Should Farming Be a Living or a Way of Life?: Diverging Ways of Measuring the Good Life in Iowa during the 1930s and 1940s

Todd Dresser, UW-Green Bay, April 9, 2015
Farm of the Future, *National Geographic*, 1970
Eleanor Roosevelt’s visit to
Granger, IA - 1935
Eleanor Roosevelt’s visit to Granger, IA - 1935
Eleanor Roosevelt on tour of homes
Antipathy towards Italians
Mining town prior to subsistence homesteads
Old “rural slum” farm home
Iconography of Italian Peasants in the 1930s
Aerial view of Granger homesteads
Grading the land for new homes.
Homes at mid-point of construction
Finished homes in Granger, IA
Learning how to take care of chickens
Learning how to milk
Getting the hang of field work
Assumption High School
Yearbooks, 1940
Google N-gram of the term “family farm” 1880-1960
1880-1960
MEETING HOUSE OF THE WEAKERLAND CONFERENCE MENNONITES NEAR NEW HOLLAND.
The auto-driving and autoless members worship in this meeting house on alternate
Sundays. Like Quaker meeting houses, those of the Mennonites do not have steeples,
colored windows, or any musical instruments within the building. Tombstones like
those of the Amish, must bear a simple inscription.

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
BUREAU OF AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS
Photographic Section
Lancaster soils are maintained by extensive use by barnyard and commercial fertilizer. Shown here are two church Amishmen loading a manure spreader.
LOCATION: LANCASTER CO., PA.

DATE TAKEN: MARCH 17, 1941
TAKEN BY: RUSKINOW

DETAILED DESCRIPTION:

ALTHOUGH HERDS ARE LARGE AND BARNS ARE GENERALLY WELL EQUIPPED, MUCH OF THE MILKING IS STILL DONE BY HAND.

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United States Department of Agriculture
Bureau of Agricultural Economics
LOCATION: LANCASTER CO., PA.

DATE TAKEN: MARCH 19, 1941
TAKEN BY: RUSINOW

DETAILED DESCRIPTION:

MOST FARMS IN THIS REGION SELL WHOLESALE MILK TO LANCASTER, PHILADELPHIA, OR NEW YORK. THE MILK HOUSES OF OLD-ORDER AMISHMEN, ALTHOUGH OF MODERN DESIGN, DO NOT HAVE ELECTRICAL REFRIGERATION, AND MILK IS COOLED WITH ICE.

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
BUREAU OF AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS
LOCATION: LANCASTER CO., PA.
DATE TAKEN: MARCH 19, 1941
TAKEN BY: RUSINOW

DETAILED DESCRIPTION:

AN OLD-ORDER AMISHMAN WORKING IN HIS REPAIR SHOP. GOOD MACHINE SHOPS ARE COMMON ON THE FARMS OF THESE PEOPLE. MACHINES, SUCH AS THE DRILL SHOWN IN THE PICTURE, WHICH DO NOT VIOLATE THE PRINCIPLE OF SEPARATION FROM THE WORLD ARE PERMITTED. THIS MAN'S OUTER GARMENTS, INCLUDING SUSPENDERS, WERE MADE AT HOME.

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
BUREAU OF AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS.
LOCATION: LANCASTER CO., PA.

DATE TAKEN: MARCH 16, 1941    TAKEN BY: RUSINGOW

DETAILED DESCRIPTION:

THESE MENNONITE BOYS ARE BICYCLING TO CHURCH. THEY BELONG TO THE ULTRA-
CONSERVATIVE MENNONITE GROUP WHICH DOES NOT PERMIT THE OWNERSHIP OF AUTOMOBILES.

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
LOCATION: LANCASTER CO., PA.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION:

THIS OLD-ORDER AMISH BUGGY HAS JUST BEEN COMPLETED. IT IS STANDING INSIDE THE BUGGY SHOP SHOWN IN NUMBER 17. NOTICE THE ABSENCE OF A CASHBOARD AND WHIP SOCKET, AND THE PRESENCE OF ELECTRIC LIGHT.

