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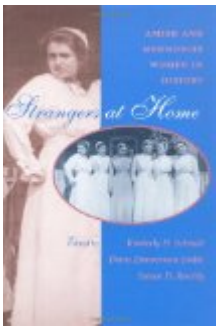

Kimberly Schmidt, Diane Zimmerman Umble, Steven D. Reschly, eds.. *Strangers at Home: Amish and Mennonite Women in History.* Center Books in Anabaptist Studies. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002. xii + 398 pp. $39.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8018-6786-6.

Reviewed by Debra A. Reid

Published on H-Women (January, 2003)

Strangers at Home Helps Scholars Get Acquainted with Amish and Mennonite Women

Strangers at Home contains fifteen articles, most of which originated in presentations at a 1995 conference, "The Quiet in the Land? Women of Anabaptist Traditions in Historical Perspectives," organized by the editors, Kimberly D. Schmidt, Diane Zimmerman Umble, and Steven D. Reschly. Each essay explores the status, attitudes, and strategies of women who identify themselves as Anabaptists, that is, as members of an ethno-religious group that emerged during the Protestant Reformation. These conservative, religious, rural women live in patriarchal households within self-disciplining communities, but remain within sight of modernity. This collection makes an important contribution to Anabaptist historiography because it analyzes the ways women cope in these competing worlds. Added significance comes from the collection's focus on methodological challenges such as objectivity and the insider/outsider dichotomy in the practice of writing women's history. As such, this volume warrants serious attention.

The editors broadly define Anabaptism in a brief, effective introduction. This frees the authors to focus on their subjects. Anabaptists--originally Hutterites, Mennonites, and Swiss Brethren--favor local control, communal interpretation of scriptures, and adult baptism. "Outsiders," insecure about the heretical ideas that Anabaptists expressed, persecuted the re-baptizers; all the while the re-baptizers ("insiders") internally disagreed over doctrine and practice. As a result, the Anabaptist diaspora evolved over 450 plus years into diverse modern expressions of faith ranging from Old Order communities (e.g., Amish, Hutterite, Mennonite, River Brethren) to fully acculturated denominations. A common ethnic heritage and familial (especially patrilineal) connections provide links between the conservative and Old Order Amish and Mennonite groups, on which these essays focus, and their more liberal Anabaptist kin. Historians of women can benefit from this study of marginalized though middle-class, white women because it furthers our understanding of the ways that religion and ethnicity affect women, material culture carries hidden

meanings, and gender relationships differ across cultures while place and change differ over time.

Hasia R. Diner, in an article solicited for the volume, reflects on how insider/outsider approaches have contributed to several pathbreaking studies, some that built on her Jewish heritage, and others that took her into the unfamiliar territory of Irish migrant women's lives. She believes that her Jewishness gave her more intuitive knowledge, but that it led her to pursue agenda for influencing Jewish change, while her inexperience with Irishness fostered greater openness and objectivity . Ultimately, Diner contends, both insider and outsider perceptions should inform scholarship; moreover, studies that originate from each perspective encourage dialogue that increases knowledge. The fourteen essays that follow Diner's certainly foster dialogue.

Outsider perspectives dominate the collection. Most of the authors consider themselves outsiders, with the possible exception of Julie Kasdorf, a Mennonite poet. Diane Zimmerman Umble and Beth E. Graybill reflect on how their academic interests and feminist perspectives make them outsiders with Old Order and conservative informants, despite their identification as ethnically Mennonite women. Katherine Jellison describes a quintessential outsider, a male employee of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics who interviewed Old Order Amish in 1940 on a quest to document "a distinctive superior rural culture" and the role women played in family farming (p. 103). Other outsiders include persecutors who recorded the interrogations of Anabaptists during the 1500s. Jeni Hiett Umble and Linda A. Huebert Hecht rely on these sources for their articles.

The authors also grapple with the contradictory position of Amish and Mennonite women as insiders and outsiders. As insiders, they influence the formation and cultivation of Old Order beliefs and practice, but they exist outside the decision-making bodies in their communities, and often bear the burden of visible separation from the world, particularly evident in their dress as explored by Graybill.

