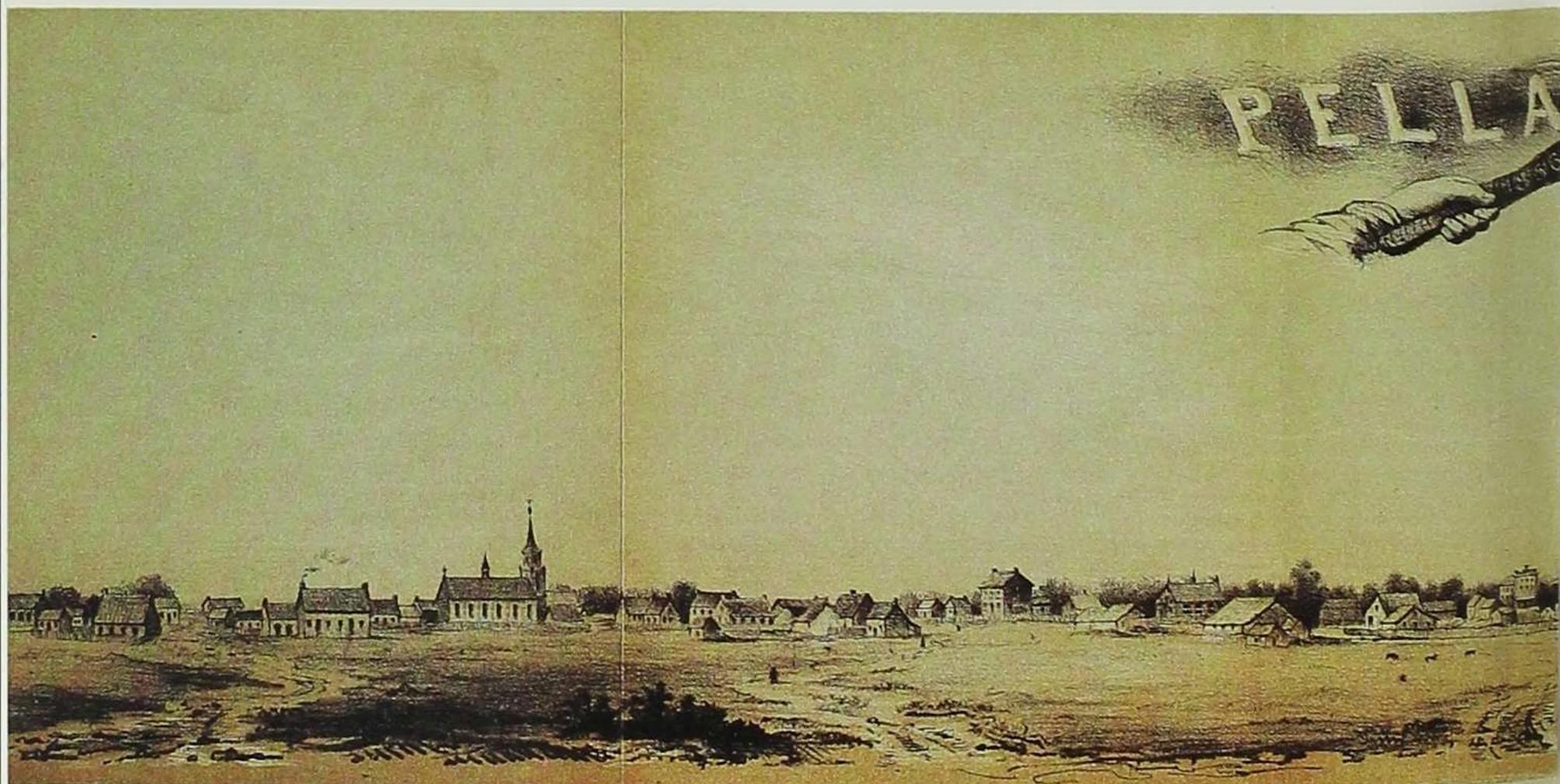


Crossing



Moves by Two Families from Pella to the Amana Colonies in the 1860s

Left: George Henckler and his wife (name unknown) left Pella for the Amana Colonies in 1864. No image of his friend Gottfried Höning has been located. Below: An 1856 panoramic view of Pella (lithograph by G. J. Thieme). The large building is Central University.



