

The Kalona Amish: Retention and Defection Patterns of the 20th century

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Introduction:

To be Amish today is to live a lifestyle that many would consider impossible. Instead of cars, Amish use horse and buggy; instead of electricity, they use kerosene lamps. There are no phones in the home. In many Amish communities, indoor plumbing is not permitted. Women are required to wear head coverings at all times; all are required to dress plainly. German, not English, is spoken at home. Military service is frowned upon, as members are to adhere to the Biblical teachings on nonviolence and nonresistance. To an outsider, these traditions may seem ridiculous. To the Amish, however, these rules are viewed as necessary in order to genuinely live out one's Christian faith. An Amish individual interviewed for this project commented that he both enjoys the Amish way of life and also truly believes that to live Amish is to best live out Jesus' teachings and commandments.¹

As extreme as the Amish appear, they continue to be a strong and thriving subculture. Despite all the rules mandated by the Amish church, in recent decades the great majority of those born Amish have chosen to remain in that church for a lifetime. Even as the number of technological interventions continues to grow, and the temptations of the world outside the Amish church multiply rapidly, an overwhelming majority of the Amish remain steadfast in their convictions against the usage of modern technology. Though the Amish have gone through changes, many of the traditions and rules have remained the same throughout the existence of the Amish church.

But while the Amish have maintained the same religious traditions for centuries, there have been times of immense turmoil and tension within the Amish church. It was during these times that individuals and families frustrated with the Amish decisions

¹ Amish interview #2, personal interview by author, hand-written, Kalona, IA, 23 Dec 2003.

regarding new technology or religious ideas chose to defect from the Amish church. This paper focuses on the years following World War II, a period of immense change for the Amish, and examines specifically the Amish settlement in Kalona, IA. During the 1940s and the decades following, the amount of technology available, especially in rural areas like Kalona, surged drastically. Experiences of young Amish men serving in Civilian Public Service Camps also had a profound impact on the Amish as they interacted with young men from other, related denominations, and simultaneously were challenged to look at the world beyond the Amish community. In part because of the effects of World War II on the Amish, the rates of defection from the Amish reached almost 25% in the Kalona settlement during the late 1940s and 1950s.²

My own family exemplifies well the transition from Amish to Mennonite that occurred for many families in the Kalona area during the post-World War II era. Both of my father's parents were raised in Amish homes. My dad's great-great-grandparents, Joseph and Lydia Shetler, settled in Iowa in 1869. In 1946, when my grandma was 10, her parents decided to leave the Amish. According to my grandma, it was partly because her parents and the youngest son traveled to Arizona for a lengthy time and after returning felt "less satisfied."³ There were also some problems within the Amish church at that time which contributed to the decision to leave. Family legend is that a triggering factor was my great-grandpa's horses being too fancy, and according to the Amish bishops, causing him pride. But rather than get new horses, he chose to switch churches. Whatever the reasons, in 1946 my Shetler ancestors left the Amish and began attending Fairview Conservative Mennonite church.

² Amish interview #2, personal interview by author, hand-written, Kalona, IA, 23 Dec 2003.

³ Mary Jane Miller, personal interview by author, tape-recorded, Kalona, IA, 18 June 2003.

My grandfather's parents were some of the later settlers of the Kalona settlement, not arriving until the 1930s. About ten years after their arrival, my great-grandfather Dan H. Miller put rubber tires on the family tractor, signifying a departure from the Amish church. While the Kalona Amish have always accepted tractors, they are to be steel wheeled.⁴ Since my great-grandparents had the unfortunate pleasure of living on a mud road, the required steel tires were a pain, and putting on rubber tires solved many of the problems related to getting stuck in the Iowa mud. Also, according to my grandpa, his parents wanted their children to receive more than an 8th grade education. These reasons, combined with a desire for modern conveniences, caused my Miller great-grandparents, like my Shetler ancestors, to leave the Amish and join Fairview, a Conservative Mennonite congregation, in 1943.⁵

My grandparents, Ed and Mary Jane (Shetler) Miller, left the Conservative Mennonite church and joined a Mennonite congregation in the 1960s after moving to Idaho because my grandfather was hired as a teacher in a Mennonite school. The primary reason for their departure from the Conservative Mennonite church was the lack of a Conservative church in their new state. However, an added bonus of attending a Mennonite church was that they could purchase a television, an item forbidden by the Conservative Mennonites at that time. My grandparents bought a television in order to watch John F. Kennedy's funeral, and my grandpa developed a strong liking for *60 Minutes*. After returning to Iowa, neither of my grandparents had a desire to sell the television in order to rejoin a Conservative Mennonite church. Instead, they began attending Kalona Mennonite, where they still attend today.

⁴ Amish interview #2, personal interview by author, hand-written, Kalona, IA, 23 Dec 2003.

⁵ Edwin D. Miller, personal interview by author, tape-recorded, Kalona, IA, 18 June 2003.

The Shetlers gather for a family reunion every three years, and members of the family range from the very traditional Beachy Amish to the rather out-of-place looking Mennonites, like me. Most of the women I am related to wear coverings, and these coverings vary depending on congregation. When my great-grandma passed away three years ago, my father and I counted 12 different styles of covering on women attending her visitation. In some ways, this project stems from a desire to discover why I am not Amish, and one of the few women not wearing a covering at family gatherings. Like many in Kalona and the surrounding community, I am a product of many years of transition and development in the Amish-Mennonite community.

The Amish, though, have a long history of division and transition as a brief historical overview of the Amish, both as a whole and in the Kalona area, demonstrates. The Amish as a distinct group emerged in 1693 after a split between leaders of the Anabaptist movement. The split occurred because of a dispute in doctrine over how literally the scriptures should be read. Those favoring a more literal interpretation of scripture were called 'Amish' after Jakob Amman, a Swiss Anabaptist elder and the most adamant supporter of the tightening of the rules of faith, while those that did not agree with Amman were dubbed 'Mennonite' after another Anabaptist leader, Menno Simons.⁶

With the discovery of the New World, many Amish left Europe in search of the freedom to practice their religion freely. In Europe both Amish and Mennonites were being persecuted and martyred for their religious beliefs, especially related to adult baptism and refusal to participate in war.⁷ An escape from both this discrimination and famine sweeping across much of Europe became possible with a move to the New World.

⁶ Steven M. Nolt, A History of the Amish, (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 1992), 26-27

⁷ John A. Hostetler, Amish Society: 4th Edition, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 50-52

Many took this opportunity, and by the end of the 18th century over five hundred Amish families were living in America.⁸ The majority of these Amish resided in Pennsylvania, in the Lancaster area, which today remains one the largest Amish settlements. As Amish continued to arrive in America, groups would migrate to new areas where land was cheap and establish new settlements. By the mid-1800s Amish sects had been established in many parts of Pennsylvania, Ohio, Maryland and Indiana.⁹

The quest for cheap farmland brought Amish from Ohio and Maryland to Iowa in 1845. The Amish who came in search of land also desired to “establish a new church in the west where higher ideals could be established and maintained.”¹⁰ The first Amish settlers scratched their names on Linn trees to mark their new property and returned home to prepare their families for the move.¹¹ In 1846, four Amish families moved to the Johnson County, Kalona area, becoming some of the first white settlers in the state. In the next years, migration to the Kalona settlement grew rapidly, and by 1851, these Amish had established a church with 27 members. In 1853 the first bishop, Jacob Schwarzendruber, was ordained.¹² While the Kalona settlement was not the only Amish settlement in Iowa to develop from the initial westward trek – other settlements were begun in Lee and Davis counties at a similar time – by 1850 a steady stream of arrivals of

⁸ Nolt, A History of the Amish, 56

⁹ David Luthy, Amish Settlements Across America, (Aylmer, Ontario: Pathway Publishers, 1985), 7-12

¹⁰ Elmer Swartzendruber, compiler. Amish and Mennonite Church Centennial Anniversary. (Mennonite Historical Society of Iowa, 1953), 53

¹¹ Elmer Swartzendruber, 8

¹² Katie Yoder Lind, From Hazelbrush to Cornfields: The First One Hundred Years of the Amish-Mennonites in Johnson, Washington and Iowa Counties of Iowa 1846-1946, (Kalona, IA: Mennonite Historical Society of Iowa, 1994), 40

new Amish to the Johnson county settlement established it as the largest Amish settlement in the state.¹³

The first divisions among this new church were due to size. In 1862, the congregation had grown too large and split so that the groups were small enough to meet in homes. The old congregation was known as Sharon, the new, Deer Creek. By 1877 Sharon and Deer Creek had each divided again, creating a total of four Old Order Amish congregations.¹⁴ To avoid size division in the future, the two Deer Creek congregations built church buildings in the 1890s, a practice very uncommon among the Amish both then and now. The leadership at Deer Creek was adamant that the building did not represent a drifting away from the Amish tradition, stating soon after the building was completed, “The church house shall and dare not be the means of granting us more freedom toward worldliness and we are minded, and promise to strive for simplicity and uniformity.”¹⁵ The Sharon congregations, however, continued to meet in homes and divide as needed.

Despite the use of buildings, the Deer Creek congregations stuck to their pledge to remain with the tradition of the Old Order for the next two decades. During these years, though, a nationwide trend of division among the Amish developed with more liberal groups taking the name “Amish Mennonite” and the more conservative groups being called “Old Order Amish.”¹⁶ Early into the twentieth century, stemming largely from the decision of the Deer Creek congregations to allow the telephone, the more progressive

¹³ Melvin Gingerich, The Mennonites in Iowa, (Iowa City, IA: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1939), 121

¹⁴ Elmer Swatzenruber, 79-80

¹⁵ William and Verda Swatzenruber, et al, compilers, Upper Deer Creek Conservative Mennonite Church Centennial Anniversary 1877-1977, (Iowa City, IA: Bowers Printing Service, 1977).

¹⁶ Wellman Mennonite Church History 1906-1986, (1986), 10

Deer Creek congregations both dropped the “Old Order” from their names. Upper Deer Creek joined the Conservative Amish Mennonite Conference in 1915 while Lower Deer Creek left the Old Orders in 1913, joined the Western Amish Mennonite District Conference in 1917 and became a member of a Mennonite conference in 1921.¹⁷

The Sharon churches in the Kalona area remain Amish today. Currently in the Kalona settlement there are an estimated 1100 Amish church members split into 8 church districts, making it the largest Amish settlement west of the Mississippi river.¹⁸ Those that have left the Amish church and many of their descendents fill the benches at the numerous Beachy Amish, New Order Amish, Conservative Mennonite, and Mennonite congregations in the local community that have developed from the initial Amish settlement begun in 1846.

