

Full Name: Jon Fraser

College: College of Engineering and Applied Science

Major: Architectural Engineering

Title of Project: The Plain Lifestyle: Amish at a Deeper Level

Expected Project Start Date: March/April 2012

Expected Project End Date: July 2012

Much myth and speculation revolves around the world of the Amish. Due to the humble and antiquated lifestyle that the Amish choose, little is known of the true Amish community and the daily beliefs and actions of the Amish. Those outside of the Amish community, known as the English, know little of the Amish beyond the occasional glance of a horse and buggy along a quiet country highway. However, many novels, websites, and television documentaries have been dedicated to discovering and displaying the true lifestyle of the Amish. As an Honors Experience, I would like to research many of the common conceptions the English world has pertaining to the Amish and follow up this research by spending a week with an Amish family living as an “adopted” member of the family participating in daily activities and Amish customs.

As preparation for the experiential portion of this Honors Experience, I would complete at least 20-30 hours of in-depth research pertaining to all aspects of Amish life and English perception of the Amish community. This research would cover a wide range of topics including clothing, religious views, celebrations, transportation, family dynamics, and education and would draw from a variety of sources and media. For instance, many novels have been written regarding Amish love affairs with the English or the crossover of an Amish to the English lifestyle and vice versa. Novels like these are valuable sources for observing English views of the Amish and the concept of English and Amish interaction.

In addition to research, I would need to put great effort into securing an authentic Amish family willing to host me and include me in family activities for a week. Since the Amish are reluctant to open up to English outsiders, I would have to use some sort of existing connection to locate a family willing to assist me with this project. My grandfather practiced as a physician in Northern Missouri for many years and had many Amish patients from a nearby Amish community. I would most likely be able to contact one of his former patients to inquire about other Amish families in the community willing to host me and include me as a member of their family. The father of this family would serve as my advisor for the Honors Experience and would also serve the role of mentoring during my time with the family. Budgetary costs would include gas money to travel to the Amish community and any discretionary spending that may arise from the need to buy materials or food.

Since I was young, I have been fascinated by the Amish and their way of life. Now that I have the opportunity to study anything and travel anywhere I choose, I would love to study these people at a closer level as an Honors Experience. In addition to exploring my curiosity regarding the Amish, this Honors Experience would also allow me to further examine the techniques and

building styles of the Amish to use as inspiration and reference as an Architectural Engineer. The Amish are known to have some of the most structurally sound buildings and furniture in the world and utilize traditional carpentry techniques and tools when constructing objects. Not only would the techniques used by the Amish to build homes apply to my major, but I could also examine the effects of culture and religion on the manner and style of a community's buildings. The Amish believe fully in living a simplistic lifestyle and the plain colors and design of their homes, barns, churches, and school houses reflect their beliefs.

During my week with the Amish, I would keep a journal to document my thoughts, feelings, actions, and interactions regarding the Amish and their lifestyle. Since most Amish are opposed to appearing in photographs, photo documentation of my hosts would be limited, but I could still photograph my surroundings. Following my week with the family, I would compile all of my research before, during, and after my stay into a presentation that I could present to Honors students and faculty interested in my findings. If the demand arose for further presentation or exhibition, I could potentially create a small exhibit of artifacts, photos, and journal entries to display for public viewing. In addition to a presentation, I would also write an essay based on my research to examine the differences between conceptions of Amish life and the actual Amish experience to be published in a student journal.