

Barn-raising remains a tradition for Mennonites

By Cathy D. Cavanah
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FAIRVIEW — Holding fast to tradition, a group of neighbors came together recently for an event that time has almost forgotten — a barn-raising.

"It's just sort of a one-day event," said Luke Hoover, a Mennonite farmer who lives just outside Fairview in Todd County.

Hoover's family and other neighbors of Mennonite and Amish faith gathered July 18 to help him build a tobacco barn. And while the large building — with wood frames and metal siding — is somewhat more modern-looking than ones of earlier decades, it has been built the old-fashioned way.

"Everybody comes together, and the women have a quilting and such while the men work," the Mennonite continued, explaining that barn-raising is also a time for some socializing.

Barn-raising used to take place frequently in farming communities. But that was back in the early part of the century — in a slower-paced world when it was not uncommon for neighbors of all faiths to participate in such events.

Today, the raisings are virtually unheard of. That is, except among the Mennonites and Amish, whose religion shuns change and modernism in favor of forefathers' ways.

"They have just remained part of

our custom," Hoover said as his helpers rested under a shade tree after enjoying a large meal served by the wives of Hoover and other workers.

In addition to cooking, the women had a quilting in the home, with tradition dictating that the finished quilt would belong to the hostess. Quilting is common at barn-raising, the women said, because it allows them to talk as they sew.

Other times they might bring clothing to mend or do work in the garden.

Outside, the children played and watched their fathers work. Some of the young boys rode their older-style bicycles to a nearby pond for some fishing.

In all, about 30 Mennonite and Amish families live in Christian and Todd counties. And about 25 to 30 of the men came to lend a hand and hammer at the Hoover farm.

The Mennonites, a Protestant group, have existed since the early 1500s. In the 1690s, the Amish split away from the Mennonites because of a disagreement concerning discipline of those who left the church.

Basically, the Amish were more strict in their beliefs that excommunicated members should be "shunned," or completely avoided, while the Mennonites still socialized with them and considered them part of the family though not of the church.

Despite this difference in church discipline, the Amish and Mennonites share the same basic religion.

Hoover explained that he and a couple of hired Mennonite boys had laid the concrete block foundation in advance of the barn-raising. Also, the wood frames for the barn were built a few days before the raising with the help of 15 or so of the neighbors.

The barn-raising was not the first to take place in the area in recent years. In fact, Hoover said he has attended several since moving to Kentucky about 18 months ago from the much larger Mennonite and Amish community in Lancaster County, Pa.

But he did acknowledge that the barn-raising in Kentucky have differed from any he saw in Pennsylvania. A lack of manpower here makes it impossible to stay with pure tradition — and a crane has to be used to help the men raise the wooden frames and set them in the ground.

"Here, they just don't have enough people," explained Phares Martin, who lives in Pennsylvania but was visiting his son's family in Kentucky. The 88-year-old Mennonite said Hoover's was the first barn-raising he has seen where a crane was used.

Mennonite and Amish families number in the thousands in Pennsylvania, and, therefore, there is usual-



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Carrying out a tradition set by their forefathers, local men of Mennonite and Amish faith help raise a tobacco barn at Luke Hoover's Todd County farm.

ly a larger turnout for barn-raising.

A number of families have settled in western and central sections of Kentucky because the price of land is much lower than the typical \$10,000 per acre in Lancaster County, Pa.

There, the men are able to raise a barn entirely by themselves using long sticks with points to push up the frames.

"We ought to have about 50 men to be able to do that," Hoover said.

Many of those taking part in Hoover's recent barn-raising had also helped him raise a smaller barn soon after he moved to the Fairview area. They also helped him build an addition to his home.