These transitions from Amish to Mennonite continue to be played out in the Kalona Amish-Mennonite community though the rates of Amish defection have dropped drastically over the last fifty to sixty years. An Amish bishop interviewed for this project estimated that in the 1950s around 25% of the baptized Amish defected while since the 70s, it has dropped to less than 5% of Amish.¹⁹

When the defection rate was high, in the 1940s and 50s, a departure from the Amish was often triggered by factors directly related to an increased interaction with the outside world. During these decades Amish attended revival meetings hosted by Mennonite congregations, served in World War II Civilian Public Service camps alongside non-Amish young men and performed mission work and outreach into the outside community. In part because of these interactions, many Amish began to

¹⁷ Melvin Gingerich, “Mennonites in Iowa.” *The Palimpsest* 40, no. 5 (May 1959): 204-205

¹⁸ Amish interview #2, personal interview by author, hand-written, Kalona, IA, 23 Dec 2003.

¹⁹ Amish interview #2, personal interview by author, hand-written, Kalona, IA, 23 Dec 2003.

challenge the traditional rules regarding technology and to question tenets of Amish theology. As dissatisfied Amish began to leave the church there emerged congregations of New Order Amish, Beachy Amish, and Conservative Mennonites, which served to provide a less drastic departure for those leaving the Amish. At the same time, such groups simultaneously challenged the Old Order view of worldliness as new groups claimed, like the Amish, that they were remaining separate from the world.

The decrease in the defection rate among both the Kalona Amish and other Amish settlements can be attributed in many ways to an increased seclusion from the world through the creation of private Amish schools and Amish work places. Isolation from the outside world allows for more effective socialization as exposure to non-Amish values is limited. The isolation also has served to create a substantial divide between Amish and Mennonite, making the transition away from the Amish much more drastic than in the 40s and 50s. Also, because of an increasing pressure to remain Amish, some frustrated Amish choose to migrate to different settlements rather than leave the Amish church entirely.

Methodology:

Much of the data for this project was acquired via personal interviews with individuals and couples. In all, seventeen individuals were interviewed. Most of these made the decision to leave the Amish after becoming baptized members of the church. There were several, however, who left while still children as a result of a decision made by their parents. Most questions centered on the reasons for leaving the Amish, but some asked interviewees to hypothesize on Amish defection/retention today and why that has changed.

Also, two Amish agreed to be interviewed for the project. The Amish request complete anonymity, and are therefore cited as “Amish interview #1” and “Amish interview #2.” Both of these individuals have been members of the Amish church for over thirty years. One is a bishop in the Kalona area. The Amish were asked questions regarding their decision to stay Amish, and why they believe others chose to leave. They were also asked questions in regards to specific Amish teachings such as Bible studies, mission work, the use of tractors, and baptism.

The interviews with non-Amish were all tape-recorded and transcribed. The Amish, however, requested not to be recorded, so the interviews with these two individuals were hand-written.

Part One: Waves of Defection

To leave the Amish is a very difficult decision as it means leaving the tradition of one's childhood and often times drawing the scrutiny of an entire community. It is a decision not taken lightly by those that choose to leave. And, in fact, most Amish remain in the tradition of their childhood – an Amish bishop estimated the current attrition rate to be less than 5%.²⁰ There were periods in recent history, however, in which many Amish did feel compelled to leave the church.

Two waves, so to speak, can be seen when looking at the defection rates of the Kalona Amish settlement. The largest exodus began in the mid-1940s and continued throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s. According to older residents of the Kalona community, during this time as many as 25% of baptized members defected.²¹ One woman interviewed believed that during a five to ten year period in the 1950s around 60% of baptized Amish left the Amish church.²² The Iowa Amish Directory does not go into great detail about these departures but states that during this time “there was considerable unrest and much diversity of opinion among the membership which was evident in the ministry as well as between the ministry and the laity.”²³ The only other significant wave occurred in the late 1970s as the New Order Amish community in Kalona was established, attracting a group of Old Order families. In the period between these two waves, and especially since the end of the second, the number of families leaving has rarely exceeded two a year.

²⁰ Amish interview #2, personal interview by author, hand-written, Kalona, IA, 23 Dec 2003.

²¹ Amish interview #2, personal interview by author, hand-written, Kalona, IA, 23 Dec 2003.

²² Bernice Miller, personal interview by author, tape-recorded, Kalona, IA, 30 June 2003.

²³ Iowa Amish Directory 1998, (Millersburg, Ohio: Abana Books, 1998), 125.

There were many reasons for the high number of departures in the 1950s. These reasons, often intertwined, included everything from a simple desire for more conveniences that are forbidden by the Amish to a desire to do mission work. The formation of ‘transitional denominations,’ like the Beachy Amish and Conservative Mennonites, forced Amish to evaluate the meaning of worldliness and provided an in-between step for departing Amish. Also, the development of such churches at this time suggests that the patterns of defection in the Kalona settlement were indicative of a larger ‘sorting out’ of Mennonite and Amish identity.

New Developments/Technology

The Amish have always had to deal with the temptations of new technology. In fact, of the former Amish interviewed, most spoke of a desire to have basic modern conveniences that are forbidden by Amish doctrine. While variances between *ordnung* allow some Amish communities more worldly practices than others, it can be stated that all Amish are lacking most modern conveniences. The desire to use modern technology has always been a motivating factor for those leaving the church.

Though all Amish settlements are fairly similar in doctrine, Amish *ordnung* varies from group to group. *Ordnung* is the particular policy for social order by which Amish abide. These rules establish what is worldly and what is acceptable for a particular group. The regulations vary between settlements because the rules are determined by the leadership of each group. To have a more liberal *ordnung* is to allow more worldly practices, more conservative, less.²⁴ The Amish in Kalona would be considered fairly

²⁴ Hostetler, Amish Society – 4th edition, 82-83.

liberal in regards to *ordnung* because of the allowance of conveniences like indoor plumbing and tractors.

The Kalona *ordnung* does, however, prohibit the use of a telephone in the home, and the conflict over the telephone made it the first invention to cause strife within the Amish community. In 1900 the first telephone line in the area was established, and by 1901 the nearby town of Wellman had established the first local telephone company in the area.²⁵ As the popularity of the telephone increased and more and more families had lines installed, the Amish bishops decided to ban the use of the telephone because of its promotion of gossiping behavior.²⁶

Though the decision to ban the telephone caused some Amish to defect, the decision of Kalona congregations like Lower Deer Creek not to ban the telephone triggered dissatisfaction among Amish as well. Already considered fairly liberal because of its use of a church building, the Amish leadership at Lower Deer Creek did not forbid its members from using the telephone. In 1914, a conservative faction within the congregation was unhappy with the lack of a decision against the telephone and withdrew. This group moved a county north to Buchanan County and established a new settlement with a very strict *ordnung*. Today it remains as one of the most conservative of the Amish settlements, accepting very few modern conveniences.²⁷ What happened in the Lower Deer Creek congregation exemplifies the backlash of conservatism that many liberal churches experience. As more progressive Amish churches look at accepting technology like the telephone, those against the usage of such items become more and more adamant in their opposition.

²⁵ Yoder Lind, 492.

²⁶ Nolt, *A History of the Amish* 217.

²⁷ Nolt, *A History of the Amish*, 220-221.

After the telephone arrived in the early 1900s the number of “convenience” inventions increased dramatically. As the Amish continued to reject the usage of many of these new items, the numbers of people leaving the Amish continued to increase. Perhaps the most problematic of these new conveniences was the automobile. The Amish, recognizing that the automobile would negatively impact family time and time spent at home, forbid its use.²⁸ According to Melvin Gingerich, author of The Mennonites in Iowa, “There is, however, nothing that the Amishman is deprived of which tempts him more than does an automobile.”²⁹ And in fact, after the Amish decision to forbid the owning of cars in the early 1920s, large numbers of Amish in the Kalona settlement left to join denominations that allowed it.³⁰

Current debates over technology continue today. One of the most recent controversies has been over the use of cell phones by Old Order Amish. The story in the Kalona community is told of the young Old Order Amish woman who was talking to her bishop about the use of the cell phones. The bishop was denouncing its usage, saying it was not in compliance with the rules of the church. As the young lady was expressing her agreement with the bishop’s remarks, her purse rang.

While the growing divide between Amish and Mennonite leaves the Amish perhaps somewhat unaware of the technological advances, more recent defectors from the Amish church still said that the desire for modern conveniences played a role in the decision to leave. But though the desire for modern technology and the conveniences it offers is a factor in the decision to leave the Amish church, it is usually only a small part

²⁸ Nolt, A History of the Amish, 216.

²⁹ Gingerich, The Mennonites in Iowa, 259.

³⁰ Gingerich, The Mennonites in Iowa, 259.

of the reason for leaving the Amish church. Technology just seems to be an added bonus to a decision that was made for other reasons.

World War II, Civilian Public Service, and the Changing Mennonite Worldview

In 1952 a group of seven Amish families in Kalona chose to leave and join the Upper Deer Creek Conservative Mennonite church because they wanted to hold a group Bible study, a practice questioned by most Amish. One member of this group, David Yoder, spoke of he and his wife's decision to defect:

“During World War II I was drafted and spent some time in CPS [Civilian Public Service] and we were accustomed to having prayer meetings and midweek meetings at camp which we weren't used to as Amish. And so when we came home, a group of us boys decided that we'd like to maintain this type of service, and we had permission from our bishop to do that...Before we were married, we were asked to discontinue these sorts of services...we were told in a preparatory service that we stop doing this, and by stopping we would use our influence against that type of service [or else they could not take communion], and then the bishop told us that 'if you don't commune for three times then you're automatically expelled.' And we didn't see any future in the Amish church so we left.”³¹

Frustrations with Amish teachings on Bible studies, missions, and evangelism were typical reasons given for leaving the Amish during this period. These frustrations were often triggered by experiences in World War II Civilian Public Service camps or from new insights instilled by traveling Mennonite revivalists. It is impossible to discount the effect of shifting Mennonite and Amish theology on the Amish in Iowa. In fact, of the individuals interviewed for this project that left in the “first wave” of the 1940s and 50s, all mentioned a desire to do missions or hold Bible studies as weighing into the decision to leave the Amish.

Mennonite and Amish theology before World War II was not necessarily anti-evangelism, but was more concerned with maintaining separateness from the world.

³¹ David and Verna Yoder, personal interview by author, tape-recorded, Kalona, IA, 26 June 2003.

