

Journal of Amish and Plain Anabaptist Studies

Volume 3
Issue 1 *Special section: Education*

Article 13

2015

Review of Stoltzfus, Duane. 2013. *Pacifists in Chains: The Persecution of Hutterites during the Great War*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Donald Eberle

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ideaexchange.uakron.edu/amishstudies>



Part of the [History Commons](#)

Please take a moment to share how this work helps you [through this survey](#). Your feedback will be important as we plan further development of our repository.

Recommended Citation

Eberle, Donald. 2015. "Review of Stoltzfus, Duane. 2013. *Pacifists in Chains: The Persecution of Hutterites during the Great War*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press." *Journal of Amish and Plain Anabaptist Studies* 3(1):140-44.

This Book Reviews is brought to you for free and open access by IdeaExchange@Uakron, the institutional repository of The University of Akron in Akron, Ohio, USA. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Journal of Amish and Plain Anabaptist Studies* by an authorized administrator of IdeaExchange@Uakron. For more information, please contact mjon@uakron.edu, uapress@uakron.edu.

miscommunication. Cates argues that most adult Amish are very fluent in day to day conversation but that doesn't mean that they necessarily understand everything that is being said in a medical setting. Unfortunately, they, like many non-Amish, will seldom ask questions, leading providers to mistakenly believe that they have been understood.

The last chapter in this section is directed towards the social workers who are called in to intervene in Amish families when cases of spousal violence or child abuse have come to the attention of civil authorities. Since such interventions can—and often do—result in a disruption of the family through the temporary removal of children, for example, these interactions tend to be viewed as unnecessarily intrusive by the Amish, making the work of a case worker particularly difficult. In order to be successful, they must devise a compromise which respects Amish culture but is also consistent with English law. This is not an easy task. If they fail, the outcome can be similar to that described for law officials, or leading the community to make greater efforts to keep such cases from the attention of civil authorities. Cates emphasizes that a successful compromise is only possible if the case worker incorporates religious leaders into the process.

Part four of the book consists of one chapter and an epilogue in which Cates summarizes guidelines for effectively working with Amish clients. These are followed by an appendix briefly describing other plain groups and another in which he provides a nice summary of the application of DSM-5 to the Amish.

In summary, this book was a joy to read and review. I highly recommend it to both human service providers and anyone else with an interest in the Amish.

Review of **Stoltzfus, Duane. 2013. *Pacifists in Chains: The Persecution of Hutterites during the Great War*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.**

By Donald Eberle, *History, Bowling Green State Univ. / Northwest State Comm. College*

Duane C. S. Stoltzfus states in the Preface that the story of brothers Michael, David, and Joseph Hofer and Joseph's brother-in-law Jacob Wipf, "contributes significantly to one of the darker chapters of this period of American history." Nearly 100 years later this, story is surprisingly and sadly relevant. In the wake of the attacks on September 11, 2001 the United States, "swept up suspects, the innocent and true warriors alike" and "descended into the ranks of nations that systematically torture prisoners." While the historical parallels are not exact as they never are, they are nonetheless disturbing.

The four Hutterites would suffer terribly for their religious beliefs. Michael and Joseph Hofer would give their lives as martyrs, but the most disturbing aspect of the persecution of the Hutterites, as is the case with the detainees at Guantanamo, is the complexity of the situation.

Stoltzfus notes that their story does not “follow a simple script neatly dividing the cast into heroes and villains.”

The Hutterites considered themselves a “pure remnant of believers.” They had both a “social memory” and a “living narrative” of martyrdom dating back to 1536 when Jacob Hutter was burned at the stake. This history of martyrdom recorded in the *Chronicle of the Hutterian Brethren* conditioned the young men to view the war, and their small part in it, as a conflict between the kingdom of God and the kingdoms of this world. Stoltzfus notes that the Hutterites held “an uncompromising view of power and authority” when these kingdoms “stood in conflict.” He argues that they were so sure of their own righteousness that they could be “unshakable in their judgment of others.”

While it is easy to condemn the abuse, brutality, and torture that many conscientious objectors faced after they were inducted into the military under the provisions of the Selective Service Act, it is also possible a century later to “appreciate the challenges set before military commanders and guards who followed a different set of orders, and by their worldview, could not understand why these men would not contribute to the national cause, if only by pushing a broom.”

