

# Journal of Amish and Plain Anabaptist Studies

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Volume 11

Issue 1 *The Plain Anabaptist People at Mid-Century (1930-1969)*

Article 3

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2023

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### Recommended Citation

Bennett, Elizabeth. 2023. "Subjectivity in the Lancaster Amish Community Study of 1940-42: 'Economic Conquest' in Loomis's Diary and Rosinow's Photographs." *Journal of Amish and Plain Anabaptist Studies* 11(1):1-16.

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# Subjectivity in the Lancaster Amish Community Study of 1940-42: 'Economic Conquest' in Loomis's Diary and Rosinow's Photographs

ELIZABETH BENNETT

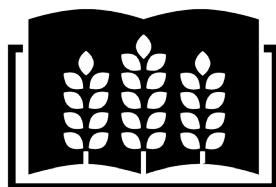
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**Abstract:** The American Farm Community Study (1940), funded by the USDA's Bureau of Agricultural Economics, was a social investigation that sought to determine why some rural communities thrive while others fail. To conduct the Study, the Bureau sent social scientists to six rural communities across the country to investigate and document the most and least "stable" American communities. Geographer Walter Kollmorgen, sociologist Charles Loomis, and photographer Irving Rusinow documented the Old Order Amish of Lancaster County, PA, as the "most stable" community in the Study. In Lancaster, the men found a people thriving in the midst of english neighbors still economically reeling from depression and war. In existing research, Kollmorgen's neutral/distant data collection effort receives the most attention. This study focuses on the subjectivity of Charles Loomis' and Irving Rustow's data collection. Loomis collected data in a personal-style diary while working as a farmhand on a former english farm taken over by an Amishman. Rusinow photographed landscapes that visually portrayed how Amish took over dilapidated english farmsteads, suggesting Amish community stability went hand-in-hand with economic conquest. Together, in word and image, Loomis and Rusinow described the Amish via narratives of conquest, empire, nascent Nationalism, and (re)valuations of the (Anglo) American dream. [Abstract by author.]

**Keywords:** Lancaster County, PA; New Deal photography; Bureau of Agricultural Economics; Works Progress Administration; Irving Rusinow; Charles Loomis



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**Recommended citation:** Bennett, Elizabeth. 2023. "Subjectivity in the Lancaster Amish Community Study of 1940-42: 'Economic Conquest' in Loomis's Diary and Rosinow's Photographs." *Journal of Amish and Plain Anabaptist Studies* 11(1):1-16.

**Publication type:** Original research article (peer reviewed), open access (may be freely distributed). JAPAS is published by the Amish & Plain Anabaptist Studies Association (<http://amishstudies.org>) and the University of Akron IdeaExchange@UA.

## INTRODUCTION

The American Farm Community Study was a sociological investigation, funded by the Bureau of Agricultural Economics (BAE), that sought to determine why some rural communities thrive while others fail. A Thorstein Veblen-trained sociologist, Dr. Carl C. Taylor, headed the Bureau and led the study. In 1940, he sent social scientists to six rural communities across the country where they played the role of participant-observer for three to four months, after which they wrote a technical report of their findings. Taylor had little interest in “obtaining a geographic sampling of contemporary rural communities in the United States,” that is, in comparing communities by region; rather, he and his team chose communities that represented “points on a continuum from high community stability to great instability.”<sup>1</sup> In the end, the sociologists concluded that a dust bowl community in Sublette, Kansas, was the epitome of instability, followed closely by Landaff, New Hampshire. Harmony, Georgia fared a bit better on the continuum; Irwin, Iowa occupied a middle position, followed by El Cerrito, New Mexico, and finally the most stable rural community, the Old Order Amish of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania.

“Stability” and “community” were the key words in this project and the scientists were interested to know how compatible the two terms were in a rural landscape reeling from depression, drought, and displacement. At stake for the Study was the larger project of the BAE: to quantify the impact of the Depression and identify the economic variables driving a rural America that had been demographically altered by a decade of migration across the landscape.

Taylor wanted to know what success or failure looked like in rural communities. Only then, he believed, could a broader system of land-use planning be best implemented to alleviate crowded cities and sustainably repopulate rural areas. Beginning in early spring 1940, Taylor and his team dispatched six social scientists to communities across the country.<sup>2</sup> The men – Olen

Leonard (New Mexico), Kenneth MacLeish (New Hampshire), Walter Kollmorgen (Pennsylvania), Edward Moe (Iowa), Earl Bell (Kansas), and Waller Wynne, Jr. (Georgia) – lived in their communities for three to four months with a basic instruction manual and a fair amount of latitude regarding the tactics of their research and the compilation of their findings.<sup>3</sup> In a letter to MacLeish before he left for New Hampshire, Taylor outlined the assignment, summarizing the particular aspects about which he wanted his sociologists to learn. In short, he wanted an investigation into the natural history of the region and the history of the community’s settlement on the land; the social, institutional, and cultural patterns both currently and historically; the value system of the people, the things by which they “measured the worthwhileness of their day;” the leadership structure within the community; the impact of New Deal agricultural programs; and an overall impression of the community’s stability. Most importantly, he wanted his researchers to identify the external and internal forces that were currently changing the communities.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to the freshly-minted Harvard anthropologist Kenneth MacLeish (son of Nobel Laureate, Archibald MacLeish), there was a true variety of academics to which Taylor entrusted his detailed task. Each of them brought a unique set of professional experience and personal comfort to the role of participant observer. Olen Leonard, for instance, was already an established sociologist working in the American Southwest with both Spanish-American and Native American communities. Waller Wynne, Jr., whom Taylor sent to Georgia, had just completed a sociological study of rural relief programs sponsored by the Works Progress Administration (WPA). Walter M. Kollmorgen was finishing a dissertation from

<sup>1</sup> Carl C. Taylor. “Foreword” in Kenneth MacLeish and Kimball Young. *Culture of a Contemporary Rural Community; Landaff, New Hampshire*. (Washington D.C.: U.S.D.A. Bureau of Agricultural Economics, 1942).

