

A COMMUNISTIC SWEDENBORGIAN COLONY IN IOWA

Emanuel Swedenborg¹ was the son of a famous Lutheran Bishop, Jesper Swedberg, Bishop of Skara, one of the most influential men in Sweden. Bishop Swedberg was among the first to send missionaries to America to promote the cause of the Lutherans. His second son, Emanuel, was born at Stockholm in 1688 and was brought up in the strictest Lutheran way, memorizing the catechism and the ritual. His chief interests at first seem to have been scientific, for he wrote treatises on mathematics, physics, astronomy, and chemistry. Later he became interested in anatomy. For a number of years, he served as assessor of mines. Not till 1747 did he resign his Professorship at the University of Upsala together with his government position, to make evident the fact that he had definitely broken with Lutheranism. Then he wrote his famous polemic against the church of his father, striking at its very heart — the doctrine of Justification by Faith — in these stinging words: "Yet they [the Lutherans] have fabricated a universal doctrine of their church upon one saying of Paul falsely understood."² Again in *The True Christian Religion* he satirized Luther.³

Whether Swedenborg, who died in 1772, desired to form a new and separate ecclesiastical denomination is an open question. Most of the books written about him in the last seventy-five years (and their number is large) repeat the

¹ In 1719 Emanuel Swedenborg was made a noble and the family name was changed from Swedberg to Swedenborg.

² *The Apocalypse Revealed*, p. 892.

³ Swedenborg's *The True Christian Religion*, p. 796.

statement probably first formulated by Henry James, Sr., that this was not his intention. It seems probable, however, that it was his desire to start a "New Church", for this is what his denomination came later to be called. This seems to be the only interpretation that can be put on his voluminous writings. Moreover, in the year 1745 when he was 57 years old he became convinced that religion as then organized had ceased to have any real influence as a social and religious power able to meet the needs of men.

At any rate, soon after Swedenborg's death there began to grow up little groups for the study of his writings. These groups flourished first in England, where Swedenborg had lived a part of his life, but they also developed on the continent, especially in France, Germany, Holland, and Sweden. One of the earliest French interpreters was Guillaume Gaspard Lancroy Oegger who wrote *Le Vrai Messie ou l'Ancien et le Nouveau Testament examinés conformément aux principes du langage de la Nature* which later influenced Emerson and the Transcendentalists of New England.⁴

The first Swedenborgian recorded in the United States seems to have been James Glen, who in Philadelphia on June 5, 1784, gave a lecture on Swedenborg. From Philadelphia Glen moved on to Boston. About 1789, Dr. Joseph Russell came from England to Nova Scotia where he founded a Society of the New Church at Halifax. Two years later he came to New York. Soon groups of Swedenborgians in New York, Philadelphia, and Boston began to show great missionary zeal, spreading the doctrine of the New Church throughout the East. In 1787 Francis Bailey published in Philadelphia *A Summary View of the Heavenly Doctrines*, the first of Swedenborg's works to be pub-

⁴ It is significant that Emerson chose Swedenborg as the example of the religious man in his *Representative Men*, published in 1850.

lished in America. The New Church doctrines were further spread by *The Freeman's Journal or the North American Intelligencer* owned and edited by Francis Bailey. The poet, Philip Freneau, appears to have helped in the editorial work. In the issue of October 4, 1786, Freneau published his poem *On the Honourable Emanuel Swedenborg's Universal Theology*. But Bailey was not content to advance the cause by his *Journal* alone. In 1789 he sought support for an American edition of the first volume of *The True Christian Religion*, and readily found subscribers. Benjamin Franklin was one of the most enthusiastic and Thomas Jefferson was another. The first volume proved so successful that in 1792 the second volume was published and was eagerly bought.

By this time the teachings of the New Church had penetrated the Ohio Valley. The new missionary for this region was none other than John Chapman, better known as "Johnny Appleseed", because of his interest in the dissemination of apple trees among the pioneer farmers. Judge John Young, a receiver of Swedenborg's doctrines, supplied Chapman with literature and in the capacity of a Swedenborgian missionary "Johnny Appleseed" walked over the region lying west of the Alleghenies, north of the Ohio, and east of the Mississippi. Like the first New Testament disciples, Chapman went without money or change of apparel. As he went, he planted apple orchards, and spread the Word as revealed to Swedenborg. To the pioneer families whose fire and board he shared he read Swedenborg, interpreted the new teachings, and left leaflets for them to study until his return. His converts were to be found in many communities, but they were seldom organized or counted.

