Critique

Savells and Foster in individual settings and circumstances have conducted research among members of the Old Order Amish using interviews and questionnaire surveys. While they report their efforts in one paper, this reviewer suspects each author had very different purposes in mind as he conducted his individual ethnographic research project. Savells's and Foster's research may have generated new information, but this information needs to be linked with earlier research findings which in turn can be used to create new knowledge. The theoretical framework from which each worked is not clear, although both authors do attempt to place their findings within the historical, social, and cultural framework of the Amish communities they studied.

Neither author provided examples of their questions. This information would have been useful in determining the nature and scope of questions and may have shed light on the nature and purpose of the research, especially that of Savells. In addition, examples of participant responses would have been helpful. These responses may enable readers to more fully grasp the difficulties surrounding this research methodology. It would be interesting to note how the data were analyzed and interpreted as these might provide clues as to the researchers' theoretical and value orientation. The authors do recognize many limitations of their data base. One wonders if the authors used a research diary not only to record data provided by the Amish, but also to record their own actions and activities. Because Savells's study extended over a period of several years and many miles, a diary might be useful as to the data recorded and provide evidence of possible changing attitudes and values of the researcher himself.

Foster's research findings which resulted from a mapping study needed by the Cleveland Electric Illuminating Company and Ohio Edison Company may be somewhat questionable since the Amish were opposed to the construction of electrical transmission towers through their areas of settlement. Therefore, it is possible the responses the Amish provided Foster were based on their strong desire not to have their lands traversed by electric power lines which would disrupt their way of life.

The fact that Foster mixed questions regarding the location of power lines and his own detailed research questions may or may not have been wise. It is possible the Amish provided the expected answers in order to avoid controversy. It is difficult to know whether the Amish would respond the same way in a discussion among themselves as they did in responding to an outside researcher.

It is not clear whether the researchers provided any sort of feedback to those who participated in the study. Feedback to participants is an important aspect and responsibility of any research endeavor, especially for ethnographic research. Such research is important and presents a

challenge to researchers. That Savells and Foster accepted a challenge is commendable and most encouraging. These efforts can be useful as a component in the growing number of ethnographic research studies. As Savells, Foster, and others continue ethnographic research, they are encouraged to demand rigorous methodology and develop theoretical creativity.

—Margaret Laughlin

Critique

This article, by Jerry Savells and Thomas Foster may well be useful for researchers attempting studies of groups living voluntarily outside of the "mainstream" of American society. To a non-specialist like this historian, however, the article is ultimately frustrating.

A more thorough historical and demographic background would have been helpful. Over the years, have the Old Order Amish grown, lost members or remained stable? Given their relatively small numbers (95,000), despite characteristically large families, is it possible that more have been lost to the dreaded "creeping urbanization and the pressures of . . . industrial society" than the authors and the Amish are willing to concede? The fear of outsiders may well be related to worries about the attractions of that outside world. At any rate, without supporting data, it is difficult to evaluate the assertion that "the Amish have been largely successful in practicing voluntary separatism."

From a methodological point of view, it is not at all clear whether the group which was willing to cooperate was typical of the Old Order Amish. As co-author Savells correctly points out, the small numbers (106 families) participating in the study make it "illogical and unwise" to offer an assessment of the Amish condition in America based upon its findings.

Savells does suggest a qualified "yes" to the issue of whether the Amish have shown "an increasing vulnerability to the forces of social change." However, he drops this provocative question with a weak "but it is not simple or easy to explain." An attempt, at least, to do so would have been worthwhile.

This reviewer realizes that it is unfair to suggest to authors that they should alter the scope, purpose, or focus of their paper. Nevertheless, some anecdotal material would have added a great deal. Did the authors win any real friendship from any of their subjects? If so, how was this accomplished? One longs for some stories or comments from those kind, earthy, and jovial aged Amish. The authors are obviously saving all this "juicy" material for another paper, but the reader is certainly entitled to hope. As an historian, this reader longed for the kind of concrete material