<sup>2</sup> His team included Charles Loomis, a sociologist and Tay-

lor’s former student; J.E. Hulett, a senior sociologist within the Bureau and formerly of the Works Progress Administration; Kimball Young, a noted sociologist; and John Provinse, an anthropologist who frequently worked for the Soil Conservation Service (SCS)

<sup>3</sup> Carl C. Taylor. “Foreword” in Olen Leonard and C.P. Loomis. *Culture of a Contemporary Rural Community; El Cerrito, New Mexico*. (Washington D.C.: Bureau of Agricultural Economics, November 1941).

<sup>4</sup> Letter from Carl C. Taylor to Kenneth MacLeish, May 9, 1940; MacLeish, Kenneth, General Correspondence, 1936-40, National Archives II, College Park, MD.

Columbia University's geography department on agricultural "islands" in the south, particularly the anomalous German and Swiss-German populations in Tennessee and Alabama. When he finished the manuscript, he took it to Washington where he impressed M.L. Wilson, Director of the Subsistence Homestead Division (which would eventually become the Farm Security Administration). Wilson, in turn, referred him to Taylor, who assigned him the Old Order Amish community in Lancaster County.<sup>5</sup>

The method of participant observation, a long-accepted approach in the field of anthropology, was also gaining notoriety in the 1930s in rural sociology as a means to obtain "inside" information. Taylor believed that only through interviews with residents and active participation in community life could the social scientists understand how social, economic, and agricultural forces inter-related in the communities. He also believed that there was some invaluable advantage gained when the researcher shed his native guise to take on the cultural skin of another. In Kollmorgen's report on Lancaster County, for instance, Taylor described the geographer (and Kollmorgen's sister, Johanna, who traveled as his typist) as personable yet highly professional researchers:

Walter Kollmorgen and his sister, both of whom speak High German, lived in the community for 4 months and probably came as near to developing the status of participant observers as is possible without being members of the Amish church. They have deep sympathy with the viewpoints of these religious people, but have not allowed their observations to be anything less than objective.<sup>6</sup>

Taylor's data could not be sullied by the messiness of subjectivity. But he would not be so lucky with all of his scientists. For example, Irwin, Iowa was Edward Moe's first government assignment and, possibly, his first time using the participant observer method. His letters to Taylor from the community reflect a growing and genuine at-

tachment to the people there. One month into the assignment he wrote that he had "been accepted into the community to a degree that I couldn't have expected," which meant that he was attending numerous social gatherings and singing in the Methodist choir.<sup>7</sup> A month later, he was "doing the preaching" at the church, and the community was entreating him to stay permanently.<sup>8</sup> The more experienced Waller Wynne Jr. had a completely different problem. He was truly shocked by the dire conditions of tenancy in Georgia and, furthermore, had a deeply felt repulsion to the landscape of central Georgia – he found the red soil of Putnam County to be "almost indescribably repellant."<sup>9</sup> In more than one case, Taylor employed his team leaders to re-work (and even rewrite) some of the reports that he felt had suffered from less than objective research.

Russell Smith, director of the Bureau's Division of Economic Information, hired the 26-year-old photographer Irving Rusinow in late 1940 to produce images that would both accompany the sociologists' technical reports and comprise six photographic essays for publication along with a seventh, synthesizing volumes of the study. Taylor does not seem to have requested a photographic component to his study and for the duration of the project, there was minimal collaboration between the project director and Smith. However, Smith was friends with Roy Stryker at the Farm Security Administration, who in 1940 was well-known for his orchestration of the most famous government photography project to date. Like Stryker, Smith believed that the government should freely wield the power of the camera, not limiting its record to "physical conservation work, erosion, or similar matters...[but] should deal with the economic, social, and cultural phases of each [geographic] area."<sup>10</sup> He did not view pho-

<sup>5</sup> Walter M. Kollmorgen. "Kollmorgen as a Bureaucrat." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*. Vol. 69, No. 1 (March 1979), 79.

<sup>6</sup> Carl C. Taylor. "Foreword" in Walter M. Kollmorgen. *Culture of a Contemporary Rural Community: The Old Order Amish of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania*. (Washington D.C.: Bureau of Agricultural Economics to Lancaster County, 1942).

<sup>7</sup> Letter from Edward Moe to Carl C. Taylor, April 29, 1940 and May 28, 1940; Project – American Farm Community Study – Iowa; General Correspondence, 1940-46, National Archives II, College Park, MD.

<sup>8</sup> Letter from Walter Wynn to Ed Hulett, February 5, 1940; Project – American Farm Community Study – SE Georgia; General Correspondence, 1940-46, National Archives II, College Park, MD.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Letter from Russell Smith to Roy Stryker, August 27, 1940. Smith, Russell; General Correspondence 1936-40. National Archives II, College Park, MD.

tography as merely an illustrative tool but one that could “deal” with larger issues that had historical “phases.” Photographs could tell a story. The nearly 1,000 photographs Rusinow took over the course of four months for the Community Study told many stories.

Although the American Farm Community Study was a thorough success, especially lauded in the academic community as a seminal contribution to the fields of rural sociology and agricultural economics, World War II cut the project short. The Bureau produced only one of the six planned photographic essays, and the Study’s team of sociologists never produced a seventh volume of the technical reports.<sup>11</sup> Since the 1940s, there have been five follow-ups to the Community Study performed by various University departments that attempt to fill the void left by the unpublished final report. The most recent of these endeavors, *Persistence and Change in Rural Communities: A 50-year Follow-up to Six Classic Studies*, repeats the study exactly in method and execution with six social scientists from rural sociology departments across the country. This most recent study also contains ten of Irving Rusinow’s original photographs: unattributed, mostly misdated, and in one case, inverted.<sup>12</sup>

