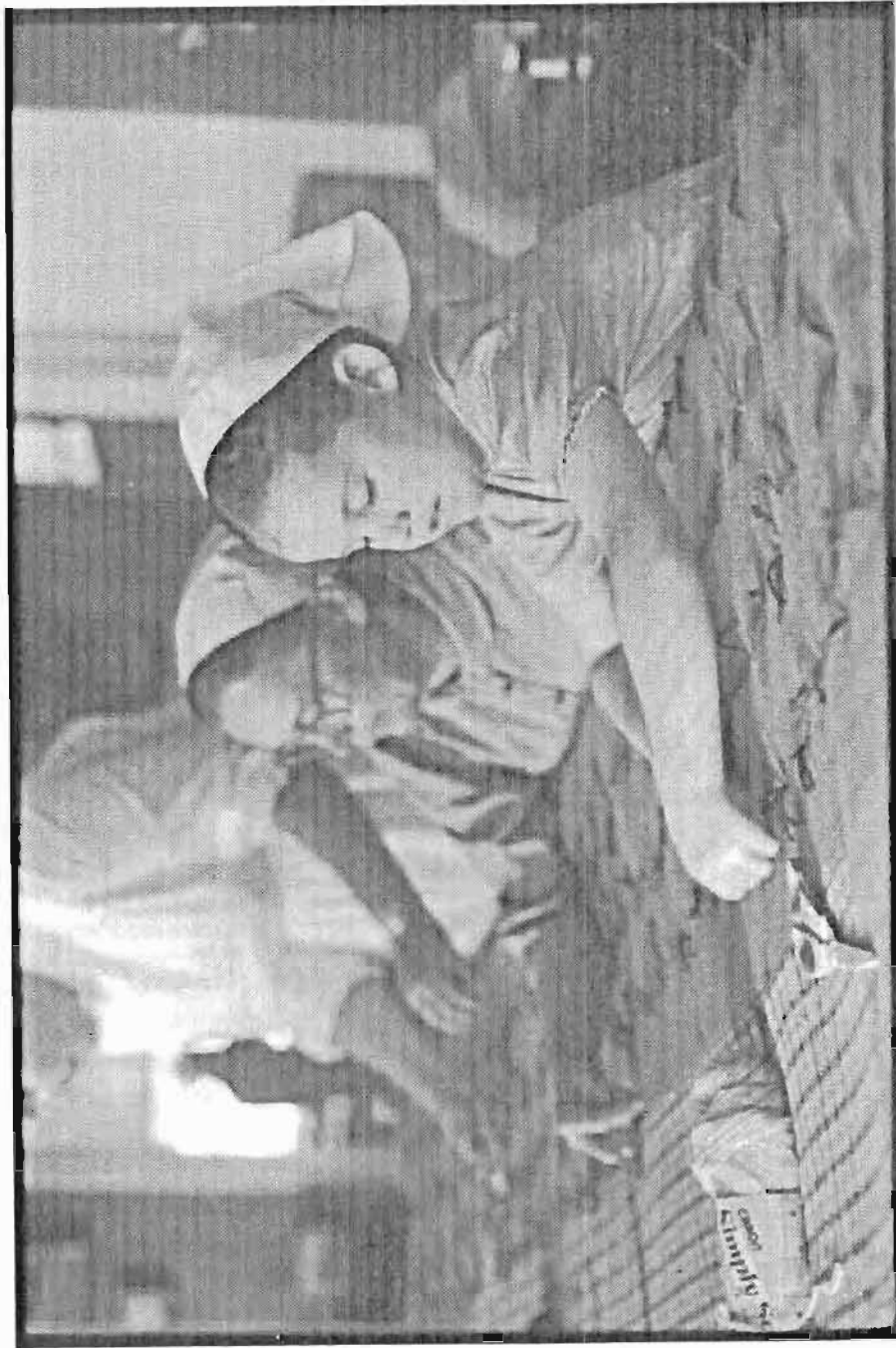


Figure 22 Rosita Zimmerman learning to quilt.