In 1792 the Baltimore Society began the construction of a church, the first New Church building in America. On

January 5, 1800, the building was formally dedicated. Jefferson sent a letter of congratulation, and afterwards corresponded with at least one officer of the church. By this time the New Church had representative groups throughout New England, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Maryland. Ohio had definite church groups by 1809. In 1835 Jonathan Young Scammon founded a church in Chicago, and about the same time organized groups were formed in Indiana. In 1839 an Illinois Association was formed.

There were many reasons for the growth of Swedenborgian churches. One of the most obvious, however, was the fact that Swedenborg, one of the greatest scientists and mathematicians of his time, early felt the necessity of such an interpretation of religion that a man could be religious and at the same time accept whole-heartedly the findings of science. To make this clear, he wrote upwards of one hundred volumes in Latin, the learned language of his day.

In the second place, Swedenborg realized the implications of higher and lower criticisms of the Bible before the majority of theological scholars did so. To meet this problem, one of the most baffling of all the problems of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, he worked out his elaborate exegesis of the spiritual meaning of the Bible. These writings, filled with learning, appealed to seekers after truth at the very points where men were most puzzled. Men and women of learning read them either in the great number of editions sent from England or in the now rapidly appearing American editions. A majority of those who were convinced that Swedenborg's views were correct did not leave their respective denominations; many of them, however, did. By 1850 practically every State east of the Mississippi had at least one New Church Society and all of them had many "reading groups".

A third reason for the great appeal of Swedenborg's teachings lay in the fact that he and his followers took a liberal, forward-looking attitude toward the economic issues of the time. Many groups of his followers were composed of Germans who had come to America because of dissatisfaction with religious and social conditions. This was especially true of the Swedenborgian colony in Iowa. Along with the writings of Swedenborg most of the groups read Marx, Owen, Fourier, and other social reformers. Many of his followers advocated the communism of the early Christians.

Surprising as it may seem, the introduction of the New Church into Iowa came not from the east but from the south, from New Orleans. There seem to have been two reasons for this. Oegger's famous work, *Le Vrai Messie*, was published in Paris in 1829. This had a wide reading and influenced French thought profoundly.⁵ Some French colonists had carried the new teaching with them as the English in great numbers had already done. Then, too, preceding and following the Revolution of 1848 large numbers of Germans came to America seeking political, intellectual, and religious freedom. Many of these Germans landed at New Orleans and later came to St. Louis.

One section of these German pioneers had fled from Germany, enraged at the attempt of Schleiermacher⁶ to make a united Evangelical Church in Germany. To the more conservative Lutherans this united church seemed nothing short of a repudiation of Christianity itself. Many of this group came to St. Louis in 1839. These German pilgrims, who later formed a new Synod which developed into the

⁵ Regis Michaud first pointed this out in his *Autour d' Emerson*, Paris, 1924. At the time Oegger wrote his *Le Vrai Messie*, he was Vicar of Notre Dame.

⁶ Friedrich Ernst Daniel Schleiermacher, a German theologian, who lived from 1768 to 1834.

Missouri Lutheran Synod with branches all over the United States, saw the issue clearly. A covenant they adopted leaves no doubt as to their attitude toward the teaching of Luther as the correct interpretation of the Bible. They asserted: "All the undersigned acknowledge with sincerity of heart the pure Lutheran faith as contained in the Word of God, the Old and New Testaments, and set forth and confessed in the Symbolical Books of the Lutheran Church". This made it clear that, in their opinion, there was no room in the Lutheran Church for Swedenborg's doctrines.

Some German colonists had, however, become interested in the New Church, founded on the writings of Swedenborg, largely through the translation of Swedenborg's works by Immanuel Tafel. After 1831 "reading groups" sprang up all over Germany for the study of these translations. It seems that Schleiermacher feared this new rival. On one occasion, it is said that he visited the learned Tafel to try to dissuade him from completing his task of turning Swedenborg's Latin into German. But this made Tafel all the more determined to finish his work. Many Germans read and embraced the new teachings.

The group of those interested in Swedenborg who later came to Iowa left Germany in 1844. Not all of these had definitely embraced the New Church teachings when they left the Fatherland. Some of them had, however, openly broken with the Lutheran Church and others had declared themselves free thinkers but kept a nominal membership in the church. The break was too abrupt to be made by a timid soul. It involved more than a rejection of the Pauline doctrine of Justification by Faith. Then, too, Swedenborg himself had never left the Lutheran Church; he merely challenged its doctrines, hoping that his teaching would permeate not only his own church but all denominations.