Neither chronology nor doctrinal focus affected the editors' organization of the essays. Rather they grouped the essays under three themes--"Practice Makes Gender," "Creating Gendered Community," and "(Re)creating Gendered Tradition." Collectively, the articles present Amish and Mennonite women as subordinate but influential members of their communities. Gathering this data and interpreting it objectively posed challenges that the five authors consider in "Practice Makes Gender." Diner's personal and engaging reflections on methodology and D. Z. Umble's self-conscious appraisal of her interactions with Old Order Amish and Mennonite informants can help researchers pay closer attention to the silences as well as the words spoken in interviews or read in documents. In pursuit of greater objectivity, Graybill had to think "critically about concepts formerly taken for granted," a strategy drawn from Jim Thomas' idea of de-familiarization (p. 56). She understood the ways that dress provided visible distinctiveness and separation from the world, but she had to forget her preconceived ideas so she could hear what the women and men of the Eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite Church told her about their dress. She realized that the headcovering reflects their acceptance of male domination; that uniform clothing indicates their rejection of individuality and commitment to community; and that the lack of fashion reflects their refusal to conform to styles and tastes not of their own making. Ultimately, she found that women embrace their distinctive dress as proof of their obedience and acceptance of gender roles. Those of us who study cultures with which we identify could profit from Graybill's process of "de-familiarization."

Behavior as well as dress reflects the ways that Anabaptist women comply with male domination. Margaret C. Reynolds, an outsider and observer, analyzes a twenty-year-old bread making

ritual associated with the Old Order River Brethren's love feast communion. During the 1700s the River Brethren split from the Amish Mennonites in Pennsylvania. Though scattered in Iowa, Ohio, and Pennsylvania, members gather twice or three times a year for love feast. Re-unification of three Old Order River Brethren denominations in 1977 created the need to centralize the "preparation" or bread making ritual so the community of believers could gather, worship, and convey ideas about women, men, and their respective roles as Old Order River Brethren. Reynolds contends that these Brethren invented the ritual to introduce and reinforce collective identity and group solidarity.

Part two, "Creating Gendered Community," inserts women into mainstream Anabaptist history. J. H. Umble relies on the records of an outsider, Konrad Peutinger, the city secretary in Augsburg, Germany, and an interrogator of arrested Anabaptists in 1527-1528, to analyze the ways that women furthered Anabaptistism. Despite persecutions, these women organized meetings in their homes, often keeping their non-Anabaptist husbands uninformed. They used traditional women's work, such as spinning and sewing, as excuses to gather and talk about religion, and they spread the word through their kinship networks. In these ways women sustained religious study and worship despite persecution. Women continued to provide cohesion to Anabaptist communities during the twentieth century, as Marlene Epp's study of Ukrainian refugees relocated to Paraguay in 1947-1948 reveals. The 4,500 Mennonites included twice as many women as men, and many of the women headed households. Despite being considered "weak" by outsiders because of their lack of men (p. 138), the predominately female colonies survived war, deprivation, migration, single-parenthood, and wilderness challenges. The shortage of men allowed women to become more dependent on each other, which helped sustain them until most migrated to Canada.

Despite evidence of female influence among Anabaptists, males worked to maintain their patriarchal society and their opposition to the forces of modernity as Steven D. Reschly explains. Migration to the United States did not provide a haven for Anabaptists as many had hoped, and the revolutionary era further undermined the believer's focus on non-worldly pursuits. Out of self-preservation, and in the wake of the market revolution, conservative Amish Mennonite men justified patriarchy, linking dominion over their households to the salvation of their communities (p. 164). Disagreements over courtship practices among other things led to disunion during the 1860s and the founding of increasingly conservative Old Orders. Some women, however, resisted the increased pater domination and supported the formation of denominations that did not shun modernity.

