

(Mennonite and Amish Definitions)

During the past generation, we descendants of the Swiss Volhynian Mennonites have learned that our group had an Amish background. When Harley Stucky edited and published Martin Schrag's *The European History of the Swiss Mennonites from Volhynia* in 1974, many people were surprised to learn that most of the Swiss families who settled in Volhynia identified with the Amish branch of the Mennonite church family tree. Our experience in modern America has been that Amish and Mennonites are quite distinct groups. We have sometimes assumed that this was the case in Europe in the 1700's and 1800's. However, Amish and Mennonite were not distinct labels in Europe. The Swiss Volhynians did not have to cease from being Amish in order to become Mennonite. This is because the Swiss Volhynian Amish, like all the Amish, always considered themselves Mennonites, and were always recognized as Mennonites. Amish identity is a subset of Mennonite identity, not something different from Mennonite.

What is "Mennonite"? The "Menno" in Mennonite refers to Menno Simons, a leader of the peaceful Christians called "Anabaptists" in the 1500's in the Netherlands. Menno always opposed such labels as "Mennist" for his faith community. After Menno's death in 1561, the movement split into many groups, and one reason was the difference of views regarding church discipline. What should be the attitude toward church members who persevere in serious and open sin, despite admonition? Is it enough to refuse the person Holy Communion, or must all members avoid eating, talking, and all social contact with the person? Generally it was the most strict groups, those that believed banned persons should be socially avoided, that accepted the label "Mennist", "Mennonist", or "Mennonite", since Menno had agreed with their position. The more "soft" Dutch Mennonites preferred the label "Dooptgezind", which eventually was accepted by all. In the meantime, the term "Mennonite" became the accepted label for those churches in Prussia and Poland, as well as among High German Anabaptists in the Palatinate.

The Swiss Brethren who were usually called Täufer were very slow to accept the label "Mennonite". During the severe persecution in the late 1600's in Switzerland, some groups of Swiss Brethren accepted loving assistance from the Dutch. Along with this aid, the Swiss Brethren often accepted identification with the label "Mennonite," as well as guidance from the Dutch on matters of faith.

What is "Amish"? The name "Amish" probably originally referred to Jakob Ammann, although some people have claimed that it should refer to his brother Ulrich Ammann. Both Jakob and Ulrich Ammann were ministers involved in the division which took place among the Swiss Brethren in the 1690's. A major factor in this split was the attempt by some ministers to hold the others to the confessions of faith drawn up in the Netherlands a generation or two earlier. In many ways Jakob Ammann and the early leaders of the group known as Amish were trying to affirm a "Mennonite" identity for the Swiss Brethren. Most of the Swiss Brethren in exile in the Alsace accepted this "Mennonite" identity, and confessed agreement with the Dordrecht confession of faith. Elder Hans Reist and the majority of the Swiss Brethren in Switzerland, especially in the Emme river valley, would not accept this and opposed the so-called Amish. The Swiss Brethren already in the Palatinate split, and Swiss of both groups continued to migrate to the Palatinate, as well as to America.

During the generations following the division, the so-called "Amish" were the Swiss Brethren who most used the name "Mennonite". The Amish defended their views on simplicity in dress, footwashing, shunning, and the authority of ministers by quoting Menno Simons, Dirk Phillips, and various Mennonite confessions of faith from the Netherlands. When Amishman Hans Richen of Montbéliard, France, started a church register in the 1750's, he called it the "Gemeindebuch für Menonisten", the Congregation Book for Mennonites. This book contains important records of many of the ancestors of the Swiss Volhynians, with names Gerig, Graber, Roth, Stucki, and Kauffman. Although these were the strict wing of the Swiss Brethren, called "Amish" by others, they never used the term themselves.