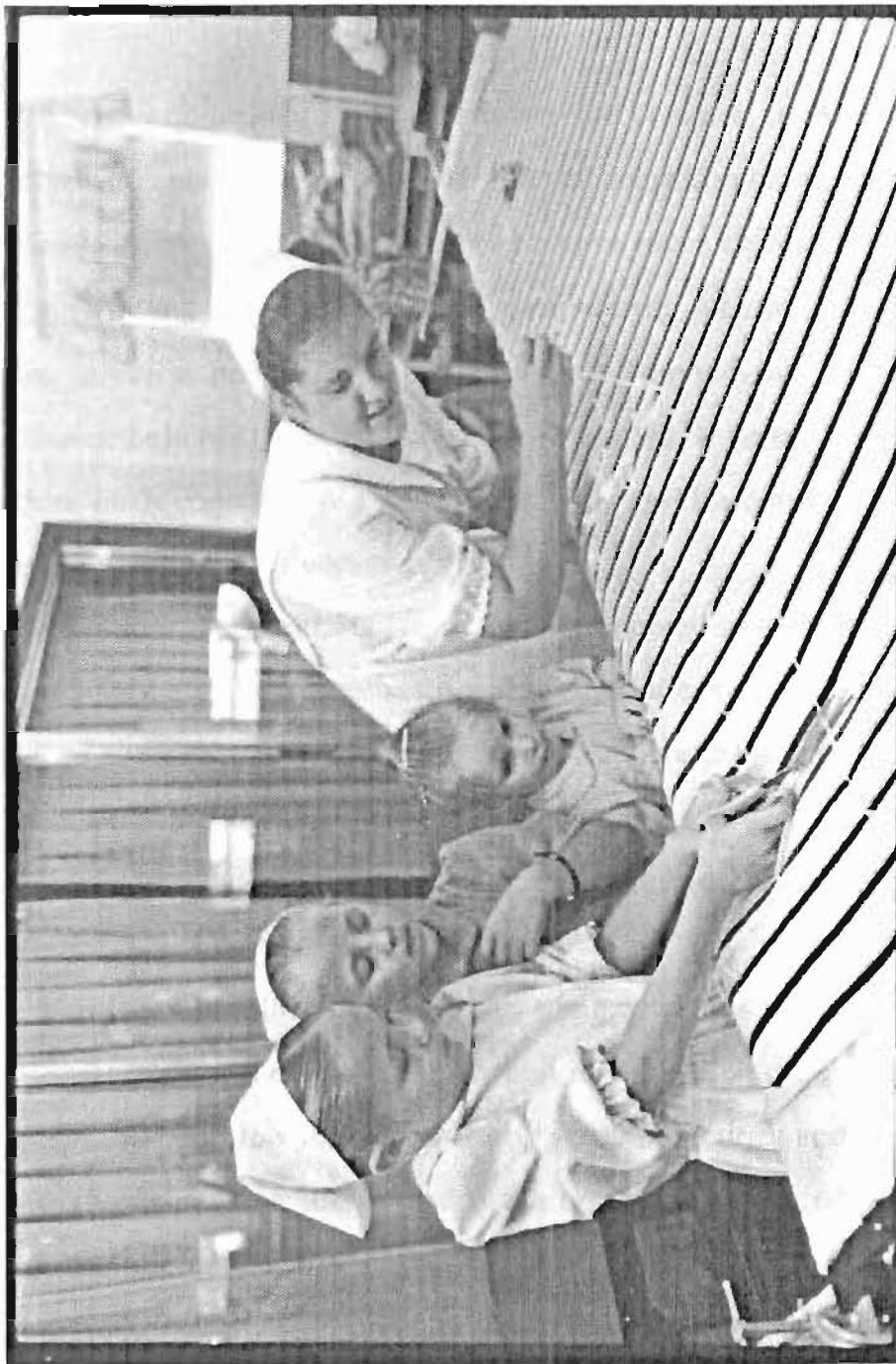


Figure 23 Janel Hersberger watches the young girls learning to quilt.

Children and Family

Large families, with many children, are common in Amish and Mennonite communities (Figure 24-25). In many communities, it is beneficial, if not essential, for families to have many children in order to run the farm and home. However, in communities such as Lott, where farming is not as prevalent, large families are common and desirable. The church believes the size of one's family should be determined by God, therefore birth control is not permitted. Every child is considered a blessing and adoption is common.

Children are generally happy, well-mannered and hard-working. Strict discipline early in life has made the children respectful, but not fearful, of their parents and other adults. They are products of strong family environments, in which religious training and practice are reinforced daily and consistently by parents and older siblings (Figure 26).

Although families may appear to some to be less overtly affectionate, deeper feelings of loyalty and love for each other are evident. Children grow up with a strong sense of security and belonging because the values they are taught in the home are reinforced both in church and school (Figures 27-29).

Children learn responsibility and obedience early on by assisting parents, brothers and sisters with chores and various tasks associated with work or running the household. So much of what the children learn

is in preparation for adulthood that it is not surprising to see children playing very realistic games such as attending church or keeping house (Figure 30). Not only do they play these games, but they try to act appropriately in the given situation, as if practicing to get it right. Maturing quickly, children as young as five or six are trusted to care for younger brothers and sisters, as well as children of other families.



