

Fulfilling An Ancient Ideal

COVER

STORY

By Warren Overlie

My first visit to Spring Creek Colony was a memorable one. It was the sunny, beautiful morning of Ascension Day, and everything was quiet when I drove into the Hutterite courtyard. There were no adults to be seen, only a few children playing near a white picket fence.

"Where are your parents?" I asked.

The children were shy, and, between their giggles, eventually told me that the older people were in the church. So that's where I headed.

When I opened the doors and stood in the small vestibule, peering into the interior of the church, I felt a warm (but curious) friendliness toward the people there. Trying to be inconspicuous (and not too successfully, I am afraid), I headed directly for the back pew. The sanctuary fit my expectations of what a Hutterite chapel would be: clean, direct, unadorned architectural lines matching the Hutterite outlook towards life. The men, wearing dark suits, all sat at the left side of the church. The women sat at the right, all of them wearing long dark dresses with polka dot head scarfs. The children there sat by themselves in the front pews.

I didn't understand the service as it was all in German. (I was told later that there are two types of German used at the colony—one for the worship services and the second for other everyday communication.) The elders, all men, sat at the front, facing the congregation, and the guest preacher that day was from another colony in Montana, who read portions of Scripture.

Friendly Hosts

Afterwards, I was invited to the home of John Hofer, the colony's German teacher, where I learned more of the Hutterite humor and warm-hearted hospitality. While there, I enjoyed some of his home-made wine, and we talked more of the history and customs of Spring Creek Colony. Later, we all went to the main dining hall, a separate building. Hutterites have no



Spring Creek Colony is located at the extreme edge of McPherson County, S.D., just a few miles southwest of Forbes, N.D. Fleeing persecution in central Europe and Russia, the pacifist sect sought asylum in the United States in the 1870s. Spring Creek Colony, established in 1964, is an off-shoot of the Hutterite colony near Scotland, S.D. About 100 people now live at Spring Creek Colony. Families tend to run large, with some families consisting of between six and eleven children. The Hutterites at Spring Creek farm about 5,000 acres and have built up a highly modern, efficient agricultural operation.



Counter clockwise, starting at top:
Two young men operate bulldozers.
Middle pictures: Hutterites utilize
some of the most advanced farm
equipment. Bottom picture: A bee hive
is checked for honey.



cooking facilities in their own homes, but instead eat together in a big dining room, the men on one side and the women at another. The menu that day consisted of a delicious home-made noodle soup, beef and freshly baked bread. We talked about a variety of subjects: farming, the drought, the colony. Some of the older, married men teased the younger single men about their girl friends. Finally, it was over. The head man prayed in German, and we left to see other parts of the dining hall.

The kitchen was, of course, big in order to prepare food for the 100-plus people who regularly dine there for each meal. Several women were still working there, and welcomed us with smiles amidst the clatter of kitchen utensils.

"I'd like to have you meet my wife," said Leonard Gross. They both laughed as he added: "You can take a picture of us and put it on the cover of your magazine!"

Further on in the tour, I was shown the children's dining room. They eat separately from the adults until they are 15 years old. The older children supervise the younger and they take pride in keeping their own dining hall neat and tidy. "Well, sometimes they don't always keep it clean," chuckled John Hofer, my guide for the day. We asked the children what their favorite foods were, and the replies were exuberant. "I like hamburger!" shouted one. "I like chicken!" cried another. The third response was a typical reply of children the world over. "I like ice cream!"