(Mennonite and Amish background of the Swiss Volhynians)

With this understanding of the terms "Mennonite" and "Amish", let's now shift our attention to eastern Europe, to the ancient principality or palatinate of Volhynia. Volhynia became a province of the Russian empire after the Russians invaded and annexed it in 1793 to 1795. Swiss Mennonite families settled in Volhynia beginning in 1801, and as late as 1837. The Mennonites came to Volhynia from five earlier settlements in eastern Europe. These five settlements were the following:

- 1) the mixed Swiss Mennonite settlement begun in 1785 in Galicia, in the villages of Falkenstein and Einsiedel;

- 2) an Amish Mennonite settlement in 1791 at Adampol in Podolia;
- 3) an Amish Mennonite settlement in 1791 at Michelsdorf and Urszulin in the W_odawa district of Poland-Lithuania;
- 4) the Hutterite colony at Vishenka in Chernigov province which was joined in 1796 by some Galician Mennonites, which colony moved to Radichev in 1801; and
- 5) a Low German Mennonite colony which some Swiss joined in 1797 at Michalin in Kiev province.

Most of these migrating Mennonite families had Amish background in western Europe, but some did not. Some people joined or intermarried with the Swiss Volhynians who had Hutterite, Lutheran, and other backgrounds. Therefore, the Swiss Volhynians were a mixed group, but most had some Amish Mennonite family background.

The First Swiss Mennonite families to settle in Volhynia were apparently not of Amish origin. The families of Peter Krehbiel, Johann Zerger, and Heinrich Müller, with two orphaned nieces Maria and Anna Hubin, probably had not been part of the Amish group. They had travelled from the Palatinate to Galicia, then joined the Hutterites at Vishenka, then moved to Michalin, and finally settled on the lands of Polish Prince Edward Lubomirski in western Volhynia, near the town of Dubno. Johann Zerger's son-in-law Johann Schrag apparently grew up Amish, but was part of this non-Amish group.

The Swiss families moving to Volhynia after 1801 were largely of Amish origin. The Amish families moving east from the Palatinate, Alsace, and Montbéliard carried the following family names: Albrecht, Fluckiger, Gerig, Graber, Gungerich, Kaufman, Lichti, Maurer, Mündlein, Roth, Schrag, Stucki, and Sutter. Some of these families may have been part of the Michelsdorf congregation, which continued into the 1830's, without going on to Volhynia. Other family names found in Michelsdorf or in Volhynia were also possibly of Alsatian Amish origin, including Gordie, Ries, Rupp, Schwartz, Sehner, and Walbert.

Mennonites speaking Low German lived in various settlements in Poland and Prussia, not far from Michelsdorf. There were also Low German Mennonites living in Michalin, who moved to Volhynia the same time as the Swiss Mennonites. During the following generations, many Low German settlements were founded in Volhynia by new Mennonite immigrants. The Swiss Volhynian records show many family names which were probably from this origin, such as Beier, Dirks, Harms, Klassen, Nachtigal, Nickel, Ratzlaff, Richert, Siebert, Tesmer, Unruh, and Wedel.

Other names entering the Swiss Volhynian records seem to have had a non-Mennonite origin. An orphan boy of unknown origin raised by the Mündlein family took the name Paul Voran, and was the ancestor of the Swiss-Volhynian Voran family. The name Waldner entered the Swiss Volhynian community after intermarriage with Hutterites at Vishenka. Other German-speaking families intermarried with Swiss Volhynians, especially Lutherans who settled near to them in Volhynia. The Swiss Volhynian Archelus, Prieheim, and Strausz families may have had this origin. There were also intermarriages with families named Kind, Meyer, Rindfleisch, and Stellmacher.

(Amish Leadership and the Essingen Agreement)

Elder Hans Nafziger of Essingen was perhaps the most influential leader of the Amish Mennonites of Europe in the mid 1700's. He was the driving force behind the Amish ministers' conference in 1779 attended by representatives of 19 congregations, perhaps all the ministers ordained at that time. This conference approved and signed a statement on Ordnung, or church order, which Nafziger probably drafted. Nafziger also wrote letters in 1781 containing advice on church order which were circulated widely among the Amish. At least one of the migrants to Eastern Europe carried copies of these letters along.

