

## Against the Grain

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# Notes from Mosier -- "Riding Shotgun with Tintin and Curious George"

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## Notes from Mosier — “Riding Shotgun with Tintin and Curious George”



Column Editor: **Scott A. Smith** (International Sales, Alibris; Phone: 503-568-9226) <scott.alan.smith@comcast.net>

Now blankets Holmes County, Ohio this time of year, and on this early Thursday morning a brisk wind adds to the chill already in the air. We've finished loading up the Blue Bird, one of two bookmobiles operated by the **Holmes County Public Library District**, and **Gary Stutzman** and I are about to head out for a day's work. Our schedule today starts with a two-hour stop at an Amish parochial school, followed by visits to a nursing home, a couple of crossroads sites, and a stint in Killbuck.

Although their communities in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania and elsewhere may be better known, Holmes County is the largest Amish settlement in the world. The county is home to over two hundred districts, representing eleven distinct affiliations (Old Order, New Order, Andy Weaver, Swartzentruber, and others), and neighboring settlements can be found in Coshocton, Tuscarawas, Knox, Wayne, Stark, and Muskingum counties. In addition to the Amish themselves, one can also find other Anabaptist groups, including the Mennonite and Beachy churches.

There's also a significant non-Amish population, known collectively as “English.” Generally speaking the western half of the county is more heavily English; the eastern half more Amish in nature. Millersburg, the county seat, is located in the center of the county, and is where the main Library can be found. An East Library is operated in Walnut Creek.

Up until fairly recently other branch libraries were located in Berlin (accent on the first syllable), Killbuck, and Winesburg. Statewide budget cuts have hit Ohio hard, though, and efforts to pass a county tax levy to cover some of the lost revenue have not been successful. The Library has been compelled to close branches, reduce staff, restrict hours, and abbreviate the bookmobile schedules.

I'm finishing up my library degree at **Kent State** this semester, and I chose to do my practicum with the **Holmes County Library**. Small public libraries are largely new ground for me, and the unusual circumstances of the Library and its patron base struck me as intriguing. Hence I spend some time out on the bookmobiles, and some time working in the main library.

**Gary** pulls out onto the highway. We follow a state route out of town, and then turn down a side road where most of what traffic we encounter is in the form of buggies. **Gary** is a kind and thoughtful fellow, and I very much enjoy his company. This morning we talk of everyday things — the merits of coal versus wood for heating, and strategies for keeping chickens reasonably happy during the cold winter.

Our first stop is a small one-room school. Students are sent out to the bookmobile by grade; they come with plastic bags of books to return, and then select what they'd like to check out. **Tintin** and **Curious George** are indeed popular (so much so we can't really keep up with demand; **Phil Yoder**, another of my bookmobile colleagues, makes a point of holding some books back so we can satisfy our patrons at stops later in the day). The kids are great. For one thing, because they're being raised without the burden of television, reading represents genuine entertainment for them. We're usually mobbed at these stops, and it's about all we can do to keep up.

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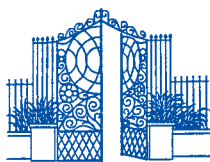
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### Rumors

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I hooked up with one of my favorite people in the world at the Conference (above). **Rosann Bazirjian**, Dean of University Libraries at **UNC-Greensboro**. Before she went to **UNC-Greensboro**, **Rosann** was Assistant Dean for Technical and Access Services at **Penn State University** and for many years she was the principal director of the **Charleston Conference**. I still miss her. But she recommended **Beth Bernhardt** for the principal director position, said I would not be disappointed. And, guess what, she was right! Thanks, **Rosann** and **Beth**!

Speaking of **Beth**, she and I gave a presentation at the **Conference for Entrepreneurial Librarians** about the **Charleston Conference**. If you want to see the slides and those from other papers, go to <http://cloud.lib.wfu.edu/blog/entrelib/>.