Nollen fecit.

DE STAD P

Colony Lines

by Philip E. Webber

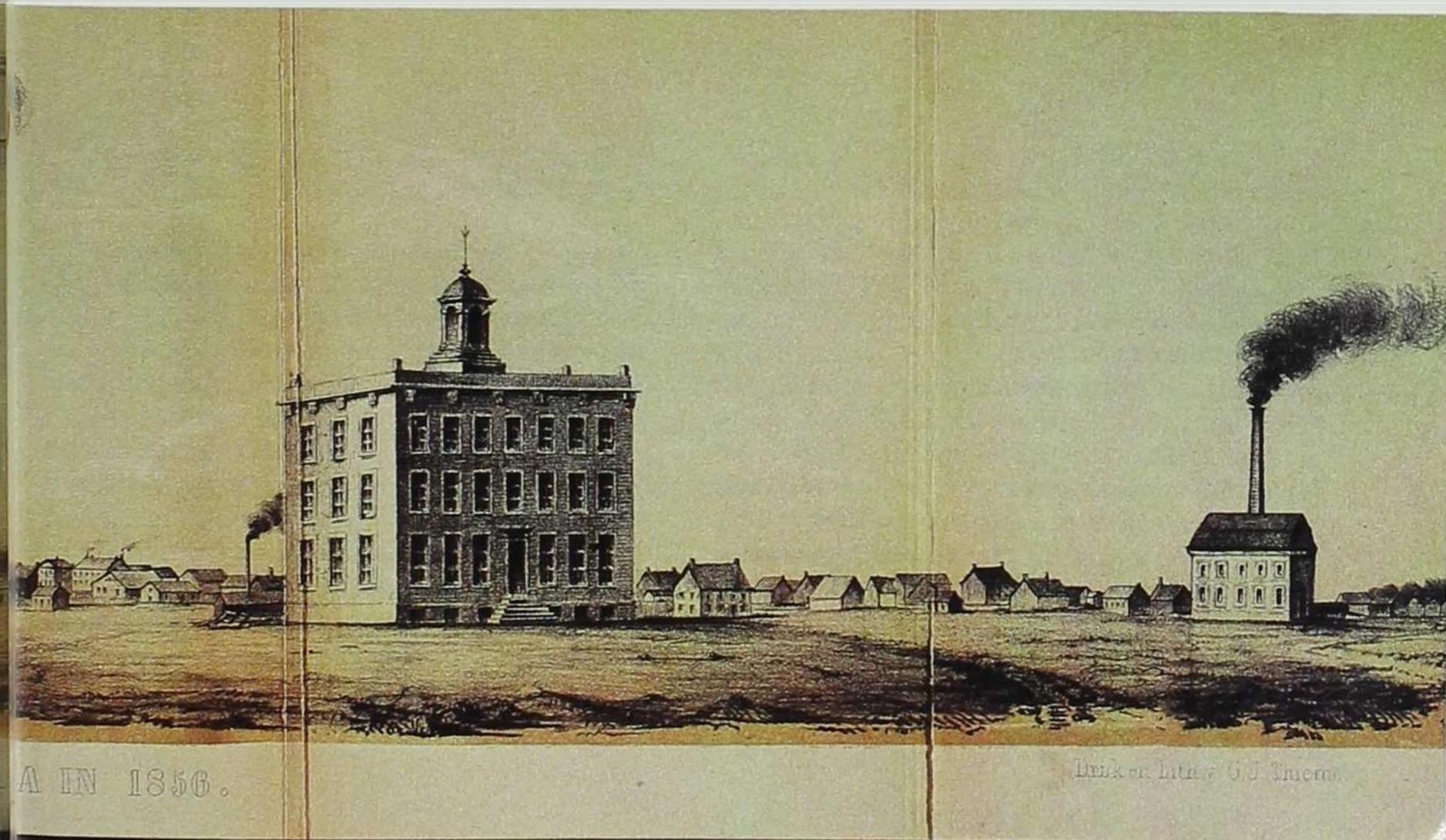
ALTHOUGH AMANA of the nineteenth century was a communal religious society settled by a Pietist sect, the eastern Iowa community nevertheless attracted German-Americans of diverse backgrounds. One intriguing episode in the mid-1860s involved two families drawn to the colonies from the Dutch-American community of Pella in central Iowa. The surviving evidence concerning these individuals, and their decision in 1864 to relocate, adds to our understanding of cross-cultural experiences in Iowa a century ago — and today.

