



The Amana Colonies' Story

The history of the Amana Colonies, a National Historic Landmark and one of America's longest-lived communal societies, can be traced to the villages and the walled cities of Germany.

It begins in turbulent 18th century Germany with a religious movement called Pietism. In Germany in 1714 two men, Eberhard L. Gruber and Johann F. Rock, spoke and wrote of faith renewal through reflection, prayer and Bible study. Their belief, one shared by many other Pietists, was that God, through the Holy Spirit, may inspire individuals to speak. This gift of inspiration or prophecy was the basis for a religious group that became known as the Community of True Inspiration. Though the Inspirationists sought to avoid conflict and confrontation, they were persecuted for their beliefs. Eventually the Inspirationists sought refuge in central Germany settling in several estates, including the 13th century Ronneburg castle.

Seeking Freedom

Renewed persecution and an economic depression forced the community to begin searching for a new home. Led by Christian Metz the community left Germany in 1843-44 and by pooling their resources were able to purchase land near Buffalo, New York. By working cooperatively,

the community, now numbering some 1,200 people, was able, in a just a few years, to carve a relatively comfortable living from the wilds of western New York calling their community the Ebenezer Society. They adopted a constitution that formalized their communal way of life and established a governing council of brethren elected by the membership.

When more land was needed for the growing community, the Inspirationists looked to Iowa where attractively priced land was available. One valley on the Iowa River seemed particularly promising. Here was fertile soil, stone, wood and water enough to build the community of their dreams – the Amana Colonies.

Remaining True

In 1855 they arrived in Iowa. After an inspired testimony instructed the people to call their village, "Bleib treu" or "remain faithful" the leaders chose the name Amana from the Song of Solomon 4:8. Amana means to remain true. Six villages were established, a mile or two apart, across a

river valley tract of some 25,000 acres - Amana, East Amana, West Amana, South Amana, High Amana and Middle Amana. In 1861 when the community learned that a railway was to be built and a station opened in the former stagecoach stop known as Homestead, the community bought the land and the Amana village of Homestead came to be.

The community adopted a communal way of life based upon Christian teachings which they articulated in a constitution adopted by the members. Called the Amana Society, the group shared the property and businesses of the seven Amana villages.

The Amana Colonies would become one of America's longest-lived and largest religious communal societies.

In the seven villages, residents could count on receiving a home, medical care, meals, all household necessities and schooling for their children. Property and resources were shared. Men and women were assigned jobs by their village council of brethren. No one received a wage. No one needed one.

Farming and the production of wool and calico supported the community, but village enterprises, everything from clock

making to brewing, were vital. Over 50 communal kitchens provided three meals daily to Colonists. These kitchens were operated by the women of the Colonies and well supplied by the village smokehouse, bakery, icehouse and dairy and by huge gardens, orchards and vineyards maintained by the villagers.

Children attended school, six days a week, year-round until the age of 14. Boys were assigned jobs on the farm or in the craft shops, while girls were assigned to a communal kitchen. A few boys were sent to college for training as teachers, doctors and dentists.

Up before dawn, called to work by the gentle tolling of the bell in the village tower, the unhurried routine of life in the old Amana Colonies was paced very differently than today. Churches, located in the center of each village, built of brick or stone, have no stained glass windows, no steeple or spire, and reflect the Inspirationist ethos of simplicity and humility. Colonists attended worship services 11 times during the course of a week, their quiet worship punctuating the days.

In 1932 amidst America's Great Depression, the Amana Colonies set aside its commu-

nal way of life. A ruinous farm market and changes in the rural economy contributed, but what finally propelled the change was a strong desire on the part of Amana Colonists to maintain their community. By 1932 the communal way of life was seen as a barrier to achieving individual goals. So rather than leave or watch their children leave one by one, they changed. They established the Amana Society, Inc., a joint stock, profit-sharing corporation to manage the farmland, the mills and the larger enterprises. Private enterprise was encouraged and many businesses located in the Amana Colonies today are independently owned and operated. The Amana Church was maintained and thrives yet today.

Today the Amana Colonies represent an American dream come true. Seven villages founded by religious faith and community spirit, the Amana Colonies are a thriving community with a population of over 1,700 people. Declared a National Historic Landmark in 1965, the Amana Colonies attract hundreds of thousands of visitors annually all of whom come to see and enjoy a place where the past is cherished and where hospitality is a way of life.

Amana Heritage Sites

The Amana Heritage Society maintains seven historical sites. Single admission or multi-site admissions are available. For more information on Amana Heritage Sites and to check their calendar of special events and programs phone 319-622-3567 or visit www.amanaheritage.org.

Amana Heritage Museum, Amana

One of your first stops in the Amana Colonies should be the Amana Heritage Museum. With an award-winning, 20-minute video, exhibits in three communal era buildings and grounds recalling turn of the century Amana life, the museum tells Amana's story from 18th century Germany to the present. The Amana Heritage Museum is among Iowa's top historical attractions. Special programs and exhibits. Museum store. *Open daily April 1 through October 31, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday - Saturday, 12 p.m.-4 p.m. Sunday. Open Saturdays only in March, November and December.*

Communal Kitchen and Cooper Shop, Middle Amana

Preserved just as it was on the day in 1932 when the last communal meal was served in Amana, visiting the Communal Kitchen and the Cooper Shop

across the street is like stepping back in time. Guides explain kitchen routines and share insights on communal Amana life. Popular with all ages, the Communal Kitchen and Cooper Shop is an historical treasure. *Open May 1 through October 31, 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Monday - Friday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturday.*

High Amana General Store, High Amana

This 1858 sandstone general store looks very much as it did 100 years ago when it served village residents and traded with farmers living near High Amana. The Amana Heritage Society still operates this dry goods store offering merchandise reminiscent of bygone days. *Open daily April 1 - October 31, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday - Saturday, 12 p.m.-4 p.m. Sunday. Open Saturdays and Sundays only in March, November and December.*

Communal Agriculture Museum, South Amana

Built in 1858 the South Amana barn housing the Communal Agriculture Museum is one of the oldest in the seven colonies. Tools, implements and photographs from Amana's communal era depict operations on the nation's largest communal farm. *Open May 27 - September 2, 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Monday - Friday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturday.*

The Amana Community Church Museum, Homestead

Whether you want to learn more about Amana or simply wish to experience a setting uniquely suited to reflection, visit the 1865 Saal (church or meeting-house) in Homestead. Guides discuss religious beliefs and practices of the Amana Church, while explaining the unique history and architecture of this 140-year-old church. *Open May 1 through October 31, 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Monday - Friday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturday.*

Homestead Blacksmith Shop, Homestead

The original village blacksmith shop. Learn about the role of the blacksmith in the economic life of the community. Demonstrations. *Open Saturdays May 27 through September 2, 11 a.m.-4 p.m.*

Homestead Store Museum, Homestead

Commerce sustained communal Amana and its importance is explored at this historic site recently renovated and opened by the Amana Heritage Society. Craft and industry, plus an examination of the community's relationship with the "outside world," are depicted. Open storage of museum artifacts and display of colony buildings in miniature make the Homestead Store well worth discovering. *Open May 1 through October 31, 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Monday - Friday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturday.*