Ran into **Bill Kane** when I was in Winston-Salem (which is a delightful town and so, BTW, was the visit to **Wake Forest** — last time I was there I was interviewing for a job at the **Bowman Grey School of Medicine** since I was a medical librarian back then). Anyway, I guess y'all know that **Bill** is married to the

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### Notes from Mosier

*from page 8*

Despite our rural setting, we have excellent wireless connectivity (more on this in a bit), and thanks to the efforts of the Library's technology wizard, **Eric Maynard**, our remote ILS system work is a treat. The Library uses **Horizon**; I have to wonder whether my former colleague **Gary Rautenstrauch**, now **Sirsi-Dynix** Executive Chairman, has ever seen his system at work in the trenches quite like this. For my part, the next time I'm in exhibits at **ALA** I'll look at the gleaming new bookmobile on display in a whole new light.

At any rate, we check books in, manage holds, take requests, and check books out, all at a steady pace. The younger children often forget their library cards, and in a population where easily half the surnames are **Yoder** and **Miller**, looking them up in the system can take time. **Phil** prompts the shyer kids in their language with a friendly "Wie heisst Du?"

At other stops we get some Amish adults, and our fiction collection has been developed in part with them in mind. In other locations, like Killbuck, our clientele is primarily English. We've also begun providing mobile internet service, including six laptops patrons can use during our visits. Some stops have been scheduled in communities where the branches have had to be closed in order to maintain library services for them.

**Marty LaVigne** is in charge of the bookmobiles; like **Gary** and **Phil**, she's been with the Library for many years. Somehow she

manages to juggle everything needed to keep the buses staffed, stocked, and on the road. **Gary** and **Phil** perform a lot of the maintenance (and, when necessary, go the distance, as it were — recently a tractor-trailer rig clipped the driver-side rearview mirror of one of the parked bookmobiles; **Phil** hopped up on his running boards to flag him down).

Collection development and acquisitions take on an entirely different character when this patron base and these service conditions are taken into consideration. For one thing, bookmobile books are very well used. Many are read in barns or by lamplight and are enjoyed, shall we say, with enthusiasm. We clean and mend books a lot, and less concern is devoted to their appearance than would be the case even in the main library. We don't have the luxury of a large budget, so replacements are obtained only when absolutely necessary.

Although much of our collection wouldn't seem unusual in most small, rural public libraries, we do have an eclectic mix. Older books on farm equipment, for example, or beekeeping have a place, alongside materials on solar power, organic gardening, and alternative medicine. Serving this range of interests with a limited budget is a challenge.

The main library also has access to a wide range of electronic resources, thanks in no small part to the **Ohio Public Library Information Network**, or **OPLIN (OHIOLink's public library cousin, as it were)**. Patrons use databases, eBooks, and others resources, albeit with some interesting twists.

The Amish may be seen by some as shunning the modern world. I think it's more

accurate to say they hold themselves apart from it, in an effort not to be corrupted by too many worldly influences. They don't reject technology outright, but rather evaluate its appropriateness to their lives and culture.

Cell phone use among some Amish affiliations has become fairly commonplace. Many Amish access the internet as well, although rules governing this vary from group to group. As the Amish population has increased, they've had to look further afield for employment opportunities. Some work construction; others are cabinetmakers, furniture makers, and craftsmen. The Internet is a way to connect with suppliers, customers, and distributors.

We roll into Killbuck mid-afternoon, and set up shop in the parking lot of the local independent grocery store. We get some English on board, primarily looking to use our laptops or connect their own to our wireless. It's been snowing since mid-day, and it's starting to pile up.

As we head back to Millersburg, I get to thinking about this experience. Holmes County is in many ways a mirror for what's happening on a larger canvas around the country. Communities are changing — evolving — while confronting stark budget realities and increasingly complex expectations.

What's next? Hard to say. We pull in to **Rodhe's**, the IGA in Millersburg that's located behind the Library; it's how we get to the bookmobile parking bay at the back of the building. **Rodhe's** has a side parking area designated "buggies only," and as I glance over at the six or seven lined up behind their horses I see the last one sports a dreamcatcher. Indeed. 