

Experiencing Time Abundantly in Amish Country:  
The Tourism of Nostalgia in Walnut Creek

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Everyone in our high tech culture knows that to be competitive requires that one is plugged in. And that requires (at the least) a laptop, a smart phone, an iPad, and a Facebook page. By now, just about everyone also knows that the Amish eschew most new technologies and even some old ones preferring to travel by horse and buggy, to light the darkness with gas-powered lamps, and to fasten their clothes with straight pins. Despite their refusal of many of the technologies Americans depend upon, they are not just surviving but thriving. Currently, there are over a quarter of a million Amish in the U.S. Moreover, in the twenty years that passed between 1991 and 2010, they doubled their numbers, and they will do that again, but next time it will take just fifteen years. How can these people who won't even drive cars, never mind get on the information superhighway, be thriving today?

This is a fascinating question and one many Americans seek to answer. Indeed, every year nineteen million Americans visit Amish Country in Pennsylvania, Indiana, and Ohio presumably to learn more about the unconventional ways of the Amish. Yet, when they arrive in Amish Country, what do they find? They find well-appointed hotels, huge restaurants, and fancy shops—that is, a style of living that appears totally at odds with the plain and simple life of the Amish. If what visitors get in Amish Country contradicts what they are seeking, then why do they make the trip, often repeatedly?

In my book, *Selling the Amish: The Tourism of Nostalgia* (Johns Hopkins UP, 2012), I explain the appeal of Amish Country tourism by looking closely at the architecture, interior décor, merchandise, and food offered to tourists in three central tourist towns in Ohio's Amish Country (which is home to the largest Amish settlement in the world). I argue that the environments constructed by tourism invite visitors to take up stories constructed by these environments that appear to resolve real anxieties Americans have about time, gender, technology, nation, and race/ethnicity. Further, I argue that these environments draw upon visible features of Amish life to make those stories and their solutions to contemporary anxieties appear viable today.

In my STARS presentation, I will talk about one of the most popular tourist towns in Ohio's Amish Country: Walnut Creek, Ohio. As I display many photographs of Walnut Creek and the Amish who live nearby, I will explain how the environment constructed there invites visitors who live amidst a "time famine" (in which they do not have nearly enough time to do all of the things they want and need to do) to experience time differently. Although I will talk briefly about some of the architectural features of the town that encourage visitors to slow down, I will focus on Der Dutchman restaurant (one of the most popular Amish-style restaurants in the area) and how the presentation of "slow food" (food that takes a lot of time to prepare) provides visitors with an experience of time as abundant. Further, I will show how the Amish are used in Walnut Creek to suggest that this experience of time can be reproduced at home (especially with the help of an Amish cookbook). I will conclude my presentation by talking about how the Amish, even as they are made to authenticate such consumer-culture solutions to real lived anxieties, also contest those solutions through their powerfully visible and distinct style of life.

This research presentation should be of interest to faculty at the University of Dayton for three reasons. First, it answers a puzzling question about an important phenomenon in our state that attracts millions of visitors and tens of millions of dollars. Second, it is interdisciplinary in that it seeks to answer questions regarding tourism, consumer culture, and a religious sect and as it employs research methodologies including participant observation and close textual analysis. Third, it will include well over fifty photographs of Amish Country, thus enabling participants to develop their own insights on Amish Country tourism and the Amish for further discussion.