There was, however, skepticism about the Biblical basis for evangelism, with church leadership emphasizing the lack of scripture bases for mass revival.³² Because of this skepticism, Amish and Mennonites resisted the revivalism embraced by other denominations, choosing instead to focus on the necessity of humility.³³ Typical Amish and Mennonite sermons during the late nineteenth century and into the twentieth were focused on nonconformity, the importance of separation from the world, plain dress, and humility.³⁴

The years following World War II brought massive change to the Mennonite church as a whole. Revivalism became an issue in everyday church life, and mission work a priority. James O. Lehman, author of Mennonite Tent Revivals, refers to this period in Mennonite history as a “quickenings.”³⁵ Organizations like Mennonite Central Committee, which had existed since the 1920s, finally began to flourish. Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) was created. Mennonite publications like Christian Living were produced. Mennonite Youth Fellowship (MYF) began to be commonplace at Mennonite churches.³⁶ All these were indicative of a shift in Mennonite ideology away from an emphasis on nonconformity and separation from the world to a new focus on revival, outreach and missions.³⁷

The catalyst for many of these subtle doctrinal changes within Mennonite teaching was the experience of Mennonite young people, mostly young men, in Civilian

³² Dale Dickey, “The Tent Evangelism Movement of the Mennonite Church: A Dramatistic Analysis” (Ph.D. diss., Bowling Green University, 1980), 34.

³³ Theron Schlabach, The Mennonite Experience in America. Vol. 2, Peace, Faith, Nation: Mennonites and Amish in Nineteenth-Century America, (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1988), 32.

³⁴ James Lehman, Mennonite Tent Revivals: Howard Hammer and Myron Augsburgers 1952-1962. (Kitchner, Ontario: Pandora Press, 2002), xix.

³⁵ Lehman, xvi.

³⁶ Lehman, xviii.

³⁷ Lehman, xix-xx.

Public Service (CPS) during World War II. CPS triggered such change in part because it brought young men from Amish and Mennonite background together and “provided an understanding which tended to weaken the rigid church lines which had been created over the years.”³⁸ One interviewee hypothesized, “The boys had been to CPS camp...the Amish boys in this community, and they found out that there were Christians in other denominations – especially the Mennonites and Conservative Mennonites. When they came home they weren’t satisfied to stay with the Amish.”³⁹ Spending time in Civilian Public Service thrust together young men of all denominational backgrounds, highlighting the similarities between the young conscientious objectors rather than the differences. After being in continual contact for several months, many Amish young men no doubt had to question the importance of plain dress and horse and buggy to their faith.

In Kalona, the Amish were impacted no differently from Amish elsewhere that served in CPS camps. A total of 39 young men from the Kalona community were drafted during World War II, and as conscientious objectors to war, served in CPS camps.⁴⁰ These young men returned to the Kalona community after a year away from home, many of them with profoundly altered views on the needs of the world. One stated: “When the CPS boys came back, you just couldn’t be the same person after seeing the needs in the world. You ‘came very much aware that there’s more to life than being an Amishman.”⁴¹ Returning home, the CPS men brought with them a challenge to hold Bible Studies and to

³⁸ Dickey, 30.

³⁹ Bernice Miller, personal interview by author, tape-recorded, Kalona, IA, 30 June 2003.

⁴⁰ David Wagler and Roman Raber, The Story of the Amish in Civilian Public Service (With Directory). (Boonsboro, Maryland: 1986), 106-108 and 128-136.

⁴¹ David and Verna Yoder, personal interview by author, tape-recorded, Kalona, IA, 26 June 2003.

do mission work. In the Kalona area, the returning young men attempted to form Bible study groups and arranged meetings focused on the subject of Christian missions.⁴²

Also presenting a challenge to the traditional Amish theology was the tent revival phenomenon. Tent revivals in the Mennonite church reached unparalleled popularity during the post-World War II era, often preaching to crowds numbering in the thousands. Led by Mennonite preachers George Brunk and Howard Hammer, the revivals emphasized the importance of evangelism and worked to encourage congregants to embrace a life dedicated to service.⁴³ While the Brunk revival never made it to the Kalona community, Howard Hammer preached there twice, once in 1952, and again in 1954, both times for several weeks. While geared to the Mennonite and Conservative Mennonite denominations, many Amish did attend the meetings, though Amish frequently attended in secret, parking their buggies in nearby cornfields.⁴⁴

Just like the CPS camps, the effect of the Howard Hammer revivals was two-fold. For one, it brought together Amish, Mennonite, Conservative Mennonite, and outside denominations and emphasized similarities in Christianity rather than differences between groups. The importance of wearing plain dress and driving horse and buggy were increasingly difficult to justify to converts from outside the Mennonite and Amish community.⁴⁵

Secondly, the Hammer revivals, like the CPS camps, left many attendees with a changing worldview. Instead of emphasizing humility, Hammer's sermons urged involvement in missions work as a central expression of one's faith. The first time

⁴² Steve Nolt, "The Amish 'Mission Movement' and the Reformulation of Amish Identity in the Twentieth Century," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 75, no. 1 (Jan 2001): 13.

⁴³ Lehman, 43.

⁴⁴ Nolt, "Amish 'Mission Movement,'" 20.

⁴⁵ Lehman, xix-xx.

Howard Hammer came to Iowa, in 1952, there was an evening service in which 47 attendees promised to live a life dedicated to mission work. When he returned to Iowa in 1954, Hammer invited these 47 persons back on stage and found that the majority were already engaged in the mission field or had planned to enter it soon.⁴⁶ All that attended the revivals – Mennonites, Amish, and outside denominations – were faced with the relatively new idea that missions work was a necessary part of faith, new ideas that affected the Amish on a tremendous scale.

The Amish as a whole were forced to deal with the new theological ideas that CPS camps and traveling revivalists brought to their people. Bible studies and mission work were areas in which the Amish had previously not had to deal with. Similarly, the Amish in Kalona did their best to accommodate the new theological ideas of the lay members of the congregation. For the Kalona Amish, dealing with the desire to hold private Bible studies without a bishop present and the desire to do mission work far from home were issues that had never been dealt with before. David Yoder, along with the other seven families that left because of the Bible study conflict, was the first to bring a request for Bible studies to the leadership. For several months the Bible studies were allowed, though the bishops were divided over the issue. It was only after those supporting Bible studies passed away that Yoder and the others who eventually left the Amish were asked to discontinue their weekly meetings.⁴⁷

Along with debating the validity of Bible studies, the Amish did attempt to accommodate the new desire for missions work. The Amish Mission movement was founded by Amish convert Russell Maniaci, who saw the Amish witness as the reason for

⁴⁶ Lehman, 92.

⁴⁷ David and Verna Yoder, personal interview by author, tape-recorded, Kalona, IA, 26 June 2003 .

his adoption of the Amish faith. After joining an Amish church in Indiana, however, Maniaci struggled with the realization that the Amish seemed to care little about evangelizing to people like him. In the early 1950s Maniaci assembled a group of over 100 like-minded individuals for the “First Amish Mission Conference” held on the farm of a Kalona Amish man, Jonas Gingerich.⁴⁸ This first meeting dealt with organizational issues for what would later be dubbed the “Amish Mission Movement.”

Because of the movement,

“Old Order church members organized national mission conferences, attended and graduated from college, participated in Mennonite voluntary service programs, distributed mission-oriented literature to thousands of Amish homes, and funded full-time Amish mission workers from Mississippi to Ontario.”⁴⁹

Old Order Amish across the country were experiencing a shift in ideology away from humility to activism and revival. As the movement gained momentum, however, the Amish leadership began to challenge whether involvement in the Mission movement was proper for their members. Common fears of the Amish bishops were that those involved in missions would become acculturated into typical American life and lose touch with their Amish-ness. Before long, “the energy, enthusiasm and innovation on the part of advocates were matched by increasing skepticism and resistance on the part of other Old Orders.”⁵⁰

As the skepticism and backlash among Amish leadership grew, those who grew frustrated trying to work within the Amish church often ended up leaving. Some that had developed a strong belief in the importance of missions work were overwhelmingly

⁴⁸ Nolt, “The ‘Amish Mission Movement,’” 16.

⁴⁹ Nolt, “The ‘Amish Mission Movement,’” 8.

⁵⁰ Nolt, “The ‘Amish Mission Movement,’” 19.

discouraged by the lack of opportunity for such work within the Amish church. Rhoda Hershberger, who left the Amish in 1954, fit this category:

“In my early teens there was an Amish conference, and at that point they gave an invitation to dedicate your life to missions, and I did...I would say my basic reason [for leaving the Amish] was because I was interested in missions and there was really no outlet for that interest in the Amish church.”⁵¹

By the 1960s there was hardly any Amish Mission Movement left as the active participants grew frustrated and joined Mennonite, Conservative Mennonite, or Beachy Amish churches.⁵² Even Jonas Gingerich, host of the First Amish Mission Conference, began attending a Conservative Mennonite church soon after the conference.⁵³

The changing theology of the Mennonite church and the desire of some Amish to embrace these changes was a divisive issue throughout the 1950s. For the Amish, it was the first time that issues of evangelism and missions were discussed. As the Amish struggled to accommodate new ideas, Amish in the 1950s worked for mission organizations and distributed literature. In the 1960s and following, however, as the revival movement within the Amish church largely dissipated, such work was unheard of.⁵⁴ Nolt is quick to point out that while Mennonite theology and identity was changing rapidly in the 1950s toward a more outward looking, evangelical faith, Amish identity too was changing, but in the opposite direction.⁵⁵

This backlash is seen further in the strict rules now in place regarding Bible Studies, missions and revival in the Kalona Amish. The Amish I interviewed did not even understand what I meant by ‘Bible Study’ – the concept was foreign. Similarly, the

⁵¹ Rhoda Hershberger, personal interview by author, tape-recorded, Kalona, IA, 23 June 2003.

⁵² Nolt, “The Amish ‘Mission Movement,’” 7.

⁵³ Nolt, “The Amish ‘Mission Movement,’” 28.

⁵⁴ Nolt, “The Amish ‘Mission Movement,’” 33.

⁵⁵ Nolt, “The Amish Mission Movement,” 34.

Kalona Amish today are discouraged from attending any revival meeting sponsored by any denomination, even from Amish Mennonite background, and mission work is frowned on. On revivals, the current oppositional stance is upheld by the idea that revivals are “more of an emotional thing, not a heart thing that the heart has really changed.”⁵⁶ The Amish today oppose their members doing mission work for fear of assimilation into and acceptance of a non-Amish lifestyle. An Amish bishop articulated the fear that missions workers would go out, be confronted with difficult issues and “bring back things that are destructive to the church.”⁵⁷ Another Amish interviewee stated that revival, prayer meetings and missions work are no longer acceptable because the Amish leadership “saw what was happening” – as the congregants were exposed to new ideas the church was too, and the Amish lost many members.⁵⁸

New Denominations: Challenging “worldliness” and providing a middle-ground

Along with new technology and shifting religious ideology, a third factor contributing to the waves of defection was the development of new denominations that created a transition between Amish and Mennonite. Mennonite Scholar John A. Hostetler states, “A newly formed or more liberalized group has emerged from the Old Order Amish about every generation.”⁵⁹ Liberalized denominations like the Conservative Mennonites, Beachy Amish, and New Order Amish developed in the Kalona settlement with the departure of individuals and families from the Amish church and served to span the gap between Amish and Mennonite. Melvin Gingerich asserts that many Amish

⁵⁶ Amish Interview #2, personal interview by author, hand-written, Kalona, IA, 23 Dec. 2003.

