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A Z I N E

June 2004

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Into a promised land

Georgia's Amish Mennonites keep the faith

BY JANE F. GARVEY • PHOTOGRAPHY BY ROBB HELFRICK



Lela Brenneman, a first-grade teacher for 27 years at the Montezuma Mennonite School, engages children in vigorous play, a vital element of Amish Mennonite family life.

When you turn west off Interstate 75 at exit 127, south of Perry, Georgia suddenly seems like another world, something far from Georgia. Silos and dairy farms have a certain look to them. The German influence on Pennsylvania farming perhaps has an echo in this part of the state.

One reason may be the presence of a strong Amish Mennonite community in Middle Georgia. Although the sect's history here isn't as old as it is in Pennsylvania, as they only arrived 50 years ago last year, they're as much a fixture

"Our aim would be
for people to see Jesus
in our lives and not
just our lifestyle."

—Michael Yoder

around Montezuma as they are around York, Penn. While no one calls Middle Georgia "Dutch" country, the Amish Mennonite community that lives and works along

Highway 26 has staked a claim in Georgia that makes folks think of them as part of the social makeup of the region.

The use of the term "Dutch" to describe these folks in Pennsylvania is a misnomer. English speakers unaccustomed to German misinterpreted the German word "Deutsch," meaning German. People calling themselves both Amish and Mennonite came to Pennsylvania because founder William Penn wanted his colony to be open to religious people of all faiths. "A holy experiment," he called it. And he



Farmer Lloyd Swartzentruber uses modern technology to work his crops.



Kauffman's Farm Market is the storefront for the farm's fresh-picked strawberries.



Cynda Weaver shows off some pretty petunias at Kauffman's Farm Market.

invited them to participate in it.

With missionary zeal as part of their way of life, the Amish and Mennonite religious immigrants who settled there in the 18th century began a community whose descendants have spread to 22 states, Canada and other countries.

Just who are these people?

Both Amish and Mennonites represent a break from European Protestantism. Both arise from the Anabaptists, a very conservative and traditional Reformation-era sect that espoused adult baptism and separation from the larger society. Persecuted as heretics by Catholics and Protestants, they fled to mountainous areas, took up farming, withdrew from contemporary society and held services in homes rather than churches.

In the early 16th century, a young Dutch priest named Menno Simons joined the Anabaptist movement, and from his teaching and preaching descended Mennonites. The term was originally derogatory, according to Bishop Donnie Swartzentruber of the Montezuma community, because it derived from the word "Menists" coined by Simons' critics. "But we're followers of Christ," says Bishop Swartzentruber, "not followers of one man."

More than a century and a half

later, Swiss Bishop Jacob Amman broke from the Mennonites and his followers were dubbed "Amish." Flash forward to the 18th century, when members of both groups arrived in Pennsylvania to participate in Penn's "holy experiment." The two groups agree as to basic ideas regarding adult and believers' baptism, nonresistance (taken from the Sermon on the Mount) and fundamental Biblical doctrine. But they differ in dress, approach to technology, form of worship service and some interpretations of the Bible.

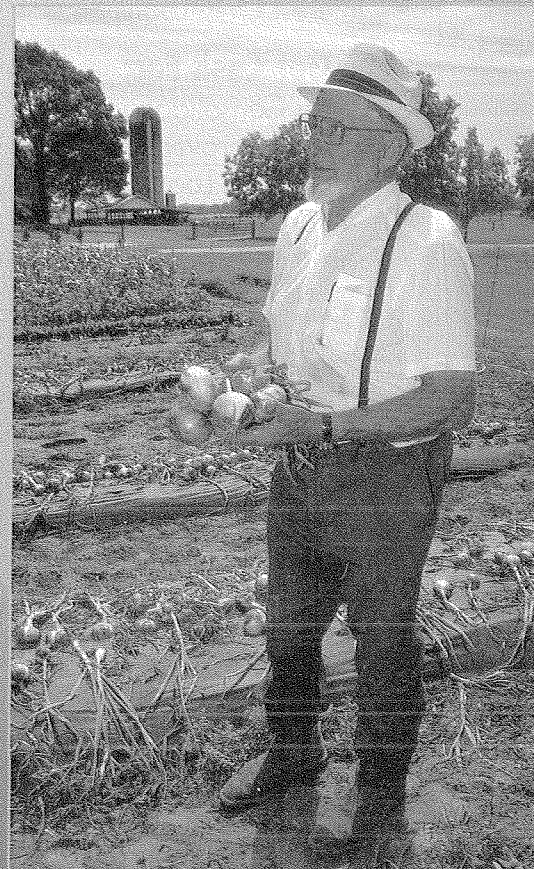
What motivated these 10 to 15 families to come from Virginia to Georgia in 1953? "The arrival of the Navy in Virginia Beach kind of crowded us out," says Bishop Swartzentruber, who points out that more than 100 families now sustain three churches in the Montezuma area—a phenomenal growth rate.