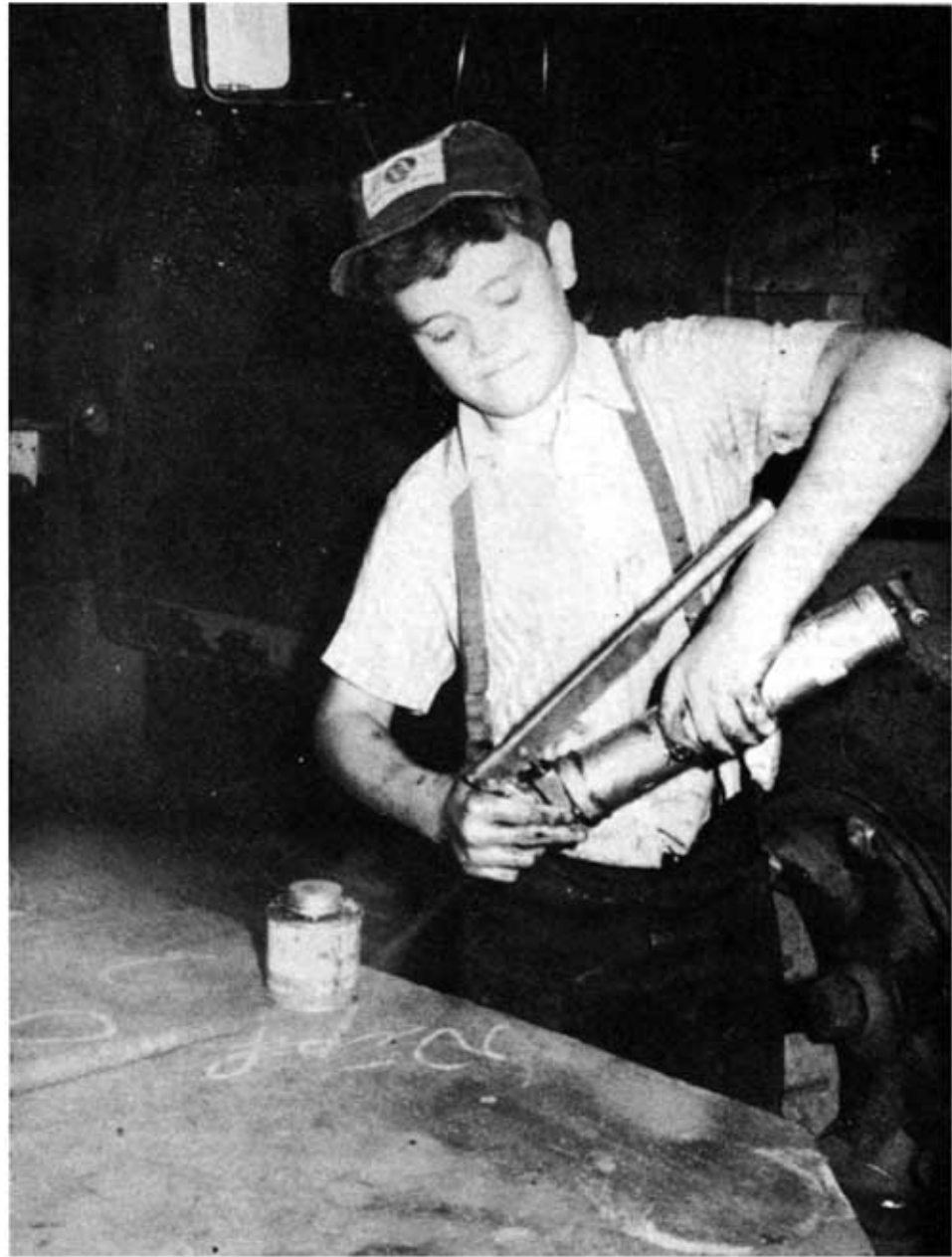
About 106 people live at Spring Creek Colony, located a few miles west of Forbes, N.D. They farm approximately 5,000 acres, growing mainly barley, oats, corn, and some wheat. There is a large livestock operation. About 4,000 hogs are raised along with chickens, ducks, and dairy herds. Approximately 100 cows are milked each day in the colony's new dairy barn, built in 1975.

Origins

The Hutterites originated in Moravia in 1528, an offshoot of the Swiss Brethren. One of several Anabaptist groups which came out of the turmoil of the Protestant Reformation during the 16th century, the Hutterites developed a code of personal life based upon a literal translation of the New



Tending her house plants, Mrs. John Hofer wears typical long dress and sparkling white bonnet. On more formal occasions, polka dot head scarfs are worn with long, dark dresses. Like the men, women are assigned tasks for the week: some garden, some cook, others bake bread. They also keep the family apartments tidy and sew for husband and children. Usually, the colony will buy fabric in bulk quantities, distributing material to each family to be sewn according to its needs. As a rule, only a few staples and hard-to-make items are purchased.



One of the boys at Spring Creek learns about automobile and truck mechanics in the colony's workshop . . .



... while in this picture, a young admirer at left is impressed by the bow's technical know-how.

LOCATION OF HUTTERITE COLONIES, SOUTH DAKOTA, 1969



The population of Hutterites in North America in 1970 numbered about 20,000. Besides colonies in South Dakota (see map above), there is one settlement in northern North Dakota, about 23 in Montana, one in Washington, with more in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba.



One of the ultra-modern swine units built by colony members.

