

Book Reviews

EDITED BY MICHAEL D. GIBSON

Amana: From Pietist Sect to American Community, by Diane L. Barthel. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984. xv, 210 pp. Photographs, bibliographical essay, index. \$19.95 cloth.

In the annals of American utopianism, the Society of True Inspiration, better known as the Amana Society, stands out as one of the country's most successful communal experiments. We can measure this group's history in centuries rather than in months. These sturdy religious communists traced their past to a mystical Christian movement in eighteenth-century Germany. For years the Inspirationist Church remained small and insignificant, but the migration of hardcore zealots to New York State in the early 1840s energized it. The cluster of settlements at Ebenezer, New York grew rapidly in population, from 350 to more than 800. The lure of inexpensive land and the relative isolation of the Iowa frontier caused the society to relocate in Iowa County in 1856 and by 1905 membership there reached its zenith of 1,770. Unlike the Spirit Fruit Society and a few other religious utopias which espoused absolute egalitarianism, the Amana colonies seemed to thrive under a structure that allowed some members to be more equal than others with an "aristocracy of elders." Differing from the famous Shakers and the Oneida Perfectionists, the Inspirationists embraced the traditional family, which contributed to their strength and longevity.

Life at Amana did change; the Iowa utopia could not and did not remain isolated. Its economic base was linked to both the national and local marketplaces; booms and busts indeed affected these Iowans. Since the utopia retained an anachronistic, German, village-based system of cottage industries, it found twentieth-century challenges difficult. So in 1932 Amana experienced the "Great Change," the abandonment of economic communism for a type of "co-operativism." The church remained, but was quickly overshadowed by the capitalistic spirit.

Diane Barthel has written the first modern, comprehensive account of the Inspirationists. Rather than write an unimaginative historical narrative, the author has explored carefully the impact of

change upon these Iowa communitarians, both before and after 1932. She is perhaps at her best when revealing how residents adjusted to a new economic lifestyle which included the subsequent rise of appliance manufacturing and tourism. Similarly, Barthel clearly shows how myths have been a continuing theme in the Amana story—for instance, people have viewed the utopia as a primitive Christian enclave pitted against evils of secular life and as a slice of midwestern life that time forgot.

This is a good book. It is well-conceived, adequately researched, and nicely written. The author, however, tends to quote excessively and to rely upon some flawed and dated secondary works. And, unfortunately, she fails to examine fully her intriguing observation that Christian Science became popular early in the century in Amana because the Inspirationist faith seemed inadequate for some. *Amana* deserves a varied audience: academics, tourists, and general readers will find the work of interest and of value.

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Sioux City: A Pictorial History, by Scott Sorensen and B. Paul Chicoine. Norfolk/Virginia Beach: Donning Company, 1982. 232 pp. Photographs, bibliography, index. \$14.95 cloth.

Those who appreciate local history—and everyone should—owe much to those who will set aside other pleasures for the grinding business of organizing the records and writing the story of a community's past. The people of Sioux City owe much, therefore, to Scott Sorensen, curator at the Sioux City Public Museum, and B. Paul Chicoine, freelance writer and photographer, who collaborated in this monumental collection of pictures and words. As is so often the case with local histories, however, this one exhibits its share of chauvinism, local boosterism, and puffery. It is overpopulated with complimentary adjectives.

That overpopulation does not mean that the authors have side-stepped some of the darker passages in Sioux City's past. They discuss the murder of Rev. George C. Haddock in 1886, several of the city's business and government scandals, its brushes with mob influence, and the national disgrace that came in 1951 when Memorial Park Cemetery refused burial to a Korean War casualty, Sergeant First Class John R. Rice, because he was part American Indian.

The book depends heavily, as its title suggests, on photographs. Unfortunately, some detailed illustrations are reproduced on a scale so small that the objects referred to in the outlines are indistinguish-

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