

A Demographic Profile of the Elkhart-LaGrange Old Order Amish Settlement

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Abstract: In 1970, Johns Hopkins University produced the first Indiana Amish directory. Its goals were narrowly related to genetic research, and it opened a window into a nearly complete census of this settlement. It is rare in social science to have such a complete picture of any population. A decade later, the second directory was published. The Amish decided to put their own energy into producing this compendium of birth dates, family size, district maps, and detailed information on the ministerial history of the settlement.

Using the data from eight directories, we can provide a nearly complete analysis of demographic change in the third largest Amish settlement in the world. In this study, we look at growth in settlement size, changes in family size, migration in and out of the settlement, defection and retention of Amish young people, the growth in nonfarm occupations over time, and the frequency of prominent family names.

Submitted September 6, 2022; October 3, 2022; published November 29, 2022
<https://doi.org/10.18061/jpac.v3i1.9157>

Keywords: Elkhart-LaGrange Old Order Amish settlement, demographic change

The third largest Amish community in the world is located in northern Indiana. The settlement began in 1841 when four families left their homes in Somerset County, Pennsylvania, to move west.¹ Those 27 original immigrants and others that followed in their footsteps produced a vibrant Amish community. This settlement flourished in the twentieth century with a rapid increase in population and geographic size. In 1901, there were six distinct church districts, and a century later, in 2002, there were 114 congregations (Joas Miller, 2017, p. 4).

The Elkhart-LaGrange settlement² is unique in several respects. It is one of a small number of Amish settlements where most of the heads of households are working in industry, and it is also the only large settlement with no current schismatic divisions.³ The 213 church districts that exist today (“A’ Sunday church reports,” 2022; “B’ Sunday church reports,” 2022) continue to fellowship together in one body.

¹ The immigrant story is described in a diary written by John E. Bontrager (1907). Hansi, as he was known, was among the children in the original families that made the trek westward in 1841.

² While it is true that the settlement spills over into Noble County (the subtitle of the directory includes that information), the settlement is nearly always represented in scholarly publications as the Elkhart-LaGrange settlement, a tradition we honor. It should also be noted that there is one family across the Michigan line in St. Joseph County and one family in Kosciusko County to the south of Elkhart County.

³ There have been divisions in the past, such as the Beachy Amish break in the 1950s and 1960s. See Nolt (2001) for more information about the factors that led to the formation of that group. More recently, a group of individuals aligned themselves with Clemence Miller, who attempted to break away from the larger settlement for a brief period of time in the 1990s.



Overview

There is a long history of scholarly interest in the Elkhart-LaGrange settlement. Among the early investigators was a group of medical researchers at Johns Hopkins University. In 1970, they produced the first Indiana Amish directory (Gingerich & Cross, 1970).⁴ Their goals were narrowly related to genetic research. To trace illnesses in families, they needed a nearly complete census of this settlement. With the assistance of Amish informants, they were able to accomplish this goal. It is rare in social science to have such a complete picture of any population. There is a virtual treasure trove of information in these directories that can be gleaned both longitudinally and as a cross section of the community at the time of each publication.

A decade later, in 1980, the second directory appeared (Gingerich, 1980). The Amish decided to put their own energy into producing this compendium of birth dates, family size, district maps, and detailed information on the ministerial history of the settlement. Although there was some resistance to providing family data for this project,⁵ the appeal of having such rich information in one book was compelling to most members of the settlement.

An Amish family took on the enormous task of acquiring information from over 1,500 households.⁶ The 1980 (Gingerich), 1988 (Jerry Miller), 1995 (Jerry Miller), 2002 (Jerry Miller), 2007 (Jerry Miller), 2012 (Jerry Miller), and 2017 (Joas Miller) directories were all compiled by the same Amish family, with different members assuming primary responsibility at different moments in time.

Using the data from eight Indiana Amish directories, this study provides an analysis of some of the most important aspects of demographic change in the Elkhart-LaGrange settlement. We look at growth in settlement size, changes in family size, migration in and out of the settlement, defection and retention of Amish young people, growth in nonfarm occupations over time, and prominent family names in this community.

As Table 1 shows, the 2017 directory⁷ includes 33,526 individuals,⁸ who can be divided into five categories. There are 10,348 adult/baptized people in this edition of the directory. The

⁴ For more information about the creation of the first directory, see Meyers (1991, p. 309) and Meyers (1994b, pp. 378–379). For a larger discussion of the field of genetics research in Amish populations, see Nolt (2020).

⁵ I was told by an Amish friend that one of the problems with these directories was that “when the Russians invade, they will be able to easily find the Amish” using these books.