Kimberly D. Schmidt places women rather than men at the center of conflict in Croghan, New York during the 1940s and 1980s. In both instances women working outside the homes abandoned traditional dress, first their cape dress and then the prayer cap. This threatened the very foundation of the Conservative Mennonite community. The women in Croghan did not believe that dress protected them from the outside world; they did not embrace their traditional dress as Graybill's Conservative Mennonites informants did. Instead, as their off-farm income shifted to domestic labor in the 1930s-40s, they shed cape dresses, which were visible proof of separation and submissiveness. Again in the 1950s, as their increased participation in factory labor led them to significant economic involvement in the world, they eschewed prayer caps in public, the last vestige of their patriarchal dependence.

Faith involves service, thus Amish and Mennonites have supported missionaries and provided relief to communities around the world, histor-

ically and today. The article by Cathy Ann Trotta recounts the ways that Mennonites served the Hopi during the Progressive Era. The Voths took their patriarchal culture with them when they moved to the Hopi pueblo of Oraibi (p. 182). Trotta contends that Martha Moser Voth, as her tradition dictated, provided for the Hopi materially by cooking and caring for the sick. Consequently, the Hopi women welcomed her into their matrilineal culture, which enabled Martha to move beyond her "place" to document anthropologically their religion, language, and culture from an insider's point of view.

The last section, "(Re)creating Gendered Tradition" focuses on historic as well as modern dialogues about women's roles in Amish and Mennonite society. Hecht examines the ways that Anabaptism affected women in the Tirol region of Austria between 1527 and 1529. The women, mostly married and from all classes of society, chose to speak their faith despite the risks involved, and despite the restrictions placed on women in patriarchal societies. Their actions sustained the fledgling movement. This article, along with that of J. H. Umble, documents the role that women played in spiritual reform, generally, and in the origins of Anabaptism, specifically. Hecht believes that the women she studied can serve as models for women involved in modern religious movements. Barbara Bolz's comparative article on eighteenth-century Quaker and Mennonite women likewise provides precedent.

Royden K. Loewen analyzes the ways that economic changes affected conservative Mennonite women from the Kleine Gemeinde and Bruderthaler groups in Kansas between 1935 and 1975. Over three generations these women redefined their roles to include more economic contributions to the family farms and more involvement in worship. Ideas about womanhood as well as ideas about being Mennonite changed, but these women retained their commitment to domesticity and their faith. This article, in conjunction with Schmidt's, expands our understanding of the ways that rural, culturally distinct women juggled modernity during the mid-twentieth century. Other contributions by Graybill, Reynolds, and Jane Marie Pederson, present Amish and Mennonite women as vehicles of anti-modernism, comfortable in the patriarchal world that has shaped their identity. Pederson synthesizes much of the collection's original contributions to argue that Old Order groups may debate how much they allow modernity to affect their lives, but their most blatant anti-modern statement remains the ways the women submit humbly to their husbands, following scriptural interpretation. Closer scrutiny of gender from a male perspective, however, might enhance the complexity of these conclusions.

Obviously Anabaptist women choose humility and submission as ways of expressing their spirituality. Yet, the authors tend to de-emphasize spirituality as they concentrate on gender analysis. Reynolds' study of the Communion breadmaking ritual practiced by the Old Order River Brethren provides evidence of female submissiveness. Hecht and J. H. Umble focus on non-submissive female strategies that reflect their faith, but do not really explain what they believed. In one of the few essays that addresses belief in addition to gender, Barbara Bolz claims that Quakers during the 1700s took on public roles as full members of Quaker meeting. They spoke when moved by their individual interactions with God, and preached when called, despite their own trepidation and lack of public support. Amish and Mennonite women, on the other hand, within the confines of the Ordnung, found their worth in their subordination, not just to men but also to God, and believed that they served God best when their served their own households.

All of these articles indicate that reality for Amish and Mennonite women is more complex, harsh, and changing than commonly believed, including the descendants of the women who lived

through change, as Kasdorf points out. Church requirements to live "plainly" affected women at different times in the history of the movement and to different degrees, as did male domination, loss of family, and the pressures of living within two cultures and two worlds. The authors use a variety of sources effectively to convey this complexity, including relevant secondary literature, traditional archival materials, oral interviews that reflect women's and men's points of view, contemporary Amish and Mennonites women's writings, and material evidence. But the authors do not accept their sources at face value. Rather, they grapple with the methodological dilemma of objectivity and perspective.