⁵⁷ Amish Interview #2, personal interview by author, hand-written, Kalona, IA, 23 Dec. 2003.

⁵⁸ Amish Interview #1, personal interview by author, hand-written, Kalona, IA, 22 Dec 2003.

⁵⁹ John A. Hostetler, “Old Order Amish Survival.” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 51, no. 4 (Oct. 1977), 354.

individuals have “indoctrination...so complete that they...[are] not able to lose all of their earlier religious concepts.”⁶⁰ These in-between denominations, then, while created to serve the spiritual needs of those leaving the Amish, also provided defecting Amish with a denominational change perhaps less shocking than Mennonite, and may have increased defection rates with their creation as unsatisfied Amish could join a denomination with views only slightly different from the Amish church.

As new denominations gained membership, the definition of “worldliness” was often questioned and challenged by some Amish. New groups were able to retain distinctiveness from the world around them, whether it be through continuing to wear plain dress or just differing theologically from the mainstream. One defector commented, “Worldliness to the Old Amish viewpoint is conveniences...cars, etc...and I learned through going to the Mennonite church that worldliness is a spiritual thing.”⁶¹

It is also important to mention that the Kalona Amish do not shun Amish who leave and join denominations that embrace pacifism as a central teaching. If a person defects and joins a non-pacifist church, that individual is shunned. This is because the Amish believe that nonresistance is central to Christianity, so while being Amish is the way to live most closely to how Jesus instructs, to join another denomination that is pacifist is to maintain still the central tenet of Christianity. To join a just war denomination is, for some Amish, almost akin to leaving Christianity entirely.⁶² Therefore, the development of new denominations that carry on the peace traditions of the Amish and Mennonites created more options for departing Amish who wished to leave the church but remain in contact with their Amish relation. Congregations of

⁶⁰ Gingerich, *The Mennonites in Iowa*, 174.

⁶¹ Loren Borntrager, personal interview by author, tape-recorded, Kalona, IA, 20 July 2003.

⁶² Amish interview #2, personal interview by author, hand-written, Kalona, IA, 23 Dec 2003.

Beachy Amish, New Order Amish, and Conservative Mennonites are just three of the many denominations originally stemming from the Old Order Amish that have developed in the Kalona area.

Conservative Mennonites:

The Conservative Mennonite denomination, along with groups like the Beachy Amish and the New Order Amish, has drawn a large number of individuals from the Old Order Amish that were considering leaving but did not want to jump so far as to join the Mennonite church. While the Conservative Mennonites existed in Iowa long before the start of the first wave of defection in the 1950s, the presence of the Conservative Amish Mennonite (CAM) conference provided a transitional step between Amish and Mennonite for those choosing to leave. One interviewee noted that many Amish defectors “hadn’t quite come to the point where they were willing to accept Mennonites; they were just a bit further than they wanted to go. So they went to the Conservative church.”⁶³

The Conservative Mennonite denomination developed not out of a church schism, but because of nuances that had always existed between particular groups of Amish and Mennonites. From the late 1880s on, though not organized in a conference, there were churches that adopted some modern conveniences, unlike the Amish, but disagreed with some teachings of the Mennonites.⁶⁴ Too accepting of modern technology, specifically the telephone and the automobile, to be called Old Order, but theologically too conservative to desire affiliation in a Mennonite conference, churches that fit into this

⁶³ Bernice Miller, personal interview by author, tape-recorded, Kalona, IA, 30 June 2003.

⁶⁴ Ivan J. Miller, History of the Conservative Mennonite Conference. (Grantsville, MD: Ivan J. and Della Miller, 1985), 44.

category were dubbed “Conservative Amish Mennonite” by the Mennonite Yearbook.⁶⁵ In 1910 this small group of churches embraced the label as their own and held their first conference in Pigeon, Michigan.⁶⁶ Five years later, in 1915, leadership at Upper Deer Creek chose to join the newly formed Conservative Amish Mennonite conference and withdraw from the Old Orders.⁶⁷ By the mid-1930s Upper Deer Creek Conservative Mennonite had grown too large, and a new, sister church, Fairview Conservative Mennonite, was constructed. In 1957 the two congregations had again grown too large, and a third Conservative Mennonite church, Sunnyside was built.⁶⁸

A substantial portion of these churches’ membership was former Old Order Amish. One reason that the Conservative Mennonite churches drew Old Order Amish away from the Amish church was their stance on missions. As early as 1928 the Conservative Amish Mennonite conference had mission outposts in Michigan and New York.⁶⁹ In Iowa, Upper Deer Creek Conservative Mennonite sent missions workers to Maryland to work in a Children’s home and started an outreach in nearby Richmond, IA.⁷⁰ Evangelists were also frequently brought in by CAM conference churches, and members were encouraged to attend. For Amish frustrated with the lack of mission opportunities in the Amish church, the Conservative churches provided the desired outlet for mission work.

The emergence of the Conservative Mennonite church as a large sector of the Mennonite community in Kalona is linked to the church’s position in between Amish and

⁶⁵ Ivan J. Miller, 49.

⁶⁶ Ivan J. Miller, 49.

⁶⁷ Gingerich, “Mennonites in Iowa,” 15.

⁶⁸ Kalona: The First Century 1879-1979, (Minneapolis: International Graphics, 1979), 86.

⁶⁹ Paul Toews, The Mennonite Experience in America, Vol. 4, Mennonites in American Society 1930-1970 (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1996), 54.

⁷⁰ William & Verda Swartzendruber et al, 23.

Mennonite, and its willingness to alter the concept of ‘worldliness.’ Avoiding worldliness to the Conservative Mennonite denomination has lain heavily in abstaining from involvement in politics, especially discouraging voting, and, of course, participation in war.⁷¹ Physically, worldliness could still be avoided by a woman wearing a head covering, though a much smaller one than in Beachy and Amish churches. Conveniences like the television, which could be considered excessive, have not been permitted until recently. The Conservative Mennonites, therefore, epitomized a group that was striving to maintain separation from the world while still allowing the use of some basic modern amenities.

Beachy Amish:

Another group made up almost entirely of Amish defectors is the Beachy Amish. The first Beachy Amish congregation developed in 1927 in Pennsylvania after a dispute between two Amish bishops over electricity, cars, and Sunday school triggered the more conservative members of the group to migrate to other settlements so as not to lose their good standing with the Amish church. Those that remained were dubbed the Beachys, after their minister.⁷² The Beachys accept some modern amenities forbidden by the Amish church, such as electricity, automobiles (as long as black or dark colored), and the telephone, but still emphasize the importance of plain dress, with members wearing clothes varying only slightly from traditional Amish clothing.

The first Beachy Amish congregation in Iowa formed in 1946, at the beginning of the first wave of defection, as the result of a dispute over rubber tires. County officials

⁷¹ Ivan J. Miller, 59.

⁷² Dorothy and Elmer Schwieder, “The Beachy Amish in Iowa: A Case Study,” Mennonite Quarterly Review 51, no. 1 (Jan 1977), 42.

banned the use of vehicles with steel lugs on the newly oiled Johnson County roads. One church district agreed to the use of rubber tires, inciting a negative reaction from the other congregations.⁷³ As the debate over rubber tires continued, issues such as the use of telephones, cars, and electricity became central as well, with some members asking, “If it is wrong to own a car or use a telephone then why is it right to hire a car or use a neighbor’s phone?”⁷⁴ The conflict resulted in seven families leaving the Amish and forming Iowa’s first Beachy Amish congregation.⁷⁵

The Beachy Amish denomination as a whole grew quickly, in part because of its ability to draw members from the Old Order congregations who could see from the Beachys’ conservative dress their attempts to remain separate from the world, while still permitting some modern conveniences. Less than ten years after the formation of the Kalona Beachy church, in 1955, there were 22 Beachy Amish families; by 1977 there were 41 families and 99 members in the Kalona Beachy church.⁷⁶ Some, like Bernice Miller, chose to attend the Beachy Amish church after making the decision to leave the Amish. She and her family “went Beachy” because her husband was “not quite ready to completely pull away from the Amish culture.”⁷⁷ The Beachy congregation’s formation in Iowa gave a place for those not ready to transition all the way to Mennonite after departing from the Amish.

The Beachy Amish also provided an outlet for the desire to do missions that triggered some to leave the Old Order congregations. In 1955, concurrent with the wave

⁷³ Schweider, “The Beachy Amish in Iowa,” 42.

⁷⁴ Schweider, *A Peculiar People: Iowa’s Old Order Amish*, (Ames: The Iowa State University Press, 1975), 130.

⁷⁵ Schweider “Beachy Amish in Iowa,” 42.

⁷⁶ Schweider “Beachy Amish in Iowa,” 43.

⁷⁷ Bernice Miller, personal interview by author, tape-recorded, Kalona, IA, 30 June 2003.

of Mennonite evangelism sweeping across the Midwest, the Beachy Amish founded their own mission organization, the Amish Mennonite Aid.⁷⁸ Also during the 1950s, the Beachy church hosted two missions gatherings, one of which was held in Iowa, began to send Beachy members interested in missions all over the country and the world, and created its own missions-oriented newsletter.⁷⁹ According to the Beachy 'Overseas Voluntary Service Manual,' missions is an important venture for the Christian "to demonstrate a positive witness which testifies to the love and power of God and to the life of a Christian by helping others to help themselves by providing information, encouragement, love, tools, and materials."⁸⁰ Unlike the Amish, the Beachy church was willing to integrate an emphasis on outreach into church doctrine. Undoubtedly the opportunities to do mission work attracted some that were interested in missions but found no vehicle for that desire in the Amish church at the time.

The Beachy Amish, even more so than the Conservative Mennonites, called into question the Amish interpretation of worldliness. The Beachys, like the Amish, dress plainly, have their own schools, and believe in nonresistance, nonconformity and coverings for women. In contrast to the Amish, however, Beachys drive cars, have electricity, and meet in church buildings.⁸¹ But for the most part, Old Order and Beachy groups remain indistinguishable to the casual observer (that is, until the Beachy individual climbs into a car). With the formation of the Beachy Amish church the Old Order Amish faced, for the first time, a "homogenous group in their own midst

⁷⁸ Schwieder, "Beachy Amish in Iowa," 49.