On the surface, the episode appears deceptively easy to explain. Gottfried Heinrich Höning and George Henckler were natives of Germany who had been living for several years in Pella. It would hardly seem unusual to the casual observer that Höning and Henckler would wish to seek closer ties with other individuals sharing their German background, such as they would find in the Amana Colonies.

However, as is so often the case when the explanation of historical events appears simple and straightforward, there is far more than first meets the eye.

Our fullest data on Gottfried Heinrich Höning (or, Hoening) comes from the obituary notice published on his death in 1877 in the Amana Colonies. Born February 18, 1812, in Elberfeld, Germany, Höning came to the United States in 1847 with his wife, Henrietta Johanna (elsewhere, Johanna Henrietta) and several of their children. Traveling up the Mississippi River from the Gulf of Mexico, the Höning family found a new home at Gravais Settlement near St. Louis. At least one child, Heinrich, was born in the settlement. In 1855, the family came by stagecoach to Pella. Höning was a furniture maker, and appears to have practiced that trade throughout his working life, both in Pella and in Amana.

A noticeably younger man of elusive biographical detail, George (or, Georg) Henckler



A IN 1856.

Look on Little G. J. Thorne

was born in Weisparde, Germany (date unknown), and moved to Pella in 1853. We know that he was married, but have only sketchy data on the number and ages of his children. He appears to have enjoyed entrepreneurial talents, and along with two other German-Americans situated in Pella, E. F. Grafe and F. W. Waechter, constructed and operated the Washington Roller Mills. Among the finest of its kind at the time, Washington Roller Mills was frequently operated around the clock, preparing flour for delivery to destinations as far away as St. Louis. Henckler was also active in the stove and tinware business. Of his death we know little more than the fact that he died a few years after leaving the Amana Colonies in 1865.