Figure 24 *Hostetler family at the wedding of Norma Hostetler and Tim Friesen.*

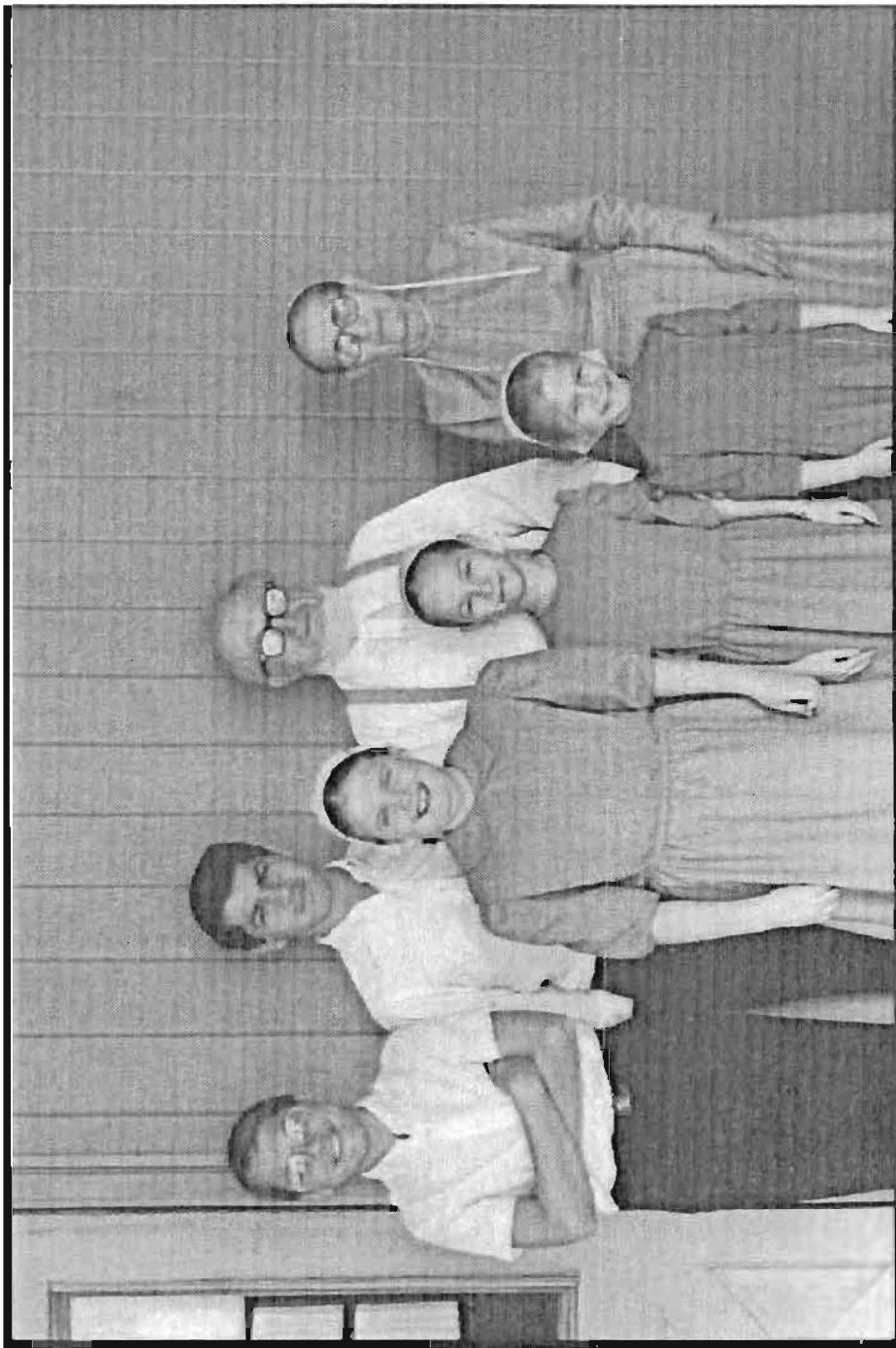


Figure 25 Esther and Peter Schrock with some of their grandchildren and family friend, Cathy Miller.

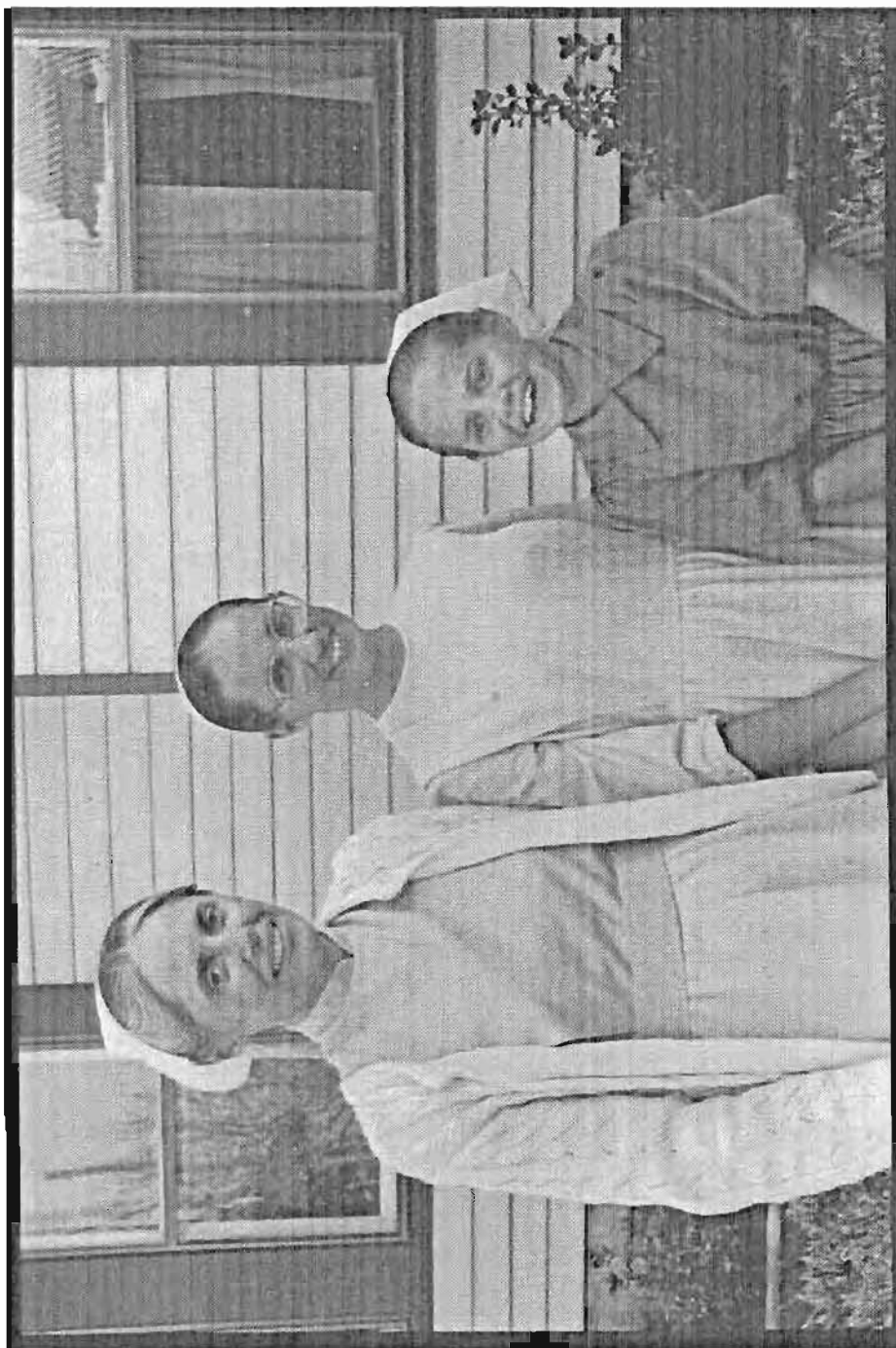


Figure 26 Wilma Beachy and her daughters, Monica and Mary.



