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Immediate Release : Sociology Professor Granted Opportunity to Live With Amish Family

Ed Alsene
Illinois Wesleyan University

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ILLINOIS WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY /BLOOMINGTON, ILL. 61701

Jerry Bidle, Director of
Public Relations

Phone (309) 556-3181

Ed Alsene, Director of
Publicity and Sports Information

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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BLOOMINGTON, ILL.--D. Paul Miller, Illinois Wesleyan University sociology professor who was granted the rare opportunity of living and working with an Amish family for three months in 1978, has published a book based on that experience and other studies of the residents of the Amish community near Arthur, Ill.

"The Illinois Amish" is a 166-page collection of historical facts, Miller's impressions of the community and its people and lists families, businesses, churches and schools in the community 30 miles south of Champaign-Urbana in east-central Illinois.

The book, published by Pequea Publishers, Gordonville, Pa., costs \$4.95 (\$5.75 postpaid) and may be purchased from the author at 8 Wilmette Drive, Normal (AC 309 452-7285. Other local outlets are the Illinois Wesleyan University Bookstore and Provident Bookstore, 1500 E. Empire and Old Main Bookstore, 207 S. Main, Normal.

In the Arthur area, books may be purchased at Country Salvage, County Line Cold Storage, Cadwell Store, Miller Dry Goods and F and B Woodworking.

About two-thirds of the book is devoted to a fascinating series of lists and accompanying maps about the Arthur Amish settlement, which was established in 1865.

Miller, for instance, conducted a census that showed there to be 430 families and 1,991 persons in 13 church districts.

He then lists the families, occupations of the husbands, dates of marriages and deaths, and birthdates of all offspring.

Miller's list of shops and businesses include 94 establishments in 15 categories, with 25 woodworking shops heading the list numerically. There are 12 buggy shops, 12 retail stores and nine harness shops listed.

Miller conducted his research before and after he spent those three months January through April of 1978 living with the family of Freeman and Bertha Beachy and working in their woodworking shop, F and B Woodworking.

Much of his directory material was the result of his continuing a study started by the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine Research Center in 1973 and then abandoned.

Miller obtained the printouts from Johns Hopkins, which had conducted similar studies in other Amish communities in research on hereditary diseases. He then gave the printouts to bishops of each of the church districts for updating.

Miller, whose roots are in the Mennonite-Anabaptist tradition, offers some opinions and insights on the changes taking place among the Amish, who originally were almost totally involved in farming.

Miller did his first research on the Amish in Kansas in 1949-50. He made no close observations of them again until he began his current research in 1976. He noted many changes during that period, mostly in economic activity.

"The frontier has disappeared," he writes. "Amish communities today are firmly established on the land, but, as their numbers increase and the area of land they own remains relatively fixed, they experience a real squeezing of their resources. It is this squeeze which compels ever-enlarging families to be content with three or five acres of land and to 'set up shop' as an adjunct to their economic activity."

"It is interesting to speculate on, but still difficult to know, what the eventual consequence of the shops will be. Admittedly, it is a trend away from the agricultural tradition, yet these activities cannot be characterized as urban operations. Without exception, these shops are located in the rural areas and, in the main, are family ventures. These rural, family characteristics are favorable to the continuation of the traditional Amish lifestyle, and would not be possible without the large Amish landholdings."

Miller points out other ways in which Amish ways are being changed and influenced and offers a cautionary note concerning urban traits creeping into the Amish living patterns.

"Continuance in the future depends upon the ability of the Amish Church to accommodate certain demands of individual members but still hold fast to enough church discipline to maintain distinction as an Amish Church," he writes.

It won't be easy, he says. "To illustrate, in the two and one-half centuries of Amish history in America, Amish families have never come so near, as now, to running out of the farmland which seems to be essential in maintaining the rural traits and general Amish characteristics."