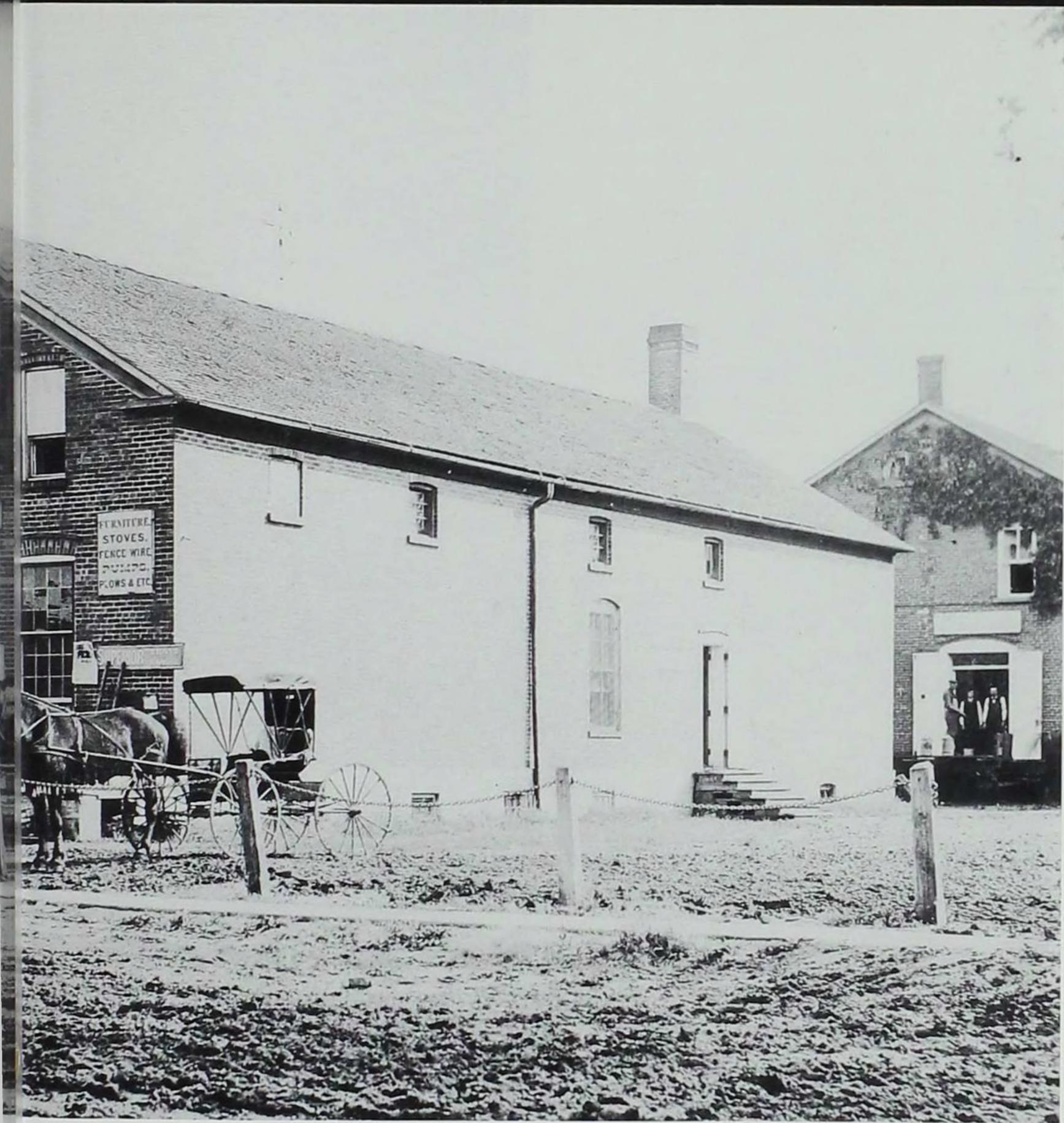
THE TOWN OF PELLA was founded in 1847 by some eight hundred Dutch immigrants led by Hendrick Peter Scholte. Though Scholte himself favored rapid acculturation to the new homeland, many of his followers, and especially subsequent waves of immigrants, preferred the life of a fairly homogeneous Dutch enclave somewhat apart from other communities of the region. Historians of Pella have made a special point of noting that the town nevertheless boasted a prosperous and well-integrated German-American citizenship almost from the start, and many of the descendants continue to enjoy prominence in the community today. Still other non-Dutch constituencies made their home there during the nineteenth century. There is no reason whatsoever to believe that being German was itself any reason to think about leaving Iowa's major Dutch-American settlement.

Like every other Iowa community, Pella suffered from the impact of the Civil War. Nevertheless, at the time of Höning's and Henckler's departure in 1864, Pella was on the verge of being connected to Iowa's growing railroad network. And even though Höning complained of a depressed real estate market, the overall picture of Pella's economy seems to have been one of venture and brisk business



activity. The churches of the town were active, with both new congregations and physical facilities appearing every few years. There was, in other words, no immediate urgency at this time that would prompt an established resident of nearly a decade to leave Pella.

Some eighty miles to the northeast, the Amana Colonies were also on the verge of noteworthy growth, though for another reason altogether. When the Community of True Inspiration (the so-called "Amana Church") decided in 1855 to make its new home in Iowa — away from worldly influences — only a part



SHSI (IOWA CITY), JOAN LIFFRING-ZUG COLLECTION

of the communal religious society moved west from Ebenezer (near Buffalo), New York. With seven villages, communal housing, and work assignments established, preparations were under way in 1864 to bring the remaining faithful to Iowa. Records kept by the Inspirationists tell us that at the end of 1863 (prior to relocation of the Ebenezer co-religionists), the population of the seven villages of the Amana Colonies totaled 1,027 souls; this jumped by the end of 1864 to 1,228, and then in 1865 leveled off at 1,240.