Figure 27 Group of Mennonite children.

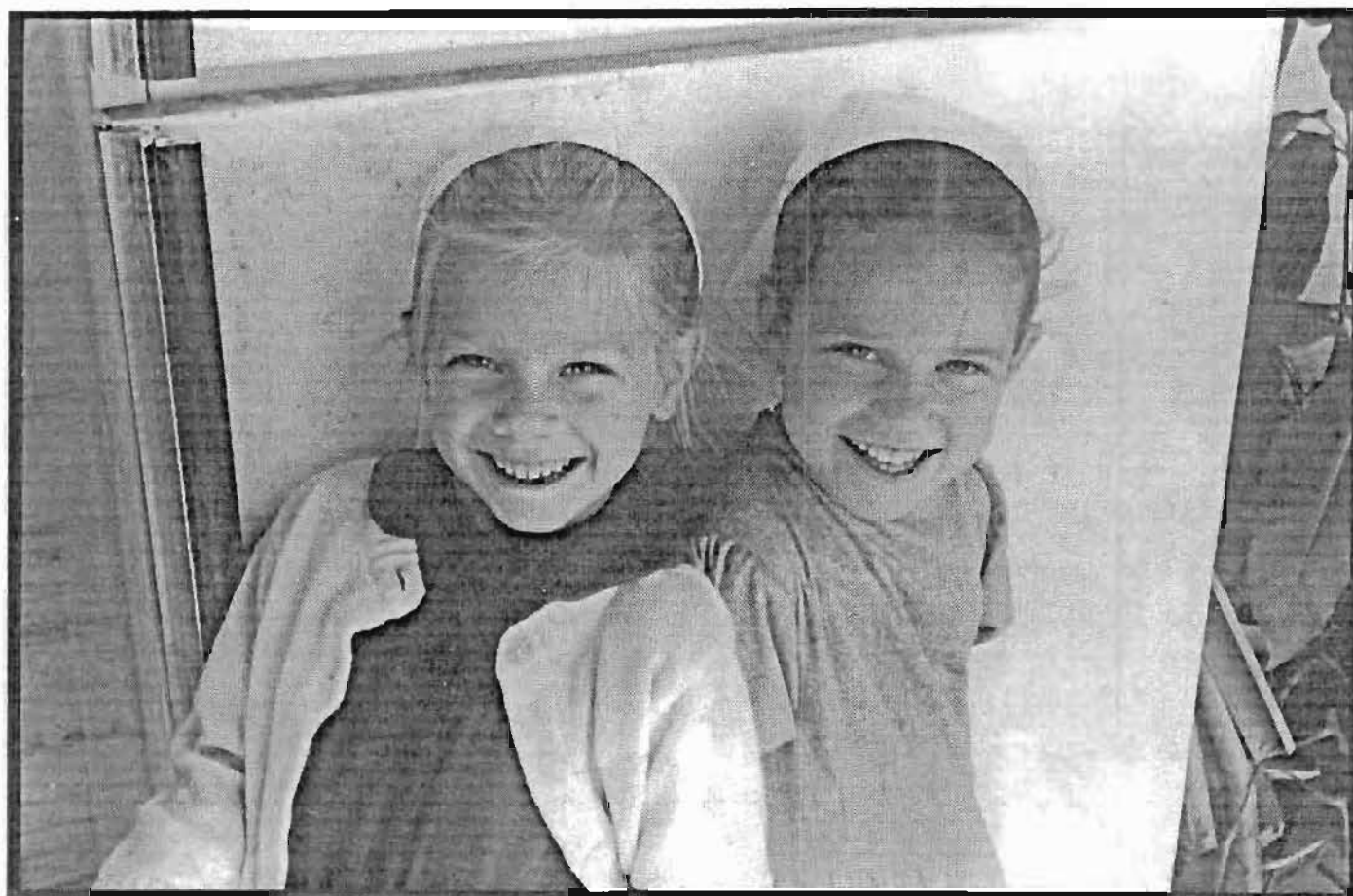


Figure 28 *Rosa Smucker and Rosita Zimmerman.*



Figure 29 Three brothers.



Figure 30 Young children playing church.

Agrarianism

Traditionally, most Beachy Amish families made their living off the land. Agrarian lifestyle agreed with their desire to remain physically separate from the larger society and allowed for greater family interaction. It also enhanced their sense of community, especially during harvest, when much of the work was shared among families.

Economic hardships have forced almost all of the Beachy Amish men in Lott into other trades and crafts: carpentry, plumbing, painting, paper hanging and roof repairing. "We try to stay away from professions," says Elmer Smucker, who works as a wallpaper hanger in Waco and other nearby communities. "With our lifestyle, very few go to college and maintain the life we think is the best expression of the Bible. We feel trades cater to a simple lifestyle."

Elmer admits that the reduction in farming and the use of modern farming equipment has made it unnecessary for the men to work together, thus negatively affecting the community and church spirit.

Although many of the families plant crops, and raise livestock and farm animals (Figures 31-33), the Yoders, who run a dairy farm, are the only family in the community who make their living off the land (Figures 34-35).