Visitors quickly recognize their attire: The women wear plain, usually solid-colored dresses with hems at mid-calf, and white caps on the bunned and never-cut hair. They wear no make-up. The men wear plain clothing, beards and, sometimes, suspenders and brimmed hats.

But while Old Order Amish drive horse-and-buggy rigs, plow with animal power, and eschew

electricity and modern conveniences, Georgia's Amish Mennonites deftly wheel automobiles around their farm-centered environs and eagerly embrace the aspects of modern life that foster their vision of God, community and family.

"Have you seen our Web site?" asks Edna Yoder who, with her husband, Crist, owns the White House Farm Bed and Breakfast near Montezuma, where guests can experience their farm lifestyle (see "Getaway," page 31). "It loads a lit-



Lloyd Swartzentruber displays the bounty of his onion crop.

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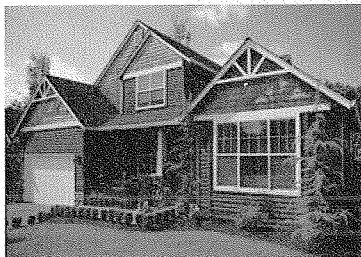
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Deborah Yoder (left) and Eunice Overholt, two barefoot Mennonite girls in their simple dress and gauzy caps, survey a summer's day on Elmer Hershberger's farm.

tle slowly sometimes," she continues, bouncing her grandson on her knee. This community has warmly embraced selected features of modern life beyond tractors and electric ovens. But don't look for them at the movies. Or watching television and listening to radios. Or attending fairs and carnivals.

At the other end of Mennonite Church Road, where it intersects Georgia Highway 26, Yoder's Deutsch Haus restaurant and the nearby gift shop function as beacons for the community, showcasing its members and their considerable business acumen. Brothers Michael and Benjamin Yoder manage the restaurant and bakery. The boys are among the nine children of Alva and Sarah Yoder, one of the pioneering families. Since its founding in 1984, the restaurant has drawn hungry customers from far and near.

Across the parking lot from the restaurant is a gift shop, managed by John and Linda Yoder. While some items are made in the Montezuma community, the quilts typically come from outside the area. There

are dolls, books about Mennonite life and history and intriguing, country-style gifts. Jellies, jams and preserves come from communities in the Midwest.

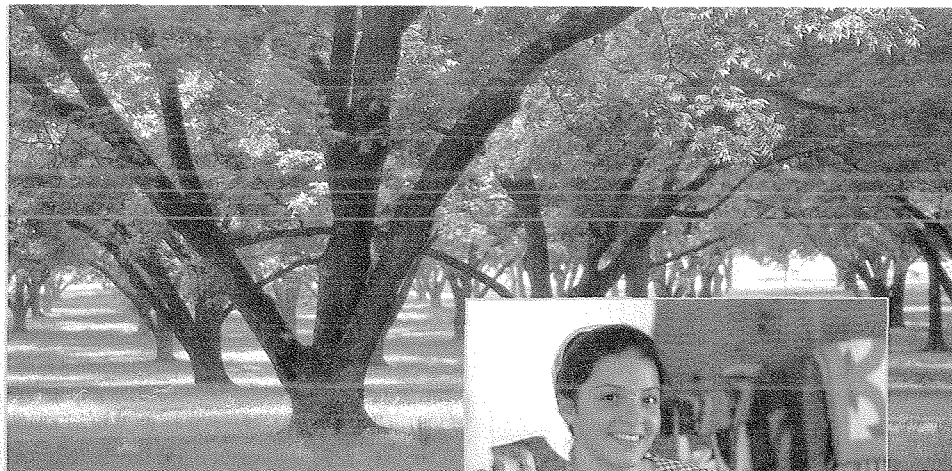
"Our lifestyle and our way of doing things get to be a focus of people's attention," says Michael, 37, who sports a neat short beard, blue shirt and dark pants.

He says the seeming melding of tradition and modernity in this group is an evolution. For the first years the community was here, it reflected mostly an Amish lifestyle. "The basic principles haven't changed, but our appearance may be a bit different from what it was then. Our goal is to live a godly life and to be a witness to the people in the community who we associate with," he continues. "We're just living as close to Bible principles as we can and, therefore, we look different. Our aim would be for people to see Jesus in our lives and not just our lifestyle."