⁷⁹ Elmer S. Yoder, The Beachy Amish Mennonite Fellowship Churches, (Hartville, OH: Diakonia Ministries, 1987), 214, 220.

⁸⁰ Schweider, "The Beachy Amish in Iowa," 49.

⁸¹ Schwieder, "The Beachy Amish in Iowa," 45-46.

who...successfully adopted most of the modern conveniences without themselves becoming worldly.”⁸²

New Order Amish:

A third denomination that has questioned the Amish interpretation of worldliness is the New Order Amish. In Iowa, the rapid growth of the Conservative Mennonite church and the rise of the Beachy Amish church were concurrent with the first period of defection. The second wave of defection and the last of any significance to this day corresponded to the creation of a New Order Amish congregation in the Kalona Area. In the late 1970s, with the founding of a New Order congregation in Iowa, 15 or so families left the Amish in a period of a few years, most joining the New Order church. Others chose to migrate to a new settlement to avoid the “skirmish” that occurred with the denomination’s inception.⁸³

The New Order Amish first developed in the mid-1960s when some Amish in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania moved to allow tractors and other farm equipment. The more conservative Amish in the group did not agree, and those favoring more progressive rules left and were dubbed the New Order Amish. Within the next few years, a similar division occurred among Amish in Holmes County, OH.⁸⁴ The New Orders differ from Old Order Amish only in areas relating to technology. Modern technology like the telephone, tractors, and indoor plumbing are allowed by some, but not all New Order Amish congregations. They do, however, remain distinct from other transition groups

⁸² Alvin J Beachy, “The Rise and Development of the Beachy Amish Mennonite Churches,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 29, no. 2 (April 1955): 140.

⁸³ Amish Interview #2, personal interview by author, hand-written, Kalona, IA, 23 Dec 2003.

⁸⁴ Nolt, *A History of the Amish*, 266.

like the Beachy Amish by continuing to drive horse and buggy and meet for church in the home.⁸⁵

The New Order Amish congregation in Iowa was established in the mid-1970s. When first established, the only difference between New Orders and Old Orders was the allowance of New Orders to use rubber tired equipment.⁸⁶ Now, the New Order Amish church allows telephones in the home, and women wear shorter strings on their bonnets.⁸⁷ The church began after a mix-up in determining by lot the next minister for an Old Order congregation. A minister was chosen by lot, but his name was not one that had been submitted for ordination – rather, another man with the same last name had been. The church chose to cover-up the incident, but one member, Jonas Miller, brought up the subject at a council meeting. Miller refused to apologize, and so was not in right standing with the Old Order church and was kicked out. Those that sympathized with him left the church and formed a New Order congregation.⁸⁸

While the transition to the New Order Amish in Lancaster and Holmes counties was and perhaps still is relatively easy, in the Kalona area the New Orders are shunned, not because they break the rules regarding pacifism, but because of the manner in which their church was established – it created a division within the church. Since Jonas Miller, the founder of the church, was not in right standing with the church at the time of his departure, he remained shunned until his death. Likewise, all those that join the New

⁸⁵ Hosteteler, *Amish Society – Fourth Edition*, 284.

⁸⁶ Harvey and Ruby Yoder, personal interview by author, tape-recorded, Kalona, IA, 21 June 2003.

⁸⁷ Ruth Ann and Clara Shetler, personal interview by author, tape-recorded, Kalona, IA, 7 July 2003.

⁸⁸ Ruth Ann and Clara Shetler, personal interview by author, tape-recorded, Kalona, IA, 7 July 2003.

Orders are automatically placed under the ban.⁸⁹ This fact most likely accounts for the lack of growth in the New Order church in Kalona.

⁸⁹ Ruth Ann and Clara Shetler, personal interview by author, tape-recorded, Kalona, IA, 7 July 2003.

Part Two: Increasing Retention

In some ways the shunning of the New Order Amish is indicative of the changes that the Kalona Amish have undergone in the last 40 years. To leave the Amish is no longer seen as normal or commonplace. Leaving the Amish today is much more controversial than 40 years ago, and the consequences of doing so much greater. Instead of being one of many leaving, individuals and families leaving today are one of few, if not the only.

The rates of Amish retention have risen dramatically since the 1950s, both nationally and in the Kalona settlement as well. Retention studies of the Elkhart, IN Amish show a defection rate of only 5% since 1961.⁹⁰ Similar numbers were found for the Geauga, OH Amish settlement.⁹¹ While no statistics have been compiled for the Kalona Amish settlement, current estimations from both Amish and non-Amish suggest a comparable defection rate of around 5%.⁹² This rate stands in stark contrast to the estimated 25% defection rate experienced by the Kalona Amish and other Amish groups in the 1950s.⁹³

The reasons for the decreased defection rates are multiple, overlapping, and complex. In general, though, among all Amish groups there is more pressure to stay Amish than before, as families have now remained Amish in the midst of overwhelming technology for decades. This pressure can be seen in Kalona and other settlements in the changing meaning of Amish baptism, the greater threat of the ban, and the increasing

⁹⁰ Thomas J. Meyers, "The Old Order Amish: To Remain in the Faith or to Leave," Mennonite Quarterly Review 68, no. 3 (July 1994): 380.

⁹¹ Lawrence P. Greska and Jill E. Korbin, "Key Decisions in the Lives of the Old Order Amish: Joining the Church and Migrating to Another Settlement," Mennonite Quarterly Review 76, no. 4 (Oct 2002): 373.

⁹² Amish interview #2, personal interview by author, hand-written, Kalona, IA, 23 Dec 2003.

⁹³ Amish interview #2, personal interview by author, hand-written, Kalona, IA, 23 Dec. 2003.

rates of migration Amish are experiencing. But more importantly perhaps, in the last forty years, the Amish have secluded themselves more and more from the English society around them. In Kalona this has involved the developing of Amish private schools, discouraging members from work in non-rural occupations, creating Amish businesses, not permitting members to attend revivals, and not permitting the traditional practice of “sowing wild oats.” These exemplify many of the ways in which the Kalona Amish have helped create a larger gap between Amish and non-Amish. Also contributing to high retention is the progressive *ordnung* of the Kalona Amish, which, in its allowance of more technology, perhaps helps keep more Kalona Amish in the church.

Under Pressure: The Increasing Importance of Remaining in the Amish Church

For those leaving the Amish during the time of the first wave of defection – the late 1940s to the 1960s – the decision was often difficult. At the same time, though, it was not especially shocking to the family, nor did not result in individuals being ostracized. Most said that while their families expressed disappointment in their decision they were not overly hurt or surprised by the choice to depart. In fact, in most instances many family members had already defected or would leave in the near future. Emma Shetler, who left with her husband Harley in the 1950s, said though her family did not think it was ok to leave the Amish, “they accepted it.”⁹⁴ This type of response was typical for those leaving during the first wave of defection. Though there were exceptions, for the most part the decision to leave the Amish was a decision that was accepted.

⁹⁴ Emma Shetler, personal interview by author, tape-recorded, Wellman, IA, 24 June 2003.

However, as the numbers of defecting Amish declines, and the pressure to remain Amish increases, the decision to leave the Amish has become a much riskier decision. In her book, Crossing Over, Ruth Irene Garret tells her story of leaving the Kalona Amish. Her departure, which occurred in the early 1990s, was quite dramatic and looked down upon, in part because she wanted to leave in order to marry a non-Mennonite man who had been married before. In order to leave, she knew that she could not tell her parents of her decision beforehand. If she were to tell her family she was leaving, Garret feared she would not be allowed out of their sight, and not permitted to see her future husband, Ottie, again. One afternoon she wrote her family a note and climbed into a van with Ottie. They fled to Kentucky, taking back roads the whole way in case they were followed, and Ruth forced to return.⁹⁵

While Ruth Irene Garret's story is no doubt the extreme, it exemplifies the pressure and fears that some leaving the Amish today experience. Another interviewee whose departure from the Amish in 1986 was much less dramatic, used the metaphor of a silo – they wanted out, they wanted to leave, but they couldn't find the door, felt trapped and pressured into a life they no longer wanted.⁹⁶

This growing difficulty in leaving the Amish church and increased importance placed on remaining Amish has resulted in both a changing interpretation of baptism and church membership for the Amish and in rising migration rates as Amish chose to move to different settlements instead of leaving the Amish. This connection between the meaning of baptism and migration is stated well by Lawrence P. Greksa and Jill Korbin:

⁹⁵ Ruth Irene Garret with Rick Farrant, Crossing Over: One Woman's Exodus from Amish Life (Allen, TX: Thomas Moore, 2001), 82-85.

⁹⁶ Gladys and Loren Borntrager, personal interview by author, tape-recorded, Kalona, IA, 20 July 2003.

“Since the initial decision to join the church is seen by the community as a decision for life, the social consequences of later leaving the church include the imposition of excommunication and *Meidung* (shunning), which act to isolate individuals from their family and community to a much greater extent (often completely) than if they never join the church.”⁹⁷

After being baptized into the Amish church the consequences for defecting increase.

Therefore, if dissatisfied, it makes sense to migrate to another settlement rather than risk being placed under the ban, and being isolated from friends, family, and community.

The increase in migration rates is caused in part by the changing definition of baptism for the Amish. Baptism for most Amish is first and foremost a commitment to God, and to the Christian faith of the Amish. There are many who believe that baptism is only a commitment to God, not a commitment to stay Amish. But even when focused on God, the rules of the Amish intertwine with the baptism commitment.⁹⁸ For example, Ed Hostetler, who would later leave the Amish, was not allowed to be baptized on the scheduled Sunday following his completion of instruction class because his hair was too short and did not meet the guidelines set by the Amish.⁹⁹

Hostetler’s experience exemplifies a growing emphasis on the membership aspect of baptism. In the Anabaptist tradition to which the Amish belong, to be baptized is to become a member of the church. However, there are varying interpretations of what this means. Does it mean only that along with the responsibilities of a commitment to God, a young person is to take responsibility within the church? Or does membership into the Amish community signify a lifelong commitment to upholding the teachings of the Amish church and remain Amish? One interviewee commented that upon baptism,

⁹⁷ Greksa and Korbin, 374.

⁹⁸ Hostetler, *Amish Society*, 82.

⁹⁹ Ed Hostetler, personal interview by author, tape-recorded, Kalona, IA, 9 July 2003.