As Lutherans, these pioneers had believed the *Sola fides*, that faith alone justifies; but Swedenborg taught that "faith without works is dead all religion has relation to life and the life of religion is to do good". The new teaching held that repentance and faith are but the beginning of regeneration, which is not instantaneous, but is the result of the choices of life.

As Lutherans they had believed in a judgment day at the end of the ages when the sun would lose its light, the earth be destroyed, the graves open, and all men be sent to Heaven or to Hell. But the New Church taught them that the judgment comes at the termination of life when the soul leaves the body for the spirit world where it finds a new life for which its choices have prepared it. Man's subconscious mind is even in this life influenced by the spiritual world. There is no physical hell, but only the spiritual remorse over wrong choices.

As Lutherans they had believed in the Trinity of three in one. But the New Church taught them that God is a unity in the same way that a man's body, mind, and activity make him a unity.

As Lutherans they had taken the Bible literally. As Swedenborgians they were taught that a spiritual sense underlies the literal meaning. The spiritual or inner sense is revealed, they were told, through "the doctrine of correspondences", the symbolism within the literal sense. Plato had taught the doctrine of the existence of the ideal or spiritual concept before this, as had Philo, many of the Church Fathers, and the Neo-Platonists. Later, Emerson was to revive it. To the members of the New Church there could thus be no conflict between religion and science. Swedenborg, himself a distinguished scientist before he became a theologian, was an evolutionist long before Darwin made the theory popular.

As Lutherans these German colonists had believed it possible for unbaptized infants to fall under the wrath of God. As members of the New Church they were taught that all who die in infancy are saved through the love of God. Baptism, communion, and the other rites of the church are never ends but always symbols. Later when Emerson came under the influence of Swedenborg he adopted this view as did hundreds of others.

Such were the beliefs of some German colonists who in 1844 began to reach America through the Gulf of Mexico and New Orleans. Of those who later came to Iowa, only one family, the Schleuters, came to St. Louis via the Ohio River from their ancestral home in Bielefeld, Westphalia. The others — the Schloemanns, the Uthoffs, the Vettes, the Junkers, the Groths, the Hartmanns, the Bokhorsts, the Naumanns, and their spiritual leader, Hermann H. Diekhöner — all came to St. Louis via the Gulf of Mexico and New Orleans. Interesting stories of these Iowa pioneers have survived, some of them too important to be lost.⁷

This Hermann H. Diekhöner was a man of character, courage, and conviction. Without him Iowa might never have had the New Church colony. His story goes back to Germany in the days of Schleiermacher, Tafel, and Göthe.

As a boy it seems that Diekhöner showed great talent. He preferred above all else to hear a theological discussion or a debate about a new social order. His simple village parents, however, were too poor to send him to the University. His family could not then rise above the traditional occupation, shoemaking. The boy accordingly was apprenticed to a cobbler, to become in turn a cobbler himself. It was at that time that Tafel began bringing out his translations of the Latin works of Swedenborg. Hermann joined

⁷ The material for much of what follows in this article was secured from interviews with descendants of the original colonists and from a lengthy correspondence.

the first "reading circle" he could find. He starved himself to buy the books; he pored over them by night until he memorized great sections so that he could repeat them to those who came to his shop. He renounced Luther for the great Swedish teacher.

Diekhöner also busied himself with thoughts about "Society" and the "Economic Order". Karl Marx was his contemporary and the thinking that was a little later to go into the *Communist Manifesto* was in the air. The young apprentice agreed in the main with Marx, but his conviction about communism came not from the German Jew, but from the New Testament. He began to revolt against the social and religious intolerance of Germany. He had a vision of building a Utopia in the wilderness. Having completed his term as apprentice, he packed up his Swedenborgian books, together with his Bible and a few communistic tracts, and set out for America.

In due time he reached St. Louis, set up his cobbler's shop, and tried to convert to the new teachings all who came to him. He must have been as persuasive in his teachings as he was honest in his trade, for he was never without listeners. On Sundays he began to hold services in his shop, opening the house door to make more room. His place was crowded. More and more people came to hear him. Diekhöner soon knew and befriended each and every one of them. He became their shoemaker, their adviser, their pastor. More families came after the Revolution of 1848. All went well; but the cobbler had interested them in the theory of communism and they considered St. Louis merely a stopping place on their journey, not their home.