Organization around the three themes, and dialogue between the articles makes the collection much more than a conference proceedings, but some articles could fit more than one theme. The location of each makes sense, but readers with different goals could read the articles in a different order. For example, those who prefer chronological sequences could start with sixteenth-century development (J. H. Umble, Hecht); and then eighteenth-century distinctiveness among Anabaptists (Bolz); nineteenth-century schisms (Reschly); twentieth-century history and evolution (Jellison, Schmidt, Loewen); cross-cultural interactions (Epp, Trotta), and conclude with twentieth-century negotiations with modernity (D. Z. Umble, Graybill, Reynolds, Kasdorf, Pederson). Whatever order readers follow, generalists can benefit most from the methodological focus of the Diner and D. Z. Umble articles as well as the synthesis Pederson provides.

What can this collection do beyond contribute to our understanding of religiously conservative rural women and methodological issues? Material culture analysis seems to be moving from the periphery of historic scholarship to assume a more central position. The multidisciplinary nature of the 1960s "new" social history began the process, but the origins of "public history" during the 1970s provided a way for traditional historians to continue to ignore three-dimensional evidence, or material culture. Of course, ethnographic analyses (see Graybill, Reynolds) cannot ignore clothing or space utilization and arrangement, but neither should historic analyses.

The collection raises many exciting topics for further study. Little exists on women's role in cross-religious unions. For example, the photographs illustrating Diner's article indicate that at least one Jewish man became part of a conservative Mennonite household. The two images of Laura Lefever and her Jewish convert husband Bernard Kautz suggest the question, in what ways did single Amish and Mennonite women influence society, household economies, and religious practice? Almost all of the articles distinguish between married and single women, touching upon the ways singleness affected women's roles. A more focused study on Amish and Mennonite ***feme sole***, however, would further complicate our understanding of paternalistic conservative religions.

Another topic needing further exploration relates to race and cross-cultural analyses of the Amish and Mennonites. True, these denominations historically qualified as an ethno-religious group with origins in western Europe, but a 400 year diaspora has spread practitioners across the world (see the articles by J.H. Umble, Hecht, and Epp). Approximately 500,000 Americans claim membership in one of four dozen Anabaptist-related groups, and the most traditional of these, the Old Order groups, exist primarily in North America.[1] Their population rate doubles about every twenty years, making them the fastest-growing Anabaptist contingent in North America.[2] Today, however, Anabaptism has grown into an international religion, with about one million members worldwide. While conservative and Old Order groups, as discussed in this collection, remain predominately white Euro-Americans, the time is coming for both international and race-based

analyses of Anabaptist practices. Rebecca, an African American fostered by a conservative Mennonite couple, introduced in Graybill's article, hints at another topic to complicate studies of an "ethnoreligious" group.

Finally, while these articles tend to focus on rural women's experiences, off-farm work reflects the more typical experience for rural Anabaptist women today. Schmidt's article covers this well, but more could be said about women's roles in micro industry, the work on which rural families increasingly base their economic livelihood, and its impact on their ability to stay isolated from the entanglements of the world. A recent analysis of Amish industry in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, explains the factors that cause Amish to become involved in non-agricultural pursuits, but the index lists women in business on only 10 of 300 pages.[3] More could be done on this critical junction between the conservative community's world and modernity as it affects women. To what degree do the conservative religious groups shape their involvement with the world, rather than be shaped by it?

Notes:

[1]. Donald B. Kraybill and Carl F. Bowman, *On the Backroad to Heaven: Old Order Hutterites, Mennonites, Amish, and Brethren* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2001), p. xi.

[2]. Steven M. Nolt, *A History of the Amish* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 1992), p. 284.

[3]. Donald B. Kraybill and Steven M. Nolt, *Amish Enterprise: From Plows to Profits* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995.

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