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Review of *Mennonites in Texas: The Quiet in the Land*
Text and photographs by Laura L. Camden and
Susan Gaetz Duarte.

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distinctive nonmainstream lifestyles—apart and in peace—is important to these separatist groups of Mennonites. And the Plains of Texas have provided a fitting refuge. Along with “a series of immigrants fleeing the Old World—Germans, Czechs, Russians, Irish, and more,” as former governor and Texas icon Ann Richards writes in the preface, these Swiss-German and German-Russian religious ethnic groups have found a home in the Lone Star State.

The label “The Quiet in the Land” (*Die Stille im Lande*) has its roots in the persecution of Anabaptists (the historical ancestors of Mennonites and Amish) in sixteenth-century Germany. Those who survived did so by withdrawing from the world, living out their beliefs quietly. It is particularly fitting for these two groups, who “separate themselves physically but mostly spiritually from the larger society”; and as part of the title, it speaks both to separation from mainstream society and connection to the larger society of Mennonites. Camden and Duarte are careful to note that the groups they document are but two of sixteen groups and more than fifty congregations of Mennonites in Texas, many of whom no longer hold to the emphasis on visible separatism espoused by the “plain” communities.

The inclusion of Mark Loudon’s chapter, “A Spiritual Journey,” provides a historical account of Mennonite beginnings dating back to the Reformation, contextualizing these two Mennonite communities in relation to each other and the larger Mennonite world. In addition to their common history, brief narratives of each group anticipate each grouping of photographs.

But it is the photographs themselves that tell the story of who these people are, how they live and worship. As they show, the two groups, from divergent historical migratory patterns, have little in common beyond basic theological similarities rooted in shared origins, simple lifestyles symbolized by plain dress, and separation from society. Separated by 450 miles of Texas land, they are about as foreign to each other as they are to their Texas neighbors. Captured

Mennonites in Texas: The Quiet in the Land. Text and photographs by Laura L. Camden and Susan Gaetz Duarte. Foreword by Ann W. Richards. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2006. xix + 123 pp. Map, photographs, notes, bibliography, index. \$35.00.

This arresting collection of black-and-white prints, complemented by concise, historically and culturally sensitive narrative text, documents two distinct groups of Mennonites who have found refuge in the Great Plains. As the title and cover photo suggest, a place to live out

in the photographs, too, are the geographical differences between the “desolate High Plains of West Texas” and the “grassy, windswept area of Central Texas known as the Blackland Prairies.” By visually documenting these differences, even as they record the commonalities textually, the authors have captured an often-misunderstood facet of a surprisingly diverse group of peoples known as Mennonites.

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