

### An Amish wedding

The actual service begins around 9:00 am. All the guests are gathered outside the shed where the service is to be held. The couple waits inside with their brauts/nevahoaker (the couple chooses one girl and one boy each, which will be the equivalent to what Americans call best man and maid of honour). Upon entering the shed, by gender, all shake hands with the four of them. The Holy Kiss is shared between the female members and everyone shake hands with those of their own gender before being seated. The church leaders enter and walk through the crowd, trying to shake hands with as many as possible. The leaders have already greeted each other with the Holy Kiss, which is the custom amongst the leaders when meeting on formal occasions. The soon-to-be-married are dressed in black, which is the typical colour of the bride and groom in this settlement. All guests are dressed in their "Sunday-clothing". The members start singing as the leaders leave the room to confer about the upcoming service. The couple follows them. The couple confesses to the leaders that they will obey the Amish rules for marriage. On special occasions like this, only men can be vorsingers. The members sing from the Liedersammlung, and the rest of the service is in deutsch. In this wedding the groom is a former Old Colony Mennonite and his family is present. In addition other non-Amish guests are former members and/or relatives to the couple, and we are all explained the service in English. The service consists of stories from the Apocrypha, with a special emphasis on the story about Tobias and Sara from the Book of Tobit. Additionally, traditional questions presented to a couple when being married are asked. Along with emphasis on the Apocrypha, the questions asked vary between the settlements, but contain the same message to the young couple about the importance of marriage and living a good life as husband and wife as married through holy matrimony. The bishop tries to perform the actual wedding around noon, and the service lasts about another half to one hour. Both in this context, and in regular church services, their belief is that God speaks through the church leaders, which is why it is difficult to know exactly when the ceremony will be over, as the leaders do not decide this for themselves.

After the service it is time for dinner. The guests are seated according to gender and age, and also to how well they know the couple. The couple is seated at the corner with their brauts/nevahoakers. The couples are always seated at the corner of two tables shaped like an "L". Some of the most exciting aspects around an Amish wedding are who is chosen to be brauts/nevahoakers and also who will be having the corner. A lot of girls are asked to help at the wedding, making food, cleaning, and serving at the tables. Having the corner is almost a privilege, as this girl will serve the newlywed couple. The girls discuss

*and guess who is most likely to have the honour prior to the wedding. The girls will receive a gift from the couple for helping out, like a home made wood box or other hand made crafts. The couple keeps all the wedding gifts in a room in the house. They will not have a list of preferable gifts, but everybody can buy, or make, whatever they wish to give. The same goes for the gifts from the bride's and groom's families. There are gifts that are more common from the parents, like quilts and wall-clocks. Traditionally and still practised in some settlements, the dinner consists of chicken, potatoes and dressing. In other words, the guests know what they will receive. But in other settlements they have changed this menu both at weddings and also regarding the meals following regular church services. The girl's family can choose what they want to serve, but it is usually a meal that is easy to make so that most of the women can attend the service instead of preparing food during it. I am seated on a table with other non-Amish, as well as extended family members of the groom. Others are seated in the basement. No speeches are held during the dinner, but sometimes a song will be sung. Between dinner and supper the guests gather for a more informal singing. Only those who are visiting, families, and the young folks are invited to stay after dinner. The singing for the youths is held just after supper. The young couple has made a songbook for the occasion, containing poems, Scripture, and both English and German songs. The singing is the final ritual of the wedding and a church leader says a benediction and a prayer before everyone goes home.*