The war had quickly taken on overtones of a religious crusade. The political and military authorities, and the majority of the public, considered the men who served, either as volunteers or draftees, to be “equally as religious and God fearing” as the conscientious objectors. The conscientious objectors were viewed as “queer men.” At best, they were cowards or shirkers. At worst, they were Pro-German propagandists or traitors. Regardless, their very presence in the military camps was perceived as a threat to military morale and discipline.

After a harrowing train ride, in which fellow inductees forcibly cut off their hair and beards, the three Hofer brothers and Jacob Wipf arrived at Camp Lewis where 52,000 men were underarms. They refused to fill out personal information cards because they were titled “Statement of Soldier.” They also refused to put on a uniform or accept any form of work assignment. Within a few hours, they found themselves confined to guardhouse No. 54 where they remained until they were found guilty by court-martial and sentenced to hard labor at Alcatraz.

Their decisions were inexplicable to the camp commandant, Major General Henry A. Greene, who met with them frequently. Greene’s view that “the end of the war MUST be a victory and a success for our side- for the God of battles also is the God of Love and Justice” was typical of the military authorities who could be as unbending as the Hutterites.

With such diametrically opposed positions, it would seem that no compromise was possible and the fate of the four Hutterite men was sealed from the moment they set foot on the train to Camp Lewis. While some degree of difficulty was inevitable, their story is all the more tragic because a surprising amount of compromise did occur between the government and

conscientious objectors during World War I.

Twenty-four million men registered for Selective Service. Just twelve percent of them would ultimately be inducted. An unknown number of eligible men, perhaps as many as three million, simply failed to register. The vast majority of these men avoided any consequences. The Hutterites considered the “mere act of registering” a civil obligation akin to participating in a census. They agreed that their draft eligible men should register and submit to physical examinations. If called they should report, but they decided that their cooperation must end once the men arrived in a military camp.

The four Hutterites were victims of chance, timing, and a long series of events, any of which, if slightly altered, would have resulted in a much different outcome. This series of events is far too long and complex to relate here, but one example, which occurred before they ever set foot in a military camp, will suffice to illustrate the point.

Local exemption boards enjoyed a great deal of latitude in granting exemptions. Men with children, or other dependents, were routinely granted exemptions. The four Hutterites were all married, and each had children, but, because the colony would care for their dependents in their absence, each answered “no” when asked if they had “a parent, spouse, or child dependent solely on them for support.” Enoch Crowder, the head of Selective Service System, eventually ruled that “members of intentional communities” should not be treated any differently in deciding if they had dependents, but this clarification came too late to prevent the Hofers and Wipf from being inducted.

It is not at all certain however, that this ruling would have mattered to the Hanson County exemption board. David Hofer’s name had not appeared on the initial list of selectees from Hanson County, but the list was revised after the War Department confirmed that it wanted farmers to be deferred. Sixteen men on the initial list were deferred. The Hutterites were farmers, but David joined his brothers and Jacob Wipf on the revised list.

Stoltzfus does a wonderful job of relating the “series of actions [...] that in isolation may have seemed measured and appropriate but the cumulative effect was a miscarriage of justice.” There is plenty of blame. This blame began at the very top, extended through every rank in the military, and included the American public, who viewed conscientious objectors with disdain and derision.

Stoltzfus argues that the default response on the part of both President Wilson and Secretary of War Newton Baker was one of “coercion, not compassion,” but he is especially critical of the Secretary of War for his duplicity and indifference. Baker considered conscientious objectors “well-disposed, simple-minded young people who have been imprisoned in a narrow environment and really have no comprehension of the world outside of their own rural and peculiar community.” He ignored pleas from the various peace churches to allow their church members who were drafted to do their service outside of the military because he was convinced

that the army could take men of “every variety of religious belief and political opinion” and weld them “into a homogenous group”. He was dismissive of the conscientious objectors and the depth of their convictions because he believed that they had “acquired quite unwarranted importance in their own eyes. To each of them, he and his cause became the pivotal and central thing in the world while, or course, as the case then stood, they were, frankly, relatively unimportant.” Although Secretary Baker was not directly responsible for any of the atrocities that occurred under his watch—and indeed he may have been surprised and saddened when he learned the details of these incidents—the military officers at Camp Lewis, Funston, and the United States Disciplinary Barracks, Pacific Branch, better known as Alcatraz, all took their cues from Baker and most of them shared his views on conscientious objectors.

