

2016

**Review of Nolt, Steven. 2015. *A History of the Amish* [3rd ed.].  
New York, NY: Good Books. Pp. 406.**

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## Recommended Citation

Pratt, Dorothy. 2016. "Review of Nolt, Steven. 2015. *A History of the Amish* [3rd ed.]. New York, NY: Good Books. Pp. 406." *Journal of Amish and Plain Anabaptist Studies* 4(1):118-20.

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Being a fellowship whose history is largely in receiving ex-members from an Old Order plain Mennonite counterpart, such a history is, granted, difficult to write when the book is intended to celebrate the Mid-Atlantic churches, not critically assess their history. Stauffer does use some of her skill in prose to suggest a current of dissatisfaction and restlessness without openly reporting it (moods anymore characteristic of many affiliations). While Stauffer attempts to present a fairly sterile reading of the Mid-Atlantic story, concerns and internal differences through the Fellowship's history and even to today remain hidden, though they are critical to understanding MAF's development and growth. Such narratives, though not easy to write, depict who a people are with much more meat and openness and can still be told in a way that is respectful on all sides. This book is not that, nor does it try to be.

Beyond the history, the book is basically a compilation of profiles. Stauffer leans heavily on reporting the word-for-word profiles ministers submitted, some of which is used verbatim without careful editing or consistent rephrasing to third person. This tattletales a bit on the project's time-crunch, unfortunate given the book's otherwise beautiful layout.

One is left wishing more time would have been dedicated to creating an in-depth history, adding interesting details and snippets about the post-revivalist era (such as the defining impact of tent meetings on Lancaster Conference that carried through to the MAF), attempting to draw some conclusions as to what actually happened beyond the textbook explanation of Mid-Atlantic's origins and developments.

For those who are Mid-Atlantic, *The History* serves as a unifying work to synthesize the current generation of Mid-Atlantic leadership and some overview of Mid-Atlantic's beginnings. As the charter members pass on, the book serves as evidence of the original vision and cadence of the church, with apparent hope that that beat will continue. The book also serves as a quick reference to Mid-Atlantic ministry and churches, and for those interested in a more analytical history, a careful combing of ministerial and church profiles hints at some deeper trends and patterns not explicitly mentioned otherwise (as with the surprising amount of ministerial turnover). Researchers looking at the history of Mid-Atlantic will have to put a lot of such fragments of information together to draw some sort of tentative conclusions.

Review of Nolt, Steven. 2015. *A History of the Amish* [3<sup>rd</sup> ed.]. New York, NY: Good Books. Pp. 406.

By Dorothy Pratt, *University of South Carolina*

In recent years, the Amish have become surprisingly popular in American culture. Books, television shows, and movies expose the curious to a relatively unknown religious sect, though most of these productions have little to do with the real lives of the Amish. Twenty years ago a very young man from Lancaster, Pennsylvania, Steven Nolt, produced a well-documented

handbook giving the history of the Amish and explaining their many schisms and subsequent sub-groups. A new third edition of the study provides verification of the popularity of the group as well as the skill of Nolt in explaining their history to a general audience.

In this third edition, Nolt relies heavily upon his original manuscript but has supplemented it in a number of ways. He delves into the origins and European history of the group in more detail and more depth. Some of this new material is a result of his own research, some reflective of others. Further analysis on the original schism led by Jacob Amman invigorates the narrative, especially when the author concentrates on shunning as a pivotal issue that becomes a running theme reappearing throughout the book. The chapter on the Amish in Europe in the eighteenth century includes far more information on their migratory patterns as they searched for a welcoming space in a reconfigured and modernizing Europe. The result is a helpful sets of links to the reasons that the Amish emigrated to the new world.

Nolt also spends a bit more time illustrating the people who espoused new ideas, whether they provoked schism or not. For instance, “White” Jonas Stutzman appears only in passing in the original edition, but the new edition allocates two pages to him and covers his interest in the apocalypse and his startling preference for always wearing white. These side stories (and there are a number) help to personalize the story, provide interest, and keep the reader engaged. Nolt also makes use of charts, old photographs, and encapsulated inserts of quick biographies or primary documents to illustrate the issues or the people involved. Thankfully, he also includes a detailed index, since occasionally, the sheer number of names in the text becomes overwhelming, and the variety of spellings makes the reader think they have read the name earlier when they have not. The names and detail, however, do keep the narrative grounded in realism.

Completely new are the sections covering recent events, which includes the sad, but illustrative story of the Nickel Mines school shootings. Also included are the changes of vocation within the Amish community, as more have turned from farming as a primary source of income to small businesses. This shift requires constant evaluation within the community about cultural boundaries and ways to protect community life from the ethos of modernity. Nolt does an excellent job of providing a quick survey of the issues, changes, and avenues of persistence. In short, in the last twenty years, he has become the historical authority on the Amish through these editions of the history.

As welcome as this new edition is, and as learned as Nolt has become on the Amish, there are a couple of problems with the book. First, the third edition is not as well edited as the two previous ones. For instance, paragraphs repeat on pages 49 and 52. A hyphen shows up in the name “Schwarzen-druber” (159), obviously a leftover from a previous edition. A reference to the issue of belt-driven tractors is referenced on page 267, but explained on page 270. None of this takes away from the excellence of Nolt’s work, but it does reflect on the publisher. The book and the author deserved better.

Finally, the biggest frustration is that the book, which is aimed at the casual reader, provides hints as to what Nolt could do with an academic or more serious examination. He has the skills: for instance, the new edition reflects more frequent reference to the context of the time period in which the schisms arose. Much, however, is missing; Nolt is trained as an historian – he knows. The new material on the European origins only hints at the surrounding issues of religious wars and the rise of nationalism. References to Zwingli briefly allude to a different side to the great divide of the sixteenth century. Nolt is on surer ground with American history, but even then he refers to the Second Great Awakening, but ignores the similarities between William Miller’s awaiting the Second Coming in 1843 and 1844 and Jonas Stutzman’s similar ideas – though he thought Christ’s return would be in 1853. The list goes on. Part of the issue may be the traditional approach to analyzing the Amish through only Mennonite eyes, but the story is much bigger and more important than denominational schism. Such a book is needed, and at the moment, Nolt is the only one who could pull it together. I hope he does; it will be good, and I will purchase it.