### KOLLMORGEN, LOOMIS, AND RUSINOW IN LANCASTER COUNTY

For the remainder of our discussion, we turn our attention to those fundamental elements of “stable community” as they were identified and articulated by the Bureau of Agricultural Economics’ Community Study. Our case study

will be the Bureau’s investigation of the Old Order Amish of Lancaster County, PA, the “most stable” community according to the final reports. Irving Rusinow spent three days in the County in February 1941; it was the second stop on his tour of six communities that ended in Harmony, GA, in June of that year. He took 92 photographs of the Amish and Mennonite communities around the city of Lancaster in the southeastern part of the state. We will be particularly attentive to Rusinow’s images of farmsteads; I suggest that this set of pictures visualize “economies of valuation” – male economic spheres in which the value of things (land, farm structures, work animals, social standing within the community) is constituted by competition between Amish and *english* as both consumers and laborers. Elsewhere, I have also written about Rusinow’s photographs of Mennonite home interiors and the selling floor of Lancaster’s Southern Market.<sup>13</sup> These pictures document “economies of desire” or spaces of female production, sale, and acquisition.

In considering the documentation of these economies of valuation, we examine relationships between text and image. We have two primary types of objects for inquiry. First, the diary of an *english* farmhand on a Lancaster Amish farm in 1940, and second, Irving Rusinow’s photographs.<sup>14</sup> Both the diary and pictures strove for answers to the same question: how have the Amish thrived in a period of widespread economic depression? I will first engage the farmhand’s diary and then Rusinow’s photographs. At stake here is a reconfiguration of the historical status of the Amish (and other sub-cultural American communities) from ideological symbols to a viable template for economic growth in the first half of the twentieth century. Central to the discussion is the issue of authorship. The diary and the photographs are documents of Contact, of the confluence and collision of Others. One of the primary tasks of the following pages will be to articulate how these documents – these mate-

<sup>11</sup> Taylor did not feel the researchers had gathered enough information from each community to write a definitive seventh report. There was also a definite shift in budgetary priorities within the BAE beginning in 1941 when war felt imminent. For Taylor’s discussion of reasons for abandoning the seventh volume see Carl C. Taylor. “Techniques of Community Study and Analysis as Applied to Modern Civilized Societies” in R. Linton (ed.) *The Science of Man in the World Crisis*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1945, 416-41. For further discussion of the Bureau’s activities during World War II see Chapters 12 and 13 in Richard S. Kirkendall. *Social Scientists and Farm Politics in the Age of Roosevelt*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1966.

<sup>12</sup> A.E. Luloff and Richard S. Krannich, eds., *Persistence and Change in Rural Communities: A 50-Year Follow-up to Six Classic Studies*. Wallingford, UK: CABI Publishing, 2002.

<sup>13</sup> Elizabeth Bennett, PhD. “Economies of Valuation and Desire: How New Deal Photography Made the Amish Modern,” Unpublished dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2012

<sup>14</sup> The Amish refer to non-Amish people as *english* no matter their nationality, race, or country of origin. I use the uncapped term throughout my text to refer to non-Amish residents who live in and around Lancaster. This term is distinct from English, which describes someone from England.



rial marks of proximities between – acquire value themselves and assign value to their subjects.

## THE DIARY OF LOOMIS

### Diary Content

Moses had bought this place for \$4000. It was an old plantation with 150 acres, a stone house, and barn. He kept saying “It’s not good soil but I didn’t pay much. I’m putting lots back in.” As we approached he told how badly the place had grown up when he bought it a year ago. Now he had cleared [the brush] away from the house so we could see the place. On the way we saw a place that another Amishman had [recently] bought. It was [still] all grown up.<sup>15</sup>

This quotation comes from the diary of Dr. Charles P. Loomis during the eight days in May 1940 when he worked as a farmhand on a Lancaster Amish farm. Loomis, a sociologist best known for his work with Native American and Spanish-American communities in the American Southwest, was the Chief Field Supervisor for the Bureau’s Community Study as well as the author of the El Cerrito, New Mexico, technical report. Along with Walter Kollmorgen, author of the Lancaster report, Loomis’ interest in the Amish centered on the speed and methods by which the community was expanding beyond the boundaries of Lancaster County and Pennsylvania. Since the early 1930s, the Amish had been vigorously buying up run-down and abandoned farmsteads formerly owned by Scotch-Irish families. The Amish would rehabilitate the land and buildings in order either to expand their existing operations (with or without an Amish tenant) or set up a newly married son with part of the family business. By 1940, the Lancaster Amish community had established entire church congregations as far south as St. Mary’s County in southern Maryland.<sup>16</sup>

In the course of Kollmorgen’s three-month stay in the community beginning in March 1940 (with Johanna, his sister and typist), it became clear to the geographer that the agricultural suc-

cess of the Lancaster Amish was a result of different and additional forces than those that created German “agricultural islands” in the South, the subject of his doctoral dissertation at Columbia University (later published by the Bureau). Unlike the German- and Swiss-Americans in Tennessee and Alabama whose agricultural success depended upon their geographic insulation from surrounding Anglo- and African-American populations, Kollmorgen concluded that the Amish Pennsylvania Germans were thriving in the midst of national economic depression precisely because they were actively expanding their boundaries.<sup>17</sup> It was the method that drove this expansion that fascinated Kollmorgen, Loomis, and other social scientists at the Bureau. They wanted to know how the Amish were so consistently turning substandard (non-Amish) land and infrastructure into profitable farms.

Moses Lapp, one of Kollmorgen’s Anabaptist “informants” from the Lancaster Study, and an active purchaser of *english* farmsteads, offered to open up one of his properties to the men from the Bureau. Loomis was to work on one of Lapp’s properties in the care of an Amish tenant farmer, Christian King and his family.<sup>18</sup> At the time of the study, the Lancaster Old Order Amish community occupied about 150 square miles and included 18 church congregations, each of which boasted 100 members.<sup>19</sup> It is important to note that Lapp/King’s farm was 25 miles east of the city of Lancaster, well outside the center of the community where land prices were higher because the land was more productive. In the community’s center, there had also been higher capital investment in farm buildings and other inventory. For these reasons, Amish

<sup>15</sup> Charles P. Loomis. “A Farmhand’s Diary.” *Mennonite Quarterly Review*. Vol. 53, No. 3 (July 1979), 237.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 251.