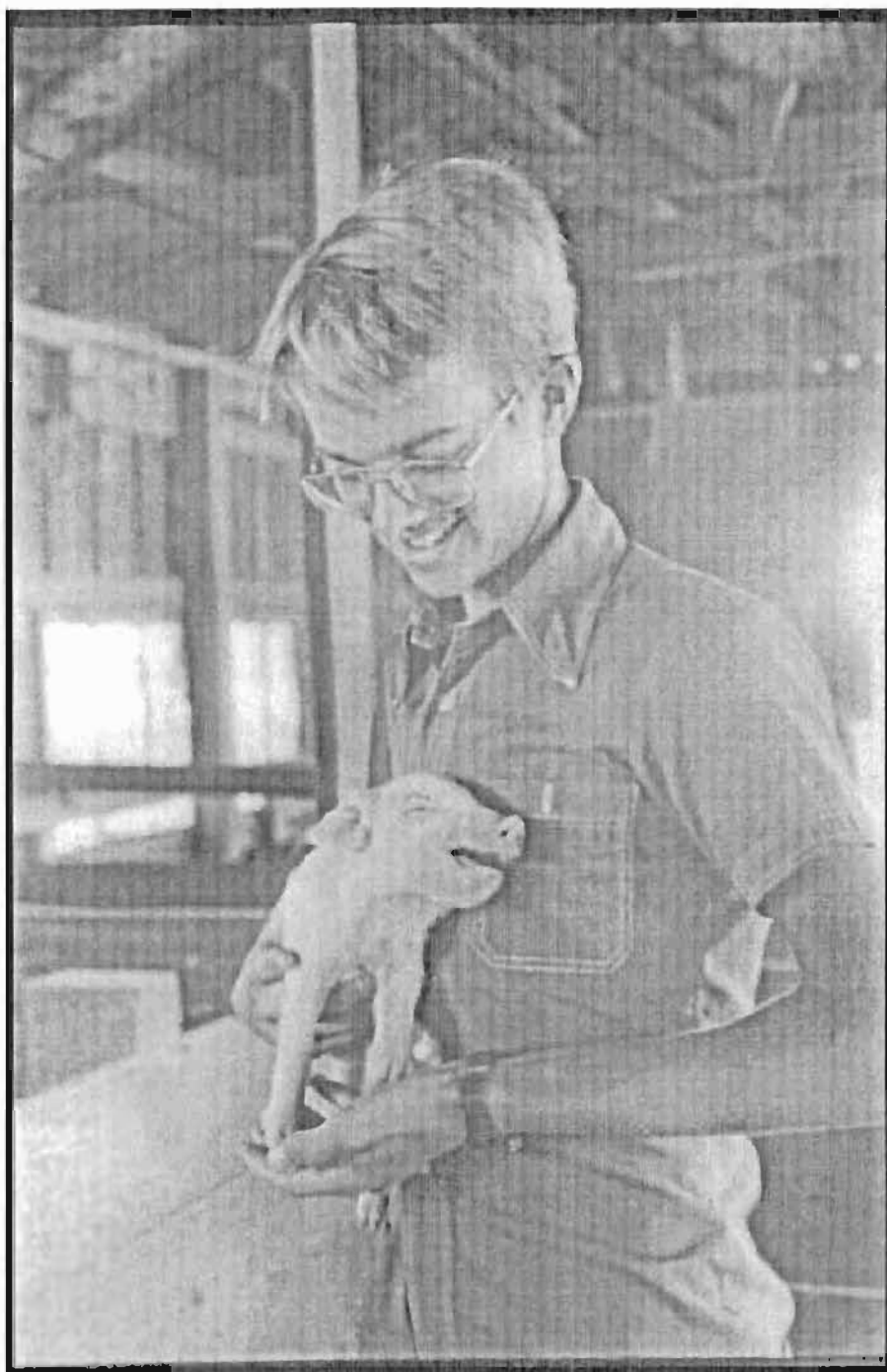


Figure 31 Tinas Yoder.



Figure 32 Cathy Miller.