*"To a man, woman
and child, they are
a group that exem-
plifies Christianity."*

—Bill Sawyer

Their school system is integral to that lifestyle. Pete Whitt, principal, explains how it guides youngsters to



Pecan groves are a lovely part of the scenery and an important income producer on most of the Middle Georgia Mennonite farms.

the eighth grade in a Bible-based curriculum. "But it's a complete curriculum," he says of the Christian Light Education program, based in Harrisonburg, Va. Content includes math, history and geography.

Four teachers and an assistant instruct the school's 58 or so young-



Diana Yoder displays a handmade quilt available for sale at Yoder's Gift Shop, near the Yoder's Deitsch Haus restaurant.

sters. Whitt says teachers can be trained at institutes in Virginia and Pennsylvania. After completing eighth grade, children continue their studies at home. The boys study trades, according to whatever business their fathers operate, and the girls learn homemaking, gardening and sewing.

Girls who don't marry may become nurses or teachers, Pete says. In any case, at about age 16 or 18, they take the GED—and tend to score very well. "We're not bragging about that," demurs Bishop Swartzentruber. "But passing the GED has been no problem." Swartzentruber, who farms and raises chickens, has established a welding shop for his son, Wendell, 22.

Family is central to this system of values, Bishop Swartzentruber

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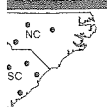


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Hay bales dot the Mennonite countryside, as seen here on the farm of Freeman Wingard.

points out. "We encourage group games and plenty of playing together," he says. Despite the rigorous emphasis on duty, God and family, there are no glum spirits in this community.

The influence of Georgia's Amish Mennonites extends beyond its members to the larger society, according to local leaders. Longtime



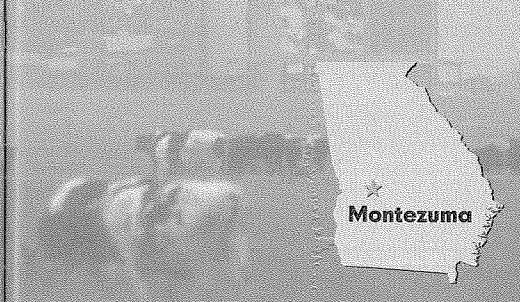
School recess becomes a volley between the girls and the boys; Rachel Whitt serves.

Macon County resident Bill Sawyer, president of the county chamber of commerce and CEO of the county-wide development authority, lauds their contributions.

"They're some of the most benevolent individuals I've ever met in my life," he says, warming to the subject. "To a man, woman and child, they are a group that exemplifies Christianity. If there's a disaster, they're the first or second group on the scene."

Last year's 50th anniversary year seemed like a big deal to people who aren't members of the community, but not for community members themselves. Life goes on among this seemingly never-changing band of families. The next half-century promises to be pretty much just like the last one, with community members keeping neat farms, doing their chores, cooking at the restaurant, raising their kids and praising God in the manner they have chosen for their people.

Decatur-based freelance writer Jane Garvey grew up in Middle Georgia, not far from the Mennonite community, and has fond memories of many family meals at the restaurant.



Montezuma

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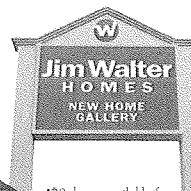
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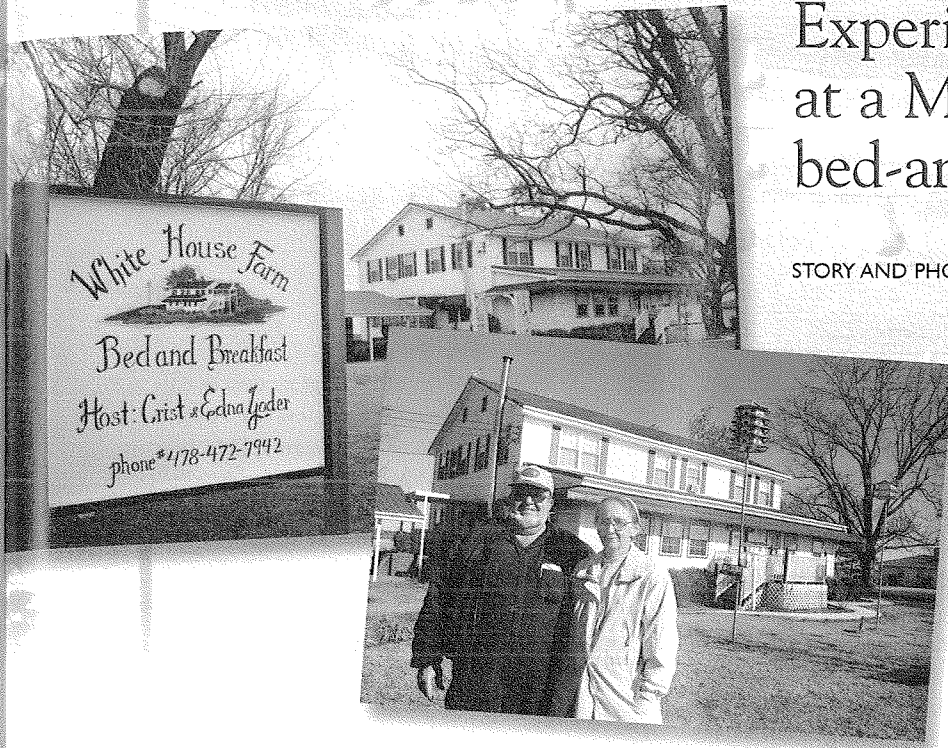
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Living on the land

