



About The Amana Colonies

Tucked into Iowa's beautiful rolling hills is a cluster of seven quaint villages called the Amana Colonies. The settlement was birthed in 1855 when thirty-three Inspirationists arrived from Ebenezer, New York, to build the main village of Amana. By the end of 1864, there were more than twelve hundred people living in this new colony.

The Amana people share a profound spiritual heritage, and for eighty years, they worked and lived in a communal system and were a self-sufficient local economy. The Amana Society provided food, housing, medical care, and schooling for every member. Men and women were assigned jobs and no one received a paycheck. Farming and the production of wool and calico supported the colonies. The Amana people were also fine craftsmen. Incorporated under the name "The Amana Society" its purpose was to live peacefully, cooperatively, with humility and dignity, and with faith in God.

While the Amana Colonies are no longer a commune, many of the people living in Amana still worship and work together. Grapevines adorn the brick and stone homes today, and the aromas from the bountiful gardens and bakeries waft through the streets. The Iowa River weaves through the villages along with a peaceful canal that once powered the textile, grain, and sawmills.

Charming inns and good German food abound in these colonies today and visitors can spend days touring craft shops, art galleries, museums, wineries, quilt stores, and an original communal kitchen. With the exception of the trains that whistle their way through the colonies, the nights are calm, and when the clouds are gone, thousands of stars illuminate the dark sky.

The most widely know business that emerged from the Amana Society is Amana Refrigeration, now a subsidiary of Whirlpool which manufactures refrigerators, freezers, electric and gas ranges, microwaves, and more.

During the 1860s, when the novel is set, the United States was in turmoil during the 1860s, but the Community of True Inspiration remained strong during the War Between the States. The Inspirationists' faith in God and pursuit of community was intertwined with their work and families and the building of their colony.

In spite of the community's beliefs regarding pacifism, eight men left the Amana Society to fight in the Civil War, though many of these soldiers returned to the Amana Colonies after the war ended and rejoined the Society. Adam Stahl, one of these Amana men, was a private with the 28th Iowa Infantry. Seventeen additional men from Amana were conscripted to join the Union Army, but after the elders paid commutation fees, these men were relieved of this duty.

The Amana community donated thirty thousand dollars (worth approximately half a million dollars today) to the war effort along with blankets, coats, and other supplies for the soldiers. And they continued to pray for peace in the States and petition the country's leaders to humble themselves and search for a peaceful resolution to the war that cost the lives of more than 600,000 men. Amana men served in both world wars and have fought in subsequent conflicts around the world.

The Amana Colonies were one of our nation's longest-lived communal societies. Although its members voted to dissolve the commune in 1932, the Amana Church is still vibrant, and a strong sense of community and faith remains among the residents.