Finding your way out of the bustle of the 21st century is as simple as taking a turn down a country road in Lawrence County.

When you find yourself sharing that lane with a horse-drawn buggy, you are in Amish country, the largest settlement of Old Order Amish in the South. It begins just north of Ethridge and is spread out over several miles east and west of U.S. Highway 43.

Three Amish families in search of good farmland arrived from Mississippi in January, 1944. A railroad car brought their horse-drawn farm machinery and household goods that did not require the electricity that was still new in many local homes.
Today over 250 families in Lawrence County continue to live according to the doctrine of this most conservative branch of the Amish sect, which considers “worldliness” among the chief evils of life.

The Amish first migrated to Pennsylvania in the late 1690s to escape religious persecution in Europe. Their particular faith was the result of a split in the Swiss Anabaptist church, and they earned their name as followers of Jakob Ammann. A second wave of Amish immigrants came to the farms of the American heartland from the early to mid-1800s.

Like those forefathers, Lawrence County’s Amish converse with each other in a Pennsylvania-Dutch/German dialect and support themselves with the things they grow and make. The rest of the world has hurried by, but very little about Amish culture has changed.

Amish children study English and other basic subjects at school, which they attend through the 8th grade, typically age 14. There are several one-room schools throughout the community, and each has one teacher for all grades.

From 14 to 21, the Amish learn a trade. Young people who have helped with the work of farm and home from early childhood are taught how they will manage their own property and households.

During this time young men may learn to make furniture, saddles, harnesses or molasses, run sawmills, or shoe horses. Young women are taught how to cook and preserve enough food to feed huge families: Amish couples sometimes have as many as 18 or 19 children. Women also produce a variety of items that are sold to visitors, including baked goods, candy, candles, baskets, jams, jellies, and pickles.

The Amish typically marry at 21, but even the newest households are not equipped with electricity. Tools that the “English” (anyone not Amish) would consider antiques are in daily use
at Amish homes and farms. Gasoline or diesel engines are used to run some machinery, such as generators at sawmills, but no motor-driven vehicles can be used. The Amish will accept rides from neighbors or take a bus if lengthy travel, such as a doctor's appointment in Nashville, is required.

The Amish hold church services in their homes, and they typically last four hours. Their bible is written, and services are conducted, in “high” German. Men and women are segregated, sitting on backless benches on opposite sides of the room, facing one another. Hymns are sung without instrumental accompaniment.

They do not pay or receive any government benefits, including Social Security. They do not vote or serve in the military, or seek public office. They wear dark colors – black, dark blue, green or brown. Men wear collarless shirts, and everyone covers their head – girls wear black caps until they marry; men wear straw hats during summer months and felt in the winter.

Amish men do not shave their beards after they marry; a long beard is a mark of an adult Amish man. They are forbidden to wear mustaches, as Amish associate them with the military.

Sunday night singings are where the young people “court.” They call it running around. On the day of a wedding, church service begins in the morning and ends at noon. Banns (the public announcement in a church that a marriage is going to take place between two specified persons) are said a week or two before the wedding in the church. The bride's parents furnish the food at their home, which is a big event. The couple spend their first night at the bride's home. Their honeymoon consists of visits with aunts and uncles.

There are approximately 100 families in the Lawrence County area with an average of 5-7 members per household and they are excellent neighbors. They prefer to associate with their own people and ask only to be left alone to worship and live their beliefs.

They have greatly improved the land in the Lawrence County area with lots of manure, lime, fertilizer and rotation of crops. Care is taken to prevent soil erosion. All of their farming is done with horses and without the aid of tractors or modern equipment. No electricity is used. They have been living this way for over 300 years. As to how much longer they can resist technology and change, only time will tell.

Rules for visiting and doing business in Amish country

Many Amish families welcome visitors and offer a wide variety of prepared foods, produce, furniture, saddles, harnesses, and other items for sale. Handmade quilts, tack and harness, furniture of all kinds, baskets, crafts and candies can be found in the Amish community.
Visit one of Lawrence County's oldest Amish Farms, tour the Museum and experience a wagon ride through Amish country.

Handmade signs at the end of an Amish driveway will direct you to these sellers; otherwise the family does not do business with the public. **There are no Sunday sales.**

Photographing Amish people is forbidden. This belief is based on the second commandment, “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth,” (Exodus 20:4). This is also the reason Amish dolls do not have faces, and there are no mirrors present in Amish homes.

Guests in Amish country are asked to treat its residents with friendship, courtesy, and respect, just as they would visitors in their own homes.

A map showing some locations and items produced can be obtained at the Chamber office, or downloaded here.