Experience farm life at a Mennonite bed-and-breakfast

STORY AND PHOTOS BY JACKIE KENNEDY



Crist and Edna Yoder (left), owners of the White House Farm Bed and Breakfast in Montezuma, invite guests to enjoy traditional Mennonite cooking and life on their 250-acre dairy farm in the heart of Montezuma's Amish Mennonite farming community.

Enter the home of Crist and Edna Yoder in Montezuma, and if the wood-burning heater in their downstairs entrance doesn't warm you, the Yoder family's gracious, tender ways will.

After four of their five children moved into their own homes, the Amish Mennonite couple filled their almost-empty nest by opening three upstairs bedrooms to turn their half-century-old home into a bed-and-breakfast.

"We've always had a lot of company," says Crist, a 52-year-old farmer and innkeeper. "When Mennonites from out of town come for weddings, funerals or church functions, we usually have some

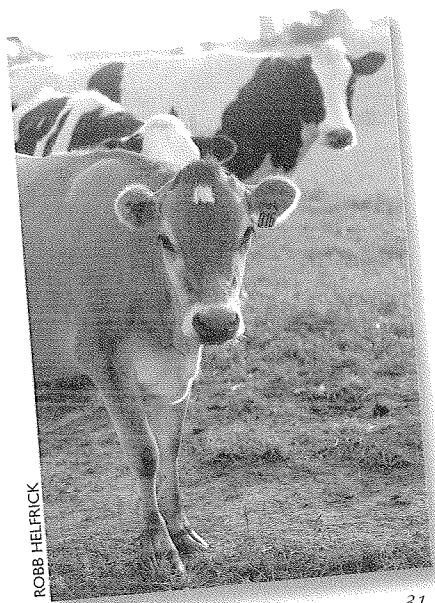
staying here. Basically, we've had a bed-and-breakfast for years; we just weren't charging money. Edna likes company, so we did this to keep people in the house."

Situated in the heart of this Amish Mennonite farming community, White House Farm features 250 acres of pastoral property on which the Yoders run a 175-head dairy operation and raise hay, corn, peanuts and sorghum. Their summer garden overflows with vegetables that keep the family's three freezers stocked.

The Yoders occupy the downstairs area of their sprawling farmhouse, while the upstairs is open to visitors. The guest bedrooms are crisp, clean and tastefully decorated, each adhering to its theme—the Magnolia Room, Rose Room and Spring Bouquet Room. Guests are treated to a full country breakfast in the upstairs kitchen, where a refrigerator is stocked with soft drinks and snacks, and they may choose

to dine in a screened-in gazebo off the upstairs hall.

Breakfast at White House Farm might include raspberry-stuffed French toast, country ham and oranges, or bacon, eggs and home-made biscuits. Truly in her element, Edna alters the menu daily, sometimes preparing traditional



ROBB HELFRICK

BACKGROUND PHOTO: ROBB HELFRICK

Mennonite dishes, and other times, Southern fare.

Some bed-and-breakfasts enforce a "no-kids" policy; White House Farm encourages guests to bring children along for fun at the farm. There are cats to cuddle and dogs to pet, along with goats, peacocks, turkeys, ducks, geese, chickens and, of course, cows.

For the full-fledged farm-life feeling, Crist welcomes visitors to join him or his son, Crist III, at the barn for milking time, which is every day from 3 a.m. to 6 a.m. and again in the afternoon. Guests can simply watch the milking or try their hand at it. Kids can help Edna gather eggs or tend to goats. The Yoders invite guests to enjoy the farm as they wish—whether that means watching the grass grow from a comfy spot on the porch or helping with family chores.