⁶ The late Eli E. Gingerich was the first collaborator with the Hopkins research team. His son-in-law Jerry E. Miller took on the third and successive editions through 2012. A grandson, Joas Miller, was the editor of the 2017 directory.

⁷ Each directory includes a map of each church district. Each household is listed with an address, birthdates of all family members, occupation of household head, and information about church membership. Each child in a family is listed with a letter denoting whether the individual is unbaptized, baptized, or has left the Amish faith. Finally, the original location of household heads who have moved into the settlement from some other location is identified. The new location of children who have left the settlement is also identified. In the analysis that follows, the information on those moving into the settlement are referred to as migrants. Those children identified with the letter *C* are the emigrants to other settlements.

⁸ In some families, a spouse died and their partner remarried. At a later point, the partner died as well and their new spouse (who is not biologically related to their partner’s children) listed the former spouse, their partner, and children. I eliminated this group of individuals from the data set.

unbaptized children number 14,164. In addition, there are adults who appear twice in the directory: as children of aging parents in their families of origin and a second time as adults in their own nuclear family. To avoid duplication and confounding of the analysis, these duplicates were removed from the data set the second time they appeared. Finally, the directory includes two additional groups: people who have left the community and live in another settlement and adults who have left the Amish faith.

Table 1*Summary Statistics from the 2017 Indiana Amish Directory*

Total number of individuals in directory	33,526
Total number of districts	181
Mean number of members per district	136
Total number of households	5,230
Total number of Amish individuals	24,512
Baptized adult members	10,348
Children	14,164
Non-Amish	1,209
Adult duplicates	7,223
Immigrants	821
Emigrants	589

There are 4,992 men and 5,351 women in the 5,230 households in the data set. Additionally, Table 2 indicates that this directory includes 58 men who live in single-person households and 164 unmarried women who have formed their own households. Some of these women share a home with one or more other women.

Finally, this settlement is largely made up of young people. The median age is 19. On the other hand, 6% of the people in the Elkhart-LaGrange settlement are 65 years of age or older. This number is significantly lower than the general population of the United States. According to the recent census, 16.5% of the population is 65 and older and the median age is 38.4. (United States Census Bureau, 2020).

Table 2*Gender and Age Profile in 2017*

Men	4,992
Single-person household ^a	58
Women	5,351
Single-person household ^b	164
Median age	19
Number of individuals under 22	14,003 (57%)
Number of individuals over 64	1,465 (6%)

^a One man is in a single-parent household.

^b Five women are in single-parent households.

Population Growth

While it is true that the Elkhart-LaGrange settlement has grown rapidly over time, the total population has not doubled in size in 20-year increments as some scholars suggest is the norm for Amish communities (Kraybill et al., 2013, p. 155). Although it is the case that the number of church districts has more than doubled in recent decades, it is also apparent that the average number of persons in each district and the average number of members has been declining. The data in Table 3 were taken from page 4 of the 2017 directory. It is clear that the size of churches has declined over time. This is partially due to the large number of new churches that have been created. When a church divides because it has outgrown the optimal size,⁹ two smaller districts are created. Many of the churches in the 2017 directory were created in recent years.¹⁰

Table 3

Average Number of Persons and Church Members per District

	1988	1995	2002	2007	2012	2017
People per district	164	153	140	141	137	134
Members per district	70	69	66	65	63	62

Table 4 provides a picture of the population growth of the settlement. Compiling data from each of the eight directories, it is clear that in this community the population has never doubled during the years the directories cover. From 1970 to 1995 (a period of 25 years), the 13,000 individuals in the settlement was slightly less than twice its original size.

Table 4

Number of Districts, Households and Total Population Growth Over Time

Year	Districts	Households	Population
1970	37	1,205	6,720
1980	51	1,561	8,575
1988	66	2,100	11,154
1995	85	2,600	13,000
2002	114	2,934	15,880
2007	131	3,400	18,423
2012	153	4,979	20,941
2017	181	5,230	24,503

⁹ When a member's home or outbuilding will not comfortably accommodate everyone for a Sunday morning church service, it is usually deemed time to divide the congregation.

¹⁰ An Amish informant suggests that the rapid division of churches is not simply a matter of population growth. It is related to the fact that with industrial employment many families have more disposable income and therefore can afford to regularly hire a driver to take them to church services that may be some distance from their home. With more people in attendance, there has to be more space for worship services. Since there is a limit to building size, the home church numbers are kept low to provide room for guests.