This interest in communism was not surprising. Socially and politically the majority of Swedenborgians have always been liberals. They have always felt that the teachings of the founder of the church should be applied to the

social system. This, for example, was the interpretation of Henry James, Sr. Just at the time the Iowa group began, the economic and social theories of Marx, Fourier, Robert Dale Owen, St. Simon, Henry James, Sr., George Ripley, and others were earnestly studied. *The Present* and *The Harbinger*, the latter a Brook Farm publication, carried the views of these thinkers to St. Louis. The relation of mid-western cities to Boston and the New England reformers was very close. The Boston New Church, for example, followed with keen interest the community at Yellow Springs, Ohio, founded by Daniel Roe, one of the first of Owen's American disciples. This community was made up of members of the New Church at Cincinnati. The experiment was much like that at Brook Farm except that it was entirely Swedenborgian.

And then, between the years 1848-1852, came the terrible cholera epidemic in St. Louis. When the German colonists had first reached St. Louis a great boom was in force and they could scarcely find a house for rent. After the epidemic, entire streets were deserted. Almost overnight the happy circle, intent on ideas of New Testament brotherhood, was changed into a group of terrified men and women. They showed great heroism, however, working valiantly and fearlessly to care for the sick and dying. Being intensely religious they took the Biblical injunctions about mercy and love for the sick as direct commands to them. Many members of the group fell victims of the dread scourge. The memories and records show that Casper H. Uthoff lost a sixteen-year-old daughter, the apple of his eye. The Schloemanns lost several sons, and lamented over them as did Rachel, the comfortless. The Schleuters lost several children, and so the sad tale went.

Fear of another epidemic was one of the reasons for hurrying the plans for a Utopian colony to the north, where

the Bible, as explained by Swedenborg, and Society, as outlined by the New Testament, might be experienced as realities. Each day was now precious. Meetings were held constantly in the cobbler's shop and a group resolved to organize as communists.

The group decided to establish to the north a colony that would express their dislike of the conditions they had left in Germany, and they determined to settle in the fertile prairie land of the newly formed State of Iowa. They had studied various communistic groups already established, such as the Shakers at Mt. Lebanon, New York; the German Harmonists at Economy, Pennsylvania; the Quaker Zoarites; the Swedes under Eric Janson at Bishop Hill, Illinois; the German group under Keil at Bethel, Missouri; the Perfectionists at Putney, Vermont, who at this very time were being expelled to form the Oneida Community in New York; the Brook Farm experiment, already mentioned; and the Icarians under Cabet at Nauvoo, Illinois. But none of these fulfilled Diekhöner's dream. He wanted to exalt Emanuel Swedenborg, who had liberated his mind, and to emulate the first century Christians who, he believed, had solved the economic and social problems.

During this period of waiting, most of the colonists not already converted to the teachings of the New Church, renounced their spiritual allegiance to Lutheranism as well as their political allegiance to Germany. Diekhöner in his cobbler's shop had sown the good seed and now found the harvest ready. He prepared to accompany the colony north to Iowa. In the midst of preparations for starting their community, they were told that the Indians were causing the new settlers much trouble. This report, although without foundation so far as Iowa was concerned, caused no little consternation and explains the type of community house in which the colonists first lived.

The name chosen for this Iowa settlement throws light on the passion of these Swedenborgians for a new and better social order. In the German translation of the Bible which they used, in Revelation 21: 19 they read: "Und die Gründe der Mauern und der Stadt waren geschmückt mit allerlei Edelsteinen. Der erste Grund war ein Jaspis".⁸ This in English reads: "And the foundations of the walls and of the city were adorned with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper". This phrase from the description of the Heavenly Jerusalem, "the first foundation was jasper" they adopted as their hope for the first New Church colony in Iowa and they called their colony the *Jaspis Kolonie*. It is said the older members used to repeat, "Der schöne Name Jaspis". These colonists were devout believers in the coming of the Christian Utopia and in the realization of the petition they daily prayed, "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth".

By the first of January, 1851, plans had been formed and all were ready to take the road to Iowa as soon as the weather permitted. Imitating the Old Testament, the group selected certain trusted men to "spy out the land". For this important mission they chose C. O. Vette, Karl Frederick Naumann, and Heinrich C. Kosfeld. As soon as the Mississippi River was navigable the "spies" set out. With little trouble they reached Keokuk and then started inland. They had no difficulty with the Indians and went as far west as what is now Iowa County. This region was then largely government land, open to settlement and so could be obtained easily and cheaply. The land in Iowa County seemed a veritable paradise to these weary travelers and they at once agreed to urge the colonists to establish the new home there. Immediately they returned to St. Louis

⁸ Swedenborg explains in detail the spiritual significance of this passage in his *Apocalypse Revealed*.

and reported their findings to the group in Diekhöner's shop. The members received the report with prayer and gratitude as a gift of divine Providence. At once they prepared to enter upon the goodly heritage.