<sup>17</sup> Walter M. Kollmorgen. *The German Swiss in Franklin County, Tennessee: A Study of the Significance of Cultural Considerations in Farming Enterprises*. (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Agricultural Economics, 1940).

<sup>18</sup> It is unclear why Loomis, and not Kollmorgen, took on the role of farmhand. However, Loomis arrived in the County just as Kollmorgen was leaving; it is possible there was a concern that the role of farmhand would compromise the otherwise “objective” perspective Kollmorgen had cultivated in the past few months, and the geographer had yet to write the final report from his findings. It’s also very possible that Kollmorgen’s physical limitations as a polio survivor in his youth left him incapable of performing the tasks required by a farmhand job.

<sup>19</sup> Loomis, “A Farmhand’s Diary,” 236 and 248.

families at the center of the community were wealthier than the vanguard of the Amish pushing out. Those closer to the city of Lancaster were also less exposed to *english* neighbors on the margins of their domain.<sup>20</sup> In other words, Loomis' experience was "on the edge of things," peripheral to the Amish community's own perspective but representative of community trends and most certainly symptomatic of its future.

### Diary Format

Arrived with Walter Kollmorgen and his sister at Moses Lapps' place. Moses was fixing a spring-toothed harrow for a son, ten years of age, to use. He was in the field but eventually came to the house. Mother Lapp gave us water to drink. We saw her cooler in her kitchen. It was a water cabinet and effective, so she said. I thought, "These Amish have modern conveniences."<sup>21</sup>

Throughout Loomis' diary, the author is generous in his intermingling of detailed observations and his thoughts about those observations. It becomes clear early on that what the text illuminates is both an Amish family's perspective on the non-Amish citizens with whom they regularly interact and Loomis' own internal process as he begins to understand the factors that shape Amish life. We need to consider the sociologist's decision to use the diary format as documentation mode in his field research. Kollmorgen, in his role as participant-observer, did not use the diary format to document his observations of the community; he also did not position himself among the Amish. Rather, Kollmorgen's notes and technical report express the voice of a distant third person, a strategy he mastered in his earlier work on agricultural islands in the South:

This island is a German settlement in Cullman County, Ala., located about 50 miles north of Birmingham. [...] A tourist traveling through Cullman County on the north-south Bee Line Highway will note some unusual features about its agricultural development, particularly north and south of the city of Cullman, located somewhat north of the center of the county. [...] As agricultural developments of this kind are not

typical of the Cotton Belt the traveler may make some inquiries concerning local farming.<sup>22</sup>

Not only does the geographer articulate a distant third-party perspective in his observations of the Germans outside of Cullman, but he places himself and his reader in the role of tourist/traveler – we are transient figures, passing through the landscape on Bee Line Highway, interested in the sites as we come upon them, but always on our way out. Dr. Carl C. Taylor (the Community Study's primary director) was particularly invested in the participant-observer method of sociological field research precisely because of this imposed proximity between the transient character and the fixed subject of study. As he put it, "[Kollmorgen and his sister] have deep sympathy with the viewpoints of these religious people, but have not allowed their observations to be anything less than objective."<sup>23</sup>

In great contrast, the diary as a literary genre is a very different format for expressing observation. It is autobiographical, an observation of Self. In Loomis' case, it is an observation of his subjects as well as an observation of himself as observer. The farmhand's diary is perhaps best characterized using the 1970s anthropological term "observation of participation" in which "ethnographers both experience and observe their own and others' co-participation within the ethnographic encounter."<sup>24</sup> This postmodern methodological shift in the field of anthropology also entailed a representational shift of authorship: instead of writing a memoir focusing on the Self (e.g., a diary) or a standard monograph focusing on the Other (e.g., a sociological technical report), the observation of participation allows for the Self and Other to be presented together within a single narrative, focused on the character and process of the ethnographic dialogue.<sup>25</sup> Loomis' diary is a good example of this process: while it is both self-reflexive and generous in its observations, the

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 236.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 237.

<sup>22</sup> Kollmorgen. *The German Settlement in Cullman County, Alabama*, 1.

<sup>23</sup> Carl C. Taylor. "Foreword," i.

<sup>24</sup> Barbara Tedlock. "From Participant Observation to the Observation of Participation: The Emergence of Narrative Ethnography." *Journal of Anthropological Research*. Vol. 47, No. 1 (Spring 1991), 69.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

bulk of material is, for all parties, reactionary to the events that unfolded over eight days.

But the content of the diary does not explain its format. Considering the audience(s) for his research, why did he choose the diary format? More to the point, why choose the diary format when you know there will be an audience for your prose? On the topic of audience, there exists a long and productive debate between contemporary scholars of autobiographical literary genres – what is the importance of audience when close reading a text? Some scholars maintain that diaries are private – that they are created with the assumption of privacy – while others maintain that they are exercises in a kind of secret exhibitionism; still others prefer to think of the diary as intended for a fictive rather than real audience (presumably, a different sense of self could also be included in this fictive arena of presentation).<sup>26</sup> Loomis' diary, however, seems to be an exception to all of these formulations of autobiographical audience. We know that he undertook this exercise to work as a farmhand in order to learn more about the methods by which the Amish were rehabilitating *english* farmsteads to expand their own communities. In this sense then, we know that Loomis' audience included his employer, the Bureau of Agricultural Economics. Furthermore, we know that Moses Lapp, who facilitated the arrangement, agreed to do so precisely because he wanted to assist the Bureau in its research.<sup>27</sup> On the one hand then, the diary is a research tool executed with all the same expectations as Kollmorgen's report: it would be submitted to the Bureau and scrutinized by social scientists as primary source material.