“[You are asked], “Do you believe this is a God-ordained church? And if you answered ‘yes’ and then leave it, there’s ‘why?’”¹⁰⁰ My grandmother mentioned a relative who did not leave the Amish along with the rest of her family: “When she got baptized, she made that promise. To her it was a promise to stay in the Amish church.”¹⁰¹ Ruth Irene Garret went as far as to assert that young Amish are forced into baptism:

“Formally joining [the Amish church], which usually occurs after a person turns sixteen, represents someone’s desire to make a life-long commitment to the Amish church – and it is a process not taken lightly. In fact, people are commanded to join, and run the risk of being shunned if they don’t comply.”¹⁰²

While for many, the vows of baptism are directed only as promises to God, there seems to be a changing, growing emphasis on that same vow to God being a promise to remain in the Amish church for the remainder of one’s life. For the Amish, then, baptism has become an “act that demands a total personal investment.”¹⁰³ This “total investment” includes acceptance of both the Christian faith of the Amish as well as a committal to the distinct way of life practiced by the Amish.

Perhaps because of this changing interpretation of baptism and an increased pressure to stay in the Amish church, there has been a rise in the number of Amish migrating to different Amish settlements. Instead of defecting from the Amish, many Amish unhappy with their church choose to migrate to a settlement that better fits their theology. Typical reasons for migrating include a desire for a more conservative or more liberal church, to escape church problems, a desire to move away from urban areas and

¹⁰⁰ Harvey and Ruby Yoder, personal interview by author, tape-recorded, Kalona, IA, 21 June 2003.

¹⁰¹ Ed and Mary Jane Miller, personal interview by author, tape-recorded, Kalona, IA, 18 June 2003.

¹⁰² Garret, 47.

¹⁰³ Schweider, *A Peculiar People*, 33.

possible negative influence, and a need for cheap farm land.¹⁰⁴ In the past, before the Supreme Court ruled that Amish could establish their own schools, many Amish migrated to states that were more tolerant of their desire to educate their children at home. Likewise, a plethora of Amish migrated to Canada to avoid being drafted in both World War I and World War II.¹⁰⁵

In the Geauga, Ohio Amish settlement, researchers found that 14-20% of adult children migrate, while at the same time, the percentage of adult children leaving the Amish church has “decreased substantially over time.”¹⁰⁶ Likewise, a study of Lancaster Amish found that as many as 15% of the Amish are migrating to other settlements.¹⁰⁷ While no statistical research has been done on Kalona Amish migration patterns, an Amish bishop interviewed for this project spoke of the decreasing defection rates in the Kalona settlement being in part the result of increased migration, as Amish look to move to new areas with cheap, available farm land.¹⁰⁸

An increase in migration rates along with a changing understanding of the baptismal vows are indicative of the increasing importance of remaining in the Amish faith. Leaving the Amish after baptism results in greater consequences than it would have 40 years ago. While those that left during the 1950s and 60s in the midst of a wave of defection did so with little fear of being cut off from their family, individuals today are much more likely to face the ban and to experience family turmoil as a result of the decision. Because of the changing consequences of leaving the Amish, the vow of baptism is taken much more seriously as a vow to remain not only in good standing with

¹⁰⁴ Luthy, 2.

¹⁰⁵ Luthy, 5.

¹⁰⁶ Greska and Korbin, 396.

¹⁰⁷ Kraybill, *The Riddle of Amish Culture* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 195.

¹⁰⁸ Amish Interview #2, personal interview by author, hand-written, Kalona, IA, 23 Dec. 2003.

God, but also with the Amish church. Dissatisfied Amish are more inclined, therefore, to migrate to a different settlement than to leave the Amish church entirely.

The increasing isolation of the Amish

Part of the increasing difficulty in leaving the Amish church has no doubt stemmed from a growing dichotomy between Amish and English, even those English from Mennonite background. As this gap grows wider, Amish considering defection must look at the consequences, which now may include being placed under the ban and facing family tensions that would not exist otherwise. To convert from Amish to Mennonite in the 1950s was a small jump; to convert today is to leap an expansive chasm.

In areas like Kalona, where the majority of the Mennonite and Conservative Mennonite population come from Amish background, boundaries between the groups have “remained porous for decades.”¹⁰⁹ This has, as suggested by the Borntragers, begun to change. The boundaries are no longer so porous, at least not for younger generations of Amish and Mennonites who did not grow up attending school together or attending the same family reunions. The older generations of Amish and Mennonites in the community, many of which are related to each other, still gather frequently. For example, my great-aunts Ruth Ann and Clara, members of a Conservative Mennonite church, meet weekly with their Amish first cousins for breakfast. Even my parents’ generation, a generation that attended school with Amish and would be more closely related, have occasional contact with Amish that they know personally. I, on the other hand, though I am related to the vast majority of the Amish in the Kalona area, am not

¹⁰⁹ Nolt, “Amish ‘Mission Movement,’” 33.

related closely enough to warrant any reason to visit, do not know them from my childhood, and would not even recognize more than a handful of Amish by name.

The solidifying boundaries between Amish and Mennonite can be attributed to the creation of Amish private education, increasing regulations on Amish activities, and the development of Amish businesses. And as fewer and fewer Amish chose to defect, and as interactions between Amish and Mennonites continue to lessen, these boundaries will likely continue to solidify, and the dichotomy between Amish and Mennonite continue to grow.

Private Schooling

Perhaps the greatest cause of the growing gap between Amish and non-Amish is the development of the Amish school system. As Amish have stopped sending their children to public schools, there has been a decrease in Amish and non-Amish interactions, and an increase in the effectiveness of Amish socialization. Amish schools have created an opportunity for Amish parents to control almost completely the values transmitted to their children. With no worldly influence from English children, the socialization of Amish children takes place in an almost exclusively Amish environment, and few, if any, relationships are established between young Amish and non-Amish.

Nationwide, until the 1940s, the Amish sent children to public school for the elementary grades. Amish had little problem with the public education system when the schools were small, rural and located nearby.¹¹⁰ But as these small, rural schools were consolidated into larger, more distant schools, the Amish began to establish their own educational facilities. The Amish disapproved of the consolidation of schools because it

¹¹⁰ Hostetler, "Old Order Amish Survival," 358.

infringed on their ability to moderate what values their children were being taught.

Amish parents feared that their children would be tempted by worldly values in the public education system, a problem easily remedied by the establishment of private Amish schools.¹¹¹

The Amish decision to privately educate their children came into conflict with several educational laws of the United States, namely the requirement of children to attend school until reaching the age of sixteen. Amish only desire their children to receive an eighth grade education. High school and other higher education is not acceptable for the Amish because they view the teenage years as years of vulnerability that should be spent with family learning a trade.¹¹² Other reasons are Biblical, for the Amish take to heart verses like 1 Corinthians 1:19 which warn against the “wisdom of the wise.”¹¹³ Amish also frown upon public school practices of busing students and playing sports. Sports are seen as a negative influence because they promote pride, competitiveness, and take away from an individual’s “Christ-centeredness.”¹¹⁴ The conflict between Amish parents and the public education system developed out of this refusal to send Amish children to high school. Many frustrated Amish moved to settlements in other states, attempting to find a locale that would accept their decisions on education. Finally, in 1972, the United States Supreme Court ruled in the case *Wisconsin*

¹¹¹ Hostetler, *Amish Life* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1959), 32.

¹¹² Hostetler, *Amish Society*, 4th edition, 260.

¹¹³ William C. Lindholm, “The National Committee for Amish Religious Freedom,” From *The Amish and the State*, Donald B. Kraybill, editor. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 121.

¹¹⁴ Amish interview #2, personal interview with author, hand-written, 23 Dec 2003.

According to Gerald Biesecker-Mast, the issue lies not in sports themselves, but in organized sports. Sports are allowed as long as played for recreational purposes, and competitiveness is not emphasized.

vs *Yoder* that the Amish right to freedom of religion meant the right to have their own schools and only educate their youth through the eighth grade.¹¹⁵

Only a few years before the *Yoder* decision, in 1966, the Kalona Amish established their own schools after the Mid-Prairie school district, which includes Kalona and the surrounding area, was consolidated by the state. Before 1966 Amish and English attended public schools together, usually in one-room school houses. Sanford Yoder wrote about his Amish school days in the Kalona area:

“The pupils of the Evergreen School were practically all Pennsylvania Dutch and came from Amish homes. Many of them knew no English and had to be taught the language when they entered school. Some of the teachers were willing to teach German when it was desired, and a number of times courses in reading, writing and spelling were offered when parents called for it on behalf of their children.”¹¹⁶

When schools were small and located nearby, Amish parents were able to watch what their children were learning, and as Yoder suggests, even dictate to some extent what their children were taught. Not all one-room schools were entirely or even mostly Amish, like the one attended by Yoder. Many provided grounds for Amish and non-Amish to interact. For example, my father attended a one-room school in the Kalona area from 1965-1966, the years right before the Amish began their own schools. Of the 32 first through eighth-grade students at Snake Hollow elementary, two were Amish.¹¹⁷ My father remembers one of these Amish students, who was around his age, being quite adept at softball and being quite popular at recess. In this public school context Amish and English learned together and played together, interactions that do not exist since the formation of a separate Amish school system.

¹¹⁵ Lindholm, 122.

¹¹⁶ Sanford C. Yoder, “My Amish Boyhood,” *The Palimpsest* 39, no. 3, (March 1958): 129.

¹¹⁷ Marcus Miller, email to author, 10 Mar 2004.

In 1966 all one-room public schools closed and were consolidated by the state. In the Kalona area, all students would now attend Mid-Prairie consolidated school. The Amish decided to buy the now empty school houses and develop private schooling for their children because, “we [Amish] had religious convictions of our school children attending a large consolidated school where they taught unscriptural doctrines.”¹¹⁸

Friendship School, the first Amish school in the Kalona area, opened in 1966 and was supported by free-will offerings from the local Amish congregations. In the years since the consolidation movement in Iowa, the Kalona Amish have established several more schools, including a school for deaf and disabled Amish children, launched in 1973.¹¹⁹

The local school district officials did not give the Amish a hard time, as occurred for some other settlements both in the nation and in Iowa. However, the Buchanan County, Iowa Amish settlement, just north of the Kalona settlement, experienced many difficulties. The schools in this community consolidated in 1947, and the Amish began educating their children at home. For fourteen years this was not a problem. Then, in 1961, a mandate passed that triggered the further consolidation of schools in the area. The Amish assumed that their children would be exempt from the consolidation as they had been educated privately for over a decade. Instead, school officials mandated that all Amish schools would close in two years, and that all seventh and eighth-graders would attend the public consolidated junior high school immediately. When the school year began in 1962, the Amish continued their regular practice of privately educating their children, amid continuing protest from the local school district. The conflict reached its pinnacle in November 1965 when for several days in a row a school bus arrived at an

¹¹⁸ Iowa Amish Directory, 138.

¹¹⁹ Iowa Amish Directory, 138.