Sometime in the spring of 1851, it seems, the families started out, coming by the Mississippi as far as Muscatine. Here they sought ways of transporting their goods northwest to the new location. After much discussion they hired oxcarts and oxen to move their possessions as far as Iowa City, then the capital of the new State, although drivers of the oxcarts feared the sticky loess over which they must travel, for in the early spring the Iowa roads were well nigh impassable. John Frederick Schleuter, who seems to have been the treasurer of the group and could speak English, supervised the transfer of the colony's possessions from the boat to the oxcarts. Then another delay came as he endeavored to make the drivers assume responsibility for any breakage on the way. This the drivers, knowing the nature of the roads, flatly refused to do. This difficulty, however, seems to have been overcome in some way, for the colony finally started on its way, the men walking beside the carts to keep them right side up, while the women and children took turns riding. Thus they reached Iowa City without mishap. They remained here several days to make final purchases and repairs for the last lap of the journey to the new home.

Exactly when the Swedenborgian colonists reached Iowa City is not definitely known. A land patent was issued to William Wolbers, who later appears as one of the trustees of the colony, on April 11, 1851. This was for one hundred and twenty acres in Section 18 of Township 81 North, Range 9 West, in what was later Lenox Township,⁹ Iowa County. Another purchase of 40 acres in Section 7 of the

⁹ Lenox Township was organized in 1855.

same township was made by Wolbers on April 25, 1851, and on the same date Hermann H. Diekhöner took title to one hundred and sixty acres in Sections 17 and 20.¹⁰

It appears, therefore, that the colonists were in Iowa City about the middle of April. A story which has been handed down relates that Mr. Schleuter rode on ahead to locate the land. About twenty miles west of Iowa City, at a point where Homestead now stands, he sought to ford the Iowa River. But the heavy spring rains had so swollen the river that continuing with the horse was out of the question. He thought of the waiting colonists anxious to be in their new home; then he tied the horse to a tree, wrapped his clothes into a bundle which he strapped to his head, and swam across the river. He walked across the tract, later to become another communistic settlement, the Amana, to the point where Willow Creek flows into Price Creek, a tributary of the Iowa. From this point he staked out the sections of land chosen for the colony's home. Nearby was a spring.

The story handed down by the descendants of the pioneers goes on to say that when Mr. Schleuter swam back across the river, his horse had disappeared. The pioneers thought it was stolen by a roving Indian since it never returned to its owner in Iowa City. Nothing dismayed, Schleuter walked back the twenty miles to Iowa City and paid for the lost horse out of the colony's slender funds.

The following day the colonists set out for their new home. They made their way with difficulty through the rain soaked loess, but their spiritual guide, H. H. Diekhöner, made them feel good cheer. Several of the survivors have told of their surprise, on arriving, at seeing a log shed roofed with grass not far from the spring. They never

¹⁰ These purchases are recorded in the office of the county recorder of Iowa County.

learned who built it, but believed it had been the shelter of a trapper who had been killed by the Indians. More likely some trader or squatter had moved away.

It appears to be difficult to fix exactly the location of all the lands held by the Swedenborgians. The center of the Jasper Colony was located in Sections 5 and 8, although this land, according to the records, was not purchased until 1852. A deed for one hundred and sixty acres — the NW $\frac{1}{4}$ of Section 8 — in the name of Casper H. Uthoff, John F. Schleuter, and Charles F. Naumann, trustees of Jasper Colony, bears the date May 28, 1852. On December 7, 1852, these trustees purchased another one hundred and sixty acres — the S $\frac{1}{2}$ of the SW $\frac{1}{4}$ and the NE $\frac{1}{4}$ of the SW $\frac{1}{4}$ of Section 5 and the NW $\frac{1}{4}$ of the SE $\frac{1}{4}$ of Section 6. In addition to these purchases, Albert H. Schloemann is listed as having bought forty acres in Section 8 on May 2, 1852, and Charles (or Karl) Kunz bought three hundred and twenty acres on December 22, 1852.