On the other hand, since its creation, Loomis' diary has been held separate from the primary repository of his professional papers at New Mexico State University. Until the *Mennonite Quarterly Review* published the diary in a July 1979 edition of the journal, only a mimeographed copy of the manuscript resided in the Ernst Correll Collection at the Archives of the Mennonite Church in Goshen, Indiana. Correll (1894-1982), originally from Germany, was an historian and Anabaptist scholar with a doctoral degree from the University

of Munich. Correll was also a frequent consultant to agricultural economists at the Bureau of Agricultural Economics.<sup>28</sup> In addition to Loomis' diary, the Correll Collection contains correspondence from the 1940s with Kollmorgen and O.E. Baker (a Chief Economist at the Bureau) as well as a copy of Kollmorgen's dissertation.<sup>29</sup> If we are to consider the farmhand's diary with this audience in mind then, an audience invested in Anabaptist Studies and its place within the Academy, then Loomis' text is also historiographically valuable to our understanding of Anabaptism in America.

But all of these audiences for the diary – the Bureau, Correll, and his colleagues – only deflect the unquestionable strangeness of Loomis' chosen methodological format. The record does not provide us with the sociologist's motivations, but we can make a few deductions regarding his reasons for keeping a diary. The first has to do with the importance of his performance in the "role of Amish," as opposed to Kollmorgen's immersive yet necessarily distant methods for studying the community. Indeed, farmhand continues to be the only role within the Amish community that can be filled by a non-Amish individual; even in this role, Loomis was not able to attend an Amish church service. While the Amish partake in some non-Amish activities, these events occur outside of the community. Amish do not marry non-Amish and outsiders are rarely entreated to stay in the community without good reason.<sup>30</sup> But that being

<sup>28</sup> Ernst Correll joined the Goshen College faculty in 1924 and co-founded the Mennonite Historical Society. During these years, he was a major influence in the College's revived interest in Anabaptist and Mennonite studies. He later taught at American University in Washington, D.C. and maintained his work on Anabaptism through frequent collaborations with other Anabaptist scholars, such as Harold S. Bender, a prominent theologian at Goshen College and founder of the *Mennonite Quarterly Review*. Ernst H. Correll, 1894-1982; Hist. Mss 1-28, Papers, 1924-1966; Archives of the Mennonite Church, Goshen, Indiana.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> As I learned on the farm of Amish writer, David Kline in 2009, the exception to this rule are the families of the formerly Amish, those who decided to leave the Church before they were baptized into the faith, usually around age 21. In this case, these daughters and sons and their families are welcomed into the community. Kline's eldest daughter, Elsie, did not choose baptism and during my visit, her non-Amish husband was helping to build an outbuilding on David's property.

<sup>26</sup> Deborah Martinson. *In the Presence of Audience: The Self in Diaries and Fiction*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2003, 141.

<sup>27</sup> Loomis. "A Farmhand's Diary," 236.



said, Loomis was not really a farmhand in the traditional sense; all parties involved understood that farmhand was only a pretense for another kind of arrangement: instead of the exchange of labor for money, Loomis and Lapp participated in the exchange of labor for information. Moreover, this arrangement went beyond contact between Amish and non-Amish; it constituted unprecedented cooperation between the Amish and the government, two entities that have a long history of conflict.

In this context of cooperation, Loomis is in control of both halves of the arrangement; the amount of effort he exerted as a farmhand would have dictated the level of respect and gratitude garnered from his hosts and thus, the level of information he desired. Stated this way, the exchange becomes less clear because the currencies at play become less distinguishable. Loomis' compensation for physical labor was not only information – Kollmorgen's three-month stay yielded quantifiably more information than Loomis' much shorter visit – rather, his compensation was the earned privilege of being able to document what he learned in the format of a diary. Suddenly the question of audience seems to miss the whole point of the autobiographical genre. Loomis was aware of the inevitably public nature of his prose – indeed, as the Study's Chief Field Supervisor he was an active agent in the shaping of this public – but what he wrote about the Amish was not as significant as how he was able to write it; that is, with a voice that neither originated in nor acquired authority from the requisite distance between the participant-observer and his subject. The unprecedented value of Loomis' voice was that his "subjectivity," an otherwise unsavory character in the research methodologies employed by the Study's authors, actually elevated the status – the authenticity – of the document.

## THE PHOTOGRAPHS OF IRVING RUSINOW

### Photograph Content

The Bureau selected the Lancaster Amish as a community for study because sociologists expected to find agricultural and economic stability

within, what was presumed to be, an insular self-sustaining cultural unit. Their assumptions were not unfounded, just vastly understated. Since the early 1930s, the Amish had been rapidly expanding their community by vigorously buying up run-down and abandoned farmsteads formerly owned by Welsh and Scotch-Irish families. Between 1920 and 1952, the Old Order Amish saw its greatest population growth; the total number of individuals more than tripled in 30 years. During this time, Amish families had on average six children, so the issue here is not the speed by which their population grew, it is the fact that they could maintain such numbers and keep everyone on the land and out of the city. The Amish are agrarian people; they are farmers first, but they are also furniture makers and owners of small businesses in the local community. They are not commuters, and thus their enterprise requires land to sustain an agrarian existence for their family and their family's families.

During his short visit, the photographer Irving Rusinow stayed on a property owned by an Old Order Amish farmer and kept in production by an Old Order Amish tenant. Like Loomis' hosts, Rusinow's short stay was on a farm outside the center of the Amish community, 25 miles east of the city of Lancaster. As we remember, land closer to the city was more productive than on the margins, and thus those Amish families were wealthier, and with fewer *english* interactions, than the vanguard of the Amish pushing out. Rusinow's photographs depict what was peripheral to the most prosperous and influential Amish, and thus, his images forecast the community's future.

