

"Religious Rights" Essay from *The Goldfinch*, February 1987

In Hazelton, Iowa, local school officials tried to force Amish children to board a bus to go to a public school in November, 1965. Amish parents protested. Amish kids scrambled terrified into nearby cornfields (photo above). They did not want to attend the public schools.

The State of Iowa is responsible for the education of Iowa children. It has a law that says school teachers must be certified and students must attend school until they are 16 years old. Officials closed the Amish school because the teacher was uncertified.

The Amish-Mennonites are a religious group originally from Switzerland who came to the U.S. to freely practice their religious way of life.

Most Amish believe farming is the simplest and best way of life. They use old farming methods. Clothing and homes are kept as plain as possible. The Amish discourage knowledge of the modern world outside their settlement.

To teach their children this way of life, the Amish have their own schools. Amish teachers teach reading, writing, and arithmetic. At home, children learn farming, cooking, sewing, and gardening. The Amish believe that education beyond eighth grade is unnecessary to be a good farmer.

All over the state, people talked about the Amish school issue. The Amish based their right to have separate schools on the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The First Amendment says that the government cannot make rules about religion. Religious rights are also protected in the Iowa State Constitution.

In 1967 the Iowa General Assembly passed a law that exempted (excused) the Amish from hiring certified teachers and from requiring their children to attend public schools. But students must be taught in a state-certified private school.

Later in 1972, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled on a case about a group of Wisconsin Amish who wanted to keep their children out of public schools. The Court said that under the First Amendment, the Amish may educate their children in the way they believe is right.