Under the frontier rule that residents had a preëmption right to buy the land on which improvements were made, it is possible that the colony selected the northwest corner of Section 8 and the southwest corner of Section 5, and established the center of the colony there, although they had not as yet secured title to the land. This site was chosen because of a spring of excellent water and a grove of timber which could be used in building the community houses and for fuel. The colonists never regretted the choice of the site to which they considered they had been divinely guided.

At any rate, it is said that as soon as the ox carts had been unloaded and the goods set up in tents, the men set to work to build a log community house near the junction of Willow and Price creeks. Almost immediately four other log houses were built. Each of the five houses at first sheltered two families. Each family had its own apartment

with an upper story, but a common kitchen and dining room seem at first to have served the entire colony. The community house, which symbolized both the principle of Christian communism and the colonists' fear of the Indians, also served at first as the church. Heat was provided from the fireplaces. All the furniture was handmade with the exception of the pieces brought from St. Louis.¹¹ Beds were made as berths fastened to the wall and so arranged that during the day they might be folded back to make more room. Wooden benches took the place of chairs. During the summer all meals were served out of doors on long wooden tables.

But the colony's first interest was not the material comforts of life. Diekhöner, their leader, saw to it that Christian communism, the divine brotherhood, and the interpretation of the Bible according to Swedenborg were kept before them as their main purpose. They brought with them Tafel's translation of Swedenborg's works, together with the original Latin. It is doubtful whether an English translation was used at this time as few of the members, with the exception of Schleuter, had learned English. Thus in one of the log community houses in the spring of 1851 the first New Church in Iowa was established under the leadership of the Reverend H. H. Diekhöner, for Diekhöner seems to have been ordained by the community before leaving St. Louis.¹²

In addition to the Reverend H. H. Diekhöner and the men who came to choose the site, the Jasper Colony included Frederick William Junker, Valentine Hartmann, Heinrich Groth, Albert Hermann Schloemann, Ernst H. Schloemann, and Karl Kunz, who came from Prague—the only

¹¹ At least one piece of the original furniture brought from St. Louis has survived to the present time.

¹² Each group had the right to ordain its own spiritual leader.

colonist of noble birth.¹³ Although these colonists planned to establish a communistic settlement, they were never incorporated, the land being held in the name of various individuals or trustees. A total of about one thousand acres was purchased by members of the Jasper Colony during 1851 and 1852, in Sections 5, 6, 7, 8, 17, 18, and 20.

This land was extremely fertile and crops flourished, but money was scarce. The colonists experienced no trouble from the Indians. They enjoyed all the blessings they had lacked in Germany. But the desire for private property was strong within them. They pondered Luther's translation of the Bible and saw that communism was neither compulsory nor did it work among the early Christians; they found nothing in Swedenborg's writings that could be interpreted as implying that true Christians must be communists. They debated the question, to the evident displeasure of Diekhöner who was a firm adherent of communism and believed it wrong for any person to receive money for preaching or for pastoral work. This restlessness continued until the spring of 1853 when at the general meeting of the colony it was voted to give up communism.

The reorganization required certain adjustments in the ownership of land. The plan had been carried out by agreement rather than under legal regulations and it appears that, upon the decision to give up communism, the colony made transfers in the interest of justice. Although this is not so stated in the records, the land bought in 1851 and 1852, whether deeded to trustees or to individuals, was apparently considered as community property. The first transfers from the colony to an individual appear to have been made on April 20, 1853, so the decision to abandon

¹³ It is difficult to find the correct spelling of the names of the various members of the Jasper Colony. The names as they appear on the different records vary, depending upon whether the English or the German spelling and sounds were used.

community property was evidently made previous to this date. The transfers made on this date were made by "Casper Uthoff and Others", as trustees of the colony. Another series of transfers, made on November 16, 1853, were signed by "Albert Schloemann and Others". William Wolbers also appears as one of the signers on some of these deeds. By the date of the series of transfers on November 16th, two of the leaders were evidently dead — Casper Uthoff and Karl Kunz — for their widows received deeds, Hannah Uthoff to a forty acres of the original purchase by H. H. Diekhöner, and Catherine "Kuntz" to eighty acres, half of which was part of the Diekhöner holding.

It appears that the reorganization took place without serious dispute as to property rights. Members seem not to have received equal shares. They had probably contributed unequally in the beginning. The records concerning these financial transactions have not been found. After the spring of 1853, many members of the community bought additional land from the government.

