

The Amana People and Their Furniture, by Marjorie K. Albers. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1990. xii, 221 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$22.95 cloth, \$12.95 paper.

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The Amana People and Their Furniture is not only a much needed study of Amana furniture; it is also a fine example of general ethnography with a focus on material culture. The first four chapters offer a very readable—and also very reliable—overview of Inspirationist history through the “Great Change” from communalism to capitalism in 1932. Although these chapters focus on the material possessions, architecture, interior, and furnishings of the Amana residents and their forebears, they are also an excellent introduction to the history of the people whose settlement in Iowa is so widely discussed and so often misunderstood. The following three chapters provide a wealth of information on furniture and the place of cabinetmaking in communal Amana. For the specialist, these chapters are the heart of the work. Yet once again, this section makes excellent general reading. The many photographs and their consistently clear captions provide a useful introduction to the subject of furniture style and design, even for those who may be unfamiliar with the technical terms. Albers also includes an intriguing chapter on the tradition of the clockmaker, whose craft has now become a vital part of the tradition of Amana furniture and cabinetmaking.

Albers has a firm understanding of the economic factors leading to the 1932 change from communalism to capitalism, and she outlines them and their impact on the furniture industry in the Amana Colonies. This is followed by a chapter on the Amana furniture industry today, where she provides a detailed look at individual workshops, products, and personalities. (This information will be popular with potential customers.) Finally, there is a projection of possible future trends in furniture making in the Amana area. The book concludes with several appendixes, including the Twenty-one Rules for the Examination of Our Daily Lives in the Inspirationist community and a list of the managers of the Amana Furniture Shop after 1932. There are brief but useful notes and a list of suggested readings.

Only occasionally is there a question about the use of a German term, and as a rule this may be attributed to special forms current in the local idiom rather than to any shortcomings on the author's part. This book would be an excellent acquisition by individuals and by libraries for a broad readership.

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