Part of the reason that population increase has not been consistent with the overall Amish population in North America is that the size of families in the Elkhart-LaGrange settlement has begun to slowly decrease. This diminution in family size is associated with occupational changes among the men in the settlement. As we shall see, the number of farmers in this settlement has declined significantly in recent decades. The majority of household heads are working in the large mobile home and recreational vehicle factories in northern Indiana. In addition, there are significant numbers of men who have their own businesses or work for non-Amish carpentry crews or other businesses. As Table 5 demonstrates, there has been a steady decrease in family size in recent years.

Table 5

Mean Birth Rates of Women Over 45

Year	Birth rate
2002	7.18
2012	6.75
2017	6.47

There may be several reasons for the decline in family size in nonagricultural households. It is clear that children have always had a role in the operation of a farm. At a young age, they participate in daily chores, and as they grow, they are given more specific responsibilities. For this reason, it makes sense that farm families continue to have at least seven children. In every other occupational category, the average number of children is just over six. In the past, I have argued that children may indeed become a burden for families residing on a small plot of land in the countryside.¹¹ There is much less for the children to do to occupy their time in these settings. Furthermore, fathers who are not farmers may be away from home every day during most of the daylight hours. Mothers are left at home with responsibility for the children. In some ways, Amish women are experiencing what women in the larger society experienced during the Industrial Revolution.¹²

Table 6 describes the differences in family size between occupational groups over the time period 2002 to 2017. The table enables us to see the decline in family size over time that has been occurring among cohorts of women in each occupational group. Since the majority of men are working in industry and their wives are having fewer children, it is clear that this factor has had a significant influence on population decline. Table 7 demonstrates the impact over time of husband's occupation on family size. It is clear that reduction in family size is not limited to factory workers. In all of the other occupational groups, there has also been a steady decline in the number of children in a family.

¹¹ For a more detailed discussion of changes related to industrial employment, see Meyers (1994a).

¹² Although it appears that some form of family planning is being used by Amish women, there has been no systematic attempt to explore that topic. The Amish continue to teach the principle that the number of children in a family is in God's hands.

Table 6*Husband's Occupation and Mean Birth Rates of Women Over 45*

	2002	2012	2017
All women	7.18	6.75	6.47
Farm	7.73	7.64	7.70
Factory	6.44	6.13	6.04
Shop	7.27	6.56	6.50
Carpenter	7.37	6.72	6.50
Other	6.30	6.13	6.06

Table 7*Husband's Occupation and Mean Birth Rates of Women in Decade Increments, 2017 Directory*

	Farm	Factory	Shop	Carpenter	Other
All women	7.76	6.04	6.39	6.54	6.10
45–54	7.28	5.72	6.13	6.78	5.54
55–64	7.70	6.20	5.89	5.93	5.63
65–74	7.82	6.48	7.12	6.47	7.54
75+	7.95	6.63	7.84	7.13	6.43

If the analysis is taken a step further and age cohorts of household heads are examined, there is clear evidence of a widening gap between the size of farm families and the size of families of all of the other occupational groups. In every cohort of farmers, the average family has more than seven children. All of the nonfarmer families under the age of 65 have fewer than seven children.

Kraybill and his colleagues (2013, p.158) have argued that it is far too simplistic to say that nonfarm occupations have been the sole reason for the decline in family size. They suggest that the matter is complicated by the degree of conservatism or progressivism present in a district or cluster of districts. Their measure of conservatism is the value of adhering to the moral imperative to follow the biblical injunction to bear as many children as possible. They suggest that “the strong moral imperative to reproduce that propels population growth in Amish society is not occupation dependent but arises from the enduring power of an oft-cited religious directive in Amish writings and oral lore to ‘be fruitful and multiply’ (Gen. 1:22).”

What makes an Amish group more conservative or progressive is not always obvious. In fact, Steven Nolt and I have argued (2007) that the conservative–progressive continuum is far too simplistic. It is possible to come up with a list of things that place a group at one end or the other, such as use of cell phones versus restricting phone use to a communal phone shanty. On the other hand, some of the most progressive groups (measured by factors like the use of modern technology) such as the New Order communities in southern Indiana have very strong controls over their young people’s activity, a value that is shared by the most conservative groups in northern Indiana.

With that caveat in mind, if one chooses segments of the Elkhart-LaGrange settlement that lean toward one end of the conservative–progressive continuum, it is possible to test the hypothesis that strictly adhering to the dictum that it is necessary to follow God’s Word on the

matter of producing as many children as possible is more important than the occupational choice of the head of the household. In other words, simply leaving the farm is not the total explanation for the decline in family size.

Two groups of Amish in the Elkhart-LaGrange settlement that live in close proximity to each other vary a great deal in their *Ordnung*. One example is the use of refrigeration. Long after the Shippshewana churches had given up older technology for gas-powered refrigerators, the Barrens districts continued to use ice as their source of coolant.

