

# 2010 Amish Series: Stories of the Lancaster Amish

by Brad Igou

*In our series this year, we will have a selection of interesting, personal stories about people in the local Amish community, past and present. Sometimes we see the Amish as “cookie-cutter” people, but this series will focus on individuals, both “average” and unusual.*

## Part 3 - An Amishman Travels the Globe (continued)

Most of us think of the Amish as a people that stay close to home, the family, the community. But there are always those adventurous spirits in a society that long to travel, to experience new lands and cultures. No other Amishman has done what Jonathan B. Fisher did. Born in 1878, he made two trips to Europe, and one trip around the world. In this, the last of three articles about Jonathan's trip around the world in 1934, we join him upon his arrival in Europe.

### Columbus and Mussolini

Jonathan sailed from Egypt and the Holy Land across the Mediterranean Sea to Genoa, Italy. There he visits the birthplace of Christopher Columbus and travels on for two weeks in Rome. Here Jonathan hears Mussolini speaking to a huge crowd. “It was acclaimed the greatest event that Rome had seen for ages. For the military affair, I had no inclination, but Mussolini's ‘talk’ was not missed.”

On board ship, he again observes with interest his fellow passengers. In colorful language he describes a professor who “possesses an oblong over-sized head and stern countenance set upon a slender and ill proportioned body, resting upon very long thin legs. Lest we ridicule, one will admit there are after all ‘worthwhile’ existence's in the peculiarly featured personage. Underneath those extremely thick and long eyelashes is imbedded an evident storehouse of knowledge.”

### Coming Full Circle

In Barcelona, Spain, he meets up with a Spaniard who had worked in Baltimore. This man, who married a woman he had met in England, became his guide around the city. Of the many items for sale in Barcelona, Jonathan writes, “Let the ones who are inclined to vanity and who have ‘stuffy’ purses patronize the jewelry stores.”

Casablanca, Lisbon, and Dover are the next ports of call. While in England, he travels to London, especially enjoying a visit to the nearby grave of William Penn. Finally, Jonathan sails for home.

Approaching New York, he “becomes desirous to again step on American soil. Partings are made and myself and belongings were soon afoot at the same place from which in a fleeting one and one-half year's time, the journey was started.”


### The Final Voyage

Jonathan's third and final trip abroad came in 1952, at the age of 74. He went with a load of livestock sent by a relief organization to Europe after the war. While there, he was the only Amishman to attend the Mennonite World Conference in Switzerland.

“Yonnie,” as he was known, died the following year, leaving his three daughters and a foster son. Neither his diabetic condition, nor a back injury from “handling a large Swiss cheese which got out of control,” had deterred his travels.

When abroad, he always sent reports and letters home, keeping diaries and autograph books of people he met. These items, his two lengthy books, and his 1908 passport are preserved in a local library.

Jonathan B. Fisher's travels are astonishing even by today's standards, perhaps even more so because he was Amish. Many readers, whether Amish or not, were enthralled by his stories of far-away lands and peoples. His writings remain fascinating and insightful to this day, testimony to the quality of his eighth grade education.

Reading his books, you not only “glean” many facts about foreign cultures, but you also come to know Jonathan himself. How I wish I could have spent a few hours visiting with him! 

Next Issue: Amish Nicknames

