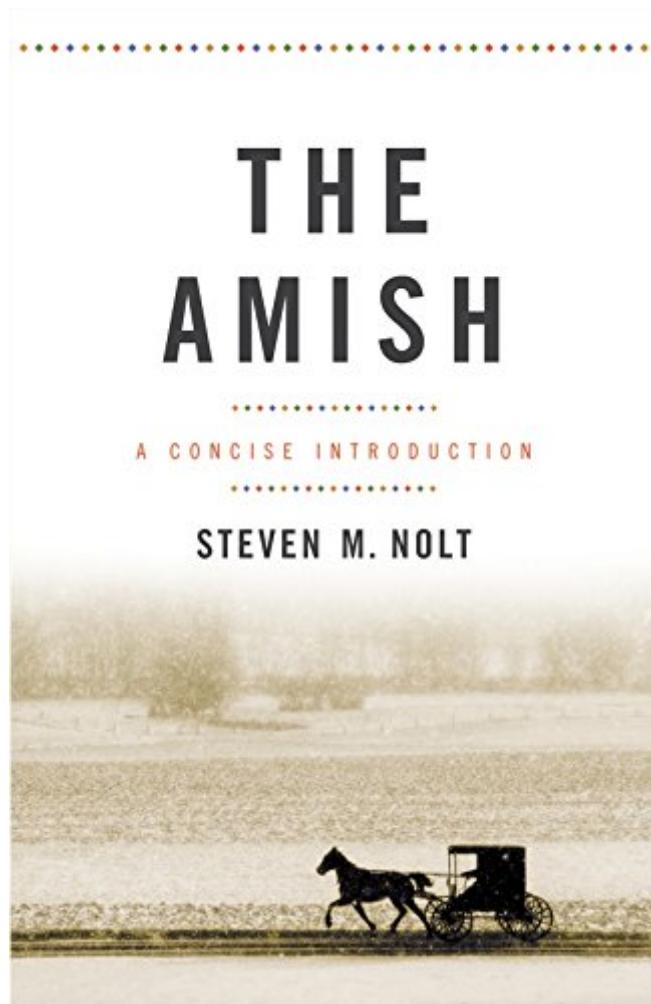


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# The Amish (Young Center Books In Anabaptist And Pietist Studies)



## Synopsis

There seems to be no end to our fascination with the Amish, a religious minority that has both placed itself outside the mainstream of American culture and flourished within it. Yet most people know very little about the nuanced relationship the Amish have with society or their own communities. Drawing on more than twenty years of fieldwork and collaborative research, Steven M. Nolt's *The Amish: A Concise Introduction* is a compact but richly detailed portrait of Amish life. In fewer than 150 pages, readers will come away with a clear understanding of the complexities of these simple people. Writing in engaging and accessible language, Nolt explains how the Amish at once operate within modern America and stand very much apart from the world. Arguing that Amish life is shaped equally by internal and external social, political, and economic contexts, Nolt explores Amish identity as emerging from a complex cultural negotiation with modernity. He takes on much-hyped topics such as Rumspringa and reveals the distinctive Amish approach to technology. He also explains how Amish principles stand in contrast to contemporary American values, including rational efficiency, large-scale organization, and Western notions of individuality. Authoritative, informative, and illustrated, this guide provides a vivid introduction to a way of life many find fascinating but few truly understand.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A very accurate and informative publication concerning the Amish's attitudes and their way of life. The author doesn't wonder back and forth in his writings but stays on track and delivers straight to the point. The book also contains some interesting photos.

I enjoyed this book a great deal. It was good to read about the Amish in a manner that wasn't sensationalized or belittling of the Amish. I will be looking forward to reading more books in this series, especially if they are as affordable as this one.

excellent writer and book content

The Amish: A Concise Introduction by Steven Nolt may be the first non-fiction book about the Amish that I have read in its entirety. (That comes after twenty years or so of reading hundreds of Amish fiction books and bits and pieces of related non-fiction books and online articles.) I found The Amish to be extremely engaging and informative. Although I would call it scholarly in the sense of presenting much factual information, the tone is very comfortable and easy to read; an academic background is not necessary for understanding. "Concise" is a good description; at less than 150 pages, not a great deal of time is required to read the entire book. Nolt fits his facts into a framework that helps his readers begin to understand these often misunderstood people and how they function in a society much different from many of their own beliefs and practices. He debunks the image of the Amish as a group of people stuck somewhere in decades long past, out of touch with the modern world, and shows how they have used insight and innovation to grow and thrive into the twenty-first century while holding to long-standing principles. Anyone with an interest in learning more about the background and lifestyle of the Amish should find this book a valuable read.

This is an excellent introduction. It's short, extremely well-written and delivers the "concise" intro promised in the title. Nolt writes with wit, objectivity and deep knowledge of the Amish lifestyle. The Amish are often conflated with other groups such as the Mennonites and Hutterites; a handy appendix describes differences among them. The book considers the Old Order Amish, which may

be the most important group, with a current population of about 300,000. Nolt notes that the population has been doubling every 18 to 20 years, so the 50,000 Amish in 1970 became 180,000 by 2000 and 300,000 by 2015, with the typical family having 7 children. The details are fascinating. Every Amish family is bilingual in a German dialect and in English (for reading and writing). There is no church but rather a church community with services rotated among the 12 to 18 or so families in a group. Schooling is through 8th grade, with teachers also having schooling through 8th grade. There are chapters on Amish roots (chapter 2, extremely helpful), family and schooling, the Amish and their neighbors, and the image of the Amish (which appears to be wrong and a sort of romantic one of simplicity and virtue). One chapter is on "rumspringa," the period after Amish youth are considered adult (age 16) and before they are baptized, but this seems to be commonly misinterpreted as a try-anything period. Nolt says these youth mostly live at home, and work essentially full-time and their adventures as reported on "reality" tv are inaccurate. There's also a chapter on work; a minority live off their farms and income from it, with many working outside the community and often for Amish companies, usually quite small. This is of important for the future because if the Amish population does double to 600,000 by the 2030s and to a million plus by the 2050s, there will be stresses in opening new communities and finding farmland. Amish seem to mostly fit well in the overall communities but the larger the Amish communities the more stress seems likely in the future. Right now the centers of Amish populations are Pennsylvania, Ohio and Indiana. The book offers lots of information. I had been unaware that the name stems from one Jakob Ammann, or that the faith began in Switzerland and Alsace. The French expelled Anabaptists in 1712 (hence from Alsace). There was some migration to America in the 1700s but apparently small (Nolt says 500 people in Lancaster County PA in the 1770s, with another wave of about 3,000 in the early to middle 1800s). The movement died out in Europe, the residual groups joining other Protestant groups. So the Amish, whatever their origins, are now an American (and a bit of a Canadian) phenomenon. There's a good bit on the Amish relationship to the modern world. Yes they use horse and buggy, but also often pay neighbors for transport. They have a body of medical knowledge but do not rule out contemporary medicine. There's also a difference between use and ownership; an Amish man might use a riding mower at work that he would never think of using at home. There seems to be an ongoing Amish adaptation of technology in the sense of determining if it would be useful to the way of life, and if so, figuring out how to make it conform to Amish-acceptable technology (in such things as energy use). Also of note: the general assumption that Amish farming products are by definition organic turns out not to be the case. There are two short and useful appendices. There are also a few appropriate photos and tables.

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