The early Swiss Volhynian leaders subscribed to the 1779 Essingen agreement and looked for guidance to writings of Nafziger. The 1781 Nafziger letters explained proper procedures for baptism, marriage, ordinations, and communion. Attached to it, the 1779 Essingen agreement included sixteen rules to be read to the congregation before communion. Joseph Mündlein, Christian Albrecht, Christian Sutter, and Johann Maurer added their signatures to the copy of the Essingen statement on behalf of the Lemberger gemein, that is, the Galician Amish Mennonite congregation. Mündlein, an Amish convert from Catholicism, had helped to lead the small Galician Mennonite group in worship in 1785. When the Amish separated from the other Mennonites in Galicia, Mündlein served as an elder for the Amish. From Galicia, Mündlein corresponded with elder Hans Nafziger of Essingen. Writing to another friend in 1787 or 1788, Nafziger described this correspondence in terms that showed he served as a spiritual guide and resource for Mündlein.

In the Lithuanian congregation in Urszulin and Michelsdorf in the Wlodawa district, one preacher was Christian Graber, ordained in 1790 in Montbéliard to go to Poland. Christian Stucky of Alsace served there as an elder from the 1790's to the 1830's. Graber, Stucky, and Johann Flickinger signed the Essingen agreement for this group. When Austria took control of the Wlodawa district in 1795 as part of West Galicia, there was no longer an international border separating the Amish Mennonites in Lemberger and Littauer congregations. The Amish all apparently left Falkenstein and Einsiedel in the next few years. Joseph Mündlein apparently moved to the Wlodawa district, where he served as an elder, performing a marriage in 1802. It was in 1804, during these years of Austrian rule that Josef Rohrer wrote about the Mennonites of West and East Galicia. He wrote that they preferred to be called Täufer. He said that one group of Mennonites was stricter, and was called, Heftler, because they used hooks and eyes on their clothes, rather than buttons, like the other group, called the Knöpfler. He wrote that the strict ones wore beards. He described wives being very careful to avoid a friendly laugh, a strong handshake, or looking other men in the eye, for fear of being put under a ban for many weeks, so that no Mennonite would speak to her and her husband could not even sit at table with her.

In the early 1800's, several Amish Mennonite families moved to Volhynia, and settled near the Krehbiel, Müller, Zerger, and Schrag families already there, near the town of Dubno. The Dubno Amish Mennonites ordained as ministers Joseph Schrag and Hans Albrecht, both sons of Palatine Amish migrants to Galicia. These two men also signed the Essingen agreement on behalf of their congregation.

No one added a signature to this copy of the Essingen statement after 1809. Perhaps the original was so worn that it was no longer useful as a document to be signed. In 1824, Jacob Graber, the youngest son of the late preacher Christian Graber, copied in his own hand the Nafziger letters and the Essingen statement with its list of signatories. These documents were carried by his children to America in 1874. Jakob Graber was one of twelve preachers ordained among the Swiss Volhynians after 1809. Of these twelve men, eleven had Amish fathers, and ten also had mothers from Amish families. The fact that no preacher ordained after 1809 added his signature to the copy of the Essingen agreement should not be taken to mean they did not agree with it or use it. To find out how important it was, we need to look at the actual practices of the Swiss Volhynians.

(Swiss Mennonite Unity in Volhynia)

The Nafziger letters and the Essingen agreement taught practices characteristic of the Amish Mennonites, such as strict humility in appearance, shunning or social avoidance of unrepentant sinners, and twice yearly communion with footwashing. Those who did not confess these among other articles were outside the fellowship. Members were to keep separate by marrying and sharing communion only within the fellowship. Yet the Swiss Volhynian Amish did not isolate their fellowship from other Mennonites around them. On what terms did the Amish leaders establish unity with other Mennonites?