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
BUREAU OF AGRICULTURAL ENGINEERING
THE MOST CHARACTERISTIC THING ABOUT THIS KITCHEN (IN A CONSERVATIVE Mennonite HOME) IS ITS EXTREME CLEANLINESS. THE COLORFUL KITCHEN RANGE SHOWN IN THIS PICTURE WOULD NOT BE ACCEPTABLE TO THE OLD-ORDER AMISH.
LOCATION: HASKELL COUNTY, KANSAS

DATE TAKEN: APRIL 1941
TAKEN BY: RUSINOW

DETAILED DESCRIPTION:

THERE ARE ABANDONED HOUSES ALL OVER THIS AND NEIGHBORING COUNTIES. THIS HOUSE AND THAT SHOWN IN NEG. NO. 42907 WERE BUILT IN THE GOOD YEARS; BOTH ARE LARGE, WELL-CONSTRUCTED PLACES. THE HOUSE SHOWN IN NEG. NO. 42903 STANDS NEAR THE SITE OF OLD SANTA FE, A VILLAGE WHICH HAS LITERALLY BEEN MOVED AWAY, LEAVING ABSOLUTELY NO TRACE. THE HOUSE SHOWN IN NEG. 42904 IS AN ADOBE HOUSE, ONE OF SEVERAL IN THE REGION. BUILDINGS LIKE THIS ONE DISINTEGRATE VERY FAST WHEN THEY ARE ABANDONED. THE HOUSE SHOWN IN NEG. NO. 42905 HAS BEEN DESERTED FOR SEVERAL YEARS, BUT THE LAND THAT SURROUNDS IT IS STILL IN USE. JUST HOW IT IS IN SUMMER FALLOW; LAST SEASON IT WAS PLANTED TO WHEAT.

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Exhibits and Photographic Section, A. W. S.
THE FARM SHOWN HERE IS QUITE TYPICAL, WITH ITS SMALL BUILDINGS AND THE HEAVY MACHINERY STANDING UNPROTECTED IN THE YARD.
GRAIN ELEVATORS NEAR THE DEPOT IN SUBLETTE. IF THERE SHOULD BE A CROP THIS YEAR, THOUSANDS OF BUSHELS OF WHEAT WILL HAVE TO BE PILED ON THE GROUND, BECAUSE THE ELEVATORS ARE PRETTY WELL FILLED UP EVEN NOW.

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Exhibits and Photographic Section, A. M. S.
SUBLETTE IS THE COUNTY SEAT OF HASKELL COUNTY. THIS IS ITS MAIN STREET AND BUSINESS SECTION. NOTICE THAT MOST OF THE CARS ARE NEW. IN THE LATE TWENTIES, WHEN THERE WAS RAIN AND THE PRICES WERE HIGH, MOST OF THE CARS WERE PACKARDS AND BUICKS.
SUBLETTE'S POOL HALL. RECREATION IS LIMITED IN THIS REGION, THOUGH NOW THAT MOST FAMILIES HAVE CARS, MANY OF THEM DRIVE TO THE LARGER TOWNS OUTSIDE THE COUNTY TO SEE MOVIES. IN SUBLETTE PEOPLE MEET EITHER HERE OR IN THE BACK PART OF ONE OF THE DRUGSTORES. THERE IS A DOMINO GAME GOING IN BOTH ALMOST EVERY NIGHT. THE POOL HALL DRAWS MORE PEOPLE BECAUSE IT OFFERS A CHOICE OF DOMINOES OR POOL; ALSO, MOST OF THE DRUG-STORE CROWD ARE YOUNGER PEOPLE.
Theodore Schultz
Homesteads in Reverse
“any doctrine that eliminates or even obscures the function of choice... helps create the attitudes that welcome and support the totalitarian state.”
Schultz and Myrdal
Myrdal and Schultz
Intended Consequences of Ag. Policy - Mechanization
Theodore Schultz - Reverse the "dead hand of the past" and replace it with the "invisible hand of the market".