

## Strangers at Home: Amish and Mennonite Women in History

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torical treatment of material based on fieldwork enables one to identify individual houses in chronological context as well as to calculate the chronological and geographic growth of communities through the succession of styles and house types in urban and small-town neighborhoods.

Thorough treatment of each historic period, eight appendixes listing primary source material for each period, extensive notes on every chapter, and a comprehensive bibliography make the volume a necessity for architectural historians, architects, restoration professionals, college libraries, and state and county historical societies

*Strangers at Home: Amish and Mennonite Women in History*, edited by Kimberly D. Schmidt, Diane Zimmerman Umble, and Steven D. Reschly. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002. xii, 398 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$39.95 cloth.

Reviewer Rachel Waltner Goossen is assistant professor of history at Washburn University. She is the author of *Women Against the Good War: Conscientious Objection and Gender on the American Home Front, 1941–1947* (1997).

*Strangers at Home* is a collection of essays drawn from an international conference held in 1995 on the history of women in Anabaptist traditions. In this volume, feminist scholars of Mennonite and related groups offer a variety of interdisciplinary approaches—from history and sociology to literary criticism and communication theory—to understanding women's experiences in these theologically and culturally related traditions.

Two important essays in the collection—Jeni Hielt Umble's study of sixteenth-century Anabaptist women in Augsburg, Germany, and Linda Hubert Hecht's survey of women's roles among the early Anabaptists in Tirol, Austria—provide crucial historical background for the radical Reformation roots of this movement in Europe. Both essays underscore the persecution and martyrdom faced by thousands of Anabaptist women and men who defied churchly and civic authorities over issues such as infant baptism and oath-taking. By the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the migration of Anabaptist groups throughout Europe and into the Russian empire ultimately spawned further movement of these nonresistant peoples to North America.

The varied experiences of American Mennonite women, particularly in the twentieth century, are the focus of this collection of scholarly essays. More than half of the volume's contributors are themselves of ethnic Mennonite background, and their essays reflect a preoccupation with having the advantage of being "insiders" who approach their

scholarly work with more than a passing professional interest. On the other hand, several contributors are women's historians who consider themselves "outsiders" to Mennonite and Amish life. A provocative lead essay by Hasia R. Diner, subtitled "Writing History from Inside and Outside," offers a comparative approach from her own experience as an American Jew who has written about both Irish-American Catholic and Jewish topics. For Diner, as for many of the book's contributors, anticipating who will be one's audience (ethnic in-group or academic peers, for example) is but one factor among many in the act of pursuing a meaningful scholarly life. Any researcher who has labored to write ethnic or religious history, while feeling a tug to "use" that history for celebrative or commemorative purposes, will find Diner's autobiographical account fascinating.

Although Mennonite and Amish history is woven through Iowa's nineteenth-century settlement period and beyond, only one essay, Steven Reschly's study of patterns of Amish patriarchal authority, addresses Iowa history; Reschly describes an 1860s controversy over Communion practices in Johnson County.

The book introduces key themes in American Mennonite history and makes gender central to the story, a methodological innovation in Anabaptist/Mennonite scholarship. However, the book's organizational structure, which adheres to the editors' analytical framework of gender rather than to chronological developments in Amish and Mennonite history, is confusing. Essays appear without regard to periodization, and coverage of some topics, such as distinctive dress for women in some religious denominations, is scattered throughout. The book's seemingly haphazard organization does little to provide historical context for the topics at hand.

By design, the volume is selective rather than comprehensive in the issues it addresses. Among important subjects that receive little or no coverage are childrearing, higher education, ordination, and pacifist ideology. And for the historical experiences of women in Anabaptist traditions dispersed throughout Canada, Africa, Asia, and elsewhere—where migration and missions have resulted in significant growth of Anabaptist groups—readers will have to await future scholarship.

Nevertheless, this work is significant both for its breadth (highlighting women's experiences in European, American, and Paraguayan contexts) and for offering glimpses into the varieties of Mennonite and Amish life. *Strangers at Home* is a welcome addition to Mennonite/Amish scholarship, as well as to the broader fields of gender and ethnic studies and American religious history.

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