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### Letter From Jim Butterfield and Ike Kaufman to Editors of the Pennsylvania Dutchman, December 30, 1957

Jim Butterfield

Ike Kaufman

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Wooster, Ohio  
December 30, 1957

The editors  
The Pennsylvania Dutchman  
Bethel, Pennsylvania

Dear Sirs:

We two DUTCHMAN readers in Wayne County, Ohio, spent a long evening comparing the favorite Amish games described by Vincent R. Tortora (Summer - Fall 1957) with the popular pastimes of Amish ~~young~~ <sup>Folks</sup> in this neighborhood. Barn raising pranks, softball, tug of war, buggy racing, barn dances, and Sunday night singings are part of the lighter side of plain life here just as in Lancaster County.

Forinstance, at one uff schtelling a man up on the barn frame hollered for more nails. A helper near the nail kegs asked how to toss them up. "Put them in your hat," the man above suggested. When the novice threw the hatfull up, of course the wide brimmed hat lagged ~~behind~~ <sup>behind</sup> and the nails fell back in a shower over him.

Almost every church district has a softball team that meets the best players of other districts at some school yard or farm ~~field~~ field. And the top players from several districts usually combine to play against non-Amish teams at the smaller towns.

School boys here don't even need a rope to start a tug of war at recess. The strongest ones grasp each others arms while the rest pull by grasping the boy ~~at~~ ahead around the waist.

Another active recess game is Hause (Rabbit). All rabbits start at one base and run to the safety of another across

the school yard. A lone shiesser (shooter) off to the side tries to hit one of them with a rubber ball. Anyone hit becomes a hund (dog) and stays in between the bases to catch rabbits and hold them until the shiesser can hit or tap them with the ball too. Finally most rabbits become dogs and the last haus to be caught and tapped becomes the next shiesser.

In years past some buggy owners with fast horses used to hitch them to light ~~wigs~~ carts and hold pre-arranged races. But church leaders frowned on that so heavily that speed tests usually happen now only when one buggy tries to pass another along some country road.

Barn dances were more frequent a few years ago than now. They were usually held on week nights after a moonlight field husking. Now such teen-age frolics are not as useful because corn is more often run through a stationary husking machine. If a farmer cuts his stalks with a horse-drawn corn binder, however, he may still invite the neighborhood young folks to come and set up the bundles into shocks. Then he provides a midnight snack in the house and opens his barn for dancing into the wee hours.

At such parties a few instruments usually turn up---most likely a small ~~Swiss~~ Swiss accordion and a guitar. Mandolins appear more often than violins because they are easier to play without lessons. In case no such hand instruments come to the midnight party, there is certain to be a mouthorgan or two somewhere in the crowd.

Actual square dancing, where four couples form a set, is taboo. But the reels or dances where all form a circle and take turns swinging are very popular. The music and dancing may



not be precise and expert, but all join in with gusto.

Sunday evening sings are more regular and more sedate. They are bi-weekly at whichever farm the church services were held that day. Young folks arrive in neat clothes and sit on the long portable ~~x~~ benches in house or barn depending on the time of year. Girls tend to sit on one side of the room and boys on the other. Typically, though, most ~~boys~~ of the boys hang around outside to talk, so the German hymns sound like a girls chorus. Later some English hymns fill out the evening.

By then the boys have pretty well agreed among themselves which ~~girls~~ maidel each will ask to take home. If any ~~girl~~ girl declines, it is said she has given that young man a henshing(glove). Er hat en henshing grickt means that a girl turned him down.

If the farm owner does not wish to have a sing due to illness in the home or for any other reason, the young people can travel by buggy ~~to a neighboring church district~~ five or ten miles to a neighboring church district. The same is true on bi-weekly visiting Sundays when no church is held in the home district but probably is in one ~~of~~ of the bordering areas.

Children here play parlor games like Monopoly, and older boys and men like a checker board. But chess is almost unknown. It is a rare Ohio Amishman who has even seen it played. There is no restriction against the game, and many keen plain people would be very adept. The Amish here simply haven't crossed leisure paths with many chess players.

As for standard cards; they are discouraged by the church but probably almost every Amish male between ages 15 and 30 knows some common game like Hearts or Rummy.

Wrestling used to be a great sport at all public sales in the Amish sections. Twenty-five years ago wrestling matches followed one after another in the hay mow for a whole afternoon. But during the last ten years the custom has nearly ceased. Do you suppose that is because automobiles bring more strangers in and sales are less of a neighborhood affair these days?

The usual style was "side hold" wrestling. Two men stood hip to hip with their far hands locked together in front and their near hands grabbing a fist full of trouser at the opponent's back. Whoever threw the other man down won if he did not go down ~~himself~~ himself.

The game of Corner Ball so popular in Lancaster County seems unknown here in Wayne County.

Table tennis is an indoor recreation at some ~~of the~~ one room schools operated by the Amish church in Wayne County. A few farm families have made room for ping pong tables in the last five years too.

You are likely to find a children's swing under the yard tree at many Amish farms. Under some other welcome shade you may see horseshoe stakes. Pitching horseshoes is a pleasant way to stretch after a big meal on visiting Sunday. On church Sunday, however, no games are played after the service.

Boys out of school (after 16) and before marriage (usually not before 21) generally find time to hunt and fish. Coon hunting through the black of night is great sport, and some Amish youths have well bred coon dogs.

Amish teen agers are usually seen among the crowds at these public events: county fair, school play, circus. And when



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happy circumstance takes them to a large city like Cleveland or Columbus, the first place they head for is the zoo. At times a small group will arrange to have someone drive them in a car 80 miles to ~~xxxxxx~~ Wheeling, West Virginia, to watch a hillbilly stage performance at the WWVA radio station studio. Such a trip is too good to miss, and when a car hauling Amish youths starts out, the back seat <sup>along</sup> ~~along~~ may be crammed with ~~xxxxxxx~~ five or six young men and maidens.

At about age 18, most Amish choose to be baptized into their church. After that solemn ritual they are expected to lay aside musical instruments, give up their place on the ~~x~~ softball team, and stay away from fairs and the circus. When they marry, newlyweds no longer attend barn dance frolics and Sunday singings.

#### ~~Exercises~~

But serious responsibilities so not pull a wet blanket over their lives. Vincent Tortora's article shows that the Lancaster Amish do not depend on special events alone, or certain games, to lighten their long hours of demanding work. Neither do they in Ohio!

At butchering time watch out or you'll find a curly pig's tail pinned on you behind. Don't go to sleep in the living room after supper while the women are washing dishes or you may feel something tickle your nose. When you raise your hand automatically to rub, you'll feel the sticky jam that they have cautiously spread on your fingers before they tickled.

Don't slip a wooly worm in under the lettuce on your sister's plate beside you or you may find hard uncooked beans in your cereal at breakfast. Don't start flicking water at someone

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with a spoon or you may end up with a dipper full down your own back later. Don't come walking innocently into the house with the tail of a small snake ~~ziggling~~ wiggling out of your pocket or the next time your pants are mended you may find the bottoms sewn shut.

And you never can tell when some boy or man or girl or woman wil sing some silly song or come forth with a nonsense rhyme. Die mommy iss im komma mit doat schlager hammer.

(Grandmother is in the bedroom with a sledge hammer.)

Wie wedde weive windle waeshe

Wann Wasser wein waere?

(How would wives wash diapers if water were wine?)

~~zzzzzz~~

We notice some differences and some similarities between Lancaster and Wayne County Amish fun. But we don't notice much difference in their twinkling spirit, do you?

Sincerely yours,

Jim Butterfield and Ike Kaufman