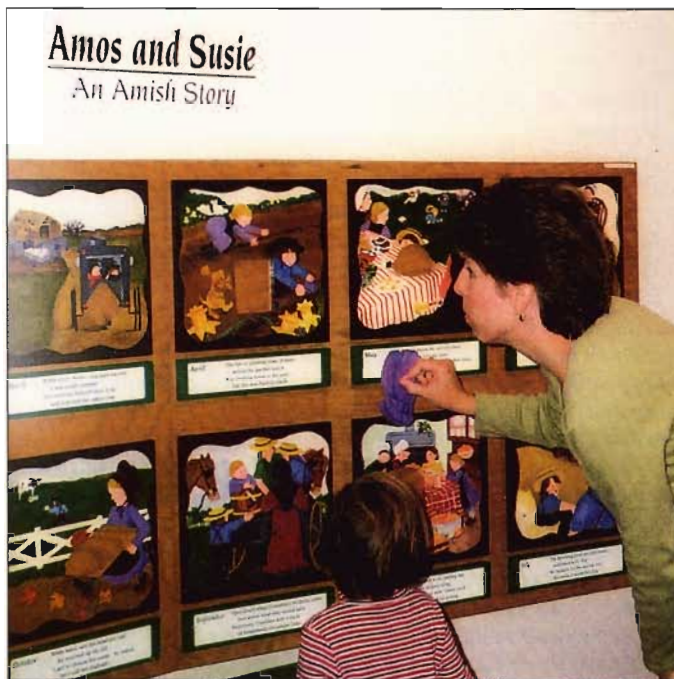


Panorama

People's Place Museum • Olde Good Things
Meadville's Sign Flowers • Chambersburg's 'Old Jail'
Buckaloons' Prehistoric and Historic Digs • Jennings Environmental Education Center



Lancaster County

People's Place Museum Answers Questions about the Plain People

Text and photographs by Michael Franco

“Why do they dress that way?” “Why don’t they use electricity?” “Do they pay taxes?” “Do they need licenses to drive

their buggies?”

Visitors to Lancaster County not only come with appetites for smorgasbords and shoofly pies, but they often come hungry

Merle and Phyllis Good, owners of The People's Place, developed the interactive museum to foster a better understanding of the Amish and Mennonite ways of life. “None of us likes to live in a zoo,” they say. “It takes effort to understand other people.”

for information about the county's Amish and Mennonite residents. For such curious souls, The People's Place, located in the village of Intercourse, presents the world of the Amish and Mennonites in a well-structured, entertaining and highly engaging forum.

Like the Amish, the People's Place is plain. It has a sense of openness and light that invites you to linger and learn as you move through the discovery museum, bookshop, theater, quilt museum and art gallery.

At the bookshop on the main floor, you may browse through books examining Amish and Mennonite life from a variety of angles. Cookbooks, volumes of poetry, historical texts and even books featuring Amish and Mennonite humor line the simple wooden shelves. Coffee-table books, rich in photographs, offer rare

glimpses into the life of Lancaster County's Plain People.

Next, step through the bookshop's back door into a small theater where you may view a multiscreen sight and sound presentation, “Who Are the Amish?” As the lights dim and the sound of Amish chanting fills the air, you will be drawn into the world of an ages-old culture. Photographs portraying the simple beauty of Amish culture dissolve into one another on three screens. As the presentation moves from season to season and from one aspect of Plain life to the next, a story emerges of persecution and growth, faith and family, tradition and change. Interjected into the narrative are the voices of tourists asking various questions and receiving frank and informative answers.

More than likely, this presentation will whet

your appetite for even more information about Amish and Mennonite life, which you will find up the staircase in 20 Questions, A Discovery Museum, the crowning jewel of The People's Place. Owners Merle and Phyllis Good say their goal in developing this interactive museum was "to create a journey" for visitors. And journey it is.

As you wind your way from room to room, you will encounter the 20 most-asked questions about the Amish and Mennonites. Each question is posed above a set of small wooden doors. Open one of these doors, and you will find an answer appropriate to Old Order communities. Open the other, and you will read about modern Mennonite society.

But more than a series of questions and answers, the museum contains plenty of other exhibits to tickle your senses. Colorful three-dimensional paintings draw you into the homes and the history of the Amish. A series of telephone receivers give you the opportunity to listen to engaging narratives about Plain culture. "Sadie's Diary" allows you to leaf through writings kept by a young Amish girl, and humorous quips and exhibits throughout the museum will bring a smile to your face.

In fact, 20 Questions has so many fun nooks

and crannies that children will have a great time, too. A "feeling box" allows youngsters to place their hands into a curtained cubbyhole to try to identify various objects hidden inside. They will squeal and squirm as their fingers explore such items as a cow's tooth, a corncob, hay and a gas lamp mantle. A replica of a buggy allows children to try out the vehicle's various signal lights.

Much like the popular "Where's Waldo?" game, "Where's Menno?" challenges everyone, young and old, to find Menno the Mennonite hidden in a crowd. In a small school-room display, children may dress in traditional Amish clothes, sit at a desk that would be found in a one-room schoolhouse and even try a typical lesson.

When you have had



The People's Place, located in the center of the village of Intercourse, Lancaster County, features a large bookshop filled with a variety of titles examining Amish and Mennonite life.

your fill of the sights, sounds and colors of the discovery museum, head across the street to the People's Place Quilt Museum. Here, the lessons about the Plain community are subtler, told in shades of color and pattern

rather than in words. Rotating shows in the Quilt Museum display more than 30 antique Amish quilts. Through the various installations, you will encounter stories of individualism, innate artistic sensibilities and clever creativity.

With your questions about Amish and Mennonite life answered, you now are ready to head out into the back roads and villages of Lancaster County and see for yourself the diverse and thriving collections of people who treasure their simple way of life and the pleasures and trials of being Plain. ▀

Michael Franco is an innkeeper in Lancaster County who first visited The People's Place to find answers to his guests' many questions.

Visitors Information

The People's Place is located at 3513 Old Philadelphia Pike along Rt. 340 in the center of the old part of the village of Intercourse, Lancaster County.

The People's Place is open 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. September through May and 9:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. June through August. Admission to either the 20 Questions Museum or the "Who Are the Amish?" presentation is adults, \$5; seniors ages 62 and up, \$4; and children ages 5-11, \$2.50. Combination admission for both the museum and the presentation is adults, \$8; seniors ages 62 and over, \$7; and children ages 5-11, \$4.

For more information, contact The People's Place at 3513 Old Philadelphia Pike, PO Box 419, Intercourse 17534; 800-390-8436; www.thepeoplesplace.com; custserv@thepeoplesplace.com. ■