Although always receptive to seekers of the

A store in Homestead, the Amana colony where the Höning and Henckler families settled in 1864.

faith, the Inspirationists have never had a tradition of proselytizing or recruiting, and this would certainly have continued to be true in the face of a major influx of the fellow-faithful from the east. The original migrations from Europe had taken place less than a generation before, and the mystic Pietists of the Inspirationist sect were eager to enjoy the quiet and undisturbed practice of their faith. Just as there was no obvious and pressing reason for Höning

and Henckler to leave Pella, there was also no clear motivation for the community at Amana to induce these two men and their families to move to the colonies.

EVIDENTLY Höning had had the conviction since childhood that he would one day be called to a community whose focus on personal piety would satisfy his deep individual spiritual needs. Late in 1863, Höning (then in his early fifties) read about the Amana Colonies in a newspaper article. He initiated correspondence with the Inspirationists and received an invitation to visit their community and learn more. On December 29 of that year, despite bitter cold and deep snow, he and his younger friend George Henckler arrived after a trip of some eighty miles (probably by rail and then by sleigh or on foot) for a stay of more than one week.

During this time, Christian Metz, who served as both spiritual and secular leader in the colonies, delivered two inspired testimonies (revelations) directly to the visitors. Höning, physically weakened by travel and inner turmoil, entered a state of intense personal conflict, and eventually confessed to Metz with tears that the Amana community and the Inspirationist faith offered just what he sought. Rather less is said in the Inspirationist chronicles about Henckler, and it would appear that his reaction, though positive, may have been more measured.

Early 1864 marked a period of intense and frequent correspondence between Höning (back in Pella) and Metz, and it was not long until Metz began wondering why Höning's friend Henckler did not care to correspond. Several letters from Metz to Höning touch upon Henckler's evident reluctance to make a firm commitment to the Inspirationist faith.

Within a month after Höning's visit to Amana, he liquidated the stock of his store. By late January, he asked to be released from the obligations of his membership in Pella's First (Dutch) Reformed Church, where he reportedly served as an elder. Although regret was expressed at Höning's decision, the testimony of Höning and of the Reformed governing con-



sistory agree that the parting was relatively amicable. True, there were occasional harsh words about Höning's choosing to leave the Reformed fold, but these seem to have come from isolated individuals, and evidently subsided as Höning's resolve and good will became fully evident.

If there was anything that preoccupied Hön-



SHSI (IOWA CITY), JOAN LIFFRING-ZUG COLLECTION

ing at this time, it seems to have been his fear of financial loss resulting from the sale of his house in a recessed market. He fretted in letters to Metz that he would lose some of the estimated thousand dollars he had invested in his house and in improvements.

On January 31, Metz wrote Höning again. His letter gives a unique insight into Höning's

Residents of the Amana Colonies worked communally. Above: sorting onions.

situation. At the same time the letter affords a rare, personal recollection of an inspired revelation by one of the Amana community's spiritual leaders. The vision took the form of a "visit," as it were, to Höning's home. In the

letter, Metz recounted his vision to Höning: "I was much involved with you in spirit. Three nights before your [last] letter arrived, I was visiting you in Pella. I looked for lodging, but could find none. Indeed, though there were large houses and inns there, they did not receive me, for it was already night. Then someone came and showed me a house, not so large, standing rather alone. When I entered, it was your house, but you were not present. I came into the parlor, and your wife lay in bed and was in a conflict that had not yet been resolved. I had important things to say to her and challenged her to come immediately to a firm conclusion or decision, for which she did not yet have the strength or resolution. Then I handed her a rather large pure silver coin, at which point I was removed [conveyed] to the opposite room. There your children lay asleep in two beds. In the first bed lay two of your daughters; one, who lay toward the front, was very restless. She was dreaming of her lover and was speaking [in her sleep] about it. I sensed that she was completely caught up in this physical love. The others lay quietly, and none noticed that I was there. Everything was topsy-turvy; things were supposed to get packed, but there was no appropriate plan to it all. I would gladly have rested with you, but I could find no proper place of repose, and so I awoke and knew that I had been at your place, and was greatly concerned because I understood that this all meant something. There is still much struggle and doubt on the part of your loved ones. I would have been glad to make a firm covenant with your dear wife, but she was still caught up in much struggle and uncertainty. Your dear children lay asleep and didn't notice or sense that I was there. And because everything was so topsy-turvy and there was not yet any order, I could find no place of rest."