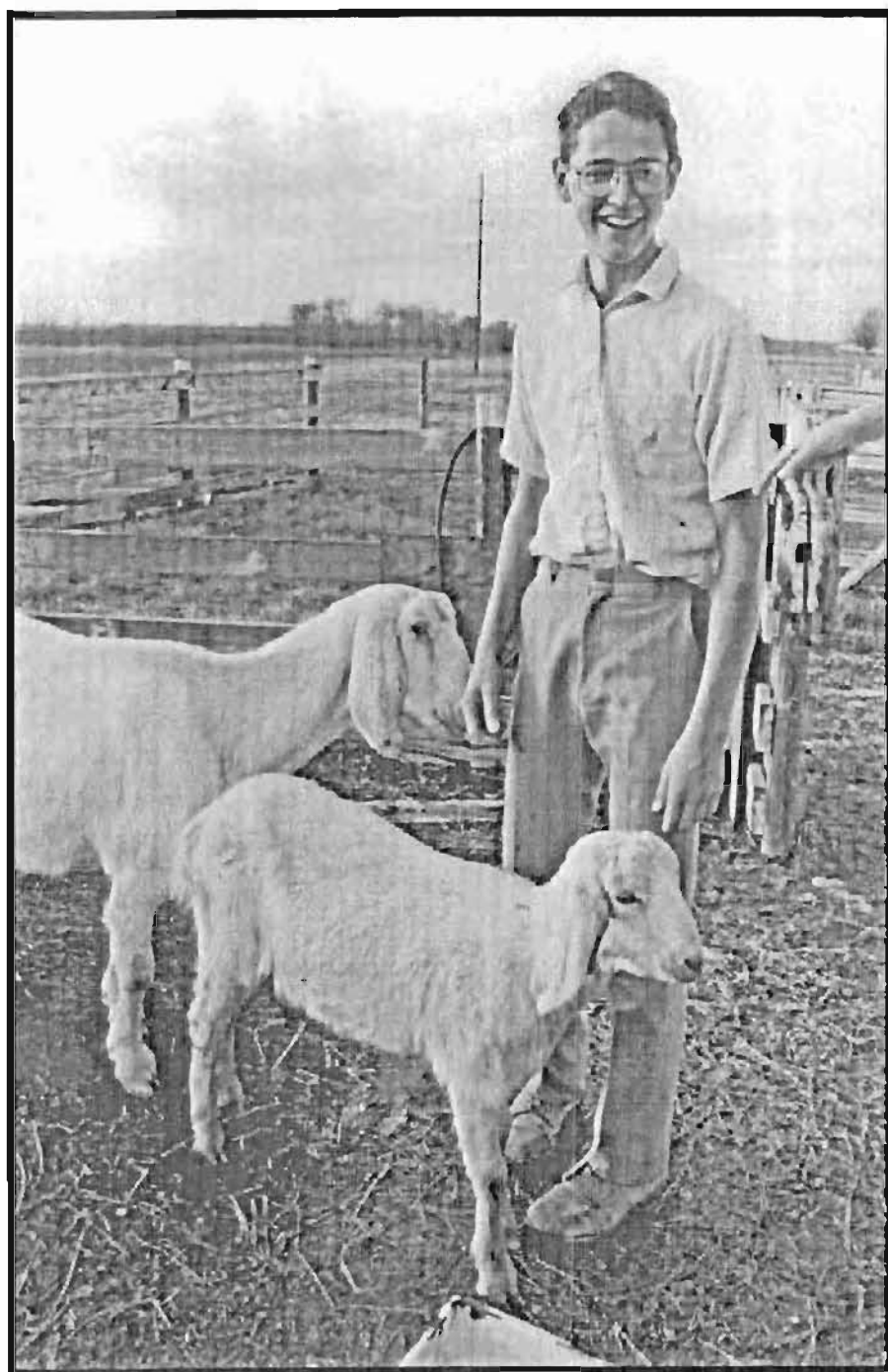


Figure 33 Gabriel Beuchy.

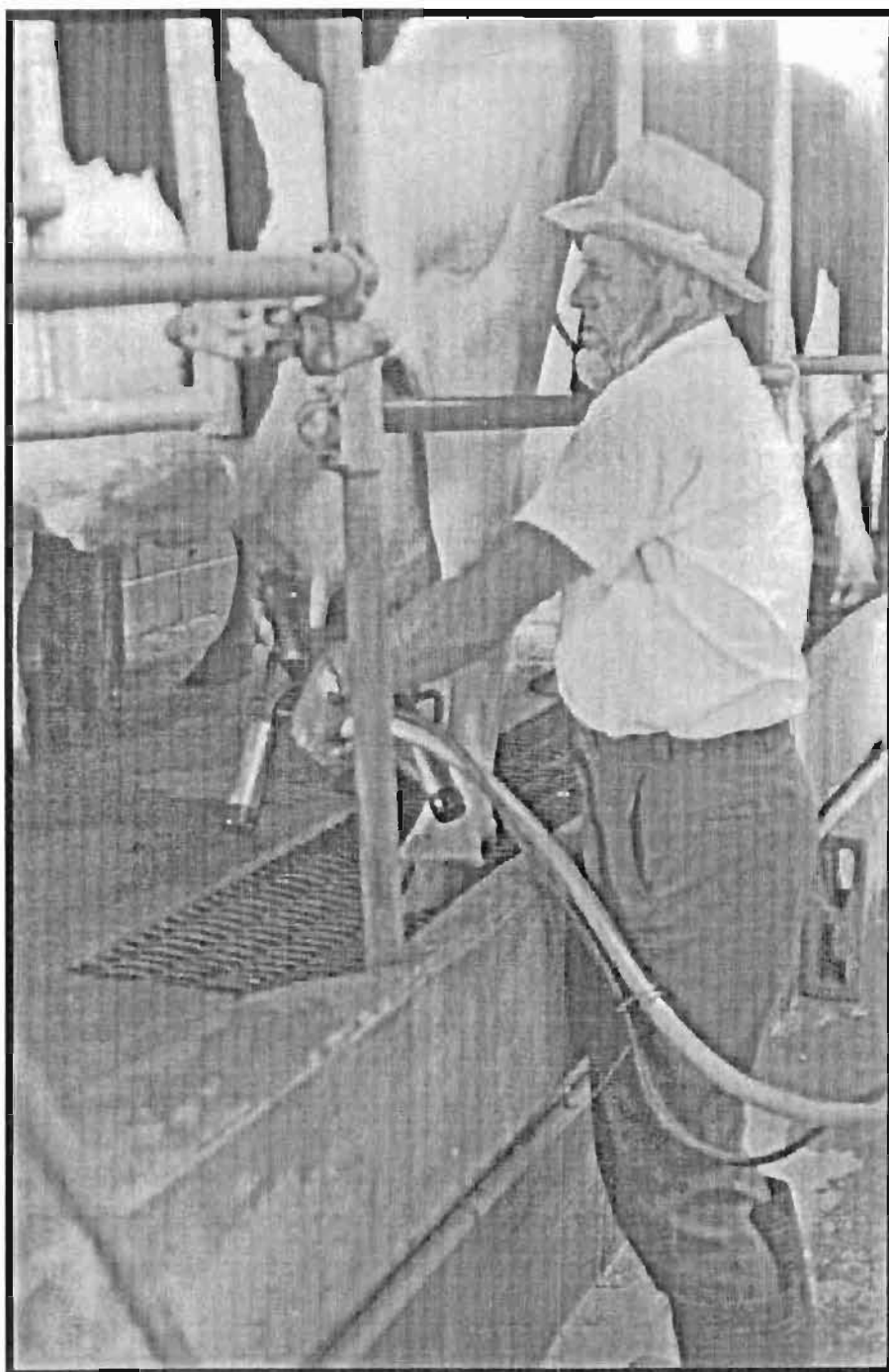


Figure 34 Iddo Yoder, dairy farmer.

