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The Growth of Amish Schools in the United States

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The school built circa 1900 is nestled in a wedge of land between two dirt roads. The white clapboard building, which serves about 25 Amish children in grades 1-8, has a combination wood/coal stove, unpainted wood floors, and four sets of large single pane windows on each side of the school. The unheated porch serves as a site to place personal belongings such as boots, coats, and lunch pails. Four rows of desks face the front of the classroom and the teacher's desk. The one-room school has no electricity. Most of the public would assume that the above is a historical portrayal of a one-room school of the early 1900s. Instead, it is a description of an Amish school in Holmes County, Ohio, June 2000. The school is similar in both structure and instruction to that of many public one-room schools in the United States in the early 1900s. In fact, this structure was originally built and utilized as a public one-room school.

In 1986, Hughes reported the demise of the public one-teacher school. While this prediction has still not come to fruition, there is little doubt that the number of public, rural one-teacher schools is in decline. Unbeknownst to many is the rapid growth in the number of Amish one- or two-room schools scattered across rural America. As of the 1999-2000 school year, there were 1,139 Amish schools in 22 states—a dramatic increase given that there were only three Amish schools in 1930.

Gathering and reporting information on Amish schools is important for many reasons, two of which have major significance for rural public schools and communities. Most importantly, the growth of these schools will have an effect on the financing of rural public school districts in areas that include Amish communities. This impact may be negative or positive depending on the method used to finance public schools in the respective area. If state funding is on a per-pupil basis, school districts that include Amish communities may receive less state funding. On the other hand, the presence of an Amish community and its schools may increase the local economy through increased farm-related trade and tourism, thereby increasing taxable property and income, which may increase public school funding. A second reason such research is important is that there is little information on the number of Amish schools in operation in the national statistical literature. For example, at the federal level the Center for Education Statistics (Snyder, 1987; Snyder & Huffman, 1995) collects information on the number of public one-teacher schools, but no data on Amish or Old Order Mennonite one-teacher schools. Furthermore, previous researchers such as Hostetler and Huntington (1992), Fisher and Stahl (1986), Kraybill (1993), and Nolt (1992) have documented various aspects of Amish education but do not document the number of Amish schools. The project described here gathers such data as well as discusses the impact of these schools on rural America.

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Method

Information for this project has been collected over a span of 15 years through a systematic analysis of state surveys, Amish publications, and related literature. This information was then validated through on-site visits and structured interviews with Amish school leaders. Rigor was incorporated into the project through triangulation of data using multiple sources and informants. National surveys to each state department of education were conducted in 1989 and 1997 to document the number of public and private one-room schools in each state. The surveys had a response rate of over 90% after follow-up phone calls were completed. A systematic review of 140 issues of the Amish publication, *The Blackboard Bulletin* (staff) from 1986 through 2000 provided data to augment state surveys conducted in 1989 and 1997. Additional sources included the work of Hershberger (1985), Hostetler (1993), Lapp (1986), Luthy (1986), and Miller (1995). The researcher also visited Amish communities in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Iowa to further document data.

Results and Discussion

A tabulation of the number of Amish schools by state at 10-year intervals is found in Table 1. As of the 1999-2000 school year, the Amish operated 1,139 schools in 22 states. The first Amish school appeared in Delaware in 1925 (Lapp, 1991, p. 128) after discussions in the Amish community about how best to address the needs of Amish children. The states with the largest number of schools are Pennsylvania with 326 schools, Ohio with 237 schools, and Indiana with 133 schools; all states that are commonly

Table 1
Amish Schools in the United States

State	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
Arkansas			1					
Delaware	2	2	2	2	5	7	10	10
Illinois					4	6	12	25
Indiana			1	5	46	57	75	133
Iowa			2	2	7	20	25	42
Kansas								2
Kentucky					1	4	14	34
Maryland					3	5	6	6
Michigan						6	32	67
Minnesota						7	12	22
Mississippi	1	1						1
Missouri			3	7	15	24	34	55
Montana						1	1	4
Nebraska						1		
New York			1	1	1	11	28	49
N. Carolina							1	1
Ohio			4	36	69	116	153	237
Oklahoma							1	2
Pennsylvania		2	5	32	87	145	248	326
Tennessee			3	2	4	6	10	17
Virginia								4
Washington								1
West Virginia								2
Wisconsin				2	6	18	45	99
Total	3	5	22	89	248	434	707	1,139