Rusinow's pictures juxtapose Amish farmsteads with those of *english* farmers in the surrounding communities. In one direct comparison published on a single page of Kollmorgen's technical report, we see a barn built by a Scotch-Irish family badly in need of repair (Figure 1). In comparison at the bottom of the page, we see a barn recently built by an Amish farmer. On the older, Scotch-Irish structure, the plaster is crumbling, the brick is exposed, windows are missing, as are shingles from the roof; the fence and gate look neglected, and even the snow that covers the ground looks, like the barn, heavy and heavily traversed. In contrast, the snow is almost entirely gone around the new Amish structure; the ground is flat and even and forms a neat foundation for the sturdy bank barn described by the photographer in



**FIGURE 1: PAGE FROM *CULTURE OF A CONTEMPORARY RURAL COMMUNITY: THE OLD ORDER AMISH OF LANCASTER COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA* (PUBLISHED BY THE BUREAU OF AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS, 1942) COMPARING A SCOTCH-IRISH BARN IN NEED OF REPAIR AND A NEW BARN BUILT BY THE AMISH**

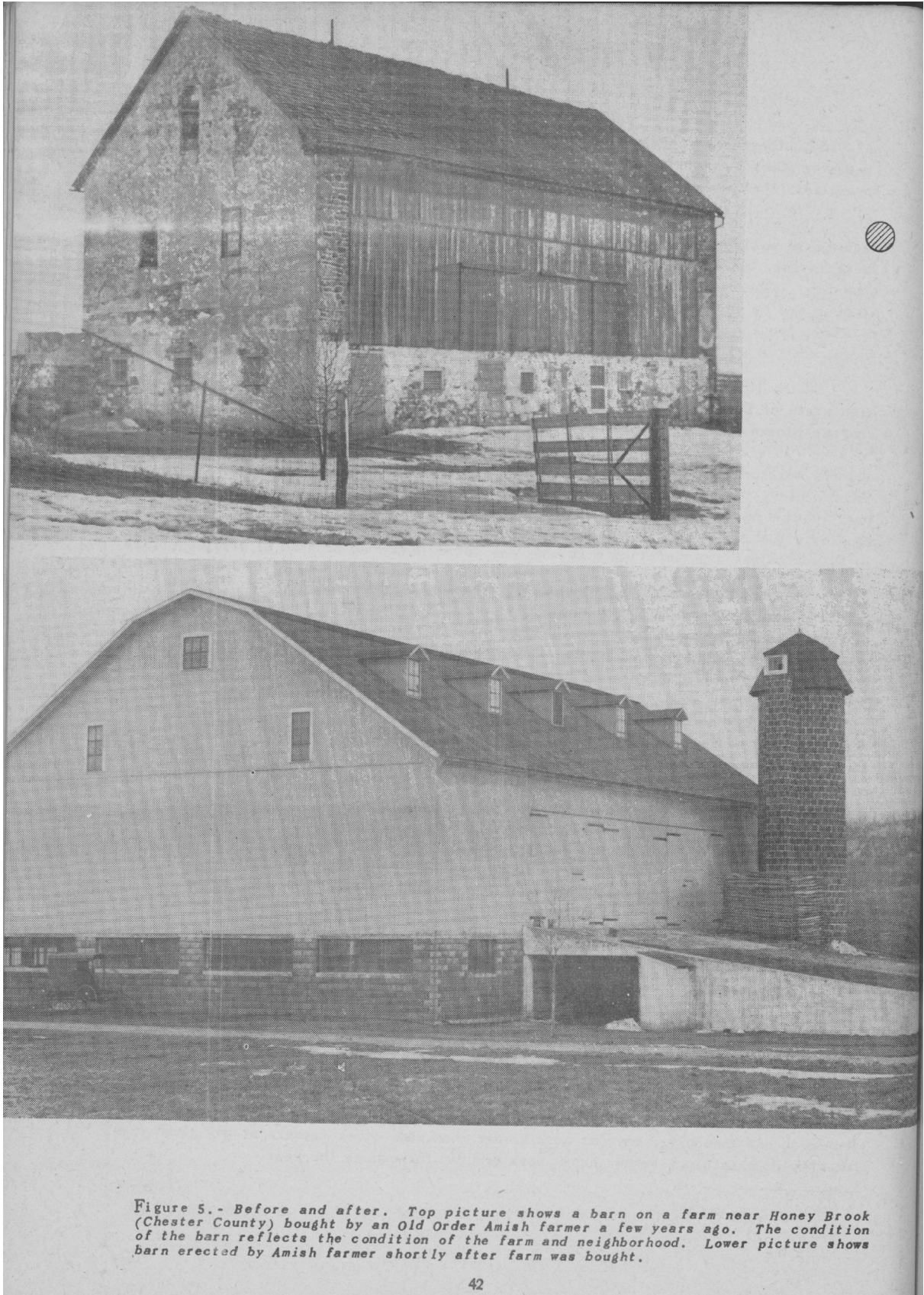


Figure 5.- Before and after. Top picture shows a barn on a farm near Honey Brook (Chester County) bought by an Old Order Amish farmer a few years ago. The condition of the barn reflects the condition of the farm and neighborhood. Lower picture shows barn erected by Amish farmer shortly after farm was bought.



¾ view. From this perspective, we are offered the stone ramp of the new structure, a distinguishing characteristic of the Swiss-derived bank barn in which both floors are accessible to wagons from the ground. The ramp would have allowed direct wagon access into the hayloft while the opening directly below would have led to the stone-exposed basement level where animals were stalled and manure was collected for crop fertilization. The structure looks manicured, clean, strong, and stable.

Within the technical report, the photographs were vertically juxtaposed, and the caption suggested a larger narrative, a more encompassing analogy than simply bad barn versus good barn:

Before and after. Top picture shows a barn on a farm in Honey Brook (Chester County) bought by an Old Order farmer a few years ago. The condition of the barn reflects the condition of the farm and neighborhood. Lower picture shows barn erected shortly after the farm was bought.