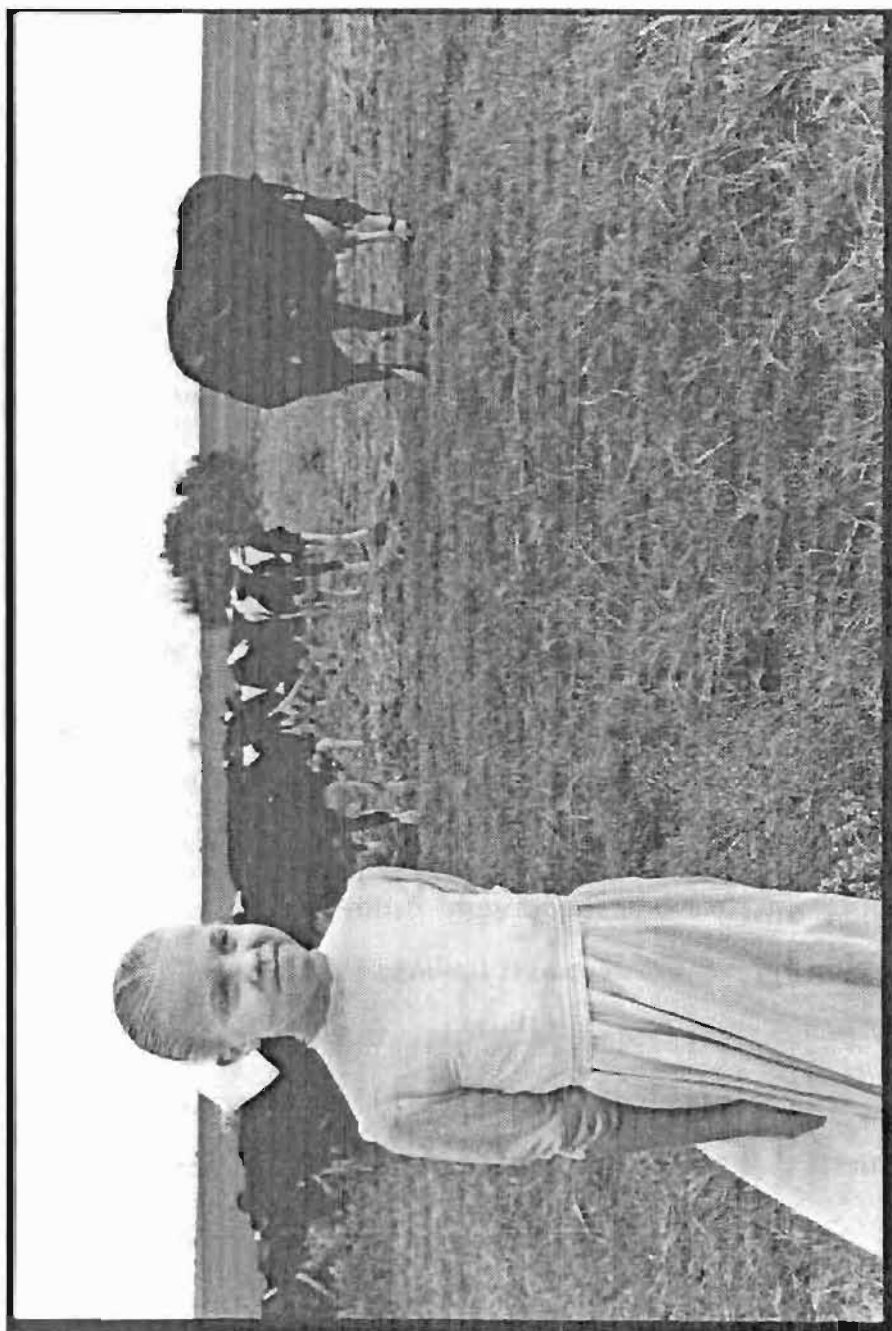


Figure 35 Maria Yoder on her family's dairy farm.

Chapter 8

Conclusions

As was discussed in the Introduction, the Mennonites and the Amish are relatively well known, but often misunderstood, because of misconceptions and stereotypes that many people have formed. These stereotypes are usually perpetuated by the popular media. This thesis is an attempt to create a greater understanding of Mennonite religion and culture by providing a balanced, first-hand account of one Mennonite group, the Beachy Amish Mennonites of Lott, Texas.

This study succeeds in deepening the understanding of Mennonitism because it combines historical research with ethnographic fieldwork conducted in a contemporary Mennonite community. Historical research provides an understanding of the origins of Mennonitism, the Beachy Amish Mennonites and early Mennonite colonization in Texas. This historical framework is a contextual tool for studying and understanding the philosophies and practices of more recent groups. Ethnographic fieldwork and documentary photography are used to present an accurate, personal account of the current lifestyle and religious characteristics of this group.

