

their plight with compassion, efficiency, and diligence. And, even though these gentlemen expressed concern that a criminal was evading American justice, the whole affair served to underline and strengthen the fundamental principle of international law that each nation, large or small, is sovereign within its own borders. Meanwhile, Chester Rowe, languishing in his Mexican prison cell, and Richard Rowe, confined in the Iowa State penitentiary, had ample opportunity to ponder the truth of the adage that crime does not pay.

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## Book Reviews

*A Peculiar People: Iowa's Old Order Amish*, by Elmer Schwieder and Dorothy Schwieder. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1975. pp. ix, 188, Illustrations, notes, appendices, bibliography, index. \$8.50

Even though Saint Titus, trusted disciple of Saint Paul, was told by Paul that Jesus Christ "gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a

peculiar people, zealous of good works," the term *peculiar* frequently has been interpreted in derogatory fashion. All too often the word means not normal, or, abnormally queer, or even, a "lettle teched in the head." A more proper interpretation, at least in the case of the Old Order Amish, would be *different*.

Some earlier studies of the Amish, although perhaps not intended, seem to leave the impression that these people, religious and independent, were excessively eccentric. Fortunately, the competent team of Schwieder and Schwieder has avoided such a mistake to write a calm, objective, and admirably researched narrative of groups which have their own ways of looking at the world and living in the world.

The dispassionate approach, buttressed by documentary evidence, by interviews, and by reference to the developments of Amish communities outside of Iowa, results, not in a book to display on a coffee table, but in a closely written, solid volume which must be read carefully to be appreciated. It is no book to leaf through, scan, and put aside.

The volume's organization is simple enough: a chapter delineating the origin and growth of Iowa's Old Order Amish Mennonites' "long and often tumultuous" history. (p. 9), followed by sections discussing Amish religious beliefs and practices, economic organization, family life, and the plain people's mobility and the establishment of new communities. It is pointed out that the Amish have conformed very little to social pressures; that they have not sacrificed the "immeasurable strength and cohesion" resulting from an individualized church district; that the individual is influenced early by the total Amish society as well as people in the outside world; and that being Amish means "living in a closely interwoven society that links religious, familial, societal, educational, and vocational beliefs into a complete whole." (p. 78)

Later chapters are devoted to education, the Beachy Amish (groups scattered throughout the nation which subscribe to many characteristics of the Old Order, but, among

other differences, do not isolate themselves from the outside world), and, to some readers, a startling final discussion of the plain people in the Midwest. The authors state flatly that the Amish are a rapidly growing, prosperous people who apparently are neither declining in numbers nor in conviction. They emphasize that in almost every dispute, including educational controversies, the Old Order Amish seldom have failed to attain their objectives. This is made clear in an excellent review of the school controversy, although the authors make clear that many scars resulted and there may be future conflict of interests between the Amish and some non-Amish. The authors' judgment is that the Amish, despite their isolation and unchanging ways, are a competent, flexible people capable of solving their own problems. One might wish that the same could be said of the American people generally.

Appendices include the Iowa act relating to compulsory school attendance and educational standards, a church financial agreement, and the Dortrecht Confession of Faith of 1632. Illustrations, including maps and a cartoon, enhance the book. One could wish that the index was more extensive.

Finally, this reviewer cannot resist a good-natured, somewhat puckish, but unimportant, comment. The authors of this excellent analysis write that the color blue has no special significance for the Plain People, but is only a myth held by those who know no better. The jacket of this book is printed in blue ink and the coloring of the binding cloth is blue. Despite all this, *A Peculiar People* comes close to being a blue-ribbon winner and certainly must be consulted by future scholars.

—Philip D. Jordan  
Burlington, Iowa

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