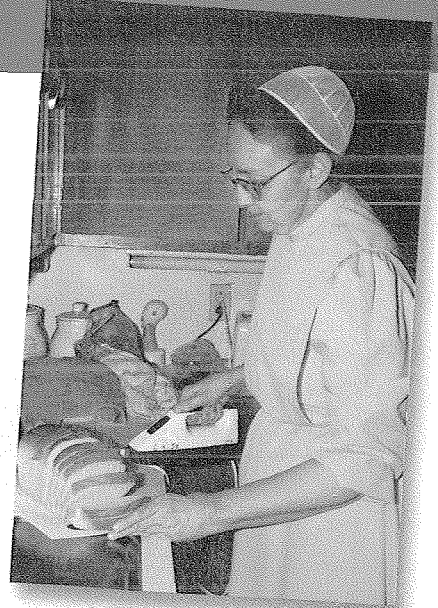
Gathering to work is a tradition Mennonites have cherished for years. The Yoders' house was built in 1959 as result of a "community frolic," a gathering of men and their families with the goal of constructing a home in a short time. Crist Yoder was 8 years old when his parents, Christian and

Anna, hosted the weekend frolic to build their home.

"Mother cooked a big meal and the men built the house," he recalls. "You talk about fun—20 men and their families with children playing and lots of good food—*that's* fun." Many homes in his community were built this way, says Crist, expressing regret over less-frequent frolics due to families working long hours to maintain their businesses.

Crist's was one of the original Mennonite families that moved from Virginia to Montezuma in 1953. Seeking affordable land on which to raise expanding families, the group settled there. By the early 1960s, about 35 Mennonite families had moved to Montezuma. Crist estimates there are more than 100 families in the community.

Founded in 1954, the original



Edna Yoder spends a great deal of time in her kitchen, preparing everything from homemade bread to scrumptious breakfast specialties.

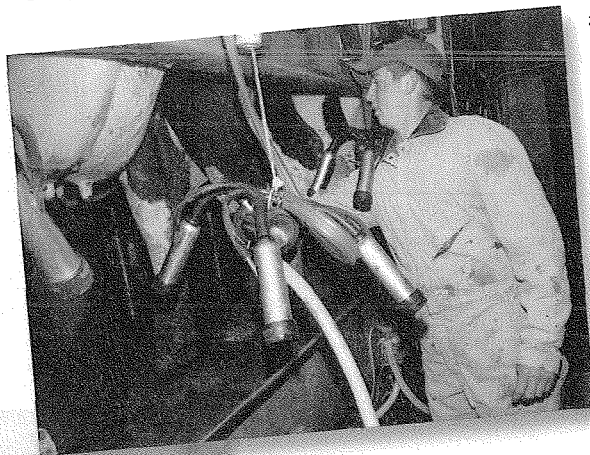
Montezuma Mennonite Church remains the largest church in the area. Two additional churches—Clearview and Gospel Light—formed in 1988 to fill the growing community's needs. Guests are welcome to attend Sunday services at any of the churches, which adhere to basic Bible beliefs with strong emphasis on family unity and land stewardship, according to Crist.

A jolly family prone to laughter, the Yoders enjoy recalling moments at White House Farm: In the 1980s, McDonald's filmed a biscuit commercial here, and Crist was paid \$1,000 a day for the use of his farm. "I told them they could do commercials year-round," he says.

Taking advantage of the area's lush green pastures and Holstein-speckled countryside, another crew visited the farm to film a commercial spot for the Georgia Lottery. "They had our son plow a smiley face out in a sorghum field," Crist recalls.

The Yoders welcome all visits, be they from commercial crews or bed-and-breakfast guests. "It gives us opportunity to talk to people, to see another lifestyle," Crist says.

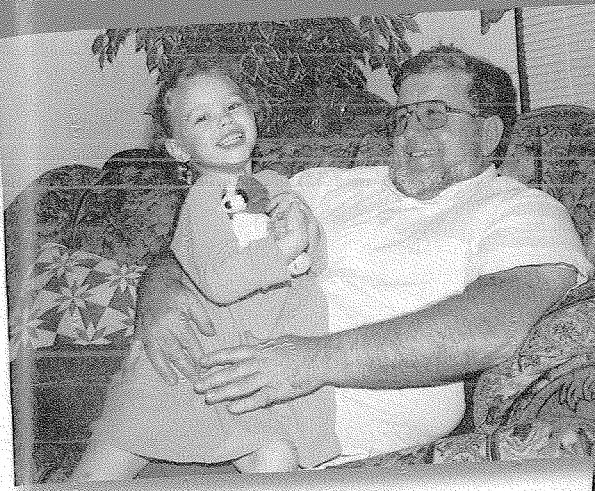
When you visit, soak in *their* lifestyle. Milk a cow or feed the



Crist Yoder III helps out with morning milkings at his family home, which now welcomes visitors to White House Farm.

Edna Yoder feeds the fowl on a winter day. During your stay at White House Farm, you may wish to assist in farm chores, which include everything from feeding the turkeys and peacocks to taming goats.





chickens. Dine at Yoder's Deitsch Haus or shop at Yoder's Country Market. Arrange to visit one of two nearby dairies, where up to 3,000 cows are milked daily.