The data in Table 8 suggest that the more conservative group is likely to hold to the traditional value of “being fruitful and multiplying,” and therefore this position may supersede other factors that influence family size, such as occupation of the household head. Clearly, family size is smaller in every occupational group in the more progressive area of the settlement.

Table 8

Average Number of Children of Women over the age of 45 in the Barrens and Shippshewana Districts

	Shippshewana		Barrens	
	<i>M</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>n</i>
Farm	6.35	20	7.13	23
Factory	5.00	63	6.39	33
Shop	6.45	22	7.37	11
Carpenter	2.67	6	6.00	6
Other	5.27	26	7.09	7

Finally, the size of families in this settlement has not been impacted by changes in the age of first marriage. There is a remarkable consistency in age at marriage: the current age for men (22.7) and for women (21.2) is exactly the same as the marriage ages of those born at the beginning of the twentieth century.¹³ These numbers are also nearly equivalent to the average ages at marriage for all Amish men (22.3) and women (21.1) in North America reported by Kraybill et al. (2013, p. 156).

Occupations of Heads of Households

The most important change in the recent history of the Elkhart-LaGrange settlement is the rapid decline in farming and the dramatic growth in employment in industry. In the late twentieth century when farming was on the decline, there was a lot of speculation about the demise of Amish society with the movement into the “world” of industry. Some Amish described this change as the “lunch pail threat.” Scholars have also noted that industrial employment may pose a threat to the Amish way of life. Donald Kraybill succinctly described these threats in the following way: “The factory, in short, would fragment the family, deplete social capital, and eventually ruin the community” (Kraybill, 2001, p. 243). In an earlier publication (Meyers, 1994a, p. 165), I quote the eminent Yale church historian Roland Bainton: “On a recent visit to Goshen, Indiana, I was told that the Amish in that area were too prolific for the resources of the land. No more land for sale. Hence Amish young men are going into factories. That, I

¹³ See Meyers (1991) for the data that go back to the early twentieth century.

remarked to myself, spells the beginning of the end.” In a similar vein, Marc Olshan argued that leaving agriculture and actively engaging with the dominant culture by inviting non-Amish clients to enter microenterprises (that I have referred to using the Amish colloquial term “shops”) was the Trojan horse that will destroy Amish society. He writes, “Cottage industry carries with it a potential for forcing the realignment of Amish life to accord with the dictates of commerce. The consequent increased contact with Amish and non-Amish, and the new roles associated with that contact, represent an opening of Amish society” (1994, p. 146).

In my research, I have found that the situation is quite the opposite. Working in a shop or a factory has not meant that the Amish will disappear. Industrial employment has enabled the Amish to survive rather than destroying their culture. In brief, industrial employment is a means to an end, not an end in itself. Amish men work in factories to be able to come home and live comfortably in their own communities. “Factory worker” is not their primary identity. For many people in the dominant culture, their work is the driving force in how they understand themselves and their relationship to those around them. For an Amish person, the answer to the question Who am I? is not related to the work that they do on a daily basis. It is much more related to nonwork hours, where one is primarily in an Amish context, relating primarily to Amish people and where Amish values are reinforced.¹⁴ Hence, the more important answer to the question Who am I? is likely to be simply: I am Amish. The values that undergird Amish society persist and continue to exist in tension with the values of the larger society.

It is clear from the data presented in Table 9 that the farm option has not been available to young men and that factory work is the primary choice of this group. The rates of participation in shop work and other occupations has remained fairly consistent over time. The “Other” category includes many recent innovations in Amish life such as therapists, electricians, plumbers, solar panel developers, restaurant workers, and other occupations that would have been unknown a few decades ago. The total number of occupations listed in the 2017 directory is 177 (Joas Miller, 2017, pp. 6–7).

Table 9

Male Occupations by Age Cohorts, 2017 Directory

Age cohort	Farm		Factory		Shop		Carpenter		Other	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
All	769	15	2,725	55	925	19	241	5	322	7
<30	54	5	785	71	145	13	58	5	57	5
30–39	155	11	867	62	223	16	73	5	74	5
40–49	170	17	516	52	199	20	44	4	67	7
50–59	135	20	303	46	151	23	28	4	44	7
60–69	101	22	157	34	129	28	21	5	52	11
>70	154	41	97	26	78	21	17	5	28	8

Although I have argued that employment off the farm does not mean that the Amish way of life is threatened, I am not saying that the movement into industry has not had an impact on

¹⁴ For a more detailed description of the history and impact of industrial employment in northern Indiana, see Meyers (1994a).