Testament. Some of their primary beliefs:

■ To the Hutterites, ownership of personal property interferes with their proper worship of God. Therefore, except for a few items, all things in the colonies are owned by the community, where there is complete equality and where everyone is cared for. Their philosophy was eloquently summarized in a petition addressed to Woodrow Wilson in 1918:

"Our community life is founded on the principle, 'What is mine is thine,' or in other words on brotherly love and humble Christian service, according to Acts 2:44 and 45. 'And all that believed were together, and had all things in common; and sold their possessions and goods and parted them to all men, as every man had need.' "

■ Another basic religious tenet is that Christians are not to serve in war or to seek revenge. Sharing this same principle of non-violence with such groups as the Quakers and Amish, the Hutterites cite their support for pacifism from such Biblical sources as Luke 2:8-20, Isaiah 2:1-4, Micah 4:1-4, and Romans 12:14-21.

■ Finally, another practice setting the Hutterites apart from others is their desire to remain as far as possible from harmful influences of the outside world. Christians, according to their belief, should not conform to the world, as is described in Romans 12:2—an injunction the Hutterites choose to follow by withdrawing from the excesses of world society.

Ironically, the Hutterites' peaceful manner of living has, throughout much of their history, only enraged governments. Indeed, it is only within the last 30 or 40 years that Hutterites have been relatively free from persecution. Their founder, Jacob Hutter, the Anabaptist pastor from whom the sect derives its name, was burned at the stake in Moravia in 1536. More persecutions made the Hutterites look for a peaceful homeland. The Hutterites continued to live in Moravia for another century, spent more than a century wandering in Hungary, and still another century in Russia.

A Home In The New World

In 1871, the Russian government nullified an earlier agreement guaranteeing the Hutterites exemption from military service. Between 1874 and 1879, practically all Hutterites left the three Crimean villages where they had been living. About 100 Hutterite



(Above): Children enjoy merry-go-round. Hutterites teach their children responsibility and strict obedience to family, teachers, and elders. But it is done with tenderness and patience.

(Below): Landscaping work is done at one of the new multi-family units.

families arrived in Yankton, S.D. during that time, starting colonies in the southern part of the state.

But strong anti-Hutterite sentiment surfaced at the time of World War I, partly due to their German background and also to their practice of non-violence. In 1918, 12 colonies left for Canada, soon followed by more colonies. By 1934, there was only one colony remaining in South Dakota—Bon Homme, near Tabor and Yankton. The next year, the South Dakota Legislature passed the Communal Corporation Act allowing the colonists to incorporate. Within the next several years, seven colonies returned from Canada.

Now there are about 70 colonies in the United States and almost twice that number in Canada.

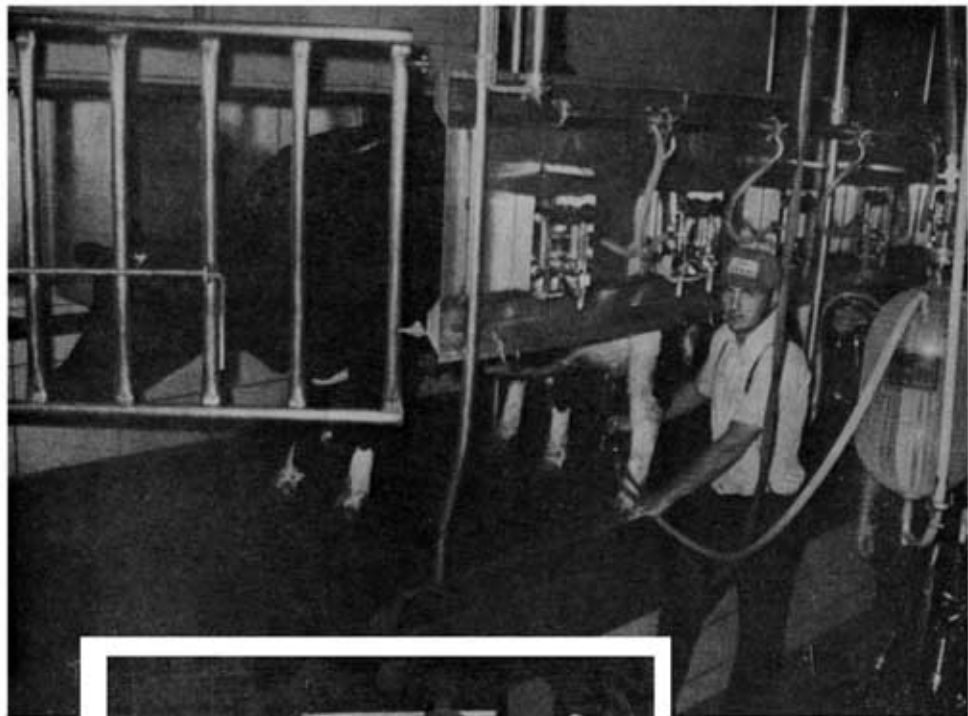
Spring Creek Colony was organized near Forbes in 1964. Its mother colony was Maxwell Colony, located near Scotland, S.D.

