

## **Northern Indiana Amish Library at LaGrange**

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## **Northern Indiana Amish Library at Nappanee**

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### **The Beginning**

The Northern Indiana Amish Library was first proposed by Floyd R. Miller as early as 2002. He shared his idea with others as he quietly assembled a group to work together to promote the sharing of northern Indiana Amish history. The vision included holding an annual historical meeting to keep the area historians informed and working together for the northern Indiana communities. In 2002, Miller hosted the 13th National Old Order Historical Gathering at his home southwest of LaGrange. This meeting also included a tour of sites of historical significance for the Amish community in Elkhart and LaGrange Counties. Attending the gathering left a significant impression on two local young men, LaVern E. Yutzy and Willis L. Miller. This led to a number of informal evening discussions that fueled their enthusiasm to hold organized meetings on a regular schedule. Through the added push for organization from LaVern Yutzy and encouragement from others, a plan was formed.

### **The Old Order Historical Gathering of Northern Indiana**

On April 9, 2005, the first Old Order Historical Gathering of Northern Indiana was held at the Mervin S. Mast home near LaGrange. This event brought thirty-one interested people together. After several presentations about local Amish history, Floyd R. Miller gave a short history of how the National Old Order Historical Gathering was started by David Luthy and how three men were appointed as an advisory board to keep it organized and focused. Miller asked, “Can we do that for Elkhart and LaGrange Counties and also include Nappanee?” This question was affirmed by the group.

One year later, the second Old Order Historical Gathering of Northern Indiana was held at the Willis L. Miller home in Elkhart County. This time, forty-seven people attended. Three people were elected to oversee the future gatherings: Floyd R. Miller for LaGrange County, LaVern E.



Yutzy for Elkhart County, and Owen E. Borkholder for Nappanee. On March 3, 2007, the third Old Order Historical Gathering of Northern Indiana was held at Nappanee in the Owen E. Borkholder home. Ninety people attended. By this time, the three-person committee had drawn up a constitution with guidelines for the future of the annual historical gatherings. From the beginning, the Old Order Historical Gathering of Northern Indiana has been an annual event that rotates from LaGrange County to Elkhart County to Nappanee, each time held in a different home. Each gathering's topics focus on that locality's early Amish settlers.

### **The Formation**

At the fourth annual Old Order Historical Gathering of Northern Indiana, an evening meeting was announced for April 7, 2008, at Floyd R. Miller's home. Due to a death in the community, the meeting was rescheduled for the evening of April 12. This meeting was held to seriously address the need for a library to collect, house, and preserve books and artifacts pertaining to the background, religion, ancestors, and everyday life and culture of the Amish people of northern Indiana. Everyone attending this meeting agreed that there was a need for a library for the people of this community. It was pointed out that many items of historical interest had already been taken to Heritage Historical Library at Aylmer, Ontario, and that the Mennonite Historical Library at Goshen College contained many books and artifacts of the area. The possibility of constructing a public building that would also house an extensive collection of old farm machinery and a collection of buggies was discussed but put aside to keep the plan small and workable. Later, if the opportunity arises and if enough support is shown, maybe a museum building with room to house the library could be purchased or built.

The Historical Gathering Committee was elected to be the executive board of the library, which was to be housed in an unused room in the upstairs of Floyd Miller's business, Quality Metal Supply. LaVern Yutzy was elected chairman, Floyd R. Miller librarian, and Owen E. Borkholder treasurer. Emanuel E. Miller was voted in as secretary and Mervin S. Mast was elected to pursue obtaining nonprofit status.

One month later, the newly formed board met to organize, and it decided to use the name Northern Indiana Amish Library (NIAL). Over the next two years, many small but important steps were taken to get the library firmly established.

To finance purchasing supplies such as acid-free archive boxes and bookshelves, printing a newsletter, and buying more books for the collection, the board decided that the library would offer an annual membership for \$15 per year and a lifetime membership for \$250. Currently the library has 65 members. NIAL sells new and used genealogy books. A set of bylaws was written and approved by the board. NIAL was incorporated in the state of Indiana as a nonprofit domestic corporation in January 2009. An EIN number was obtained, allowing NIAL to accept tax deductible gifts and donations.