Both barns belong to the same Amish farmer; the new one was supplemental to the old dilapidating structure, which even in a renovated state, will not adequately provide for the growing needs of the owner. The caption here provides us with more than just evidence of the Old Order's push outwards into Chester County, east of Lancaster. It is the textual description of the photographs, as visualizing a "before and after" situation, that is peculiar. It is peculiar because these two images do not describe the same barn, pre- and post-renovation for instance – "before and after" does not work here as it usually does in photographs, whereby two images are markers of the transformation of a single object. Typically, the conceptual point, we could say, of "before and after" pictures, resides in the space between the two images, that which is necessarily unseen and impossible to picture. Here the designation of "before" and "after" has little to do with the visibly articulated state of the objects (the old barn remains in disrepair and the new barn is simply new), or the temporal space between the images because there is no shared, singular point of reference. So we must ask, before and after what exactly?

In image after image made by the photographer, we see unpeopled landscapes and built environments in the Amish community described in terms of violent conquest. For example, in another com-

parison, the photographer captures two farmsteads comprising a house, barn, and outbuildings. The first homestead is described as "one of the better Amish farm places," with the replacement value of the barn alone noted being "at least \$10,000" (Figure 2). This would have been a significant expense considering that the annual net income for an Old Order farm in the 1930s was around \$1,000.<sup>31</sup> The Amish home adjacent to the large barn looks its equal in size and substance. While many *english* in the County as well as Protestant and German-Reform Pennsylvania Dutch adopted the *English* Georgian style as early as the first decades of the nineteenth century, the Amish and Mennonites maintained traditional Swiss and German house forms. With a design provenance rooted in the Hans Herr House – built in 1719 and the oldest surviving example of Pennsylvania Dutch architecture in the County – this Amish home exhibits the same steeply sloped roof, lack of dormer windows, and covered porch space on the front of the house (the *Vorkich* in Pennsylvania Dutch, meaning the space beneath the eaves, literally "before the kitchen")<sup>32</sup> (Figure 3). Another distinctly Amish architectural feature, the *Gros Dawdy Haus* (grandfather house) also juts out from the right side of the home; the eldest members of an Old Order family would have lived out their lives here once they had handed over the business of the farm to a son and his family.<sup>33</sup> Between the house and the barn exists an expansive and expensive natural and built environment that, we suspect, extends farther back into the frame. This "better Amish farm place" requires great physical distance between camera and compound in order to see even the most general outline of its latitudinal breadth. Rusinow's position before his subject denies the viewer any real sense of what exists at the property's terminus in the far background; we are left with the impression that the boundaries of this Amish farm are, if not boundless, at least beyond our visual comprehension.

<sup>31</sup> Katherine Jellison, "All Women were Once Amish Women," The Berkshire Conference on the History of Women, June 2008, 7.

<sup>32</sup> William Woys Weaver, "The Pennsylvania-German House: Its European Antecedents and New World Forms" Winterthur Portfolio, 245.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 252.

**FIGURE 2: PHOTO OF AN AMISH HOMESTEAD, WITH CAPTION**

"This is one of the better Old-Order Amish farm places. Barns like this cannot be replaced for less than \$10,000. The part of the barn nearest the camera is a straw shed in which feeders are kept. Straw is stored in the second story."

In comparison, the Scotch-Irish farm place looks vulnerable to collapse, not only definitive in size but also constricted within the shallow space of the photograph (Figure 4). According to the caption, it is in a region "rapidly being invaded by Amish farmers." Indeed, as a photographic subject, the farm looks vulnerable to both collapse and conquest; the buildings appear sparse, feeble, and confined within the cramped boundaries of the photograph. The camera provides little spatial breadth, leaving us with an image not so much of a farmstead, as of a far more easily usurped barn-next-to-house. The low placement

of the camera offers a slight upward slope to the extremely data-rich foreground, and the development process (which Rusinow always did himself) leaves us with an extremely data-free sky. Along with the disorienting expanse of fallow field in front of the house, the blank sky above seems to oppressively press down on the solitary structures in the cold landscape. The documentary photographer does not take the chance that active skies inevitably carry. He knows that clouds are risky because they move, and thus threaten the ordered, static, and stable landscape subject. Art historian Robin Kelsey calls this the "graphic picture" be-



**FIGURE 3: HANS HERR HOUSE (1719) LANCASTER COUNTY, PA**

cause it operates like a “legible surface of record” as opposed to the index of a three-dimensional scene.<sup>34</sup> As a photograph of pending “invasion,” the image gains more currency as a legible surface of record, for conquest is first and foremost a quantitative project and only second, a totalizing, multi-dimensional operation.

### THE PHOTOGRAPHS: VALUATION

We now have a better idea of what exactly Rusinow’s “before and after” photographs purport to be about: there is an ongoing Amish invasion of the Anglo-American lands on the margins of the community’s established center in Lancaster, and we could say that these images provide a view

of the land and its infrastructure before and after Amish conquest. At stake in this particular narrative of transformation is not the material status of any single object (like a barn), but rather the economic, cultural, and perhaps even ethnic status of the nation. Before and after: these photographs perform their work in the past and future tense.

Most likely, Rusinow did not write these captions. Although the record is incomplete in this regard, it is probable that anthropologist Kenneth MacLeish accompanied Rusinow to Lancaster. We know that MacLeish was with Rusinow a month earlier in Landaff, NH. It seems likely that the Bureau would have wanted one of the Study’s primary authors to remain with the photographer in order to guide his camera towards subjects central to the already completed technical report. Very little correspondence exists between Dr. Carl Taylor, the project’s leader, and Russell Smith, Director of the Division of Farm

<sup>34</sup> Robin Kelsey. “Viewing the Archive: Timothy O’Sullivan’s Photographs for the Wheeler Survey, 1871-74.” *The Art Bulletin*. Vol. 85. No. 4, (Dec. 2003), 702-23.

**FIGURE 4: PHOTO OF A SCOTCH-IRISH HOMESTEAD, WITH CAPTION**

“This Scotch-Irish farm place is located in a region which is marginal to the Amish and which is rapidly being invaded by Amish farmers. Notice the lightening rods on the barn. These are not to be found on Amish buildings.”

