

Kolonie-Deutsch: Life and Language in Amana, by Philip E. Webber. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1993. xii, 127 pp. Illustrations, map, notes, tables, bibliography, appendix, index. \$19.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY LA VERN J. RIPPLEY, ST. OLAF COLLEGE

In *Kolonie-Deutsch* Philip E. Webber succinctly reviews the origins of the Amana Colonies, which date from 1855, when pietistic adherents of the Community of True Inspiration moved under the leadership of Christian Metz to communally owned farmland in Iowa. Webber's book, however, is not about history or theology; that is best gleaned from the works of Bertha Shambaugh, Barbara Yambura, Jonathan Andelson, and Robert Edwin Clark. Rather, Webber follows Lawrence Rettig's University of Iowa dissertation about grammatical structures in Amana German to produce a reader-friendly expedition to the spoken German Amana dialect.

In his chapter on language, Webber demonstrates that Amana German is both a century outdated and colored by regional vocabulary. Yet he argues that, far from ruining the language, Amana's German speakers, in fact, "preserve" it. Sometimes, though, hybrid forms come precariously close to crossing the line separating variation from aberrational linguistic compliance. In the end, Amana speakers exhibit something old, something new, and something borrowed in their everyday speech. For example, when in 1932 the community gave up its theocratic system for individual ownership and administrative legalities, the event acquired the name *Der Change*. Or, as a helpful interviewee said, even if you cannot understand everything said in an Amana German conversation, all you need to do is pick out the key words, for they will always be in English. Such English words as *fun*, *farmer*, and *railroad* have been borrowed directly. Words such as *der Weg*, meaning path or road, in modern Amana German acquire the meaning *manner*, while combinations such as *Meinung* for *opinion* comes more closely in Amana German to *meaning*. Others, such as *Pocketbuch*, *ausstraigten*, and *aufpicken* illustrate half-borrowings.

While the above expressions pique the interest of the linguist or schooled German speaker, Iowans will have more interest in the sociological, psychological, and organizational variations that still define the Amana speaker. Visitors may have trouble understanding intuitively as the natives do the community-focused meanings of names, who talks to whom about what, and how much rapport is needed before insiders interact, but they can over time sense the social taxonomy of family ties, marital status, respect between age groups, taste, the affectionate propriety of neighbors, and a host of similar values. With extended contact, outsiders will also hitch on to the rich texture of Amana nicknames (not that this community feature exists only in

the Amana Colonies). Hidden from most Iowans and reserved to linguistic insiders are the humorous songs and idiomatic expressions that characterized Amana life during its first century in Iowa, a bonding experience that has faded since the Change and especially with the loss of German. Webber's Amana respondents recollect the good times the pre-Change community enjoyed accomplishing arduous tasks that demanded many hands, tasks that furnished an opportunity to sing, gossip, and tease with one's neighbors.

There never did exist a monolithic Amana in linguistic terms. Rather, the keen observer discovers microdialects of German, variations that allow a person to be pinpointed to one of the seven villages. Loss of identity and language individuality occurred at different stages depending on the village concerned. South Amana, with two railroad lines, enjoyed greater mobility earlier and produced residents who learned English faster and better, followed by Homestead on the highway, and then Main Amana, where both a railroad station and industry brought dependence on outsiders. The more isolated East, Middle, High, and West Amana, on the other hand, were slower to use English and retained specialized German dialects longer. The microdialects of these villages had origins in Hesse and other states in Germany, but demonstrate considerable coalescing of scattered German locales which linguistically regathered on Iowa soil.

Folkloric references by villagers of one Amana to those from another likewise give evidence of Webber's intimate grasp of the languages used in these communities. His quotes from speakers demonstrate intricacies that exude from countryside village styles in Germany even today. Unfortunately, few Iowa tourists to the Amanas will be able to penetrate the rich culture linguistically wrapped in these speakers. Luckily, this volume, with its rich, illustrative German accompanied by expert parenthetical translations in English, offers a dazzling substitute for a lifetime of language learning.

Land of the Fragile Giants: Landscapes, Environments, and Peoples of the Loess Hills, edited by Cornelia F. Mutel and Mary Swander, with additional material by Lynette L. Pohlman. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press for the Brunner Art Museum, Iowa State University, 1994. xxii, 118 pp. Illustrations, references. \$24.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY GAIL E. H. EVANS, IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

Over the past few years, the Loess Hills of western Iowa, often considered the state's most distinctive natural landscape, has received growing public attention. In 1989 Cornelia F. Mutel's *Fragile Giants: A Natural History of the Loess Hills* helped focus midwesterners' interest

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.