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## **Review of: *Heaven Will Heal: Eternal Perspectives in the Life and Times of Oregon Bishop, John P. Yoder. Iowa to the West Coast, 1885-1975—Mary (Gingerich) Kropf***

Paul Smucker

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Review of: **Kropf, Mary (Gingerich). 2021. *Heaven Will Heal: Eternal Perspectives in the Life and Times of Oregon Bishop, John P. Yoder. Iowa to the West Coast, 1885-1975.* Gap Mills, WV: Yoders' Select Books. Pp. 465. Hardcover, with color inserts.**

By Paul Smucker  
Unaffiliated Conservative Mennonite

*Heaven Will Heal* is a history of the life and times of John P. Yoder written by John's granddaughter. John wrote and received numerous letters in his lifetime and saved all his letters that he received. After John's death his son Glenn also saved the letters. When John's granddaughter Mary gained access to the letters and postcards, she read them carefully, and she decided to use these letters as a basis of telling the history of her grandpa, the Anabaptist community in the southern Willamette Valley, and the Harrisburg Mennonite Church from its beginnings to the 1970s.

John was a very conscientious man who sorrowed over people's wrong choices as well as his own poor choices which led others to suffer. He faced a lot of heart ache within his own family, as minister and bishop of the Harrisburg Mennonite Church, and as a Mennonite leader of German ancestry. He suffered much from relatives losing their lives at a young age, including children, and in his later years longed for the relief from sorrow which Heaven would bring. In writing his history, Mary chose to write about those sorrows with the constant reminder of the title she chose: *Heaven Will Heal*.

John grew up in Iowa. In his late teens and early 20s, he faced health issues that led him to travel west looking for climates which would agree with his health better than the climate in Iowa. After working in several different places, John settled as a farmer in the Willamette Valley in Oregon close to the town of Harrisburg where a new Mennonite group of pioneers had taken root. He did some carpentry work and helped build barns that are still standing 108 years later.

John fell in love and married Ida Kropf, and together they had two children, Alton and Edna. Less than three weeks after Edna was born, Ida passed away. John was heartbroken and devastated without a wife and without a mother for his children. Three years later John was manipulated, by Ida's parents, into marriage with Ida's older sister Clara. John and Clara had two sons who never married. John's son with Ida, Alton, died as a child so Edna, the mother of Mary the author, was the only child who continued the lineage.

The purpose of the book seems to be to try to tell John's history, the history of his friends, the history of those who married into John's family and Ida's family, and certain parts of the history of Mennonites in the southern Willamette Valley. The stories are all based on the letters he saved.

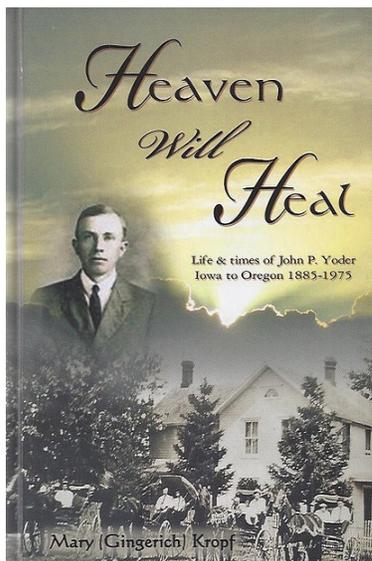
Realizing those letters gave an incomplete story, Mary talked to many older people who had also lived at that time.

The book is written somewhat haphazardly. Many times a story is told in chronological order and then a paragraph is inserted about something else that happened about the same time or maybe a year or two earlier or later that seemed to have no connection except that both stories were probably contained in the same post card.

As I read the book I was intrigued, because it included many family stories I had heard. My grandmother was a younger sister to Clara and Ida. My great-grand-

mother and great-grandfather were John's mother and father-in-law. Some of the stories match ones I have been told by relatives. Some of the history included more information than I had been told, and there were new interesting pieces of history about people I knew by name, but did not know much about their lives.

The book will be enjoyed by people like me whose relatives' stories are mentioned in the book. People interested in some of the notable stories of Mennonites in the southern Willamette Valley would also find interest in the book. The book includes connections to Iowa and other places in the Midwest and covers what led people from the Midwest to settle in Oregon.



The author worked hard to make things interesting but at times failed to turn a good phrase. She also seems to have written in a way she hoped would honor those who came before and not bring shame on the family. Many things within the family were mentioned, but care was taken to not be hard on people like Clara who struggled with emotional issues and who seemed to be the source of the poor socialization of her two sons.

There is no way to verify much of the history which is presented because most was taken from oral stories, letters, and postcards to which we do not have access. I want to trust the author, but certain facts presented in the book, such as the cause of death in one case, is something that I know is not completely true. This makes me back track from endorsing the trustworthiness of the book. Every reader will have to do some reading between the lines as they read the history as told by the main subject's granddaughter.

On the one hand, the book lacks organization, editing, and trustworthiness. On the other hand, it held my attention, gave me new things to think about, and was a fairly accurate history of the Mennonite culture in which my father grew up. I believe it would be an enjoyable read for anyone with an interest in Mennonite history, particularly within the southern Willamette Valley.

*Paul Smucker lives in Harrisburg, OR, is a retired Biblical Mennonite Alliance affiliated minister, and husband of writer Dorcas Smucker.*

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