Economics and Rusinow’s immediate boss. But as Loomis’ diary demonstrates, the Amish community was of unique concern to the Study and its facilitators. Certainly MacLeish’s presence with Rusinow would indicate that the Bureau intended for the photographs to act as illustrations of the report’s conclusions. MacLeish authored two of the Study’s technical reports and, most likely, all of the captions for Rusinow’s pictures.<sup>35</sup> The

anthropologist was not only familiar with the intellectual questions driving the Community Study

<sup>35</sup> There is evidence in the Bureau’s archives that MacLeish wrote the captions for Rusinow’s photographs that appeared in the technical reports for El Cerrito, NM, Landaff, NH, and Lancaster County. The captions for photographs in the other six reports read very similarly. Additionally, Rusinow’s older work for the Soil Conservation Service bears a much different voice than the Community Study photographs. All

of his pictures for SCS assignments in 1938 and 1939 have sparse captions that note a single descriptor, the location, and date for the image. For example, for Rusinow’s second assignment in 1939, the photographer captioned a picture of a young girl in New Mexico as “Child. Pajarito School, Bernalillo County, N.M., October 13, 1939.” In great contrast to Rusinow’s voice, MacLeish’s captions are detailed and contain types of sociological information that the photographer most likely could not have learned in a three-day visit. Kenneth MacLeish to Carl C. Taylor, November 22, 1941; 431-8 Photographs, Pictures, Slides, July 1941-December 1941, Box 195; General Files, 1939-40; Records of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, Record Group 80; National Archives, College Park, Maryland.



but he was also well-versed in its creative and photographic precedents.<sup>36</sup>

The anthropologist's captions work via contrast and relation, between modes of valuing the built environments depicted in Rusinow's images. On the one hand, his valuations are based on tangible numbers, statistics, data, and research. For example, in Figure 2, there is an unequivocal process of valuation in the caption for the barn in this image – it could “not be replaced for less than \$10,000.” By assigning a monetary value to the structure, he is also assigning a monetary value to those responsible for erecting such a structure. In the simplest sense, we could say that the anthropologist's estimation of the barn's value lends credibility and legitimacy to the entire Amish project. But at the same time, no matter the seeming concreteness of MacLeish's valuations, they find grounding not in the presence of the thing but in its absence. MacLeish does not say that the barn is worth \$10,000, he says it would cost \$10,000 to replace. In other words, the barn's function in Rusinow's picture is not as an illustration of Amish prosperity, it is an illustration of the cost of potential loss. The purported subject of this Amish picture is an even less stable articulation. It appears to be contingently constituted because the action in question – the action of loss – has not happened yet. In this way, the photograph works in the subjunctive tense, somewhere between a future that is riddled with *english* anxiety, and a present concerned with quantifying what could potentially be lost to the past.

MacLeish's tendencies toward absence and lack are most apparent when his captions do not readily deliver monetary values. His consistent use of words such as “marginal,” “invade,” “disappear,” and “displace” most deftly demonstrate how tightly bound are issues of value with issues of proximity – geographic, temporal, material, personal, prosaic. Each of these terms situates the origins of valuation not on the face of the thing in need of estimation – the church, the barn, the house – rather, it is interstitially located in the gaps

between things. For instance, the photograph is not an image of a Presbyterian church in Leacock County near the town of Intercourse (Figure 5). MacLeish's prose deems it “once a center” of a community now “disappeared.” The Church's value lies in its status as a marker of something no longer, and the function of the photograph is to visualize what is left. The relational content of MacLeish's prose and Rusinow's images explains the format that together they constitute. The anthropologist asks the reader to recollect, remember, and reimagine the unseen, while the photographer's camera illuminates that which the eye alone cannot.

We are caught between these two readings of image and text – between a visual narrative about the past and present occupation of land, and a less structured activation of “loss,” an entity that haunts the landscape and psyches of Americans still suffering economically and now on the eve of another world war. But it's the fact that we are caught that's important. We are implicated in every way in these pictures and the information they convey about the Amish, the *english*, and the southeastern Pennsylvania countryside. Rusinow's images inside Kollmorgen's report tell us that these Amish own land lost by *english* (and *English*) Americans. The pictures and the text tell us that the Lancaster Amish build expansive and expensive barns to support thriving agricultural enterprises. The images describe in graphic, quantifiable detail, the ways in which the Amish are physically displacing whole communities in a period of widespread economic depression. Together on the pages of Kollmorgen's report, Rusinow's photographs of Amish economies of valuation make the Amish both modern and threatening.

The Old Order's conquest around Lancaster is reminiscent of anti-Hutterite laws in South Dakota and Alberta. The province passed a 1942 law prohibiting land sales to Hutterites, later modified to specify that Hutterites could buy land, but not within 40 miles of an existing colony and limited to 2,072 hectares. The law was not rescinded by courts until 1973. In 1955, a poll in South Dakota showed that 87% of the citizens opposed further Hutterite land expansion.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Kenneth MacLeish's father, the Poet Laureate Archibald MacLeish, had collaborated with Roy Stryker at the Farm Security Administration in 1936 on the photographic essay *Land of the Free*. This book, along with Dorothea Lange and Paul Schuster's *American Exodus: A Record of Human Erosion* (published in the same year), established the genre of the photographic essay as it exists today.

<sup>37</sup> Rod Janzen and Mike Stanton. *The Hutterites in North America*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010, 50.

**FIGURE 5: PHOTO OF A PRESBYTERIAN CEMETERY, WITH CAPTION**

“Leacock Presbyterian Church near Intercourse, Pennsylvania. Established 200 years ago, it was once the center of a Scotch-Irish community which has now disappeared. The land is owned today by Amishmen.”

Different from the kind of “stability” sought by Kollmorgen and Loomis, Rusinow’s images and MacLeish’s captions demonstrate that Amish stability gained power from expansion. The men of the BAE’s Community Study expected that Amish stability would mean strength in terms of property assets, business operations, and family connection in order to ensure strong lineages to sustain the community. What they found instead, writ large in MacLeish’s captions, was stable conquest, a near colonial attempt to claim southeastern Pennsylvania for the Old Order.

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