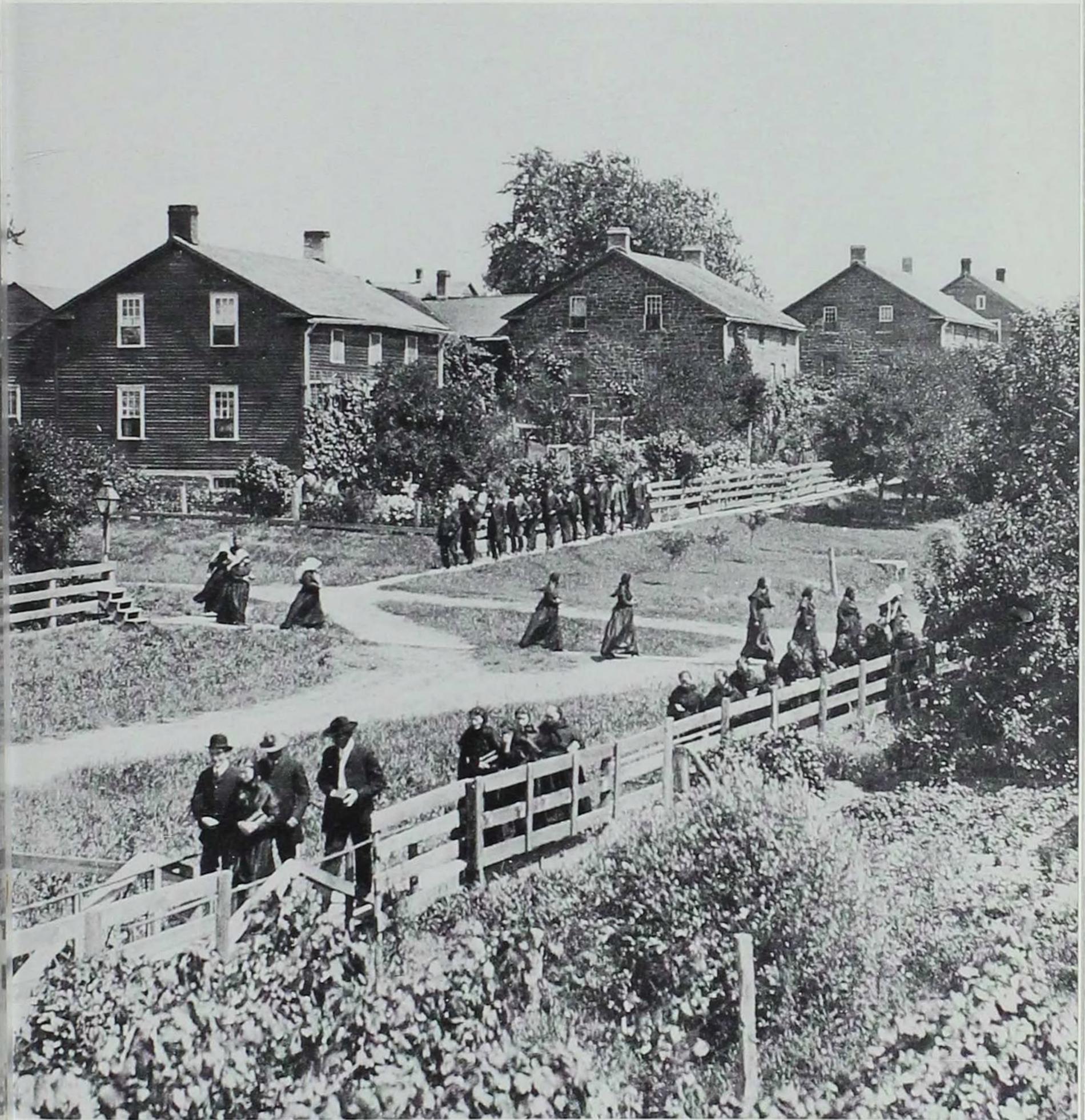
Höning seems to have interpreted the account of Metz's "visit" rather literally, yet also as a spiritual admonition. In his response to Metz he admitted that although not all the details of the vision were objectively accurate, things stood pretty much as Metz had reported them. During February, however, Höning's wife agreed to the move, and preparations began in earnest.

