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Plain & Fancy Farm – 50 Years from Broadway to Amish Attraction

Trio of Lancaster County “firsts” celebrating 50th anniversary in 2009

(Bird-in-Hand, PA) In 1955, a musical called Plain & Fancy opened on Broadway and spurred the beginning of tourism in Lancaster County. Soon thereafter, a house and barn on Route 340 opened using the same name, which referred to the Plain people and the rest of the local “fancy” population. Fifty years later, the house, restaurant, and tours provide experiences where plain and fancy traditions meet, including new offerings like the Amish V.I.P. (Visit-In-Person) Tour.



From Farm to Table

Original plans called for barn dances, Amish house tours, and a gift shop. When brothers Christian (Christ) and Robert Lapp bought the property in 1959, the Amish house tours began, but they had a different plan for the barn.

The idea was simple – guests would eat at long tables and pass the food around “family-style.” The original dining room at Plain & Fancy held about 125 diners, and the all-you-can-eat meals cost about \$1.50 for adults. On opening day, they ran out of food and closed their doors for several hours to re-stock for the evening meal.

As tourism grew, so did the restaurant. An addition was built, and meals were soon served both upstairs and down, with a capacity of about 700 guests. The employee roster grew to 250, and on busy days there might be 15 buses in the parking lot at any given time.

In 1994, the owners of Miller's Smorgasbord purchased the property. Lancaster's original Amish farm feast continued to be served, with the focus on the traditional Pennsylvania Dutch menu. When *USA Today* picked one signature food for each of the 50 states, shoofly pie was chosen for Pennsylvania, and Plain & Fancy's was recommended as the representative sample.

The "farm to table" concept remains important today, with many foods purchased from local Amish farmers with crops that are in season. The owners also recognized changing dining trends, introducing a new a la carte menu so that visitors can now enjoy either a sampling or the all-you-can-eat feast that made Plain & Fancy famous.

Further improvements included the open-beam Country Store, built using traditional barn techniques, and the upscale Amish View Inn & Suites offering striking views of the countryside.

That Authentic "Lived In" Feeling

The original Amish house tour that started it all here at Plain & Fancy Farm is now known as the Amish Country Homestead. The changes both in its furnishings and tour content are a reflection of the changes in the Amish lifestyle since 1959. This was the first Amish house built specifically for touring, as well as the first tour to try and make changes to better reflect how the Amish live now rather than 50 years ago. To maintain integrity, Amish were brought in for consultation so that the entire house is now furnished to look "lived in," and not like a museum.

Rather than just point out objects, guides interpret some of the "riddles" of Amish life, such as why the Amish may have a propane gas refrigerator, but not an electric one.

The Amish Country Homestead at Plain & Fancy Farm became the first, and still the only, Amish house tour to have received the coveted Lancaster County "Heritage Site" designation.

The home's location was enhanced by its setting surrounded by Amish farms along Route 340, now a designated AAA cultural scenic byway. It thus became the ideal starting point for touring the countryside.

Where the Amish Live and Work

Dutchland Tours, the county's oldest daily tour operation, started soon after the Lapp brothers opened Plain & Fancy. Brother Christ knew curious visitors who toured the Amish house would want to see where the Amish lived and worked.

He bought a new Volkswagen bus in 1959, obtained the required permits, and opened for business in a small building along Route 30. Local hotel owners requested pick-up service for their guests, and soon the tour operation was flourishing with stops at about 50 lodging

properties. At its peak, an average of 300 to 400 people toured the farmlands, with as many as 600 on very busy days.

Christ and wife Dolly owned Dutchland Tours from 1959 to 1979. At that time, Bette Ranck, who had worked as a tour guide and dispatcher, purchased the company. A group tour division, Penn Dutch Adventures, was added in the mid 1980's. Today, as the Amish Experience, the company has originated special interactive and experiential group tours, including the Amish Wedding Celebration, the Old & Moo Tour, From One Room to Rumspringa, and Amish Country Cookin' Tour.

In 1995, partners Chuck Romito, founder of the Pennsylvania Renaissance Faire, and Bette Ranck moved their business to Plain & Fancy Farm and grew Amish Country Tours once again with the opening of "Jacob's Choice," in the distinctive special effects Amish Experience Theater.

Now under the name Amish Country Tours, guides travel the back roads seven days a week, with visits to Amish farms. It is the only local tour operator to have a certified guide program. Most recently, third partner Brad Igou, himself an Amish scholar, developed the exclusive V.I.P. (Visit-In-Person) Tours that offer unprecedented opportunities for guests to meet and talk personally with the Amish.

So whether visitors plan to stay the night, take a bus tour of the farmlands, tour an Amish home, experience the moving drama of an Amish family today, or enjoy traditional Penn Dutch cooking, Plain & Fancy Farm remains a Lancaster original, the one-stop destination "where visitors find it all."

For details on all there is to see and do in Lancaster, visit www.discoverlancasterpa.com or call 1-800-PA-DUTCH.

Lancaster County is a wonderful blend of urban style and rural splendor, and the PA Dutch Convention & Visitors Bureau is dedicated to promoting its many rich cultures, from the Amish to the arts. Travelers can take in our vibrant downtown city life – featuring galleries, great dining, specialty shops, and live music – or explore some of the surrounding towns and villages to get a sampling of the heritage, food, craftsmanship, and hands-on activities for which Lancaster is famous. Visit us today at www.discoverlancasterpa.com. Lancaster is also part of Pennsylvania's [Dutch Country Roads](#) region, a true vacation destination where country meets city and the past lives side-by-side with the present.