Whether your idea of a getaway is resting peacefully in attractive surroundings or mingling with locals to learn their way of life, time spent at White House Farm is time well spent. ☺

Jackie Kennedy is a freelance writer living in LaGrange.



Far left: Crist Yoder takes a break from farm chores to share a smile with his 5-year-old granddaughter, Alison.

Left: The Magnolia Room features a four-poster bed with bright and cheerful accessories adhering to the room's flowery theme.

Details: White House Farm Bed and Breakfast, 1679 Mennonite Church Road, is 1.5 miles west of Interstate 75. Check-in is 3-6 p.m.; check-out is at 11 a.m. For reservations, call (478) 472-7942, (478) 957-6363 or (888) 472-7941. Visit the inn's Web site at www.whitehousefarmbnb.com.

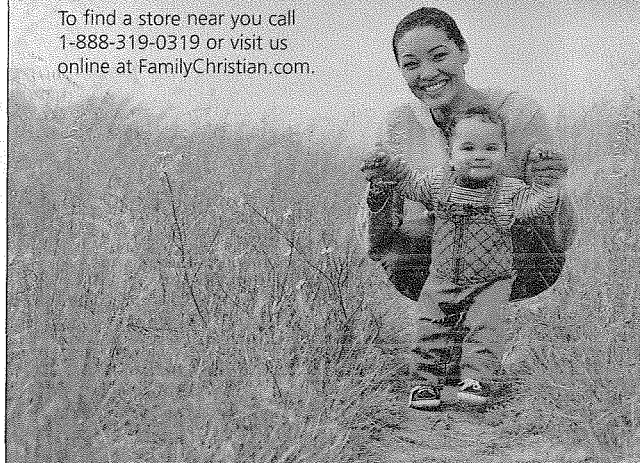
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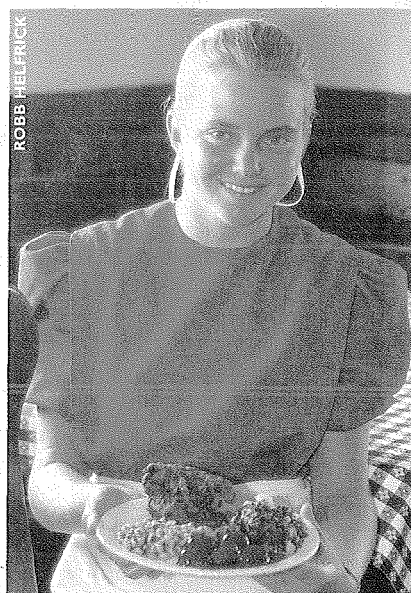
Mennonite cooking takes a Southern spin in Georgia

BY JANE F. GARVEY

The minute my car hits south of Macon, I begin thinking about fried chicken at Yoder's Deitsch Haus, just outside of Montezuma. Eighteen-wheelers parked alongside the road near this simple country dining spot surely house drivers tucking into the hefty fare. Peanut pie and squash casserole are not among the dishes you're likely to find if dining among Pennsylvania's Mennonites; that's sausage-and-creamed-potato country.

At Yoder's, squash casserole, peanut pie and fried chicken are among the Southern-style house specialties. The fried chicken in Mary Emma Showalter's book, featured later in the article, is finished in the oven, as is the fried chicken at Yoder's. So that's perhaps a touch of "Mennonite magic" where fried chicken's concerned. Oven-finished chicken sure turns out good.

Food is not the only reason to dine at Yoder's Deitsch Haus. It's the atmosphere. It's the women in



Yoder's Deitsch Haus serves up Southern fare and Mennonite favorites like this plate of fried chicken, greens, black-eyed peas and beets, served by Katrina Schrock.

Squash Casserole

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| 1 stick margarine | 1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper |
| 1 (12-ounce) box Ritz crackers | 2 cups milk |
| 4 eggs | 1 (10-ounce) bag diced onions |
| 1/4 cup sugar | 2 (1-pound) bags sliced yellow squash |
| 1 teaspoon salt | |

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Melt 6 tablespoons margarine and reserve. Use 1 tablespoon of remaining margarine to grease a 2-quart baking dish; set aside. In a blender, crush crackers, half an individually wrapped package at a time, to fine crumbs; set aside.

In a separate bowl, beat eggs, melted margarine, sugar, salt, pepper, milk, onions and squash. Incorporate all but 1/4 cup of crumbs into mixture. Pour into greased baking dish. Scatter remaining crumbs on top; dot with remaining margarine cut into small pieces. Set casserole, uncovered, on a baking sheet to protect the oven, and bake until squash is soft and dish is puffy, about 2 hours. Let sit a few minutes before serving so custard sets. *Note: Yoder's serves their squash casserole topped with a cheese sauce. Serves 6-8.*

their simple single-color dresses and filmy bonnets, the men and their beards. It's like another world, and yet these ladies deftly cook for large crowds even as they're capable of handling a tractor with the best of them. A meal at Yoder's makes for a good break from the frantic world we inhabit.

