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Amish Food: Tasting AmericaThe Simple Way

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Destination: Amish America

Book: *Amish Cooks Across America: Recipes and Traditions from Maine to Montana* by Kevin Williams and Lovina Eicher.

Article by Brette Sember

There's something tantalizing about Amish life. It sounds so simple and down to earth – no phones, no electricity, no computers, no TV. It's definitely fascinating to many people, which explains why Lancaster County, Pennsylvania and Holmes County, Ohio have become a huge tourist attraction, as people come to see the Amish in their buggies and plain clothes.



Amish buggy, Holmes County Ohio

There are several groups of Amish in my area of western New York state – in the Finger Lakes and in the Chautauqua Lake region. Weekends jaunts to these areas bring us face to face with the Amish at farm and craft markets and we pass their buggies on the road. We've brought home our share of Amish baked goods and jams. Additionally, I have a personal link to the simple lifestyle. My great grandparents were Mennonite, a religious group very similar to the Amish that embraces a rustic and basic lifestyle (the religions are very similar and so are the cultures – both are known for their baked goods!). So it was with interest that I picked up ***Amish Cooks Across America: Recipes and Traditions from Maine to Montana*** by Kevin Williams and Lovina Eicher.

Amish Are Everywhere

The most fascinating fact this book brings home is that Amish are not an East coast group. There are Amish all across the U.S., Canada and even in central and South America. And because the Amish communities are

so insular (no way to call each other up or send email), the geographic groups tend to evolve independently. For example, although we tend to think of the Amish in their closed top buggies, the Amish in Wisconsin use topless buggies, those in Pinecraft, Florida ride bikes and have no buggies at all, and those in Montana ride their horses cowboy style. Each community is distinct and separate and so is their food.



Amish Parking in Millersburg, Ohio

Food Groups

While there are Amish dishes that are consistently enjoyed across the country (the author names whoopee pie and pickled beets but does not include a recipe for either), each group of Amish has its own specialties and this book highlights them. A lot of what people in my area think of as Amish is not recognizable to the Amish in the south or the west. The Amish cook with local ingredients and pick up on regional specialties. For example, in Texas the Amish regularly make quesadillas and burritos, those in Georgia make cornbread, the Florida Amish fry alligator, and the Amish in Montana cook with wild game (the book includes recipes for all of these).

The book is divided into geographic segments and each contains several pages of descriptions about the lifestyles, beliefs and differences in that area with specific pages devoted to groups in certain counties or

towns within that region. It's a fascinating journey through a subculture that is widespread across the country. Each chapter also includes recipes. I recommend loosening your belt before getting down to these: Elderberry Custard Pie, Potato Chowder, Hot Fudge Sundae Cake, Scalloped Corn, Oatmeal Bologna, Yoder Coffeecake, Muscadine Pie, Amish Stovetop Beans, and Huckleberry Pancakes all beckon. This is hearty, carb-laden, homestyle cooking at its best.



Amish breakfast at Der Dutchman Restraunt in Holmes County, Ohio

Viewing the Amish

If you were hoping for a photographic peek into Amish life, you won't get it in this book. The Amish universally shun appearing in photographs and many prefer not to even have their homes or buggies photographed either. One of the authors is herself Amish (she writes a newspaper column with Amish recipes) and the other is her editor, so they are closely attuned to the beliefs of the Amish and are very careful to mainly show photographs of food and landscapes that do not show actual Amish.

What you do get is a tour via words of the people who live this reserved life and how their cuisine reflects their beliefs (the bishops in each area decide how the people live, so some are allowed gas-powered stoves and refrigerators, while others are not) and their geography. The authors interview and quote many Amish across the country so you feel as if you really get to know each group well. Lest you think the Amish are outdated and a fading curiosity, the book explains that they are rapidly expanding – each family generally has eight or nine children, necessitating the start of new groups all across the U.S. If you don't have an Amish community near you now, you may in the future.

For a taste of the Amish, I'm planning to make **Flat Rock Pudding**

FLAT ROCK PUDDING



Flat Rock Pudding

Serves 8 to 12

Dorcas Raber said this dessert originated when a woman in her church used chocolate chip cookies instead of the graham crackers in the recipe she had gotten. "It really became a hit in our church," she said. "Everyone just loves it."

Flat Rock Pudding

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of the graham crackers in the recipe she had gotten. “It really became a hit in our church,” she said. “Everyone just loves it.”

- 6 cups milk
- ¾ cup all-purpose flour
- 2 cups sugar
- Pinch of salt
- 1½ teaspoons vanilla extract
- 4 large egg yolks
- 3 cups whipped topping
- 4 dozen chocolate chip cookies ([See page 60 of the book for a recipe or use your own favorite homemade or store bought cookies](#))
- Peanut butter, for sandwiching the cookies

Heat 4½ cups of the milk in a large saucepan over medium heat until the milk is scalded (180°F). Whisk in the flour, sugar, salt, vanilla, egg yolks, and the remaining 1½ cups cold milk. Heat the milk mixture until thick, stirring continuously. Remove from the heat and allow to cool. Fold in the whipped topping. Spread some peanut butter between two chocolate chip cookies to form a cookie sandwich. Repeat until all four dozen cookies have been used. Cut or crumble the cookie sandwiches into the pudding mixture, and stir until well combined.

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Brette writes often about travel, food, and home arts and is the author of more than 40 books about food, law, health, family issues, business, finance and textbooks. She blogs at [Putting It All on the Table](#) and her personal web site is [Brette Sember](#).

[Brette Sember](#) – who has written [27](#) posts on [A Traveler's Library](#).

**Like It? Share!***About Brette Sember*

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4 thoughts on “Amish Food: Tasting AmericaThe Simple Way”



October 12, 2013 at 1:56 pm

Pamela

Interesting. I also did not know how many Amish communities existed in different parts of the U.S.

My family is from the area near Lancaster County, PA and my mother spoke Pennsylvania Dutch to keep me and my sister from learning family secrets.

But I have seen minor differences in the food I remember from Pennsylvania compared to that we get from Amish and Mennonite people in Penn Yan, NY. Looks like a terrific cookbook to find some old childhood favorites.



October 12, 2013 at 9:42 am

Sophie

I've never met – or even seen – Amish people, but am fascinated by people choosing such an alternative lifestyle. Didn't know they were so spread out in the USA. Would love to meet the ones in Montana especially. Imagine riding as everyday transport...

Oh, and they're probably in good shape because they don't drive. 😊



October 11, 2013 at 1:21 pm

wanderingeducators

we live in amish country, here in mid-michigan. it's where i get my eggs (and most of my veggies!)



October 11, 2013 at 9:47 am

Vera Marie
Badertscher

I grew up around the Amish in Holmes County Ohio and my husband's family is Mennonite, so I'm familiar with the culture and the food of that region. I just didn't realize that the Amish were quite so far-flung and that they adapted their food to their locales in that way. I can't get over how the "plain people" make such lavish use of sugar—and yet the ones I'm familiar with are generally not obese. Ah! Maybe someone needs to publish the "Amish Diet Book."

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