Schooling

A person is born a Hutterite. Converts are rare, and are not sought. Although not baptized until their late teens or early 20s, Hutterite children become "young people" at age 15. This allows them to join the adults at work and to sit at the adult dinner table.

School consists of "English" school



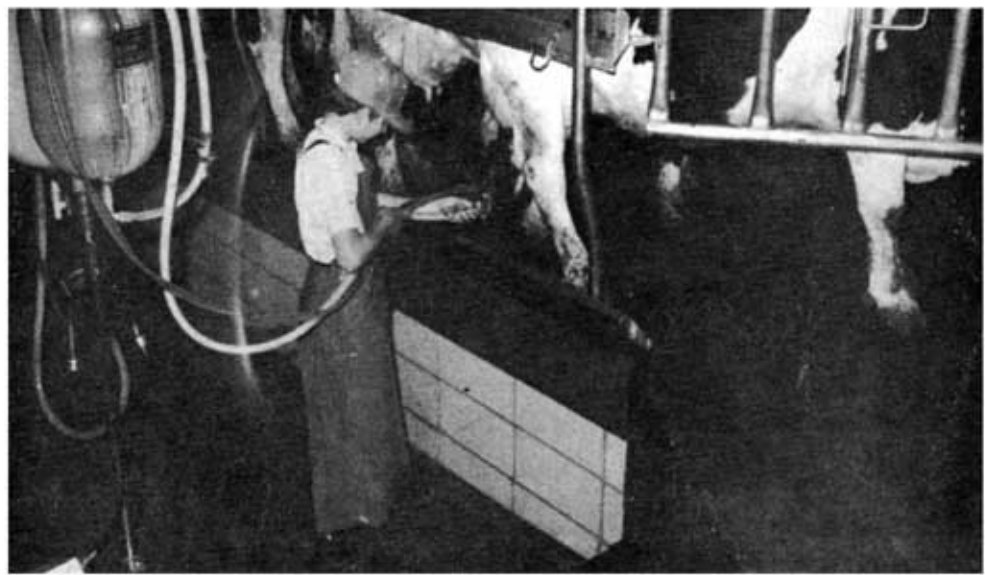


In their manner of dress, Hutterites are similar to the Amish. Both follow fashions most of us would consider out-of-date. But there the difference ends. Hutterites utilize modern conveniences (although television is forbidden mainly because of the degeneracy of most programming). The new dairy unit, above, for example, employs the latest equipment for milking as many as 100 cows each day.

Below: Young man pauses before he starts to weld.

Opposite page, above: Children learn the three R's in the "English" school. The children also attend "German" school where they learn the Bible, the sect's traditions, hymns and High German, the liturgical language. A German dialect serves for most everyday speech.

Opposite page, below: A youngster helps in the new dairy farm.





A park bench—and two small children—miniatures of their mothers with bonnets and long dresses.

Below: A young girl darts past our cameras, trying to escape from being photographed.



and "German" school. Each Hutterite colony has a German teacher, whose primary responsibility is to teach the children Hutterite hymns, Bible history, and how to read and write German. The "English" school follows the regular curriculum of all South Dakota schools. The teachers at Spring Creek Colony come from their homes

in Frederick, S.D. and Leola, S.D. each day the Spring Creek Colony school is in session. They are not Hutterites.

Other skills like carpentry, cooking, gardening, sewing, and others, the children learn from adults in the colony.

At the colony, no one is in need. Everyone helps in the work according to ability.

Spring Creek Colony, like other Hutterite colonies, has its own president — Jacob Wipf. Departmental heads are appointed to supervise such areas as farming, carpentry, blacksmith work, hog production, and other important aspects of the colony.

Spring Creek Colony is still young, compared to other Hutterite colonies. Established in 1964, John Hofer remembers when there were no homes at the colony site. It took about three years to get the colony ready before people could move in, he said. Older buildings were moved in, and new ones were built too. Today, there are 16 homes.

I am still curious. There is much more to learn about the people at Spring Creek. But our friendly visit draws to an end. As we drive away, I think more about those verses in the Book of Acts, chapter 2: "And all that believed were together, and had all

things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need."

These ancient words are being adapted among us on the prairies of the Dakotas. Indeed, we are a richly diverse people. ■



A mother does her family's laundry in the colony's communal laundry room while her daughter washes, and then sweeps, a rug.