Amish life. To be sure, factory employment has led to changes in the Elkhart-LaGrange settlement. These individuals have incomes that greatly exceed their agricultural neighbors. Their homes have become much elaborate, with detailed landscaping surrounding the buildings. Amish people are frequent patrons of restaurants, malls, and big box stores in northern Indiana, have large boats and other recreational vehicles, and frequently hire drivers to take them to other parts of the country. Kraybill et al., (2013) add that the movement to nonagricultural occupations has had

profound implications for Amish life—the use of time, family relationships, access to capital and consumer goods, interaction with the wider world, and one’s sense of self. Increasingly common are church districts with no farmers, vanloads of men working on construction sites miles away from home, and business advertising that mocks the traditional value of humility. While none of the new occupational ventures signals the end of Amish society, they are certainly changing it. (p. 308)

While at one point in history, nonfarm work was discouraged and even made a test of membership in some Amish congregations (Kollmorgen, 1942), it has become the norm in all of the large Amish settlements. Farming as a way of life cannot be sustained with the burgeoning population of the Amish and the rapid decline in farmland. Furthermore, the land that is available has become prohibitively expensive.

To survive and continue their way of life, the Amish have had to compromise and move away from the farm. Although there continues to be some concern about this compromise, it is clear that the stigma that was once associated with factory work is much less pronounced today.

One way to look at the decline in negative status of factory work is to look at the occupations of the ministry. In the past, a minister was not only a spiritual leader but one who demonstrated successful farming ability and furthermore kept his children on the farm. Today the stigma associated with factory work has diminished to the point that more than half of the men in the ministry are employed in factories. They are trusted leaders in their communities and their work is not viewed as a threat to the values of Amish society. Table 10 demonstrates that, in the population of men in ministry under the age of 50, factory work is the predominant occupation.

Table 10
Occupations of Ministry, 2017 Directory

	Ministers N = 408		Bishops N = 202		Deacons N = 189		Under 50 N = 356		Over 50 N = 443	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Farm	97	24	69	34	52	28	64	18	154	35
Factory	170	42	62	31	80	42	179	50	133	30
Shop	102	25	56	27	34	18	77	22	115	26
Carpenter	16	4	6	3	11	6	19	5	14	6
Other	23	6	9	5	12	6	17	5	27	6

When the ministerial roles are broken down into bishop, minister, and deacon, there is a slightly greater likelihood that bishops are farmers. However, if further analysis of the age strata of these men is done, it is clear that part of the reason there are more farmers in the bishop category is that the median age of this group is 60. Because they are older as a group, it is logical that there would be more farmers in this category. The median age of ministers is 48. The difference in the number of farmers in each category is partly a function of age. Among the population that is under 50, half of the ministry are factory workers. These numbers suggest that working in a factory does not disqualify someone from being a candidate for the ministry.

Migration

One of the ways that population pressure in a particular Amish community can be ameliorated is to have people leave the community and move to other areas of the state or country. Kraybill et al. (2013, pp. 181–183) provide a thorough discussion of the push-pull factors related to any family's decision to leave their settlement of origin. Among the push factors are land prices, encroaching urban sprawl, weak local economies, and disputes with an Amish church or families. The pulls to move to another location include available farmland at reasonable prices, new markets for Amish products, a less strict or a more conservative *Ordnung*, and the opportunity to being nearer to friends and family in the new community.

Kraybill et al. (2013, p. 182) provide the evidence that settlements in Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Delaware, Ohio, and Michigan are losing large numbers of people who have moved elsewhere in the country. Notably, Indiana is not on that the list. In the past (Meyers, 1991), I have demonstrated that the Elkhart-LaGrange settlement has consistently had more people moving into the area than leaving. This continues to be the case. In the 2017 directory, there are 589 individuals who have left northern Indiana and 821 who have moved into the settlement.¹⁵ Although the land base is rapidly declining, people continue to move to Elkhart-LaGrange.

It is clear from the data in Table 11 that many people are moving to the nearby Nappanee and Centreville, Michigan, settlement. In the 1980s and '90s, a large group of Elkhart-LaGrange Amish moved to the Hillsboro, Wisconsin, settlement, and that out-migration continues to this day. Many of these people were looking for a more traditional (agricultural) way of life and wanted to get away from the problems associated with large populations centers. Among those concerns is the stereotype of Elkhart-LaGrange having a large group of young people who test the boundaries of their Amish background in their teen years.¹⁶ The assumption is that it is easier to maintain control of young people in a smaller settlement.

¹⁵ Migration data is included with each family entry in the directory. If a household head or his spouse has moved into the settlement, they are identified as an immigrant to the settlement and the name of their home settlement and the date of migration is listed. A child with the letter *C* after their name is one who has moved out of the Elkhart-LaGrange settlement (an emigrant from the settlement) and the name of their new community as well as the date that they emigrated is listed.

