

BOOK REVIEWS

*D*onald B. Kraybill and James P. Hurd. *Horse-and-Buggy Mennonites: Hoofbeats of Humility in a Postmodern World*. (Publications of the Pennsylvania German Society: Pennsylvania German History and Culture Series. University Park, Pa.: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006. Pp., xii, 362, photographs, tables, diagrams, appendixes, bibliography, notes, and index. Cloth, \$40.00; paper, \$19.95.)

Horse-and-Buggy Mennonites is about more than horses and buggies. Rather, its theme is “selective modernization” (p. 30) as practiced by one fellowship of auto-shunning Mennonites, the Wengers. According to authors Donald B. Kraybill and James P. Hurd, Wenger Mennonites are discerning about modernity—sometimes accepting, sometimes rebuffing it—and avoidance of automobile ownership is their most conspicuous and most effective way of rejecting it.

Wengers owe their existence to a 1927 emotional dispute over whether members could own Henry Ford’s innovation among Mennonites in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. Schism resulted,

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and those opposing the car became the Groffdale Conference Mennonite Church, or more commonly the Wengers, named for their leader, Joseph O. Wenger. Subsequent divisions have resulted in other horse-and-buggy Mennonite fellowships, but the Wengers remain the most numerous. (The Amish left in the Mennonites in 1693 and developed independently.)

The Wengers stand with the horse against modernity because of the car's perceived threat to faithfulness. According to Wenger thought, separation from the sinful, mainstream world, brings individuals closer to God, but the "car culture" and "too much running around" (p. 89), eventually bring unacceptable levels of involvement in the world, including TV, divorce, and large businesses. Thus, the rule against the car is the first one read in church and the primary source of identity for the Wengers.

Besides the auto, other markers prevent Wengers from selecting too much modernization. Similar to most Anabaptists, Wengers are non-resistant and conscientious objectors to military service. Education, a key component of modernization, occurs in private schools operated by church members and stops at the eighth grade. Moreover, in addition to English, Wengers speak Pennsylvania German, which, like the horse-and-buggy, adds to their distinctiveness.

But, according to Kraybill and Hurd, these eighth-grade educated, Pennsylvania-Dutch speaking, horse-and-buggy Mennonites other times accept, usually with restrictions, modernization. They use tractors that require steel wheels cushioned with rubber belts. Still, they regulate the size of the belts because too much rubber might speed the way to modernity. Kitchens, otherwise not especially modern, have electrical appliances. Households have telephones but not radios, cell phones, television, or computers. Although dress is plain, especially for women, garb is less important than for some other horse-and-buggy fellowships. Thus, Wengers are not completely resistant to modernization but, as the authors say, employ "selective interaction with the surrounding society" (p. 29).

Horse-and-Buggy Mennonites has several obvious strengths. One is its rich, detailed description of Wenger life, including education and community. The portrayals of worship and ordination are particularly interesting. Another asset is the authors' methodology, which is self-consciously "empathetic" to the Wengers and allows them to "tell the story in their own voice" (p. ix). Consequently, quotations from Wengers are abundant. They speak powerfully with simple yet articulate expressions of their faith. "One step

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closer to the world is one step farther away from God," (p. 49) a favorite Wenger expression, is typical.

Occasionally, however, the authors' unabashed empathy for their subjects leaves unanswered questions. A contradiction in political affiliation, for example, receives little analysis. Although few Wengers vote, in 2004 they strongly supported George Bush because they oppose gay rights and abortion, but the book is silent about how these conscientious objectors could swallow the war in Iraq. Likewise, the authors say little about possible limitations created by eighth-grade knowledge of science. We might guess what the Wengers think of Darwin but what about run-off from their farms that pollutes the Chesapeake Bay? Evidence in the book indicates that folk and non-traditional medicine tempts the Wengers, but the authors leave this untouched and do not connect the dots between medical choice and barebones education.

These shortcomings, however, are minor, and *Horse-and-Buggy Mennonites* is outstanding scholarship. Moreover, this gracefully written and well-organized book contributes to an understanding of all Old Order Anabaptists because all of these traditions are variations on the theme of selective modernization. Thus, this volume makes an excellent companion to Charles D. Thompson, Jr.'s recent *The Old German Baptist Brethren: Faith, Farming, and Change in the Virginia Blue Ridge* (University of Illinois Press, 2006). In brief, *Horse-and-Buggy Mennonites* is a wonderful book and a welcomed addition to the literature on Pennsylvania German Anabaptists.

STEVE LONGENECKER
Bridgewater College

John Franch. *Robber Baron: The Life of Charles Tyson Yerkes*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006. Pp. 324, notes, index. Cloth \$45.00.)

Consider a time when a "culture of corruption" had the potential to sway voters from one party to another, when public funds were appropriated for legislators' gain, or when corporate windfalls were granted through law and extended by creative financing. Such practices were common during the Gilded Age, and were standard operating procedures in the business life of Charles Tyson Yerkes, Jr. Freelance writer John Franch admitted that he did