The Amish had very close relationships with the non-Amish Mennonites in Galicia, and probably also in Volhynia. In the harsh winter of 1784-1785, the Amish Mündlein and Schrag families in Galicia suffered with the Krehbiels and other non-Amish migrants in thatched huts. Six families worshipped together as Mennonites, not worrying about their differences. When they received new houses in 1785, more migrants arrived, and for several months six Amish and twenty Reistish Mennonite families resided in a few houses in Falkenstein, with many Lutherans and Calvinists. The Schrags hosted the Müller family, and perhaps other guests. Tensions must have arisen among these crowded migrant families waiting for new villages to be built. Families such as the Schrags and Müllers had young men and women ready to consider baptism and marriage. Without organized congregations or ordained spiritual leadership, worship, communion, and baptism could not be according to traditional order. After all houses were built, the Amish and Reistish Swiss Mennonites separated for worship, and within a short time both congregations had organized leadership, but they continued to live closely together, occasionally even sharing houses.

Although we do not have similar testimony about the settlement in Volhynia, we can imagine similar situations occurring. As far as we know, the small non-Amish settlement of Krehbiel, Müller, and Zerger families did not have any ordained spiritual leadership. We do not know of any good records for these three families. As soon as the Amish settled in Volhynia, they provided an ordained leadership, and potential marriage partners for the young people who already knew each other and had shared some history.

Among the Amish young men settling in Volhynia were Joseph Schrag and Hans Albrecht. Joseph Schrag's older brother

Andreas had married Hans Albrecht's widowed mother Barbara, and this family had joined the Hutterite colony in 1796 along with the Müller, Krehbiel, and Zerger families. With this shared experience of the unsuccessful union with the Hutterites, Schrag and Albrecht may have been in a good position to draw their friends and relatives into a more conservative fellowship committed to strict discipline. The Schrag family in particular straddled just about every dividing line among the Swiss Mennonites of the East. Although Joseph had married Freni Stucki, from an Amish family, his oldest brother Jacob had married among the non-Amish Mennonites and stayed in Galicia, but another brother Johann had married Susanna Zerger and settled in Volhynia. Their sister Katharina Schrag had married and stayed in the Hutterite colony, as had Maria Zerger. Joseph's younger brother Daniel had married Mennonite orphan Maria Hubin, the niece of the Müllers. Among the weddings celebrated on Easter Day, 1810, young preacher Hans Albrecht married Anna Hubin. Joseph Mündlein died that day, but he passed on leadership of the Amish fellowship to a new generation with Amish credentials, but with an understanding of the need for unity among the Mennonite family.

The fusion of the Amish and Reistish Swiss Mennonites in Volhynia was under way when Johann Müller married Andreas Schrag's daughter Katharina and then was ordained a preacher in 1825.

A distant relative named Johann Müller was the elder minister of the Galician Mennonites in the early 1800's. He greeted elder Joseph Schrag of Volhynia in a letter written in the winter of 1829-1830: "If only the border did not block it, how often should we personally rejoice to see, to embrace, and to kiss each other.

The union process was probably complete by 1838, when baptismal records were begun. The Krehbiel, Müller, and Zerger children were all accepted as members of the congregation.

The Swiss in Volhynia had several villages near Dubno: Berezina (Beresina), Vignanka (Wignanska), Eduardovka (Eduardsdorf or Poutschy), Futtur, Zahorts (Sahorez), and Koryt (Goritt). Most or all of the eastern Amish moved to Volhynia by 1837. Villages further east in Volhynia settled after 1837 included Horodischtz, Bereza, Kolovert, Valtayem (Waldheim), Zabara (Sabara or Dosidorf), Kutuzovka and Neumannovka. By 1874 there were over 150 Swiss Volhynian families in four congregations, with no known divisions between them.

(Unity with Low German Mennonites)

In eastern Europe, the Amish recognized their spiritual unity with Mennonites speaking Low German. Most of the Mennonites in Prussia, Poland, and Russia were members of conservative groups, namely the "Old Flemish" and the "Old Frisian". Like the Amish Mennonites, these groups recognized the old Dutch confessions of faith as valid, and practiced footwashing and shunning. The Amish could easily accept intermarriage and shared communion with such groups. The Volhynian Mennonites who spoke Low German were mostly from the Old Flemish group, and were conservative, like the Swiss Amish.