AT THE SAME TIME, Henckler, whose exact religious background remains unclear, wrote Metz of his doubts about the Inspirationists' failure to practice water baptism. Metz responded in one of the most complete (and never-before-published) statements available on the Inspirationist stand on this matter. Though representative of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century German Pietism, the statement is a rare find in Inspirationist documents.

Among many points, Metz observed: "In 1714 and the years following, there was a great awakening and out-pouring of the Holy Spirit, and not only among the Inspirationists — a multitude of God's witnesses received the prophetic gift of the Holy Spirit and heralded the departure from Babel and false Christianity. . . . They established many prayer communities and a separation from the dead works and ordinances of the churches, such as baptism, the pulpit, the [communion] cup and the altar — idols that were an abomination to the Holy Spirit. Thus it was that many souls were moved to come to repentance, and prayer associations were formed. . . . The Spirit made it evident among them that they should no longer receive or touch the sacrament of baptism, which had been desecrated to being the sign of the Beast, nor the token of communion, which belonged to a false worship; He [the Lord] himself would baptize them with another baptism of faith, and true penance [leading] to sanctification and reconciliation with God."

About a week later, Metz clarified that this should not be taken as inflexible dogma. This time writing to Höning, Metz stated that while physical baptism benefits the individual no more than circumcision of the physical foreskin, he clearly understood that it might wound the conscience of some to forgo water baptism. Those who feel compunction to do so might submit to water baptism, Metz explained, though he and his co-religionists felt called to an inner and more lasting form of the sacrament.

Höning, for his part, moved ahead with resolve, sold his house for a thousand dollars (at a loss of about four hundred dollars), and on



An Amana wedding procession, led by bride and groom Christine Gernand and William Foerstner. Photographed in 1907, the image portrays aspects of the religious communal society Höning and Henckler entered in 1864.

March 23, 1864, arrived in the Amana Colonies with his wife, five daughters, and one son. Metz had other concerns: he was burdened by the need to arrange payment for the release of

young Inspirationists from military duty in the Civil War, and by the impending relocation of the Ebenezer faithful. Nevertheless he noted in the Inspirationist chronicles that he found it



“an anxious matter [to contemplate] how this [Höning] family would acclimate and melt in,” yet felt “that God was involved in the matter, and . . . would continue to lend His help.”

TWO MONTHS LATER, in May, Henckler again visited the colonies, this time with his aged father and evidently in the company of his wife and several German-American women from Pella. By late June, Henckler had decided to submit to the promptings of the Spirit and to the authority of the Inspirationist leadership at Amana. He began casting plans for a move in September from Pella to the colonies. Henckler proved to be straightforward and compliant with Inspirationist expectations regarding disclosure of his financial standing. He was also generous in offering, of his own free will, to support the relocation efforts of the Inspirationists in Ebenezer, New York. Every indication was that Henckler wished to participate in the communalism of the Amana Colonies. In a kind but open manner, Henckler also begged understanding for his wife. By nature of a physically weaker constitution, she evidently was exhibiting anxiety about the rigors of relocation, while nevertheless declaring herself ready to follow her husband to Amana.

