

Kathleen M. Fernandez. *Zoar: The Story of an Intentional Community*. Kent: Kent State University Press, 2019. 313 pp. \$29.95, cloth, ISBN 978-1-63101-156-6.

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In 1817, in the southwest German kingdom of Württemberg, a group of some 150 radical pietist adults plus accompanying children from some 36 villages decided to emigrate to the United States. They had been persecuted for years for refusing to conform to the requirements of the state Lutheran Church. Some had endured prison. Soldiers had been quartered in their homes. Property had been confiscated. Receiving permission to emigrate, they were aided financially by Quakers in both England and America. On board ship and even more so in Philadelphia, they came under the leadership both spiritually and otherwise of a shoemaker named Joseph Bäumler who used the surname Bimeler in America. The group was offered a tract of more than 5,500 acres in northeastern Ohio, which Bimeler purchased in his name. They named the spot Zoar.

Kathleen M. Fernandez's book narrates the history of the utopian socialist community that survived until the end of the nineteenth century. New immigrants from Germany were admitted to membership until about 1850, but membership peaked just before the cholera outbreak of 1834. Originally each family had its own tract of land, but in April, 1819, after a hard winter, and having to support a number of older women, the group decided to pool its property and work under the direction of three elected leaders, or directors. Each

person, male and female, was assigned a permanent task or work for the day. Buildings were built, land was cleared and cultivated, craft or industrial work was done. Each person was given food, clothing, and shelter. Much work was done for outsiders for money including the milling of grain. Departing members sometimes sued for what they felt they had contributed, but all such suits were rejected by the courts.

When the Ohio and Erie Canal was planned to come by Zoar, the community contracted with the state of Ohio to dig by hand several miles of canal along their property, by which they earned the money to retire their mortgage on the land. The canal allowed them to ship pig iron from their foundry as well as agricultural produce to Cleveland, from whence it could be shipped to New York City. Partly as an economic measure, the community practiced celibacy from 1822 to 1829. The community owned about one hundred horses, one hundred dairy cows, and even pigs, although they did not eat pork. Pork was served to visitors of the Zoar Hotel, popular with canal travelers. Much of the farm work was done by women while the men did more artisanal and industrial work. As the community became more prosperous, it hired outside agricultural laborers.

Bimeler read a sermon each Sunday at the Zoar Meeting House which kept alive the religious

belief shared by community members. After he died in 1853, others read his old sermons to the faithful, but gradually the common beliefs that held the community together disappeared. Although the Separatists, as they called themselves, taught pacifism, when the Civil War came, some two dozen of their young men—some full members of the community and some only employees—joined the Union Army. One of the Zoar men, who all served in the 11th Corps, wrote home about dropping his pack and running at the Battle of Chancellorsville. Fernandez fails to note the historical controversy about the supposed flight of the mostly German 11th Corps at Chancellorsville and the disdain for Germans within the Union Army thus engendered.

Although the community had money to lend to Tuscarawas County and to buy exemptions for drafted men who chose not to serve, over the course of the late nineteenth century, it lost money in bad investments until it could not afford to keep its industrial enterprises technologically current. A turn toward tourism brought more strangers to Zoar, whose cash and tips to young people weakened members' desire to maintain their property in common. At last, in March 1898, a decision was made to divide the community's assets, including over seven thousand acres of farmland, among its members. Many stayed on for years farming their portion of land or running the craft shops.

The author, although not a fully trained professional historian and unable to read German, began working at the Zoar historical site in 1975 and served as site manager of the Zoar Village State Memorial from 1989 through 2004. Her book tries to answer the kinds of questions visitors asked. The reviewer suspects that the author has done about as good a job as could be done with the available English-language materials. Although she pays considerable attention to Zoar's relations with George Rapp's Harmony Society, and other utopian communities, the reviewer would have liked to read more about other radical pietists and

others in Württemberg and their attempts to emigrate. Still, this is a book one is proud to recommend to any interested reader.

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