

Gortner's Swan Meadow School

Swan Meadow School has been an integral part of the Gortner Amish community since opening its doors in 1892. The number of students, referred to as scholars, grew quickly after the school's establishment thereby causing overcrowded conditions. To accommodate the larger enrollment, scholars were initially divided into two groups that attended classes every other day. Community members decided that a better solution would be to enlarge the school building by about one third. The school house still stands along Route 219 where a visual inspection reveals where the addition was connected to the original structure.

By the mid 1950s overcrowding and an aging facility became a concern for Garrett County officials who considered closing the school and transporting students to Oakland. The proposal created a dilemma for the Amish who typically enroll their children in schools operated under the authority of their local church. Swan Meadow School had been providing for a unique educational program where the scholars attended a Garrett County Public School populated predominately with Amish and Mennonite students. Although Swan Meadow was subject to state and county authority instead of the Gortner Amish Church, the community fully supported the school and organized to save it. Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) meetings and prayers were directed to keeping Amish scholars in their community and at the Swan Meadow School.

An agreement was reached whereby community members agreed to provide volunteer labor for building a new Swan Meadow School, thereby reducing costs to local government. In 1958, the arrangement was approved and work began on a new brick building located adjacent to the original structure.

Today Swan Meadow School provides educational programming for students through grade 8 and remains part of the Garrett County Public School system. Since the Amish typically end formal schooling at the end



Scholars at work.

Written by: **Dan Whetzel**
Photography by: **Lance C. Bell**

of grade 8 the arrangement has proven to be successful. The school population is more diverse than in year's past but Amish, Mennonite, and Brethren pupils still make up a significant part of the enrollment.

Swan Meadow teachers follow the state curricula and students are subject to state assessments, including the use of computer technology. While Amish students are restricted from accessing the internet, instruction in computer skills is recognized by the community as an important life skill.

If state assessments are considered as one measure of success then

Swan Meadow students are at the top of the class because scores are consistently above average for Maryland's public schools. And if a satisfied staff and parent population remains a measure of success, then Swan Meadow School continues to remain a valued and important community partner.

Nicole Beachy

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Swan Meadow follows state curricula and students are subject to state assessments including computer technology. The facility also has plenty of room for exercise and fitness.

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