Note. 1980 Total and NY includes 5 schools with no known date of origin. 1990 Total and KY, MI, MN, MO, MT, NY, PA, TN, and WI includes 62 schools with no known date of origin.

associated with the Amish. Lapp (1991) reports that the first Amish schools in Pennsylvania, Oak Grove School and Esh School, originated in 1938 and were located in Lancaster County. Amish schools are now found in 31 counties in Pennsylvania with most being one-room schools. The first Amish schools in Ohio, Maple Grove School and Fountain Nook School, began operation in the fall of 1944 (Hershberger, 1985). Both schools are still in existence and are located in Wayne County. Indiana's first Amish school was started in 1948; most of the Amish schools in Indiana have two teachers. Some of the newer schools in the Elkhart/LaGrange area of Indiana have an apartment for the teachers on the second floor of the school.

Table 1 also reveals Amish schools sprouting in states not often associated with the Amish including West Virginia, Virginia, Mississippi, and North Carolina. The total number of Amish schools has increased in each 10-year time period beginning in 1930; and, in many 10-year intervals, the number of Amish schools doubles. For example, from 1960 to 1970, the number of Amish schools more than doubled from 89 schools to 248 schools. The decade with the largest increase in the number of schools was from 1990 to 2000 with a net increase of 432 schools. The average growth rate for Amish schools is about 16 new schools each year from 1930 to 2000. Hershberger (1985), Lapp (1991), Luthy (1986), Miller (1995), and Kraybill (1993) note that the growth of Amish schools has not been without controversy with local school boards and state departments of education. Some Amish groups have faced legal challenges to their educational system. This has even led to incarceration of some Amish parents for noncompliance with compulsory attendance laws. The Supreme Court decision of Yoder v. Wisconsin (1972) affirmed the right of the Amish community to provide for the education of its youth and has resulted in less conflict in recent years.

Yoder v. Wisconsin (1972) was one of the key factors in the growth of Amish schools in the United States. Two other key factors were the closing of rural one- and two-

room public schools and the rise in the compulsory school attendance age. Hostetler (1993) notes that the Amish supported rural public schools until local school districts required compulsory school attendance beyond the eighth grade and instituted busing students to a consolidated school outside the community. Other factors in the growth of Amish schools include population growth and migration trends. One finds more schools in traditional Amish communities because of population growth coupled with the Amish desire to keep schools within walking distance of the pupils. The migration of the Amish to new areas leads to new schools in those rural areas.

The presence of an Amish community and its schools can have both a positive and negative effect on the local economy and tax structure. One major impact of the growing number of Amish schools is that public school districts in communities that contain Amish citizens will have fewer students. This can have a negative effect on public school funding; fewer pupils may mean less support from the state. In terms of local economics, Amish communities may increase the local farm-related trade and tourism of a community. This would have a positive impact on local tax structures, which may increase school funding.

The presence of an Amish community and schools does not only affect the local economy, it can affect the cultural diversity of a community. The Amish add to the cultural diversity of rural areas and tend to preserve some of the history of rural public schools. The Amish add to the cultural diversity of rural areas because of their unique style of dress, methods of transportation, their use of the Pennsylvania German dialect to communicate within their community, and their use of the German language in religious readings and services.

Another important impact of Amish schools is that they serve to preserve a portion of rural public school history. This is true in three distinct ways. First, the Amish will sometimes buy public one-room schools to use as schools, thus preserving the buildings. Second, the Amish will often purchase old desks, furniture, and textbooks used in rural public schools. This saves many of these items from the local solid waste facility. The third way that the Amish preserve the rural legacy is that the Amish schools also preserve a method of teaching that was an integral part of rural education in the United States in the late 1800s and early 1900s. It seems, then, that for the foreseeable future, one and two-room schools will still dot the landscape of rural America despite the consolidation movement in many rural public school districts. The Amish may, in fact, be preserving a part of rural America and a piece of America's rural educational history. As noted by Beeson and Strange (2000), without growth and development, many rural communities will simply vanish or grow so that they no longer remain rural in character. The Amish tend to preserve farmland, rural occupations, and small schools. This may enable some communities to have growth and development and still remain rural in character.

As of 2000, there were 1,139 Amish one and two-room schools scattered across numerous rural communities in 22 states. If the current growth rate continues, there may be well over 1,500 Amish schools by the year 2010. Knowledge of their growth and impact is essential to a complete understanding of education in rural America.

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