Amish school house to take the Amish students to the public elementary school. The Amish students, refusing to comply, fled into a nearby cornfield. Iowa governor Harold Hughes asked the state legislature to consider the events occurring in Buchanan County, and 1967 it was decided that Amish in Iowa could operate their own schools.¹²⁰

A year later, because of the legality of Amish education obtained in Iowa through the successful struggle of the Buchanan County Amish, the Kalona Amish did not experience the same turmoil and legal issues when establishing their own schools. However, the creation of private schools in the Kalona area was not without problems. Difficulties arose when the State Board of Education wanted the Kalona Amish to have teachers that were certified by the state of Iowa. The Kalona Amish invited the governor at the time, Robert Ray, and School Board member Stanley Barber, to visit their schools. After the visit and a series of meetings, it was agreed that the Amish could provide their own teachers.¹²¹ Soon after the visit, because of the laws passed by the Iowa legislature, the Kalona Amish were legally allowed to hire their own teachers, and only educate their children through the eighth grade.¹²²

Since the Amish have begun the private education of their children, a central place of interaction between Amish and non-Amish has ceased to exist. One interviewee stated, “They [the Amish] don’t mingle as much as they used to. Most of the Amish used to go to country schools...we were the only Amish kids there...So they mingled with other people more, and now they don’t, they really don’t get to know too many people.”¹²³

¹²⁰ Nolt, *A History of the Amish*, 256-261.

¹²¹ *Iowa Amish Directory*, 138.

¹²² Schweider, *A Peculiar People: Iowa’s Old Order Amish*, 1967.

¹²³ Edwin D. Miller, personal interview by author, tape-recorded, Kalona, IA, 18 June 2003.

Along with limiting social interactions between Amish children and the outside world, the creation of private schools has also allowed for more effectual socialization. Parents are able to moderate almost completely through home life and education the values transmitted to their children. The purpose of Amish education is to “produce Amish Christians able to understand and contribute to the small events that will help perpetuate their community here and in eternity.”¹²⁴ Teachers in Amish schools are expected to not only teach their students to read and write, but how to live a Christian, Amish lifestyle.

Such socialization of the younger generations of Amish is of vast importance to maintaining a stable Amish subculture. Some have gone as far as to assert that private education of Amish children is essential to the survival of the Amish culture:

“As long as the Amish can give their children an education in a rural setting under conditions which they can control, there will continue to be strong Amish settlements in Iowa and elsewhere. But if they must send their children away to consolidated schools where values are stressed which they do not cherish, an increasingly large percent will accept these secular standards and drift away from their childhood culture.”¹²⁵

The importance of schooling for the Amish is apparent. Socialization of youth into the Amish culture and lifestyle, without the outside influences of technology and worldliness, has helped the Amish to remain a strong and growing subculture. The development of Amish private education has, at the same time, been part of the ever growing dichotomy between the Amish and the world around them. Even as recently as the mid 1960s Amish and non-Amish in Kalona and the surrounding areas attended school together. Such regular interactions between the two groups do not exist anymore.

¹²⁴ John A. Hostetler, “Old Order Amish Child Rearing and Schooling Practices: A Summary Report,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 44, no. 2 (April 1970): 184.

¹²⁵ Gingerich, “The Mennonites in Iowa,” 185.

Limiting Interactions with English society

The growing divide between Amish and English is also due in part to an increasing strictness of the Kalona Amish. Since the 1960s many rules have been enacted by the Amish leadership that attempt to limit the interactions between their people and non-Amish. The mounting consequences for breaking rules, coupled with the development of new rules impeding Amish and non-Amish interactions, has worked like the development of private schooling to further solidify the barrier between Amish and the world around them.

One substantial change from the 1960s is the rules against attending revival meetings. Though the Amish never endorsed the revival work of Mennonite evangelists like Howard Hammer who came to the Kalona area in the mid-1950s, and did not encourage members to attend the revival meetings, Amish were not forbidden from attending. Today, however, that has changed as Amish are leery of revivalism as a whole, and discourage mission work because of the exposure to worldly values such work entails. Even revivals sponsored by the closely related Beachy Amish group in the Kalona area are not permitted.¹²⁶ Despite the increased strictness on revival attendance, many Amish still attend meetings. One couple that left the Amish in 1986 mentioned that though revivals were unacceptable, they attended anyway. If discovered, the disobedient Amish would have had to confess before the congregation in order to remain in good standing with the church.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ Amish interview #1, personal interview by author, hand-written, Kalona, IA, 22 Dec. 2004.

¹²⁷ Gladys and Loren Bortrager, personal interview by author, tape-recorded, Kalona, IA, 20 July 2003.

Another practice that has helped the Kalona Amish remain isolated from the world around them is not allowing Amish young adults to “sow their wild oats,” a well-known tradition in some Amish communities. In a number of Amish settlements, including large settlements in Lancaster, PA and parts of Ohio, the “sowing of oats” is a period of a young Amish person’s life in which s/he has the opportunity to live as though not Amish – drive cars, go to movies, and hang out with English youth. While often the rebellion does not go further than the wearing of English clothes and hairstyles, there have been problems with use of alcohol by underage Amish. In the Lancaster, Pennsylvania area Amish youth have been involved in fatal, alcohol related driving accidents.¹²⁸ The sowing of wild oats is meant to provide the Amish young adult with the ability to decide if the Amish life is really what is desired. It gives youth the perception that they have a choice in accepting the tradition of their parents and culture. Some scholars suggest that the practice of “sowing wild oats” actually helps retention rates. If an Amish youth, after experiencing the supposed glamour of a non-Amish lifestyle, returns and joins the Amish church, making a commitment to its Ordnung, than that individual, it is thought, must be sincere in his/her decision.¹²⁹

Not all Amish sects believe the “sowing of wild oats” to be an important part of church tradition, and many, including the Kalona Amish, do not allow the practice for their young people. While there may be a case for the “sowing of wild oats” actually helping retention rates, what is more important is the opportunity it gives Amish in those settlements to jump the barrier that is slowly solidifying between Amish and English. Though most who cross the gap eventually return and are baptized into the Amish

¹²⁸ Kraybill, The Riddle of Amish Culture, 139.

¹²⁹ Kraybill, The Riddle of Amish Culture, 140.

church, in these communities the barrier is still permeable, at least during the teenage years. In settlements like Kalona, where Amish young people do not go through this rite of passage, the dichotomy between Amish and English is growing faster. Amish young people in the Kalona settlement, never faced with the same choices, are not educated in the same way about the lives of English, and rarely form relationships outside the Amish circles within which they were raised. Not allowing the practice of “sowing wild oats” has, then, aided the Kalona Amish in keeping a tighter control on the behavior of their youth, and contributed further to the lack of interactions between Amish and the secular community around them.

Job Choice

Interactions with the community have also been limited by Amish occupational decisions. Traditionally, Amish have been farmers or, if no farm land is available, other “rural” occupations like carpentry are acceptable.¹³⁰ The Amish have always placed a high emphasis on farm life, even as essential to living a Christian life, since Adam, the first man, was called by God to work the land.¹³¹ Another reason farm life is esteemed is because it provides an environment conducive to raising a family, where values like hard-work and cooperation are necessary. Also, the large quantity of labor that farm life entails requires children to work long hours on the farm, providing Amish youth with socialization into both the life of farming and the life of the Amish, while at the same

¹³⁰ Hostetler, Amish Society, 114.

¹³¹ Hostetler, Amish Society, 114.

time limiting an Amish youth's time away from home where one could possibly be exposed to alien, non-Amish values.¹³²

However, as Amish settlements continue to grow, and farm land becomes more and more scarce, a shift into non-traditional work places has begun. In many settlements, where farm land is limited, and/or expensive, the Amish are becoming more accepting of factory work, and other forms of labor that are not traditionally done by Amish. For instance, in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, home to one of the largest Amish settlements, the exploding population and growth of the city of Lancaster in the 1960s greatly reduced the amount of available farm land. With the growth of the city has come new job opportunities that Amish, convinced of the value of farm life, were at first reluctant to accept. But as economic forces necessitated a shift in Amish occupational choices, Amish went to work in near-by factories. Soon, in the early 1970s, "over one hundred Amishmen were...[working at] several mobile-home plants, accounting for 5% of the total work force."¹³³ Similar shifts towards factory work have occurred in the Elkhart-LaGrange, Indiana Amish settlement. In 1988, there were more Amish "heads of households" making their living in factories than from farming. In fact, only 37% of the Amish household heads in the Elkhart settlement were farmers in 1988.¹³⁴

The fear that many Amish have of accepting factory work is the resulting exposure to non-Amish values that may cause members to falter in their faith and leave the church. There is also the fear that the father leaving the home to work each day will erode family values and diminish the authority the father holds over the family. Amish

¹³² Kraybill, The Riddle of Amish Culture, 190.

¹³³ Kraybill, The Riddle of Amish Culture, 193.

¹³⁴ Meyers, 381.

are also wary of unions, benefits packages, and retirement funds that could undermine the support system central to Amish survival.¹³⁵

The other side of the argument is simple. As one man in the Elkhart-LaGrange settlement stated, “If they all had to farm with horses, there would be far fewer Amish men today.”¹³⁶ Farming is a difficult occupation, and often not a profitable one. This, coupled with the dwindling availability of land resources, the transition to non-rural work seems logical, if not inevitable. And, importantly, the fear that Amish would leave the church after being exposed to non-Amish culture through work in the factories appears unfounded. In Tom Meyer’s study of retention rates among Elkhart-LaGrange Amish, he found that an individual’s decision to remain Amish is not correlated with factory work, or with a father’s working in a factory.¹³⁷

There are several factories in the Kalona area where Amish men could work if necessary. However, despite the lack of evidence that factory work has a negative impact on Amish values, the Kalona Amish still urge their members to remain in rural occupations. Perhaps because of the still rural nature of the Kalona area, it has been possible for most Amish to continue to farm or work construction.¹³⁸ This is slowly beginning to change as local communities continue to experience population growth and the amount of farm land decreases. But even with a growing shortage of farm land, the Kalona Amish are urged to migrate to different settlements before succumbing to a life of factory work. In part due to the shrinking availability of farm land in the Kalona area a

¹³⁵ Kraybill, The Riddle of Amish Culture, 193.

¹³⁶ Qtd in Meyers, 381.

¹³⁷ Meyers, 381.

¹³⁸ Amish Interview #2, personal interview by author, hand-written, Kalona, IA, 23 December 2003.

new Amish settlement has recently been started in Brighton, Iowa, with three or four families relocating there in the past year.¹³⁹

Another way the Kalona Amish have dealt with the dwindling amount of farm land is to create their own businesses. There are Amish bookstores, Amish grocery stores which cater both to Amish and to English customers, Amish farmer's markets where they sell organically grown foods, and Amish community stores which sell goods normally found at a town pharmacy or Wal-Mart. Recently, a family of Amish opened Central Discount Grocery, which sells "bent and dent" goods at very low prices. All of the employees are Amish, and the store does not have electricity or lighting (making it difficult to shop on cloudy days). Central Discount Grocery, though its work force is primarily Amish, caters mainly to non-Amish consumers.