The following recipes have been adapted from those prepared at Yoder's Deitsch Haus.

Fried Chicken

- 1 chicken, cut into 8 pieces
- 2 cups bread flour
- 1-1/2 teaspoons seasoned salt, or to taste
- 1 teaspoon salt, or to taste
- 1 teaspoon freshly ground white pepper, or to taste
- 1/2 cup milk
- 1 egg
- 1 quart vegetable cooking oil

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Rinse chicken under cold running

Healthy feasting

BY NANCY H. CROSBY, R.D.

Travel Highway 17 from Savannah to Brunswick and you'll pass through the small coastal town of Eulonia. There you'll find Sapelo Station Crossing, a seafood restaurant that serves fresh dishes prepared to order any way you like. Talk to Sapelo Station's chef, Carol Knupp, at and she'll explain how they use only freshly caught fish, a few select spices, lemon juice and a cooking method that quickly melds the flavors.

Try this equally simple and delicious sautéed fish at home. Prepare salad, bread and baked potato before you start this quick dish.

Sautéed Red Fish

16 ounces bass or red fish fillets
1/4 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon white pepper
1/2 teaspoon Old Bay seasoning
1 teaspoon light olive oil
1/3 cup baby Vidalia onions, chopped

Pat fish fillets dry with paper towel. Lightly season with salt, pepper and Old Bay seasoning. Place olive oil, fillets and onions in skillet; cook 2 minutes at medium-low heat. Turn fillets and sauté about 3 minutes or until fillets begin to crack down center. Serve immediately.

Nutrition Facts: Serving size: 1/3 recipe; Calories per serving: 160, from fat: 15; Total fat: 2 grams; Carbohydrates: 0 grams; Protein: 28 grams; Very Lean Meat Exchanges: 4.

Nancy H. Crosby, R.D., is director of nutrition services at Claxton's Evans Memorial Hospital and Glennville's Glenvue Nursing Home. She has 26 years' experience counseling diabetics and others requiring therapeutic diets.

water and pat dry. Set aside. In a wide, deep plate, place flour, seasoned salt, salt and pepper. In a separate wide, deep plate, mix milk and egg.

Dip chicken pieces into milk and egg, then roll in seasoned flour. Remove to a plate and let pieces dry a few minutes while preparing oil for frying.

In a deep fryer or deep pot, place about a quart cooking oil. *Note: canola, corn, sunflower or peanut oil, or a combination of them, works fine.* Heat oil just to the smoking point. Dip chicken once more into seasoned flour and shake off excess. Fry chicken pieces, a few at a time, for 5 minutes. Remove and drain on paper towel.

Place chicken in a shallow baking pan large enough to hold all pieces without overlapping. Bake, uncovered, for 2 hours. *Note: Baking is the secret to this juicy, tender fried chicken. Serves 4-6.*

One source of traditional Mennonite dishes is Mary Emma Showalter's "Mennonite Community Cookbook" (Herald Press, 1950). The following recipes come from women in Mennonite communities throughout the United States and Canada.

Shoo-Fly Pie

Adele Auman, Woodstock
2 cups dark-brown sugar
1 egg
1-1/2 cups molasses
1 teaspoon baking soda dissolved in 2 cups warm water
3 unbaked pie shells

Topping

3 cups plain flour
1 cup brown sugar
1/2 cup shortening

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. In a bowl, combine dark-brown sugar, egg and molasses; add warm water/soda mixture. Divide and pour into unbaked pie shells.

Prepare topping. With a pastry blender, combine flour, brown sugar

and shortening until crumbly. Divide topping evenly among pies, gently sprinkling a tablespoon at a time on top of filling.

Bake 45 minutes or until filling is set (when a knife comes out clean, but moist). Cool pies on rack. *Makes 3 (9-inch) pies.*

Sausage and Creamed Potatoes

1 pound sausage links
1 medium onion
Water
6-8 potatoes, peeled, cut into quarters
1-1/2 teaspoons salt
1/4 teaspoon pepper
2 tablespoons flour
1 cup milk

Cut sausage into 1/2-inch lengths. Chop onion finely. Mix meat and onion together and fry until slightly brown. Add water to cover and cook 10 minutes. Add potatoes to meat and season. Cover and cook until vegetables are done. Once vegetables are tender, make a paste of flour and milk; add to mixture and cook until thickened. *Serves 6-8.*

Peanut Pie

1 (9-inch) deep-dish pie shell
1 cup old-fashioned-style (non-hydrogenated) creamy peanut butter
2-1/2 to 3 cups confectioners sugar
2-1/2 cups whole milk, 1/3 cup reserved
1-1/3 cups granulated sugar
1/4 teaspoon salt
1 tablespoon margarine
4 egg yolks
1/4 teaspoon vanilla
1/3 cup tapioca
1 can whipped topping

Bake pie shell; let cool and reserve. Place peanut butter in a bowl and, at low speed, blend in confectioners sugar, sprinkling a bit at a time until it acquires a crumb-like consistency; set aside.

