

Declaration by Robert B. Alexander

I, Robert B. Alexander, do certify and state:

My name is Robert Alexander. I am 55 years old and a member of the Old Order Amish church. My wife and I live on an 86-acre farm near Coral in west central Michigan. We have been farming in Michigan since 1977, except for a few years when we lived out of state. We have always been in the dairy or beef business, as well as hogs, poultry and most other livestock. We make our entire living on our farm, as do most members of our community and neighboring communities. I am also a free-lance writer, with work appearing in several nationally-distributed periodicals and books. During our few years out-of-state, I was on the editorial staff at Pathway Publishers, an Amish publishing house.

An Overview of the Amish

The beginning of our church goes back to the earliest days of the Reformation. Our forefathers broke from the other Reformers in 1525 and were considered the radical left wing of the Reformation. A century and a half of the most violent persecution followed, during which time a remnant survived by living at the very edge of society in the mountains of Switzerland and South Germany. That legacy of separation from the affairs of the world is still with us today, and our lifestyle remains entirely rural and deliberately separated.

By 1693 the Amish church emerged as a separate group within the broader Anabaptist movement. The other two branches are the Mennonites and the Hutterites, both of which are found especially in rural areas across the US and Canada. By 1693 the era of violent persecution was about over, and our people were able to live more openly, mostly in South Germany and Alsace. Milder forms of persecution continued though. Much like the Jews of eastern Europe, the Amish were highly valued for their skills, and survived only under the toleration of sometimes-fickle petty nobles. They were not normally able to purchase land, and made their living by farming on estates rented from the nobility. Other strong restrictions applied to areas of social life and

freedom of movement. It was a constant struggle to remain out of military service. Following an invitation by William Penn, the first Mennonites arrived in Pennsylvania about 1711, and the first Amish soon afterward. The main reasons for immigration were the promises of freedom of worship and freedom from military conscription, and the freedom to farm their own land. Immigration continued in several waves through the 1850s. All of the Amish and Hutterites, and most of the Mennonites, completely disappeared from Europe after this period, due to increasing intolerance toward their principle of separation, and their somewhat forced integration into European society.

Already by the end of the 18th century, the Amish name was used in Europe as a synonym for "good farmer", in much the same way that it is used today as a symbol of quality. While scorned for their religion, they were admired for their inovative farming practices, including manuring, crop rotation, cover cropping and other practices that would today be called "organic" farming. We have continued this tradition down to the present.

At the turn of the 20th century, the Amish numbered about 5,000. Scholars were predicting that the Amish were headed for extinction within a few decades, due to their undesireably simple lifestyle. We didn't listen. Today the Amish population is nearing a quarter million, and we are doubling every twenty years. This is partly due to a high birthrate, but also due to a surprisingly high retention rate, contrary to what is seen on TV. Apparently our simple lifestyle is now desireable! There are perhaps 26,000 families in about 1300 churches, in maybe 250 settlements scattered across 27 states. No one knows for sure, partly because it changes so fast, and partly because of our aversion to counting people and keeping records of them all. It must seem strange that a quarter million people can be happy, healthy, prosperous and free without being recorded, chipped and tracked!

Michigan has the fifth highest Amish population, just behind Wisconsin, and far behind the big three of PA, OH and IN. We may be switching positions with WI, as many, many families have left that state in the last 3 years due to mandatory premissis ID. But