Not only does the creation of these businesses help the Kalona Amish to avoid the supposed negative influence of factory or urban labor, it also helps to reinforce the separation between Amish and the community around them. One interviewee mentioned how Amish, with the creation of their own businesses, have stopped using other local businesses, specifically Reif's Family Center, a locally run all-purpose store in Kalona in business since 1879.¹⁴⁰ "They don't need to go into town to buy things – they have their stores...like Reif's in Kalona used to cater a lot to the Amish – I think they at one time had over 80% of the Amish trade, but now, not very much, they just get tourist trade."¹⁴¹ Since the Amish rely less on non-Amish businesses for their goods, this too has helped to solidify the barriers between Amish and English.

¹³⁹ Amish Interview #2, personal interview by author, hand-written, Kalona, IA, 23 Dec. 2003.

¹⁴⁰ *Kalona: The First Century*, 182.

¹⁴¹ Ruth Ann and Clara Shetler, personal interview by author, tape-recorded, Kalona, IA, 7 July 2003.

Less reason to leave: The Progressiveness of the Kalona Amish

Another reason the Kalona Amish have had success in maintaining the farming tradition among its members is the allowance of the tractor for farm work. The use of the tractor, as long as it is without rubber tires, was never debated among the Iowa Amish. A bishop suggested that acceptance of the tractor was “never an issue” for the Kalona Amish.¹⁴² In the 1920s, when the tractor first came to Iowa, an influential member of the Amish church purchased one. Gradually, as other members also acquired tractors, the church accepted them as well.¹⁴³

It seems logical that the Kalona Amish, who still emphasize the importance of farming and in general do not look favorably on work outside of the farming and construction industries, do allow the use of the tractor. If they did not permit the tractor, it can be hypothesized that either the retention rate would be much lower than it is or that there would be less animosity toward factory life.

In any case, the tractor is just one issue on which the Kalona settlement is seen as more progressive than other settlements. Along with allowing tractors, instruments, four-part harmony singing, haircuts, indoor plumbing and shirt pockets are allowed, unlike in most other Amish communities. A professor doing research on Amish recalls his surprise at the variances between Amish groups, and particularly in awe of the allowances made by the *ordnung* of the Kalona Amish:

“I was surprised in a number of ways, some trivial, some more substantial....They used tractors in the field for heavy work...Another surprise for me was that the young people sang parts in their singing; also the boy’s hair looked like barber shop hair cuts...They also part their hair in the middle. In addition, the men had pockets in their shirts...Another surprise: on Saturday afternoon when I lay down for a nap after lunch I was awakened by the sound of

¹⁴² Amish interview #2, personal interview by author, hand-written, Kalona, IA, 23 Dec. 2003.

¹⁴³ Amish interview #2, personal interview by author, hand-written, Kalona, IA, 23 Dec. 2003.

a harmonica. For some reason I assumed that there would not be musical instruments in this community, and yet harmonicas are apparently perfectly acceptable.”¹⁴⁴

Settlements in Lancaster, PA, Holmes County, OH, Elkhart, IN, and elsewhere do not allow many of the practices accepted by the Kalona Amish. The Kalona settlement with its progressive *ordnung* is perhaps able to keep members in the Amish church that would be unsatisfied with in a more conservative Amish group that did not permit as many conveniences.

The Kalona Amish, a group that maintains a very low defection rate and has a progressive *ordnung*, conflicts with Meyers’ correlation study of *ordnung* and retention. Meyers found that among Indiana Amish settlements, “There appears to be a direct relationship, or at least an indirect one, between defection and *ordnung*. The...most progressive clearly have a greater percentage of defectors than do other congregational clusters in the settlement.”¹⁴⁵ The Kalona settlement, however, which is likely more progressive than the congregations studied by Meyers in northern Indiana, has maintained a similar, if not higher, retention rate than the Amish studied by Meyers. In any case, it can be argued that the liberal allowances of the Kalona Amish, specifically the permission to use tractors, account in part for both the high retention rate and the high numbers of Amish still engaged in the farming occupation.

¹⁴⁴ Richard A. Stevick, Messiah College, to Rev. David L. Yoder, Kalona, IA, 21 July 1995, transcript in the hand of Richard A. Stevick, Collection of David L. Yoder, Kalona, IA.

¹⁴⁵ Meyers, 389-490.

Conclusion: “They’ve Got a Hold on Their People.”¹⁴⁶

The post World War II era was a unique period for the Kalona Amish. Interactions between Amish and Mennonite groups were numerous due to public school attendance, the close relation of many Amish to members of Mennonite and Conservative Mennonite churches, and in some instances, due to relationships formed while working in Civilian Public Service during the war. These interactions triggered questions among the Amish, especially regarding the definition of worldliness. It was also during the post World War II era that both Mennonites and Amish were bombarded with challenges of new technologies and new religious ideas on missions and evangelism. As the Amish struggled to accommodate more liberal-minded members, many grew frustrated, either from lack of acceptance of certain technologies, or from lack of opposition to these same conveniences.

Amish decisions on technology, mission work and evangelism made the Amish definition of worldly quite different from the Mennonite definition. Whereas Mennonites believe that separateness from the world can exist even with the use of technology and lack of plain dress, the Amish have found such restrictions to be essential. With these decisions in favor of a more conservative interpretation of worldliness, the gap between Amish and Mennonites began to grow, and the defection rate began to drop. In the post-war period through the 1960s, the Amish and Mennonite worlds were closely linked, and the boundaries between the groups were permeable. In part because of these permeable boundaries, the number of Amish who chose to defect to other Anabaptist denominations was high, as high as 25% during the 1950s.¹⁴⁷ After this period, when conflicts on

¹⁴⁶ Ruth Ann and Clara Shetler, personal interview by author, tape-recorded, Kalona, IA, 24 June 2003.

¹⁴⁷ Amish interview #2, interview by author, hand-written, Kalona, IA, 23 Dec. 2003.

mission work and Bible Studies were resolved and Amish began to establish their own schools and businesses, defection rates dropped to less than 5%.¹⁴⁸

The decreasing defection rate of the Amish is in many ways surprising. The world around them becomes increasingly appealing with a growing number of modern technologies and conveniences, yet the number of Amish giving in to that appeal has diminished to a handful of families each year. Common sense would suggest the opposite effect of modern technology – that as the amount of technology increases and the enticements of the outside world appear continually greater, the number of Amish leaving would increase. This paradox can be attributed in part to the growing gap between Amish and outside world. Even groups that are closely related to the Amish, like the Beachy Amish and Mennonites, have limited interaction with Amish. As the dichotomy widens, and interactions between Amish and non-Amish decrease further, Amish are able to better socialize their children away from outside influence, and are able to de-glamorize the technologies and lifestyles of the world.

As Amish contact with modern technology and outsiders lessens, the Amish begin to view the non-Amish world not as something they are missing out on, but on what they are saving themselves from. One of the Amish interviewed, when asked why she was still a member of the Amish church, simply stated, “look at what happens when you don’t” and nodded in my direction.¹⁴⁹ She saw me as a product of drifting – that to allow one thing is to allow everything. My ancestors left the Amish for rather minor reasons – fancy horses and rubber tractor tires. Now their descendents drive cars, dress worldly, attend college and carry cell phones. The divide between Amish and other

¹⁴⁸ The one exception is the period in the late 1970s when the New Order Amish withdrew taking 15 families. Amish interview #2, interview by author, hand-written, Kalona, IA, 23 Dec. 2003.

¹⁴⁹ Amish interview #1, personal interview by author, hand-written, Kalona, IA, 22 Dec 2003.

groups continues to grow, and as it does the Amish are better able to identify the problems and risks associated with the allowing of modern technology.

Socialization is important for the Amish community to maintain their strict standards of life. If not seen as necessary, either more would leave the Amish, or the Amish would advocate so strongly a separation from society. Amish are taught from childhood the practices of the Amish and are socialized to accept these practices as religiously necessary. The decreasing defection rate can be attributed in large part, then, to the increasing effectiveness of Amish socialization. With their own schools and businesses, coupled with increasing regulations limiting interactions with the outside world, the Amish have little to infringe on the socialization of their youth. And in the Kalona settlement, which does not follow the Amish tradition of “sowing wild oats” for young people, these interactions between Amish and non-Amish are even less frequent than in other Amish groups.

Through this socialization in the Amish subculture, Amish enter into a system of immense support and stability. Another of the tensions, therefore, in leaving the Amish is removing oneself from this stable, tightly knit support system. At the same time, this support system can feel binding and suffocating for those that want to leave and feel the strain to conform. One interviewee who left stated, “They keep a really tight grip on their people. But they’re a really good people...that’s what makes it hard.” Part of the care the Amish have for their members is a desire for individuals to remain true to their baptismal vows, not falter in their faith, and to remain in the Amish church. To most Amish, this support system is comforting, and they remain a part of it. For those that chose to leave the Amish, however, this same support system can become a hold, keeping

them in a lifestyle they no longer want to live out. It becomes, as my great aunt Clara stated, “A hold on their people.”

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

Questions asked to persons who defected from the Amish:

1. When and why did you leave the Amish? How old were you/your parents? Had you been baptized into the Amish church? Were you married? Children?
2. Were there many others leaving at the same time?
3. If so, why? Were their reasons similar?
4. Did you parents frown on your decision? Did others in the community?
5. What role did technology play in your decision to leave?
6. Do you recall any times when it seemed many were choosing to leave the Amish?
 - a. If so, When?
7. Do you know many families or individuals that have left recently?
8. Did you attend the revival meetings of Howard Hammer?
9. Do you have many interactions with Amish today? Other than those you are related to?
10. Did you attend school with many Amish?

Total number of Amish defectors interviewed: 17 (7 couples, 3 individuals)

Questions asked to Amish:

1. Why have you chosen to remain Amish?
2. Do many chose to leave? Have there been times when many have? Why?
3. Is it generally an accepted decision?
4. Do you have much interaction with non-Amish? Outside of family?
5. In what ways do the Amish try and keep their people in the church?
6. In what ways are the Kalona Amish unique from other groups?
7. What is the traditional Amish view of Bible Studies? Mission work? Evangelism?
8. Why did the Amish chose to establish their own schools?
9. In what ways have the Amish changed in the last century?
10. Do the Kalona Amish allow their members to work in the community?

Total Amish interviewed: 2