In the next two months, a number of letters passed between Henckler and Metz. Metz issued a clear warning that life in the seven communal colonies would be crowded, with less privacy and personal living space. Yet he pledged all necessary help for Henckler, and sensitive understanding for Henckler's depressed wife. Henckler sent money on ahead to the colonies, in part as an act of voluntary charity; Metz was careful to note receipt of the funds, and to explain how they were to be handled. In late August, Metz wrote to George

In the Amana Colonies, food was prepared and eaten in community kitchens. Those with small children or who were ill or elderly received baskets of food. In Middle Amana, Dr. Christian Herrmann photographed his mother carrying a food basket on a winter day in 1915.

Henckler's father, F. G. Henckler, explaining governance of the colonies, the trustee system, financial matters, and possibilities for residence in an apartment of the house assigned by the community to the Hönings. Finally, on August 19 the seven members of the Henckler family arrived in the Amana colony of Homestead. A short time after August 19, Henckler's father and a nine-year-old grandson arrived.

While it might have been unusual for a Pella resident to move to Amana, the Höning and Henckler families were not alone in coming from the outside. Of some 220 persons who came to the Amana Colonies in 1864, between 30 and 40 were *von ausserhalb*, "from outside," that is, from outside Inspirationist circles. These "outsiders" ranged from transients, to immigrants with family or friends in the Amana Colonies, to members of religious sects who were seeking a new affiliation.

ONLY A LITTLE more than a year later, in early October 1865, Henckler and his family (including his father) left the Amana Colonies. Of the several accounts of Henckler's departure, no mention is made of disagreement on points

of doctrine (such as baptism), of Henckler's wife's health, or of any desire for greater material opportunity outside the colonies. The consistent account, admittedly from the perspective of the Amana Inspirationists, is that Henckler was a *Vielwisser*, "a know-it-all," and a *Buchstäbler*, "one fixated on the letter [rather than the spirit of issues]." As one account put it, "he would have liked to have been, and to have meant, something." Needless to say, such attitudes set Henckler on a collision course with Amana's sense of communal interdependency and egalitarianism.

At about the same time that Henckler departed, Höning became an elder in the Inspirationist church, something not at all usual for a newcomer to the colonies and to the Inspirationist faith. All in all, Höning appears to have been a beloved and supportive member of the Amana community.

Some of Höning's children married into Inspirationist families, others chose to go back to Pella, and some stayed in the colonies for a period of time but later left. Descendants may be found in Pella, in the Amana Colonies, and in surrounding communities.

The conclusion to be drawn is not without implications today. Feeling at home in a community with a strong ethnic focus is not merely a matter of national origin or of native language. Both Höning and Henckler appear to

Huge loaves of bread were baked in Amana Colony bakeries.



SHSI (IOWA CITY), JOAN LIFFRING-ZUG COLLECTION



The interior of the Amana church has changed little since Höning and Henckler moved to the Amana Colonies.

have been well-accepted and productive citizens of Pella, without any stigma associated with their status as German-Americans. In addition, Höning was an active member of a Dutch Reformed congregation. Both, however, seem to have wanted something more, and the Amana Colonies appeared to offer what was desired.

Within the next year or so, however, one man had been vested with a position of leadership, and one had left. The difference, of course, lay not in outward indicators of ethnicity, but rather in matters of attitude. One readily accepted the values of the new community, and was in turn embraced by its residents. The other evidently chose to stand apart from the norms of communal society, and thereby separated himself from the reciprocal support that is the true key to any individual's well-being in a social setting. □

NOTE ON SOURCES

Completion of this work was made possible through the cooperation of my collaborators: Arthur Selzer and Peter Hoehnle (of Homestead), Ruby Hoekstra and Evelyn Joosten (of Pella), Melissa Morris (formerly at Central College in Pella), and Madeline Vanderzyl (Archivist, Central College, Pella).

The information presented here is based heavily on the manuscript and printed chronicles of the Community of True Inspiration. Copies of all sources may be found at the Museum of Amana History, Amana. An expanded version of this paper with complete footnotes and a transcript of all pertinent German texts is on file in the *Palimpsest* production files at the State Historical Society of Iowa (Iowa City). Much of the material in these files has been noted for the first time, and scholars choosing to work with these resources are asked to give due credit to this work in any resultant papers and publications.