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Review of *Gentle People: A Case Study of Rockport Colony Hutterites*. By Joanita Kant.

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Gentle People: A Case Study of Rockport Colony Hutterites. By Joanita Kant. Brookings, SD: Prairie View Press, 2011. i + 120 pp. Photographs, tables, maps, charts, index. \$16.00 paper.

Joanita Kant's *Gentle People* is an excellent case study of South Dakota's Rockport Hutterite Colony. The book includes in-depth description and analysis of the lifestyle of Rockport Colony residents and covers people of all ages and interests. There are numerous helpful photographs, both contemporary and historical.

Members of the Rockport Colony belong to a religious society that has practiced "community of goods" for nearly five centuries. The book not only introduces the reader to the deep-seated beliefs and practices of members, but also provides important sociological analysis supported by helpful figures and maps, including population pyramids, floor plans, and colony branching charts.

The Hutterites have indeed created an important alternative and communitarian society, which citizens of the modern world might learn much from, especially in terms of economy of scale and conflict management. Kant gives us a good picture of how different life is in a small community where residents are tied to each other by social, economic, and religious bonds.

Her book, however, also contains an abundance of factual errors, which greater attention to secondary sources might have forestalled. On page 17, for example, we are told that the unnamed Hutterite village where communal life was resurrected in Ukraine in the 1850s was located about 200 miles "northwest" of Odessa. Hutterthal was in fact located primarily *east* and a bit north of Odessa. On the same page, Darius Walter is listed as the leader of the Scheromet Hutterite village, when in fact Michael Waldner (Walter's competitor) was the leader of that group. Kant suggests that there were three Hutterite villages in south Ukraine at the time of immigration to the United States; there were in fact five.

Kant claims that only in "rare cases" (p. 10) do Hutterites pursue post-secondary education; since the mid-1990s, however, over 100 Schmiedeleut (Group One) Hutterites have graduated with bachelor's degrees from Brandon University (Manitoba). Kant says (on p. 18) that after settling in Dakota Territory, the non-communal Hutterian Prairieleut were "no longer members of the Hutterite faith." This is not the view of the Prairieleut, and their well-known leader Paul Tschetter (mentioned twice for other reasons in the book), who formed the same kind of Hutterite churches in which they had worshiped in Ukraine. In one of these congregations (Neu Hutterthal) the traditional sermons were the only homilies read into the 1940s, an issue I discuss in detail in *The Prairie People: Forgotten Anabaptists* (1999).

Other problems stem from an absence of footnotes, making the origin of some information impossible to track. For example, Kant suggests that the Hutterites influenced the Mennonites to settle in Ukraine in the late 18th century, though no source for this notion is provided.

Kant also de-emphasizes the significant diversity among Hutterite colonies, even within the same Leut, or what Kant calls "denomination." She does not mention that the 15,000-strong Schmiedeleut group divided in 1992, and that each group (Groups One and Two) has gone its separate way, institutionalizing differences significantly and quickly. These groups have not been unified since 1992. Hutterites cannot be neatly characterized as a single entity.

It is perplexing, moreover, that there are so many important academic works on the Hutterites missing in the reference section of Kant's book, including my own (the most recent: *The Hutterites in North America*, 2010), Austrian historian Astrid von Schlachta's *Die Hutterer zwischen Tirol und Amerika* (*The Hutterites: Between Tirol and America*, 2006), ex-Hutterite Robert Rhodes's *Nightwatch* (2009), historian Leonard Gross's *The Golden Years of the Hutterites* (1980), and Alvin Esau's *The Courts and the Colonies* (2004), along with studies undertaken by Karl Peter (*The Dynamics of Hutterite Society*, 1987) and Donald Kraybill and Carl Bowman (*On the Backroad to Heaven*, 2001).

Despite all this, Kant's case study is valuable, providing important insights into the Rockport colony's social environment, economic activities, governance, and general worldview. The reader gets a good sense of what transpires when colonies divide as well as the dynamics of extended family relationships, education, daily life, and the sense of place. The history of the Rockport Colony is also carefully positioned within the South Dakota context. If some of the historical commentary as well as Kant's attempt to compare Rockport to the larger Hutterite world had been omitted, thereby keeping the focus on the Rockport Colony and its place in the history of the Dakota Territory and the state of South Dakota, the work could have been much improved. **Rod Janzen**, *Department of History, Fresno Pacific University*.