The settlement at Michelsdorf had early contacts with Mennonites of Low German origin to their north. Elder Christian Stucky apparently welcomed into fellowship Peter Ratzlaff, of Low German origin, and solemnized his marriage to Freni Walbert in 1805. The Ratzlaffs did not stay in Michelsdorf long, but went with two Schrag girls to join the Hutterite colony in Russia in 1810. An old record indicates that a Low German man named J. Wedel married Anna Gering, possibly about 1810. However, after 1820, at least fifteen Swiss Mennonites in Michelsdorf and in Volhynia married Low German Mennonites.

When the Swiss Volhynians were ready to ordain Jacob Stucky as elder for the new Kutusovka settlement in eastern Volhynia, they called on a Low German elder, Johann Schröder of Michalin, to supervise.

In later years in Volhynia, the Swiss worked with other Mennonites and Hutterites in planning a massive migration to America. When the Mennonites organized a delegation to speak to government officials, the Swiss sometimes sent a representative along, but other times, they sent letters authorizing other Mennonites to speak for the Swiss.

(Were They Amish in 1874?)

The Swiss Volhynian Mennonites came to America as part of a large Mennonite migration, assisted by Mennonites of Germany and America. Were they "Amish"? They were, in that they carried to the new world their strict tradition of

obedience. Also, for a few years, they aligned themselves with the progressive American Amish Mennonites, recognizing them as fellow members of a distinct branch of the Mennonite movement.

(Humility and Simplicity)

The Essingen agreement warned members against pride in appearance. Beards should not be cut, and proud hair styles must be avoided. Clothes and shoes should be humble and plain, not according to proud fashions.

In 1830, the Swiss Volhynians were seen as stricter in many ways than the Galician and Prussian Mennonites. Writing in 1830 to a Prussian elder, elder Johann Müller of Galicia commented, "There is indeed still a congregation not far from us near Dubno, under elder Joseph Schrag, that is very restrictive in external life, on dress, beards, and hooks."

P.P. Wedel wrote that in Volhynia, "Whether one was allowed to wear buttons was a much disputed question. Originally only hooks and eyes were allowed." Martin Schrag concluded that the majority of Swiss Volhynian men wore buttons on arrival in America, but that a few still wore clothes with hooks and eyes." Another authority wrote that the immigrant men's coats had fabric-covered buttons. During the first years in America there were heated arguments whether women could wear hats instead of shawls, or dresses with buttons rather than hooks and eyes; or whether men could wear neckties or belts instead of suspenders.

I cannot say all Swiss Volhynians dressed more strictly than all the other Russian Mennonites. Photographs of Swiss Volhynian men in the 1890's show neckties and other signs of change. However, the most conservative immigrants considered photos proud and wrong, and they are not represented in photo collections.

(Social Avoidance)

The 1779 Essingen agreement prescribed shunning or social avoidance of those who leave the brotherhood.

P.P. Wedel described the Swiss Volhynian tradition: "If the member continued to sin, he was excluded from communion, and if there was still no improvement, he was placed under the ban, that is, he would be completely excluded from the congregation, which was handled literally according to I Cor. 5.11. . . . In general one feared the punishment and respected the congregational rules and the church discipline."

P.R. Kaufman's book described the Swiss Volhynian immigrants as strict and occasionally harsh. "This was also true of the punishment of the ban, as Menno Simons taught it, and we believed we understood it, in the first years it was a much discussed question. A person was punished with the ban because of an offense." This was written in 1931, after the Swiss had ceased congregational discipline, but the author noted the presence of two banned persons in a nearby South Dakota congregation.