Liberal Shift of Mennonitism

Since the 16th century Protestant Reformation, Anabaptists have undergone persecution and hardship in order to survive. Four hundred years later, the descendants of the early Anabaptists continue to struggle with their survival, only now they struggle with questions concerning their identity and continued assimilation into the larger society.

Mennonites and groups with recent Old Order Amish roots, like the Beachy Amish, are questioning what it means to be Anabaptist and how gradual assimilation into the larger society will affect their long-term survival. In recent years, these groups have become increasingly dissatisfied with the Old Order Amish and, as a result, many groups are becoming less Amish and more mainstream Christian. The reason for this shift is a change in mindset or philosophy about being Anabaptist, which places greater emphasis on the religious state of mind and less emphasis on outward signs, such as dress. As mentioned, a symptom of this change in mindset would be the decreasing dissimilarity of their dress, including trimmed beards and veils rather than the traditional head coverings.

In addition to cultural issues, the struggle with assimilation is influenced by issues concerning theology. For instance, most Mennonite groups do not desire full assimilation into society because of their religious belief in being separated from worldliness. Theologically, they are struggling to find an appropriate way of putting their religious

value of separation from the world into practice. However, two questions arise: Will gradual assimilation be beneficial for the long-term survival of Mennonitism, and can Mennonites retain their identity and values in the midst of such change?

The Beachy Amish of Lott are a present reality of this struggle with identity and assimilation. Like other Anabaptist groups, they are gradually becoming more assimilated and moving towards more mainstream Protestantism. The specific challenges facing their community may be indicative of larger issues affecting other Anabaptist and Mennonite groups. Therefore, by looking at the issues affecting the Beachy Amish of Lott, a greater understanding of the general aspects of Mennonite persistence and survival is possible.

Faith Mennonite Fellowship

The members of Faith Mennonite Fellowship admit that their community is changing faster than they would like. Although they have retained simplicity of lifestyle and thought, they have systematically adapted to changing economics and 20th century influences. According to Wilma Beachy, there is concern over the many changes and adaptations that have taken place in the Beachy Fellowship in the last 50 years. Those changes have created a fear that their community may be becoming too worldly too fast.

There is probably little doubt that the community will survive as a group because of the large families and practice of proselytizing.

However, the Beachy Amish, like other Anabaptist groups, will change and are changing. The questions remaining are will such change be too rapid, and will it be detrimental to the lifestyle and culture they value?

It appears that the greatest threat to the family unit and community is their increasing interaction with the outside world as a result of being less agrarian. The term used to describe the consequences of non-farming in Mennonite communities is the "lunchpail threat." The men leave their homes and families each day and often don't return until late at night. This means children are spending less time with their fathers and less time as a family unit.

Despite these challenges, the members of Faith Mennonite Fellowship remain optimistic about their community. Fortunately, their greatest strengths are their strong leadership and commitment to family. Their hope lies with their children, who will be responsible for passing on the religious values and traditions to future generations.

Photography in Ethnographic Fieldwork

There is an ongoing debate as to the reliability and validity of photography in ethnographic and anthropological research. Some researchers argue that photography is too subjective and uncontrollable, while others contend that photography is a powerful fact-gathering and interpretive tool.

From my fieldwork experience, I found that photography is a viable research tool for ethnographic research because it provides information about people, behavior and events that might not otherwise be understood or appreciated. In studies such as this one, which focus on a single group or community, photographs are important because they allow the reader to see the faces and environments of the subjects. In my experience, by photographing the people of this community, I was able to present a very personal view of their lifestyle which would have been difficult, if not impossible, using text alone. I succeeded in capturing the essence of Mennonite life through photography, and, as a result, created a deeper understanding of their culture, lifestyle and religion.

I found there were advantages and limitations to using photography in research. In the beginning of my fieldwork, the use of photography helped establish my entree into the community because I provided prints to people I had photographed. Another benefit of photography was its strength as a supplement to other research methods. I was able to use the photographs to generate and ask questions during informal interviews with members of the community. Discussion of the photographs usually led to conversations concerning other issues which were equally important. Finally, the photographs complemented the quotations and descriptive text, making the entire project more meaningful, personal and informative.

There were also limitations to using photography, some that were specific to this community and others that would apply to most fieldwork situations. In regards to this community, I discovered that the people were not accustomed to or readily comfortable with being photographed by an outsider. Therefore, I had to be sensitive to the needs of my subjects and refrain from shooting if someone felt awkward or uncomfortable. Also, there were certain times when photography was not allowed or would have been highly intrusive or offensive. Although these photographs would have been very interesting they would not have been ethical or approved of by the members of the community.

The photographic limitations that apply to most fieldwork situations have to do with maintaining the relationship between the researcher and subject. In ethnographic fieldwork, the researcher has an emotional involvement with the community, and relationships are essential to the success of the project. If these relationships are compromised due to intrusive, unethical photography, the entire project could be jeopardized or set back until amends are made. At such a point, reestablishing relationships may be impossible. Therefore, the photographer has to be willing to forego taking certain photographs if taking them risks losing the trust of their subjects. I found that the best approach was to ask first because this would ensure that the integrity of the project was maintained.

Finally, it is important to mention that the standards of photojournalism cannot necessarily be applied to documentary and ethnographic research. Photojournalists commonly have little or no involvement with their subjects. Therefore, their photographic method is rarely influenced by the needs or concerns of their subjects. On the other hand, documentary photographers spend a concentrated amount of time with their subjects, not just as observers, but as participants in their activities. Documentary photographers require greater sensitivity and intuition than photojournalists because they must respect the needs of their subjects, and use them as a guide for establishing an appropriate photographic method. Unlike photojournalism, the photographic method used in ethnographic fieldwork must reflect the ethical considerations of the community of people being studied.

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