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Review of: *Hoofbeats in the Bluegrass: Thirty Years of Mennonite History in Western Kentucky, 1987-2017*—Elvin S. Eberly

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Review of: **Eberly, Elvin S. 2018. *Hoofbeats in the Bluegrass: Thirty Years of Mennonite History in Western Kentucky, 1987-2017*. Trenton, KY: Self-published. Pp. 262.**

By Donald Martin
Markham-Waterloo Mennonite Conference

When Elvin Eberly sat down to write *Hoofbeats in the Bluegrass* (that is to say, horse-and-buggy people in Kentucky), he, as an Old Order Mennonite, wrote about his Old Order Mennonite community. The theme of the book is community. Throughout the book, references are made to building projects, accidents that happened, and the funerals and weddings that occurred within the community. In fact if this factual matter were removed, the writing would be reduced to a pamphlet of little stories. It is those humorous stories and community events that will intrigue readers outside of the Old Order community. *Hoofbeats in the Bluegrass* will reveal to the reader the inside of an Old Order community as it grows from its beginning.

The writing style is like reading a diary. Most paragraphs are a topic of their own as the following paragraph may be an unrelated event. Elvin's subject matter came from diaries or stories that people related to him. His choice to maintain some continuity was chronological order. The first part of the book titled "Experiences of the First Families" is exactly what the title says. The next section titled "Events in Chronicle Order" is a record of what the community experienced each year from 1987 to 2017. In this section the reader will find the events of each year such as deaths, marriages, building projects, accidents, or whatever. Due to this style of writing there is some repetition throughout the book.

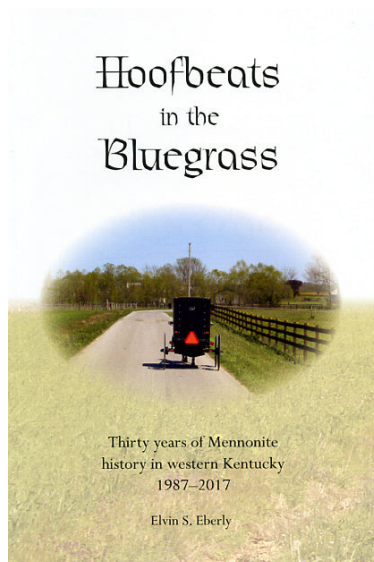
We will give a few sketches of those exciting happenings. How would you react if when going to bed with limited lighting, you noticed a large snake (4 feet long) behind the dresser? The husband who noticed it responded with a mere grunt and went to find a tool to dispatch the unwanted guest. After the mission was completed, he joined

his wife in bed and told her his short story and went to sleep. The feminine reaction to such an event was several nightmares of snakes crawling on her legs. Sometimes their extremely busy schedules brought about events that called for immediate adjustments. On one occasion a family moved hastily into a shop for a short term. When ready to go to bed it became evident the opening to go outside had no door. After some quick thinking, a piece of plywood was nailed to the doorway and there was peaceful rest.

For a seasoned historian, *Hoofbeats in the Bluegrass* is a very valuable jewel. Elvin lists 185 families by the year they moved into the community, or when couples were married from 1987 to 2017. The deaths for the same time frame are also recorded as a separate list along with the cause of the death and in which cemetery the body is buried. Another list includes the date of every ordination plus the ordained man's name and age, which office, and for which congregation. Also recorded are the officiating bishops and the class nominated with their age. Furthermore, two maps are included. The first map shows where all the Mennonites were located in 1992. A map of 2017 shows where over three quarters of the Groffdale Conference families lived and their meetinghouses and schools. Other

Mennonite groups are not shown.

A reader with no knowledge of the settlement may become confused as Elvin mixes the Reidenbach Mennonites and the Gorrie or the Canadian Orthodox Mennonites into the text along with the Groffdale Mennonites. These three groups will mingle in their weekly labors but not on Sundays. All three groups drive horse and buggy but differ in whether they have a phone, electricity, tractors, etc. Elvin alludes to the fact that the Casey County Mennonites also shun modern conveniences more than do the Groffdale Conference. A reader familiar to the Old Order Mennonites' splinter groups will read *Hoofbeats in the Bluegrass* without an issue; whereas, a person unfamiliar with the differences may not grasp all that is assumed in the text. Elvin remained true to his heritage when he chose the pictures for the



book. Old Order tradition shuns human portraits. Throughout the book no person can be easily identified. The way he promotes and supports the church is also in agreement with his Old Order tradition.

After reading *Hoofbeats in the Bluegrass* the reader will have gained some understanding of the changeable Kentucky weather. The reader will also be exposed to a level of hospitality not readily found elsewhere. There is a story of a woman faced with an unexpected busload of brethren and sisters in the faith on the morning of a community wedding. Her hospitality was an open door with a menu of eggs and cornflakes. The normal kitchen activities had to be humbly set aside. This hospitality was also at times in reverse order when quests arrived expectantly with a redi-mix truck in the yard. They donned some boots and pitched in to help pour concrete that had arrived. The reader will be exposed to the selflessness of the Old Order community. After a barn fire, the community banded together and in a few weeks had the barn rebuilt. For this to happen, the whole community willingly delays their own projects to go help the one with the unexpected lost. This is what makes the Old Order community, according to Elvin's expectations.

Donald Martin resides near Clifford, Ontario, and is a deacon in the Markham-Waterloo Old Order Mennonite Conference.

*For order information, send a SASE to:
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42286 or call 270-265-0028.*