¹⁶ This stereotype was reinforced and accentuated by the popular 2002 film, *Devil's Playground* (Walker, 2002). According to Kraybill et al. (2013, p. 213), the filmmaker Lucy Walker "found four Amish teens willing to describe their wild, drug-laced parties on camera.... [The film] featured the wildest of the wild in Rumspringa."

Table 11

Individuals Leaving Elkhart-LaGrange: States and Settlements Where the Preponderance of Emigrants Have Relocated

Location	<i>n</i>
Other Settlements in Indiana	225
Nappanee	183
Michigan	135
Centerville	72
Wisconsin	104
Hillsboro	38
Kingston	14
Ohio	36
Holmes County	36
Missouri	17
Illinois	16
Arthur	11

Table 12 describes the movement into Elkhart-LaGrange. Once again, the surprising fact is that more people are moving into the settlement over time than are moving out. Eight hundred twenty-one people have left 19 states and the province of Ontario to come to northern Indiana.

There has been a significant number of immigrants from the large settlement in and around Holmes County, Ohio. Older long-established communities like Arthur, Illinois, those in Reno County, Kansas, and in Wisconsin have been the home settlements of many immigrants. Some of this movement is related to choice of marital partner. Following their marriage one of the partners chose to reside in their spouses' settlement of origin.

Table 12

Immigrants to Elkhart-LaGrange: States and Settlements with the Largest Number of Immigrants (N = 821)

Location	<i>n</i>
Indiana	369
Nappanee	227
Adams	84
Ohio	124
Holmes	70
Hicksville	21
Michigan	98
Centerville	72
Wisconsin	59
Bonduel	16
Kingston	12
Kansas	50
Reno County	44
Illinois	41
Arthur	37

There is a lot of migration from nearby settlements in Indiana and Michigan. A little more than a one third (36%) of all immigrants come from Nappanee and Centerville, Michigan. Why

is there such a large influx of immigrants into a community that is already taxing the limits of available land? Occupational opportunities may be part of the answer.

Table 13 shows that the majority of immigrants have always been men, with comparable gender ratios in each cohort. Table 13 also provides a glimpse at the structure of occupations over time. Prior to 1960, the majority of immigrants were farmers. As a result of increasing pressure on the land and the lack of available farmland, it is not surprising that relatively few of the immigrants arriving after 1959 were farmers. Over time, the number of household heads working in industry has increased. The most recent cohort is the most evenly distributed among the other occupational groups.

Table 13

Gender, Occupations of Household Heads, and Average Age Upon Arrival in Elkhart-LaGrange, 1960–2017

	Before 1960		1960–1980		1981–2001		2002–2017	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Immigrants								
Men	49	58	85	55	146	62	201	56
Women	36	42	70	45	91	38	161	44
Farm	20	41	10	12	11	8	10	5
Factory	12	25	34	40	90	62	111	55
Shop	8	16	21	25	27	19	15	15
Carpenter	3	6	4	5	13	9	15	15
Other	6	12	16	19	5	3	10	10
Mean age	17.15		23.18		26.44		30.52	
Under 20 years of age at migration	44	52	29	19	41	21	26	8

The other group that is striking is the number of immigrants from the Swiss Amish settlements of Adams and Allen counties. Slightly more than 10% (84 individuals) have moved into the Elkhart-LaGrange settlement from Adams County, which is south of the city of Fort Wayne, Indiana. My colleague Steven Nolt and I have described (in two publications: Meyers & Nolt, 2005; Nolt & Meyers, 2007) in some detail the essential differences between the Swiss stream of immigrants that came to North America in the nineteenth century and the Pennsylvania Dutch group that began to immigrate in the eighteenth century. We note that the most striking difference is linguistic. The so-called Swiss Amish speak a dialect of German that most Pennsylvania Dutch speakers find difficult to comprehend. On the other hand, most Swiss speakers also speak Pennsylvania Dutch, the dialect that is predominant in Amish society. There are other cultural and theological issues such as the year-round use of unenclosed buggies and the practice of strict shunning in the case of excommunication. These differences have created boundary markers between the two groups that many have been reluctant to cross.

Given this background, it is surprising to see such a large influx of Swiss Amish into a Pennsylvania Dutch settlement. Why are they migrating to a community with a different historical background and some cultural elements that are quite different? The answers may not be as obvious as occupational opportunities, although that may certainly be the case. In

recent years, Elkhart and LaGrange counties have had very low unemployment rates and jobs are easily found in the recreational vehicle industry.

