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Review of: *Our Amish Heritage*—Publishing Committee of the Geauga Amish Historical Library

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Review of: **Publishing Committee of the Geauga Amish Historical Library. 2021. *Our Amish Heritage*. Middlefield, OH: Geauga Amish Historical Library. Pp. 67. \$5.00.**

By Dan Raber
Old Order Amish

The booklet, *Our Amish Heritage*, succeeds admirably in its stated goal of being a general history suitable for parochial schools or home use. The overall flow of the narrative reads well, not going into great detail anywhere but pointing out highlights in a nearly 500 year attempt at the Anabaptist, then Amish, people literally living Christ's commandments.

While the book is a general history, it has some minor inaccuracies throughout that will not be noticed by the casual reader or affect the overall meaning of the narrative. For example, Chapter 1 (p. 2) references the Cathars. Using the Cathars as a group with similar virtues to the Anabaptists is an error. The Cathars had many admirable traits but so do the Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and others. None of them are or were an expression of "orthodox" Christianity, even if we share some similar values. In Chapter 3, I'm disappointed to see no reference to the Froschauer Bible, which was far more important and influential on early Anabaptism than the *Ausbund*. In Chapter 8, the Hochstetler family was attacked by a raiding party retaliating for broken treaties and invasion of their lands, not by a tribe of Indians. There is a difference between the two.

Where the book disappoints me the most is in recent history. In Chapter 13, the section on education skirts the current trend of more and more Amish working in offices and getting their GED after graduating eighth grade; these people circumvent and negate the entire reasoning behind *Wisconsin v. Yoder* (1972), a case the authors write about in detail. The section on government programs omits all mention that the various church insurances (such as "church fund") violate a professed religious opposition to any form of insur-

ance, public or private, as stated on Form 4029, Social Security Exemption.

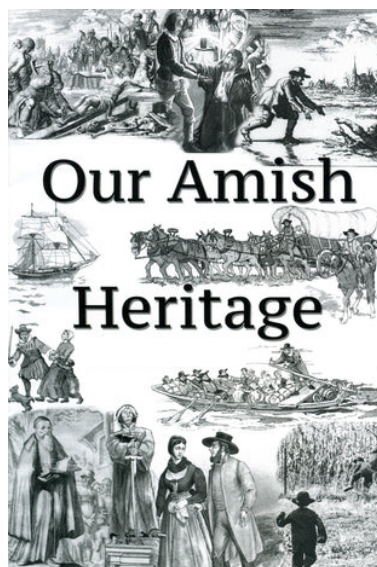
The short concluding chapter was the biggest disappointment. As a member of a conservative Old Order district in Holmes County, Ohio, I see so many flavors of "Amish" even within the Old Order, that it is at times bewildering. I try to see and appreciate the reasoning behind the paths they've chosen. As an historian, I look at other tipping points in our collective history and see another one upon us.

Accordingly, I would have wished for a more than casual mention of some of the schisms that rocked the Amish churches in the past century.

Readers of this booklet could easily assume that all the most traumatic fault lines that had fragmented the church were over by the late 1800s, and the 20th century brought peace and brotherly love among all involved. Various groups spread across North America, including the Swartzentruber Amish, Andy Weaver churches, New Order, New Order Christian Fellowship, and Beachy Amish-Mennonites, who all have a sizable number of adherents yet have no mention. That may be an issue if the booklet is for school use, since these various groups are sometimes represented together in a single school, especially in Holmes County, OH.

As written, the book does somewhat suggest "we are the one true church" up until the last chapter, which basically shrugs and says, "Hey, your version of Amish may or may not have certain restrictions. That's cool. Just keep in mind you're fine as long as you don't rock the boat. As for that technology stuff? Ask your parents or ministers before you get too much. Whatever you decide is great. Just smile, shake hands, and let's all agree to show tolerance."

I appreciate the writers' work to celebrate our heritage. The authors did not set out to rewrite Amish history, and yet, in relying strongly on existing secondary sources, they replicate existing problems with the standard Amish history narrative. Namely, why do Amish and non-Amish readers alike prefer sterile versions of our recent history that do not ask harder questions: of not



shaking our heads at mistakes of the past, of the many schisms in the past 100 years, of ignoring the recent blatant commercialization of “Amish,” of the acceptance of the multimillion dollar business leaders as our sources for advice and counsel, of our Holmes County image of a helmeted Amish bishop chatting with his wife on his smartphone with a Bluetooth headset while biking to work on his ebike? Folks, there’s something wrong with this picture. I would have liked to see even a book intended to be a “general outline of our history and beliefs” (Foreword) acknowledge the changes and unrest we have faced, now and through the past century. The problem is that a realistic, well-rounded history of the Amish from the 1900s on does not exist except possibly for Leroy Beachy’s account in *Unser Leit*.

In sum, as a condensed primer on Amish history and thought, this book succeeds but it also does not address recent and contemporary controversial issues, a problem common in other Amish history books. I hope the authors, and other authors of Amish history, will consider acknowledging these changes and conflicts in future editions.

Dan Raber is a member of the Old Order Amish in Holmes County, OH.

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