Despite severe persecution, the Hutterite community was reluctant to publicly criticize the government and made no effort to attract publicity to the plight of their conscientious objectors. Through a most improbably set of circumstances, the story would nevertheless become widely known beyond their colony. Stoltzfus does a wonderful job of connecting the dots between the conscientious objectors, Jacob Ewert, the bedridden, paralytic “Mennonite journalist and professor from Kansas” who typed with one thumb and relied upon his brother David, also an invalid, to feed the paper into the typewriter, and Theodore Lunde, the crusading “owner of a piano hardware company.” Through their efforts, some good would ultimately come from this tragedy. Partially because of their courageous actions, conscientious objectors during World War II would have the option of being assigned to “work of national importance” under civilian direction.

The basic narrative of the confrontation between the pacifist Hutterites and the government during the First World War has been told before but never with such insight or in such detail. *Pacifists in Chains* is fantastically sourced. The access to unpublished letters, written by the Hofers from prison, particularly distinguishes Stoltzfus’ narrative. These letters give the conscientious objectors a voice. They reveal that the men did not seek martyrdom but that they were prepared to die for their beliefs. The day after learning that he would be sent to Alcatraz, Joseph Hofer wrote to his “dear and never-to-be-forgotten spouse” Maria. He wrote that they must “hold firmly to God and plead to him with prayers for the strength of the Holy Spirit, so that we might win the battle and remain firm until the end [...]” He concluded by noting that “the children of God are called to nothing else than to affliction, cross, tribulation, persecution, and hatred from the world.” Joseph Hofer died on November 29, 1918. Military officials dressed him in the uniform of a soldier. Pneumonia was listed as the cause of death. Michael Hofer died on December 2 also of pneumonia. This time military officials respected the wishes of the family and did not dress his body in a soldier’s uniform.

The focus of *Pacifists in Chains* is clearly upon the Hofers and Wipf, and this is understandable not only because of the dramatic nature of their story but also because previously unavailable sources give new insights into the thoughts of the men at the center of this narrative. Stoltzfus discusses some of the other 52 Hutterites who reported to military camps during the

war but not in any great detail. The alleged attempt to win the release of Hutterite men from Camp Funston through the paying of bribes, which resulted in federal charges against three Hutterite leaders, would provide an interesting counterpoint to the story of the Hofers and Wipf.

The persecution of the conscientious objectors was but one small part of the persecution of Hutterites during the Great War, yet this aspect tends to dominate the larger narrative. The tension between the Hutterites and their neighbors was so great that 11 out of 18 colonies relocated to Canada by the spring of 1919. Stoltzfus discusses the broader challenges but not in as much detail as this important issue deserves. This is perhaps a minor quibble though, as Stoltzfus makes an important contribution to part of this larger narrative and raises the bar for anyone who might tell another part.

Stoltzfus concludes that torture “erodes a nation’s moral center just as surely as it dehumanizes the victims and in the end fails to achieve its stated goals.” He notes that the persecution of the Hutterites “was intended to be an example to deter other conscientious objectors. Instead, they became a shameful example of the failure of a government to stand by its constitutional guarantee of freedom to practice religious and promise to safeguard citizens from torture and other cruel and unusual punishments.” This example is as relevant today as ever, and policy makers and the public alike would do well to contemplate from time to time the lessons from the Great War.

Review of Veen, Mirjam van, Piet Visser, and Gary Waite. 2014. *Sisters: Myth and Reality of Anabaptist, Mennonite, and Doopsgezind Women, ca. 1525-1900*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill.

By Berit Jany, *Germanic and Slavic Languages and Literatures, University of Colorado*

Agent of the devil, harlot, martyr, marriage breaker, and devout maiden are some of the images attributed to Anabaptist women from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. These diverse pictures from a wide array of perspectives were the focus of attention of the conference “Myth and Reality of Anabaptist / Mennonite Women in Continental Europe ca. 1525-1900” held at the Free University of Amsterdam in 2007. Scholars came together to explore the images of Anabaptist women in Europe across the centuries. Those scholars in attendance from across Europe included Piet Visser, Mirjam P.A. de Baar, Mirjam van Veen, and Nicole Grochowina, among others. From North America, most prominent were Gary Waite, Mary Sprunger, Mark Jantzen, and Michael Driedger. Their findings were put together in this collection of essays, a 2014 publication.

Attention to the role of women in the radical reformation movement has been given in a number of works, for instance *Profiles of Anabaptist Women* (eds. C. Arnold Snyder and Linda A. Huebert Hecht) and *Aufsässige Töchter Gottes* (Marion Kobelt-Groch), as well as essays by