The Adams County settlement has had a history of division between competing understandings of how best to be Amish.¹⁷ They have also insisted on maintaining certain boundary markers such as open-air buggies and refusal to accept air or hydraulic power in their businesses. One of the contentious theological issues in the Swiss settlements is the insistence on *streng Meidung* (strong shunning). In the Swiss tradition, when a member is excommunicated, the ban that prohibits members from interacting with non-members (including family) is in place for life. In many Pennsylvania Dutch communities, including Elkhart-LaGrange, the ban may be lifted after a period of time. The suspension of the ban may occur when the person leaving demonstrates a strong commitment to a new church such as the Beachy Amish or Conservative Mennonites.

Thus, there are many reasons why Swiss Amish have moved north and west of their settlement of origin. Differences in approach to permitted technology, different symbolic separators from the larger non-Amish world, and serious reservations about forgoing older understandings of tests of church membership are all part of the answer to why they may choose to emigrate.

The other interesting phenomenon is the fact that the age of immigrants continues to rise with time. As Table 13 shows, the mean age of cohorts of immigrants, beginning in the 1960s, continues to rise as each decade passes. The average age (31) of current immigrants is 10 years older than that of the earliest group (17.5). There were clearly more children who came as part of the family unit that migrated prior to 1960. More than half (52%) of that group of immigrants were under 20 years of age.

Defection

Contrary to the popular assumption that Amish society could not withstand the pressure of the modern world, the Amish have not only survived but are keeping more of their children in the faith than was the case in the middle of the twentieth century.¹⁸ In Elkhart-LaGrange in the 1930s, roughly one in five (21%) Amish young people decided to leave the church (Meyers, 1991, p. 313). Kraybill et al. (2013, p. 162) report that 30% of the Amish born in Geauga County, Ohio, in the 1920s left the church. They contrast that number with a 5% loss of those born in the 1960s. It is interesting to note that Geauga is one of the small number of settlements with the majority of men working in industry.

Table 14 provides the data about the membership decisions of all Amish children in the 2017 directory. These individuals are all adults—people who have had the opportunity to make a decision about their faith choice. They are identified in the directory with the following letters: *B* is a baptized member; *C* is a person who has left the community but remains an Amish church member; and *D* is a person who has defected from the Amish. The defection rate of

¹⁷ The inclination to divide the church into competing factions has been part of the history of the Swiss settlements from the beginning of their founding. For a fuller description of the historical and cultural background of Swiss schismatic tendencies, see Nolt & Meyers (2007, 101–120).

¹⁸ For a detailed discussion of the factors that lead Amish young people to leave or to remain in the faith of their parents, see Meyers (1994).

14% is higher than has been previously reported but still much lower than it was in the past and is in other large settlements.

Table 14

Membership Status of Adults, 2017 Directory (N = 9,104)

Baptized		Migrants		Defectors	
<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
7,194	80	599	7	1,221	14

When the analysis is taken a step further by breaking down the data into age cohorts of people under the age of 60, the numbers change rather dramatically. Table 15 clearly demonstrates that the oldest cohort has a defection rate that is more than twice the rate of the under-30 cohort.

Table 15

Membership Status of Adult Age Cohorts, 2017 Directory (N = 5,945)

Age Cohort	Members		Migrants		Defectors	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
<30	1,960	88	67	3	196	7
30–39	2,431	83	160	5	355	12
40–49	1,692	77	161	7	352	16
50–59	824	80	144	12	210	18

Table 16 addresses the question of how membership decisions are impacted by father's occupational choice. The percentage of children who choose to remain in the church and in the settlement is consistent. Children of shop workers have a slightly higher rate of retention than children whose fathers have other occupations.

Children of factory workers are the least likely to migrate to another community, and they also have the highest rate of defection at 17%. Clearly, industrial employment does have an impact on the older cohorts of Amish children. Given the real difference in rates of defection as age increases, it is possible that the overall defection rate will decline as the older population is no longer living.

Table 16

Child's Membership Status by Father's Occupation

	Farm <i>N</i> = 3,268		Factory <i>N</i> = 2,881		Shop <i>N</i> = 1,828		Carpenter <i>N</i> = 376		Other <i>N</i> = 661	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Member	2,598	80	2,251	78	1,508	83	304	81	533	80
Migrant	266	8	155	5	110	6	30	8	38	6
Defector	404	12	475	17	210	12	42	11	90	14

To be sure, the reasons an individual leaves the church of their parents are complicated and may include many factors that are not examined here. In an earlier publication (Meyers, 1994), I looked at the following variables: birth position in a family, having a sibling who left the church, gender of the defector, living in close proximity to an urban community, variations in severity of the *Ordnung* from district to district, and whether the individual had attended an Amish school. All of these factors should be examined in further analysis of the complex matter of membership choice.