Thus an Iowa religious communistic colony had organized and given up communism before the Society of True Inspiration came into Iowa in 1855. It is interesting to note, however, that the German pietists who later developed the Amanas came to America like the Swedenborgians in the 1840's and largely for identical reasons. It is also interesting to note that the Inspirationists put greater weight on the significance of communism than the Swedenborgians did, remaining communists till 1932 when they too reorganized. The Amana Community, however, became a joint stock company and did not return to an unqualified private property system. It later purchased some of the land owned by the Jasper Colony, including at least part of the original purchase by H. H. Diekhöner.

About the time the colony renounced communism, Reverend H. H. Diekhöner returned to St. Louis. To him the rejection of communism was almost the renunciation of Christianity itself. On his return to St. Louis, it is said, he reopened his cobbler's shop to earn his daily bread. He also became pastor of another New Church group, serving it without salary until he died.

Accounts of the Iowa colony which came to St. Louis encouraged other German families to move north to Price's Creek, and within a few years the following additional families settled down: Bernhardt Vette and his wife; Hermann Biermann; John, George, and Henry Burmeister; Christopher Volz; Heinrich Mueller and family; and Joachim Schultz. Bernhardt Vette was a bookbinder. Hermann Biermann came as a farm hand, and after a few weeks he had saved enough money to return to St. Louis for his bride.

George Burmeister came with a plan for educating the children. It was he who opened the first New Church Sunday School in Iowa in 1857. He also taught the day school for several months. Henry Burmeister was the first of the family to unite with the New Church in Iowa County. In the meantime a new school was built. This was known as the Excelsior School and served as the public school, although it was also used for religious services on Sunday and occasionally in the evenings. The Excelsior School was completed by 1859 and supplanted the old log community house as a church, serving until 1880 when the new church building was dedicated. Henry Burmeister was the first teacher in the Excelsior School, serving from 1860-1861. Heinrich Mueller and his family came in 1870. Mueller spoke both German and English, and for several years he served as translator for *Der Bote*, a German New Church paper published at St. Louis.

Members of the Jasper Colony and those who settled in the community became naturalized citizens and took an active interest in political affairs. During the Civil War period they were chiefly Republicans in politics, but the approval of prohibition by the Republican party, it is said, later influenced many of them to join the Democratic party.

Contacts of the Swedenborgian Colony with the outside world were at first few and far between. Muscatine and Iowa City were the nearest towns and through them the few contacts were maintained. Linwood post office in the Wilkins farm home was established in 1856. In 1864 an office was opened at Florence, the present village of Norway, four miles from the Lenox New Church.

A word should be said about the spiritual leaders of the colony after the Reverend H. H. Diekhöner retired, disappointed at the rejection of communism. From 1853 till 1863 Albert Hermann Schloemann, a layman, served as minister of the community. This was permitted in the New Church since the Sacraments, according to Swedenborg, are symbols rather than means of salvation. It was during Mr. Schloemann's ministry that the Excelsior School was completed. Schloemann was always devoted to the spread of the New Church and while pastor organized societies in schoolhouses at Parker's Grove (near Shellsburg) and also at Ely.

In 1863 the work became too strenuous for a lay preacher, and the Reverend Gerhard Bussmann was called as pastor. He was a carpenter by trade and during his service at the Lenox Church he continued to carry on his trade until he left in 1883. After the coming of Reverend Bussmann, Mr. Schloemann continued his work in the outlying districts always finding new groups ready and eager to study the writings of Swedenborg. About 1880 he formed "a reading circle" which soon developed into a New Church Society in

a rural community near Newhall in Benton County. This society continued to flourish for many years bringing a religious and intellectual stimulus to an otherwise remote community.

Early in the seventies, a new society of Swedenborgians started near Burlington, known as the Flint River Congregation. The Reverend J. J. Lehnen came from Canada as pastor of this group about 1874 and, on the departure of Reverend Bussmann, he often preached at Lenox. He also acted as State missionary, visiting the various "reading groups" and societies. Among these was the group at Rogers School north of Norway. His preaching was almost entirely in German, and it is said that he spoke English with a decided German accent.