(Footwashing)

One 1781 Nafziger letter carried to Volhynia specified communion at Easter and on Michael's Day, to be preceded by an assembly at which congregational discipline was discussed, and a day of prayer and fasting, held a week before communion. The day of communion began with a preparatory service at which all brothers and sisters were asked if anything hindered their full communion. Footwashing followed communion, demonstrating humility and obedience to Jesus' instructions.

In 1793 two Hutterites visited Galicia and talked to Mündlein and leaders of the other Mennonite congregation. The visitors observed that the Mennonites were close to the Hutterites in all articles of belief except footwashing, which the Hutterites did not practice.

According to P.P. Wedel, the Swiss in Volhynia held communion and footwashing on Good Friday. This was preceded on Thursday by a preparatory service, at which all disputes should be settled, so that every member could freely take part in communion.

I believe all Swiss Volhynian congregations practiced twice yearly communion with footwashing in America. However,

the Salem congregation in South Dakota dropped footwashing officially in 1911, and other Swiss congregations dropped it later, in about 1930. The congregations which kept footwashing longest had made it optional, and thus it had lost some of its meaning as a demonstration of humility. According to Edwin P. Graber, certain members did not want their feet to be washed by certain other members.

(Identification with American Amish Mennonites)

Some Swiss Volhynians identified with American Amish Mennonites, particularly the Progressives organizing the annual Amish Mennonite ministers' meetings, or Diener Versammlungen, until 1878.

The first meeting I know of between a Swiss Volhynian Mennonite and an American Amish Mennonite was on August 16, 1873. Andreas Schrag, a delegate sent to America by the Swiss Volhynian congregations, was visiting Mennonites in Pennsylvania. That day he ate near Lancaster with Samuel Kauffman, who belonged to the Amish. With them was Bishop Samuel Yoder, visiting from Mifflin County, the only Amish leader who attended all the Diener Versammlungen from 1862 to 1878.

Samuel Yoder became a valuable promoter of gifts and loans for the Russian immigrants, collecting large contributions in Mifflin County in 1873 and 1874. Other Amish congregations also laid aside contributions for the expected immigrants, and some also asked to have immigrants come to live and work with them.

In 1874, the majority of the Swiss Volhynian families migrated to America. While most settled in Kansas and Dakota, several families temporarily stayed elsewhere, including that of Joseph N. Kaufman. His son wrote later, "In Illinois, there was opportunity for earning money and also they were received kindly by those of like faith [Amish Mennonites] who provided for them the necessities of life, such as food and shelter. God reward these dear people for their love and kindness. . . ." They stayed in Tremont, Illinois, until February 1876.

In 1875, the two senior elders of the Swiss Volhynians took part in the annual Amish Mennonite Diener Versammlung, held from May 16 to 19 near Hopedale, Illinois. The Volhynians were Johannes Schrag of Dakota and Jacob Stucky of Kansas. Johannes Schrag's father was Joseph Schrag, the elder who signed the Essingen statement for the Amish of Volhynia. Both of Jacob Stucky's grandfathers were Amish elders who had signed the Essingen statement, namely Christian Stucky of Michelsdorf and Joseph Mündlein of Galicia.

Jacob Stucky delivered the main sermon on Sunday morning, May 16, about the observance of Pentecost, and he closed the service with prayer. That afternoon, Johann Schrag presented the main sermon, on the doctrine of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ alone. The next day, one speaker reminded the assembly how they were inspired the previous day, being "richly admonished by the unfamiliar ministers from a distance, through the Holy Spirit."

On Monday, the conference asked Jacob Stucky to serve on a committee to consider if it is right "that a brother undertake the job of agent for the sale of all kinds of machinery, attend the World's Fair each year, take great profit from his brothers, and publish his name in newspapers as agent." The committee decided that this was unevangelical, citing scriptures that seem to condemn all buying and selling.

On Tuesday, both Jacob Stucky and Johann Schrag served on another committee to answer whether it is right to use musical instruments to the glory of God. They decided that no musical instruments may be used for this purpose. After this a request was read on behalf of the poor brethren in Dakota asking the assembly to help them in their need with a loan of \$500 for about 5 or 6 years. Then the chairman, assistant, and several other ministers spoke, quoting scripture to encourage generous aid for the poor.

