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Names, Places, Statistics

As the tourist nears Kalona, Iowa, driving southwest of Iowa City on Highway 1, his curiosity is aroused when he is suddenly confronted with a road sign picturing a horse and buggy and warning — ENTERING AMISH COMMUNITY. SLOW VEHICLES. DRIVE CAREFULLY.

Within the next seven miles he will likely see both top and topless carriages pulled by one or two trotting horses driven by bearded men wearing a garb reminiscent of medieval Europe. It may well be that this experience will not surprise the tourist, for within the past decade the Amish have been so well publicized in books, plays, and feature articles that it would appear most Americans should have made their acquaintance.

The Amish in Iowa who number 775 baptized members, (perhaps 1200 with their children), are, however, only one branch of the six kinds of Mennonites living in Iowa today. These six are the Old Order Amish Mennonites, the Beachy Amish Mennonites, the Conservative Mennonites, the

"Old" Mennonites, the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren, and the General Conference Mennonites, ranked from the most conservative to the most liberal. In 1958 these had a combined baptized Iowa membership of approximately 5,000 and a total family population of perhaps 6,500 or more.

Their largest settlement is in southwestern Johnson County from which area they have spilled over into eastern Iowa County and northern Washington County. In this large community they have a church membership of 2,870, belonging to twenty-one congregations, most of which are in the Kalona-Wellman locality. The second largest settlement is in the northern Henry County-southern Washington County area, with Wayland the chief center. Here they have six churches with a membership of 1,086. Smaller communities are located in Lee, Davis, Buchanan, Calhoun, and Woodbury counties, in which the centers of the settlements, respectively, are Donnellson, Pulaske, Hazelton, Manson, and Luton.

If the tourist were to read the names on the rural mail boxes in the larger communities, he would quickly recognize the prominence of certain family names. In the Kalona-Wellman area he would find the most common names to be Brenne-
man, Gingerich, Hershberger, Hochstetler, Miller, Swartzendruber, and Yoder. In the Wayland area the chief names are Boshart, Conrad, Graber, Leichty, Roth, Wenger, Widmer, and Wyse.

All of these names, as well as nearly all others in the Iowa Mennonite communities, with the exception of those in the church in Woodbury County, are Swiss in origin. They originated in the German speaking area of northern Switzerland, although only a very few bearing these names came directly from Switzerland to Iowa. Many came to Iowa by way of Alsace-Lorraine and Ohio or some other eastern state. A larger number, however, are descendants of those Swiss who fled to the German Palatinate in the 16th and 17th centuries and from there, and other parts of Germany, migrated to Pennsylvania and Ohio in the 18th and 19th centuries and finally reached Iowa in the middle and last half of the past century. A small number, nevertheless, came directly from Switzerland, perhaps stopping in Ohio a few years before settling in Iowa.

The name Gingerich, one of the most common Iowa Mennonite names, originated in the canton of Bern, Switzerland. It appears among the Swiss Anabaptists, spiritual ancestors of the American Mennonites, in the 17th century. By the 18th century, the direct ancestors of many of the Iowa Gingerichs had moved to the German state of Waldeck. From there they came to Iowa by way of Pennsylvania and Ohio in the first half of the 19th century.

Other Iowa Mennonite families, such as the Yoders, had come to America a century earlier.

Although most of the Iowa Mennonites are Swiss in origin, their ancestors lived in Germany enough generations to absorb considerable German culture. These are part of America's Pennsylvania German (popularly "Dutch") folk and have maintained Pennsylvania Dutch traditions. When they think of the "fatherland" in the "Old Country," they think of Germany. A minority, however, thinks of Alsace or Switzerland as the home country, but all groups have only a sentimental attachment to Europe, long ago having become thoroughly Americanized.

MELVIN GINGERICH