Common Elkhart-LaGrange Surnames

The four families that arrived in northern Indiana in 1841 included two with the family name “Miller” and two with the family name “Bontrager.” Table 17 clearly indicates that Miller is by far the most common surname in the settlement. Bontrager has moved to the third rank and is superseded by Yoder. More than half the population in Elkhart-LaGrange have one of three names: Miller, Yoder, or Bontrager. This pattern of the occurrence of frequent names in a settlement has been observed in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, by Donald Kraybill (2001, p. 93), where the majority of the settlement have Stoltzfus, King, or Fisher as their surname.

Table 17

Common Family Names

Family name	2017		2012	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Miller	6,010	25	5,208	25
Yoder	3,574	15	3,043	15
Bontrager	2,892	12	2,589	12
Hochstetler	1,154	5	966	5
Lambright	1,015	4	909	5
Lehman	906	4	790	4
Schrock	722	3	619	3
Schlabach	658	3	512	3
Troyer	657	3	534	3
Fry	551	2	519	3
Mast	495	2	431	2
Beachy	471	2	409	2

Table 17 also demonstrates that these family names¹⁹ remain consistent over time. The only name that changed position in recent years is Troyer. In 2012, it was more common than Schlabach. By 2017, Schlabach had surpassed Troyer by one person. Common first names for men are David, John, and Daniel; for women, Mary, Kathryn, Sara, and Ruth are the most prominent. There is a lot of innovation in recent years with first names. One example is a family with two sons named Ryker and Jaxon and a daughter named McKenna. Other examples of

¹⁹ It should be noted that every variation of the spelling of a surname is included in these statistics. For example, both Bortrager and Bontrager, and Hochstetler, Hostetler, and Hochstedler were included in this table as one family name.

names that are new to Amish society include Blake, Brantley, Cheyenne, Damon, Mackensie, Novalene, and Teasha. The addition of these novel names does suggest that there is greater contact with the non-Amish world than in the past. It is not clear whether the contact is through media or direct conversations with outsiders.

Conclusion

It is clear that the population of the Elkhart-LaGrange settlement continues to increase. Using the eight editions of the directories that have been produced in this settlement since 1970, the growth in settlement size has been demonstrated. In the 47 years between the first and most recent editions of the directory, the population has increased from 6,270 to 24,512. In the latest directory, there are 14,164 children and 10,348 baptized adults. Although the settlement has expanded, the population has not doubled in 20-year increments, as is the case in other Amish communities.

Family size has slowly begun to decrease from seven children as the norm to slightly more than six in all occupational groups except farmers. It is clear that the movement away from agriculture has had an impact on Amish demography. The smallest families are those with fathers who leave for the factory each morning.

The occupation of the head of the household is only one factor that explains family size. By comparing a more progressive and a conservative set of districts, we have demonstrated that the strong affirmation of the biblical injunction in the Book of Genesis to be fruitful and multiply may be more strictly adhered to in the more conservative districts.

Elkhart-LaGrange is one of a very small number of Amish settlements where most of the household heads are working in industry. Among the men under the age of 50, less than one in five is still on the farm. Fifteen percent of all of these men are farmers. Working in cottage industries is the second choice of all of the heads of households.

The Elkhart-LaGrange settlement has a declining land base as a result of the increase in both the Amish and non-Amish populations. It is therefore surprising that many Amish from other areas in North America continue to come to this region. We have demonstrated that the number that moved into the settlement exceeds the number that left. There were 821 immigrants to Elkhart-LaGrange, and those leaving the settlement numbered 589. Part of the reason that so many people are coming to this congested area is the ready availability of employment. But the picture is much more complicated than simply work opportunities.

We gave special attention to the large number of immigrants from Swiss settlements near Fort Wayne, Indiana. These immigrants may be looking for opportunities to use more modern technology and or they may have left some divisive issues behind, such as an adherence to strong shunning.

There has been an assumption by some scholars that factory work would inevitably lead to the demise of Amish society. This has not been borne out by the evidence. In the Elkhart-LaGrange settlement, the rate of leaving the Amish is 14%. That number is slightly higher than previous findings but lower than the figures for other larger settlements, notably Holmes County, Ohio, and Lancaster, Pennsylvania. The evidence presented here suggests that the younger children of factory workers, particularly those under the age of 30, are less likely to leave the church than those in this category from earlier generations.

Finally, the names that were brought to Elkhart-LaGrange by the first immigrants continue to dominate. Half of the population in this settlement have Miller, Yoder, or Bontrager as their surname. Common first names such as David or Mary persist.

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