The next year Johann Schrag again attended the Diener Versammlung, this time near Archbold, Ohio. On Monday, June 5, he "was called on to give an admonition to the assembly. He admonished the listeners with God's Word, and reminded them of what the Lord requires of us in order to be saved by grace."

On Tuesday Johann Schrag served on a committee to answer if a member may be excused repeatedly for knowingly failing to practice avoidance, either in weakness or deliberately. They advised ministers who investigate the matter to use a strong penalty if someone acted out of impertinence, but patient discipline if it is out of weakness or ignorance.

The following October, Christian Nafziger of Hopedale, Illinois, visited South Dakota. Jacob Graber's children gave him the copies of the 1781 letters of Hans Nafziger and the 1779 Essingen agreement with all signatures. Later in 1879 Christian Nafziger prepared a new copy of the document, which stayed with his family in Illinois.

In 1878, Johann Schrag again attended the Amish Mennonite Diener Versammlung near Eureka, Illinois. This was the last conference of its kind. It may also have been the last open acknowledgement of the Amish heritage of the Swiss Volhynian Mennonites.

The Swiss Volhynians were Amish Mennonites from 1807 until their emigration from Volhynia in 1874. They continued to follow the distinctive Amish practices of simplicity and humility in appearance, shunning of the banned, and footwashing. They continued to identify with and intermarry with other strict Mennonites who shared their beliefs and practices. They accepted other Mennonites, and possibly other Christians, as fellow believers who could work together in important areas.

(Possible Reasons for the Loss of Amish Identity)

For some of the Swiss Volhynian families, their identity as Amish was weak from the beginning. For those who were very strongly Amish, they continued to identify with other Amish Mennonites as much as 4 years after the immigration to America. For these people, it was the next generation that lost their identity. I see four main forces which I believe gradually led the Swiss Volhynian Mennonites away from their Amish identity and heritage.

First, I believe intermarriage with other groups was almost unavoidable in eastern Europe, when the Amish communities were small and separated by long distances and difficult borders. Marriageable men and women had difficulty finding available spouses within the fellowship. I believe this created bonds between groups that proved stronger than the traditional desire for a closed faith community.

Second, I believe the conservative Low German Mennonites of eastern Europe showed the Amish that they were part of a larger fellowship, not affected by the specific schism of the 1690's which defined the "Amish" fellowship. Most of these Low German Mennonites accepted footwashing and shunning, two articles disputed by opponents of the Amish. The Swiss Volhynians felt the loving embrace of many other non-Amish Mennonites during the emigration to America, when friends in Russia, Germany, and America worked together toward a common goal.

Third, I believe Swiss Volhynians found evangelical missionaries, baptist neighbors, and pietistic literature to be allies in the midst of an alien culture, both in eastern Europe and in America. After years of learning to appreciate pietistic devotional books, it was natural for elder Jacob Stucky to write to friends in Dakota in 1878, "When someone asks, are these traveling preachers Mennonites, I answer, they are not Mennonites, but they are born-again Christians, so this is sufficient."

Fourth, the tasks of shepherding the poor Swiss Volhynian flocks in Kansas and Dakota were immense. In addition, many other immigrants had similar experiences and needs. As sweet as it might have been to keep involvement with other Amish Mennonites, the priority issues were different for the new settlers. In 1876, Jacob Stucky and others began working toward a Kansas Conference of Mennonites, which finally met in 1877. In 1880, Johann Schrag and other Mennonite leaders of Dakota held a conference and agreed to open communion, transfer of membership, and intermarriage. The Swiss Volhynians found more value in working with the other Mennonites around them, and they directed their energies toward this endeavor. When the Volhynian Amish settlers formed district conferences and later a general conference with other non-Amish Mennonite neighbors, they could not long maintain separatism or strict discipline.