### ***NIAL News Lines***

The first newsletter, a single sheet of paper called *NIAL News Lines* that described the beginnings of the library, came out in December 2008. The second issue, consisting of eight pages, came out in February 2009. This was followed by another one in August 2009. Every year since then, *NIAL News Lines*—eight pages filled with local stories of historical interest and current news from the library, such as recent accessions and announcements of upcoming events of historical interest—has been sent to library members twice a year. It is also sent to seven other libraries. *NIAL News Lines* was typeset by Emanuel E. Miller through 2012. In September 2012, Miller turned in his resignation, and the board voted in Willis L. Miller to take on the duties of secretary/editor. He continues to fill that position.

### **Library Day**

In January 2010, NAIL held a public open house. This event was successful enough that the board decided to make it an annual event called Library Day. Library Day included presentations for the public, displays of old books, and the sale of genealogy books. The event was held in January or February every year through 2015. In November 2015, the date of Library Day was changed to occur in the fall so that the weather would be warmer and would possibly boost attendance. Due to dwindling attendance, Library Day was discontinued after the 2021 event.

### **Library**

NIAL was first housed in the upstairs of Quality Metal Supply's store building. After Floyd R. Miller closed the business and his son Ervin moved the Creekside Wheel Shop business into the building, the younger Miller did not need all the office space and storerooms. This left the first-floor office and storeroom area empty and allowed the library to move down to the first floor, making it more accessible. In January 2013, most of the library items were moved down to the first floor, which also provided more space. As time went on, more bookshelf units and showcases were purchased. In January 2024, the library was moved again, this time across the road and into Floyd Miller's garage, which is attached to his house. This brought it much closer to Miller's living quarters, allowing him to use his time more efficiently. Call ahead for an appointment before visiting.

### **Book Collection**

In March 2011, ninety-four-year-old Dan A. Hochstetler passed away, leaving a large collection of genealogy books to his two sons, Ivan and Albert. Hochstetler had worked for many years amassing this collection, which eventually outgrew his house. As he was involved in the D. A. Hochstetler business, he arranged to use a large room in the upstairs of the business office building to display and house the collection. In addition, Hochstetler had been selling new genealogy books, including *Descendants of Jacob Hochstetler* and *Descendants of Barbara Hochstedler. and Christian Stutzman*. He had also reprinted *Descendants and Ancestors of Johann Martin Borntraeger* and, upon his passing, still had a large number of those books in stock. NIAL was

approached about buying this collection, since his sons did not want to maintain it. After evaluating the books, an offer was made and accepted. This acquisition helped grow the collection at NIAL and also helped stock the shelves for its book sales.

In September 2012, an estate auction was held to disperse Norman Swartzentruber's very large collection (nearly 5,000 volumes) of genealogy books, plat books, old Bibles, and history books. NIAL made a number of purchases from this collection.

In the summer of 2013, NIAL purchased an 1838 German Bible at a local auction. This Bible had traveled by team and wagon from Somerset County, Pennsylvania, to Indiana with the Henry H. Miller and Rachel (Hershberger) Miller family. Their arrival in northern Indiana on May 16, 1842, is noted in the Bible. This was a very important and exciting accession.

In 2023, a 1796 *Christenpflicht* was put into the archives at NIAL by the Farmwald family. This was Joseph Farmwald's prayer book that came from Europe with the Farmwald family.

### **NIAL at Nappanee**

In 2018, the need was expressed for a library to serve the Nappanee Amish community. Although the Nappanee Amish community has an Amish population about one fourth the size of the Elkhart-LaGrange Amish settlement, it still has a very rich history reaching back to the 1840s. The two communities cooperate in many ways, yet they are quite distinct. A small wooden wagon brought from Holmes County by the John Borkholder family in 1852 needed a secure home, specifically in the Nappanee area. The John and Rachel (Hochstetler) Borkholder family had brought the wagon along from Holmes County in order to transport their crippled child, Jacob. Jacob died soon after the family arrived in Indiana, but the wagon has survived for more than 170 years. Owen Borkholder received this wagon and stored it in his shop for several years. In 2023, Owen built a new house that included a large room for his extensive personal collection of books and artifacts pertaining to the local Native American and Amish history. This room now serves as the Northern Indiana Amish Library at Nappanee. Several items pertaining to Nappanee that are at the LaGrange library will be transferred to Nappanee as time goes on. Presently, the same board members serve for both branches of NIAL. NIAL at Nappanee is located at 7327 W 1300 N, Nappanee, IN, 46550. Call ahead for an appointment with the librarian before visiting.