With the building of the new church in Lenox Township in 1880 the language problem came to the fore. The younger members had learned English and demanded an English service. To meet this difficulty, the church called the Reverend Stephen Wood as co-pastor to preach in English. From 1880 to 1894 the society had two pastors and two services. Wood was a remarkable man and his influence on the cultural life of Iowa is too important to be forgotten. He was descended from Thomas Wood, a Puritan who fled England for conscience sake in 1620. Born in New York in 1814, Stephen Wood began life as a farmer. But he early developed a desire to prepare for the ministry, carried a Bible with him while plowing, and soon memorized great sections of it. As soon as possible he left the farm and entered the University of Athens, Ohio. Here he applied himself equally well to Greek, Latin, Hebrew, German, and mathematics. He entered the ministry of the Methodist Episcopal Church where he remained till 1850. At this time the interest in Swedenborg had spread over the country and Wood studied the new teaching carefully.

At last, convinced of the truth of the New Church doctrine, he came to Iowa, teaching school in Linn, Clinton, and Jackson counties, and preaching the doctrines of Swedenborg in schoolhouses or wherever an opportunity offered. He was also one of the first to introduce the teaching of Swedenborg into the Dakotas. In 1880 he settled in Lenox Township where he exerted a powerful influence. On August 10, 1889, The General Society of Iowa for the Church of the New Jerusalem was founded by Wood, Lehnen, Kimm, and a group of laymen. Through this society he purposed to unite the scattered Iowa societies. In this he was unusually successful and the New Church reached many hamlets in the State, securing a large number of readers.

Annual meetings were held at the Lenox Church, at which men and women from Iowa and neighboring States planned and worked together for the advancement of the New Church. These meetings meant much to the rural people of Iowa. Thirty-five communities in the State had societies at the time of the founding of the State society. But Stephen Wood was more than a tireless preacher and missionary. He found time to write several books which were widely read throughout the country. Best known of these books are: *The Formation of Plants and Animals by an Orderly Development*; *The New Philosophy Applied to the Solar System*; and *The New Philosophy in Connection with the Science of Correspondence*.

From 1896 to 1904 J. B. Parmelee served as pastor. He was followed after a short interval by William Martin. The latter's work was significant. Born in Fairfield, Ohio, in 1842 of a very religious family William Martin early heard of Swedenborg, although his parents were members of the Associate Reformed Church. At the age of twenty-six Martin came to Iowa, teaching rural schools in Appanoose

County, while preparing himself to enter the State University at Iowa City. It was about this time that Emerson began his lecture tours through the middle west. Although definite proof has not been found, it seems likely that Emerson interested Martin more deeply in Swedenborg. Finally, having read the article on Swedenborg in *Johnson's Cyclopedia*, written by Theophilus Parsons, a friend of Emerson's, Martin decided to enter the ministry of the New Church.

Martin had spent his life in teaching school and newspaper work up to the time he was licensed as a New Church minister in 1901. In 1900 Mr. Martin began the publication of the only New Church paper ever to be published in Iowa, *The Echo*, published quarterly at Solon, twelve miles from Iowa City, by the Economy Publishing Company. The Reverend J. B. Parmelee acted as editor. Its purpose was to promote the interests of the New Church among both German and English speaking residents of the State. The paper from its beginning took a radical social position. It reprinted articles and sermons from *The Public*, a single tax organ published in St. Louis. It carried articles by Reverend Parmelee on "Christian Socialism", exhorted its subscribers to read Henry James, Sr., as an exponent of the social teaching of the New Church, and stressed the reading of other books giving the Swedenborgian point of view.

About 1901 the Lenox Church began to lose its power. It voted to discontinue regular Sunday services and have services but once each month. Two reasons were given for this. One was financial. Many of the older members had died; their children seemed to lack the fervor of their fathers or had moved away. Another reason seems to have been the interest that Reverend Parmelee showed in the Koreshite movement. This movement, founded by Cyrus

Teed, a medical practitioner of Utica, New York, adopted the theory of communism, held that the earth is a hollow globe on the inner surface of which the human race lives, and asserted that Teed was the Messiah. The Lenox Church people looked askance at all of these doctrines, although Reverend Parmelee continued as part time pastor till 1910. Since that time the church has had only occasional services. Many of its members, however, hold loyally to it, and each summer a reunion is largely attended by persons from all parts of Iowa.

The Swedenborgian Colony gave to Iowa a group of intelligent, thrifty, and honest citizens. It continued the Swedenborgian tradition, being part of a movement which in the first half of the nineteenth century spread over the United States, enlisting some of the best minds of America. The teachings of Swedenborg gave spiritual and intellectual nourishment to many a rural group, in the days before Iowa had developed its school system and created its spiritual life. In a difficult period it helped men and women to solve the perplexing problem of the relation of religion to the new scientific knowledge and to social problems.

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