Dip out 1/3 cup milk and reserve. In a 4-quart pot set over medium heat, combine remaining

(Continued on page 40)

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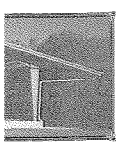
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(Continued from page 39)

milk, sugar, salt and margarine; heat just to boiling. In a bowl, combine egg yolks, reserved milk, vanilla and tapioca. Blend and set aside. When milk is heated, remove from stove. Temper egg-yolk mixture by slowly pouring a bit of heated milk into mixture, then pour egg yolks into heated milk and return to heat. Stir constantly until mixture comes to a boil and thickens slightly.

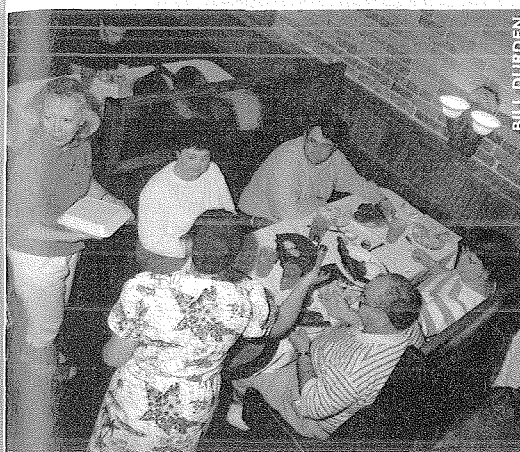
Sprinkle half of reserved crumbly peanut butter mixture on bottom of pie shell. Pour half the custard over crumbs, then scatter remaining peanut butter crumbs on top; cover with remaining custard. Cover loosely with plastic wrap and chill. When ready to serve, remove wrap and cover pie with whipped cream. *Makes 1 (9-inch) pie.*

Sour Cream Cookies

- 1/2 cup shortening
- 2 cups sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 2 eggs
- 4 cups flour
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon soda
- 1 cup sour cream
- 1/4 cup sugar-and-cinnamon mixture

Grease baking sheet; set aside. Cream shortening and sugar together. Add vanilla. Add eggs and beat until fluffy. In a separate bowl, sift flour; add salt and soda, sift again. Add sifted dry ingredients to egg mixture alternately with sour cream; mix thoroughly. Drop by teaspoonfuls onto greased baking sheet, spaced 2-3 inches apart. *Note: Cookies will spread as they bake.* Sprinkle with sugar-and-cinnamon mixture. Bake at 375 degrees for about 12 minutes. With a flat spatula, remove cookies and let cool on a rack or cloth towel. *Makes 5 dozen.*

Jane F. Garvey, a freelance writer living in Decatur, has driven out of her way for a plate of crispy fried chicken from Yoder's Deitsch Haus.



A family affair

Another Mennonite-owned and -operated restaurant, The Giesbrecht Haus, (above) on the square in Tennesse, serves up entrees like fried chicken, baked ham, sweet-potato soufflé, catfish, a large selection of vegetables and from-scratch pies.

Owners Rodney and Melva Giesbrecht and their family run a dairy farm in addition to the restaurant.

Sweet and Sour Chicken

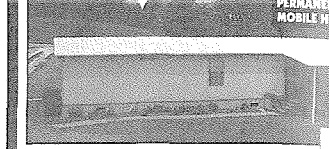
- Melva Giesbrecht, Davisboro
- 3 pounds chicken breasts, cut up
- 1 egg beaten
- 1 cup cornstarch
- Salt, to taste
- Garlic salt, to taste

Sauce

- 1-1/2 cups sugar
- 1/2 cup water
- 1/2 cup ketchup
- 4 teaspoons soy sauce
- 1/2 cup pineapple juice
- 1/2 cup vinegar
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 tablespoon orange juice concentrate

Dip chicken in beaten egg and shake in a bag with mixture of cornstarch, salt and garlic salt. Fry until lightly brown; set aside. In a saucepan, combine ingredients for sauce and cook until dissolved. Place chicken in baking dish. Pour sauce over chicken and bake at 350 degrees for 30 minutes or until done. Baste while baking. ☺

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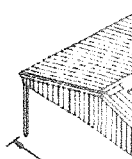
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