### **Serving Our Friends and Community**

NIAL at LaGrange serves as a connection point to local Amish history and helps people research their family tree through the 750-plus genealogy books on the research shelves. There are dozens of old nineteenth-century Bibles, prayer books, *Ausbunds*, and other devotional books in the archives, many with signatures, handwritten dates, or family records in them. Floyd Miller has spent years researching the area's land records and has much of that on file. NIAL also has a sizable collection of clothing made and worn by Amish in years past. On the reference shelves are books written about the Amish; memoirs by Amish authors; local town histories; plat books covering many years from early settlement to the present time; Amish church directories; copies of *The Diary*, *Die Blatt*, and *Mennonite Family History*; *Budget* letters from 1890–1910; issues of

Pathway magazines; and cemetery records. Information about the network of local Amish historians who pool and share the knowledge they have gained through research is also available. Occasionally someone will ask for help doing a tour of the area to see their ancestral homes and burial sites.

Owen Borkholder has researched Nappanee Amish history for many years, and he has published the *Nappanee Amish Directory* since the 1993 edition. Currently, the hundreds of reference books at NIAL at Nappanee are his personal collection, which he can access to help with questions concerning the Nappanee area. He also has a large collection of local items that were used in daily life in years past.

### **Work in Progress**

Currently, the libraries are working to compile a complete alphabetical listing of the books and documents they hold. Adam Hershberger at Ohio Amish Library is retrieving all of the older *Budget* letters that were written by people from northern Indiana. Currently, the NIAL libraries have the letters from 1890 through 1910. The goal is to have the letters through the 1950s, which will be a very valuable asset. Work is also being done to compile lists of the Amish people who died in the northern Indiana Amish communities, stretching back from the present to the beginning of the settlement in 1841.

### **Mission**

The mission of NIAL is to provide a central and secure location to house family heirloom books, so that these books can be seen by interested persons. NIAL collects books, documents, and other publications that pertain to the background of the northern Indiana Amish, including information on the settlements in other states that were settled by people from the northern Indiana area. NIAL is dedicated to promoting understanding of where our ancestors came from and what they suffered to provide for us a place to raise our families and to build the church of tomorrow. This is truly a community-minded project to help the Amish church remember its past. The church that forgets its past has no future. One of the ways we remind and educate our people is with the Annual Old Order Historical Gathering of Northern Indiana, which focuses on local families. This event encourages families to share their ancestors' stories with the rest of the community.

### **Book Sales**

NIAL stocks and sells the recently reprinted *Descendants of Jacob Hochstetler* and *Descendants of Barbara Hochstedler and Christian Stutzman* genealogy books, along with *Amish and Amish Mennonite Genealogies*. In 2009, NIAL reprinted Levi Christner's *Old Order Amish Church Districts of Indiana*. This 12-in. x 10.5-in., 20-page book was originally printed around 1949 and shows all 44 Amish church districts in the state of Indiana in 1949. It contains very basic maps of each of the nine settlements at the time and shows the borders of the individual districts. It also includes a listing of all the bishops, ministers, and deacons, but does not list any family information. NIAL sells this directory reprint for \$10.

There are numerous used books for sale at reasonable prices, including Amish church directories, genealogies, memoirs, and reference books pertaining to the Amish. (Many of the used books are donated from estates.) There are also new genealogies and memoirs for sale.

### **The Future**

To provide guidance and continuation for NIAL, the organization currently has six elected board members and one appointed librarian. The six board members serve as chairman, vice chairman, treasurer, secretary, and two members at large. Board members serve six-year terms and are reelected or replaced by the attendees at the Annual Old Order Historical Gathering. The librarian was initially elected and now serves as the tiebreaker and permanent board member. At the bimonthly board meetings, the members discuss the visitors, accessions, book sales, memberships, finances, requests for historical information, upcoming historical meetings and tours, book auctions, new books on the market, and much more. NIAL encourages school group tours and welcomes the involvement of young people. The Old Order Historical Gathering of Northern Indiana is guided by NIAL but gets others involved in sharing their knowledge to get the stories out to the people.