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## Review of *The Prairie People: Forgotten Anabaptists* By Rod Janzen

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*The Prairie People: Forgotten Anabaptists.* By Rod Janzen. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1999. Tables, illustrations, appendices, notes, glossary, select bibliography, index. xiii + 326 pp. \$50.00 cloth, \$24.95 paper.

In his latest book, *The Prairie People: Forgotten Anabaptists*, Rod Janzen examines the Prairieleut, a sect of Germanic Anabaptists who have largely escaped the public view, even as researchers have focused on their relatives, the Hutterites.

The Prairieleut and modern-day Hutterites are descendants of a small group of radical Christians who rejected the orthodox doctrines of infant baptism and Transubstantiation and began living communally in 1528. After more than three centuries of religious persecution in Eastern Europe and Russia, the

Hutterites fled overseas in the 1870s and settled on the northern Great Plains. They selected a sparsely populated area to limit interaction with the outside world and to develop self-sufficient communal settlements. Despite their plans, two-thirds of the Hutterite population chose individual farms over communal living, earning them the chagrin of their Hutterian relatives. These people came to be called the Prairieleut, German for "People of the Prairies."

Years of separation caused the Prairieleut to lose some of the distinctive characteristics of their communal counterparts. The Hutterites routinely speak in their unique Hutterisch dialect, a language the Prairieleut have nearly forgotten. Although the Hutterites are pacifists, wear traditional dress, and marry only within the group, the Prairieleut wear modern clothing, commonly marry outside their ethnic group, and attend Mennonite churches. Some Prairieleut have even served in the military. For rejecting communal life and directing attention toward their immediate families, the Prairieleut have been considered self-interested and materialistic by their Hutterian kin. As Janzen explains, however, they had little choice but to focus on their families in order to survive. While they tend to be quieter about their religious beliefs, the Prairieleut support a strong, Christian family life.

The Prairieleut are caught between two worlds: contemporary society and their Hutterian relatives, to whom they feel a deep connection. *The Prairie People* illustrates their inability to gain full acceptance from either world. Janzen explores the neglected Prairieleut viewpoint through the lens of a dedicated historian, interested onlooker, and understanding insider. He brings a forgotten story to light with eloquence and compassion, shaping the history of the Prairieleut into a compelling narrative.

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