Amish, Hutterites

"But I thought Mennonites wore dark clothes, lived without electricity, and rode a horse and buggy? If you're a Mennonite, then who are they?" Well, in the case of the Old Order Mennonites and Old Order Amish, they are branches of the Mennonite church. Hutterites are also related, but are not generally considered part of the Mennonite church.

Amish

Location

As of 1998 there were seven large Old Order Amish settlements in Ontario, and none in the rest of Canada. Although many Amish groups have actually joined the Mennonite church, the most conservative remain separate and are easy to identify; they wear dark, "plain" clothing, travel by horse and buggy, and use little or no electricity. When most people hear or think "Amish," they think of these conservative groups. Perhaps a more complete name would be "Amish Mennonite," but the term "Amish" has come to be used by itself.

Beliefs

The Old Order Amish are some of the most conservative descendants of the early Anabaptists. Following their leader, Jakob Amman, this group separated from the "Swiss Brethren" in 1693-1697.

The main reasons for this division were a disagreement on how strictly the church should regulate the lives of its members, and how to discipline those
who did not follow these rules. For example, Amman thought that Mennonites should all wear the same kinds of clothes, and not follow the fashion trends of those around them. He also wanted to support these and other practices with a strict application of the "ban." In other words, if certain people failed to live up to these standards, others in the community would limit contact with them. This might mean refusing to eat with someone, but could also be as serious as avoiding your husband or wife! Although this sounds fairly drastic, the "ban" was done in the hope that the person would repent, change their action, and be accepted back into the community.

Many of the guidelines set out by Jakob Amman around 1700 are still followed by the Old Order Amish today. This is why they wear different clothes, do not use electricity, and do not drive cars. Although many know English, Pennsylvania Dutch remains an important part of their culture. One could well imagine an Amish person's response to "Why are you so different?" being something like: "Well, we're not the ones who have changed - you are!"

It is quite amazing how this group has maintained its beliefs, customs, language and way of life for almost 300 years, despite many pressures from the outside.

Hutterites

Location

As of 1987 the Hutterites, or Hutterian Brethren, had 235 colonies in Canada. The great majority live in the western prairies, with 119 colonies in Alberta, 76 in Manitoba, and 39 in Saskatchewan; there is 1 colony in B.C., but none east of Manitoba.

Beliefs

The Hutterites live together, with several families joining together to create a colony. Although many families have their own houses, colonies often share a common dining hall and some living space. In these communities they attempt to follow the example of the early church by practicing the "community of goods." In other words, people do not own many things themselves; rather, the community as a whole owns them.

Farming is a major part of Hutterite culture. Farm land is purchased by the entire colony, and is farmed by several families together.
The colonies attempt to be fairly **self-sufficient**, producing most of the things they need for food, clothing, shelter, etc. Unlike the Old Order Amish, however, Hutterite colonies have welcomed **new technology** into their business; they often maintain state-of-the-art operations, complete with computerized and modern equipment. Hutterites continue to have their own schools, where their children are taught German as well as Math, Science, and other common subjects.

Like the Amish Mennonites, the Hutterites broke off from the main Anabaptist movement early on. Following **Jakob Hutter**, this group decided to own everything together in 1533. Although other Mennonite groups also toyed with the "community of goods" idea, the "Hutterites" have held it most strictly; in fact, they have many of the same beliefs and practices today as their ancestors in the 1530s.

Like Mennonites, the Hutterites have had some difficulty because they refused to participate in war. After World War II, for example, many Hutterites moved to Canada from the United States because of pressures to support the military. At various points they have actively sought others to join their communities, but also tend to "live to themselves."

**Name-sake**

As we can see, just as the term "Mennonite" came from the name of an early leader, Menno Simons, "Amish" comes from Jacob Amman, and "Hutterite" from Jakob Hutter. All of these early leaders played an important role in changing the tradition they had inherited, and their names continue to be used to identify their followers.

"We reply that we do not wish to resist the government. Far be it from us to resist what is neither against God nor our conscience... However where the government or power expects something beyond the order of God and its demands... such as taxes in war and similar things which contribute to the destruction of men, then... we must obey God more than man."

Jacob Hutter (ca.1535) in Klaassen, p. 252