The Palimpsest

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The Amanas

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L. Edward Purcell, Editor

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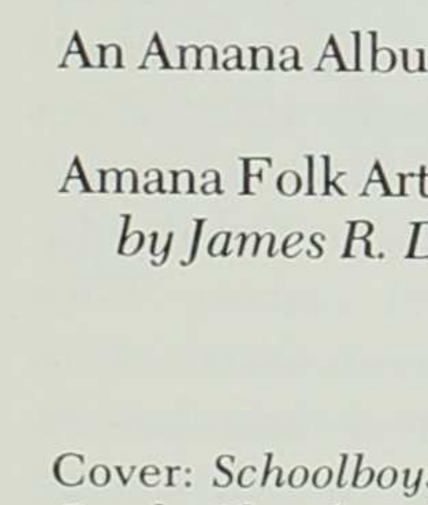


The Meaning of the Palimpsest

In early times a palimpsest was a parchment or other material from which one or more writings had been erased to give room for later records. But the erasures were not always complete, and so it became the fascinating task of scholars not only to translate the later records but also to reconstruct the original writings by deciphering the dim fragments of letters partly erased and partly covered by subsequent texts.

The history of Iowa may be likened to a palimpsest which holds the record of successive generations. To decipher these records of the past, reconstruct them, and tell the stories which they contain is the task of those who write history.

The Amana Society:
A History of Change

by
Barnett Richling

The Amana Colonies in Iowa seem to represent stability in a world of change to the many outsiders who visit there each year. Yet the Amanas today are a far cry from the colony originally envisioned by the parent religious community of post-Reformation Germany. The relative stability of modern Amana perhaps conceals the gradual but marked change of the colonies over the last century from a spiritually-oriented religious sect to a more business-oriented secular society.

The history of the Amana people began in early eighteenth-century Germany, a region — like other parts of Europe — fragmented in body as well as in spirit. Germany was then a collection of autonomous provinces ruled by powerful and often corrupt state-churches or noble houses. Most of the political and religious reforms expected in the age of Martin Luther had never been fully realized, and deep schisms rent the European Christian world.

In 1714, a small congregation called the Community of True Inspiration gathered at Himbach to resurrect the spirit and virtue of a Christianity they thought to be mired in the tumultuous wars and religious chaos of the post-Reformation period. Dedicated to the principles of an earlier time in Christian history and convinced their beliefs would salvage purer lives for themselves and their descendants, these sectarian Lutheran dissenters interpreted the Bible in a severely literal fashion. This literalness led the Inspirationists to believe their own spiritual experiences, visions, and prophetical thoughts were divine inspirations, gifts bestowed upon them by God. They called inspired members of their own congregation *Werkzeuge* — "instruments of the Lord."

The prophecy of these human "instruments" was divine authority for the Inspirationists. They followed the inspired advice of the *Werkzeuge* unquestioningly and made their commandments into law. Prophetic declaration was known as testimony, and the Community found scriptural proof of its divinity in Joel 2:28: "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and

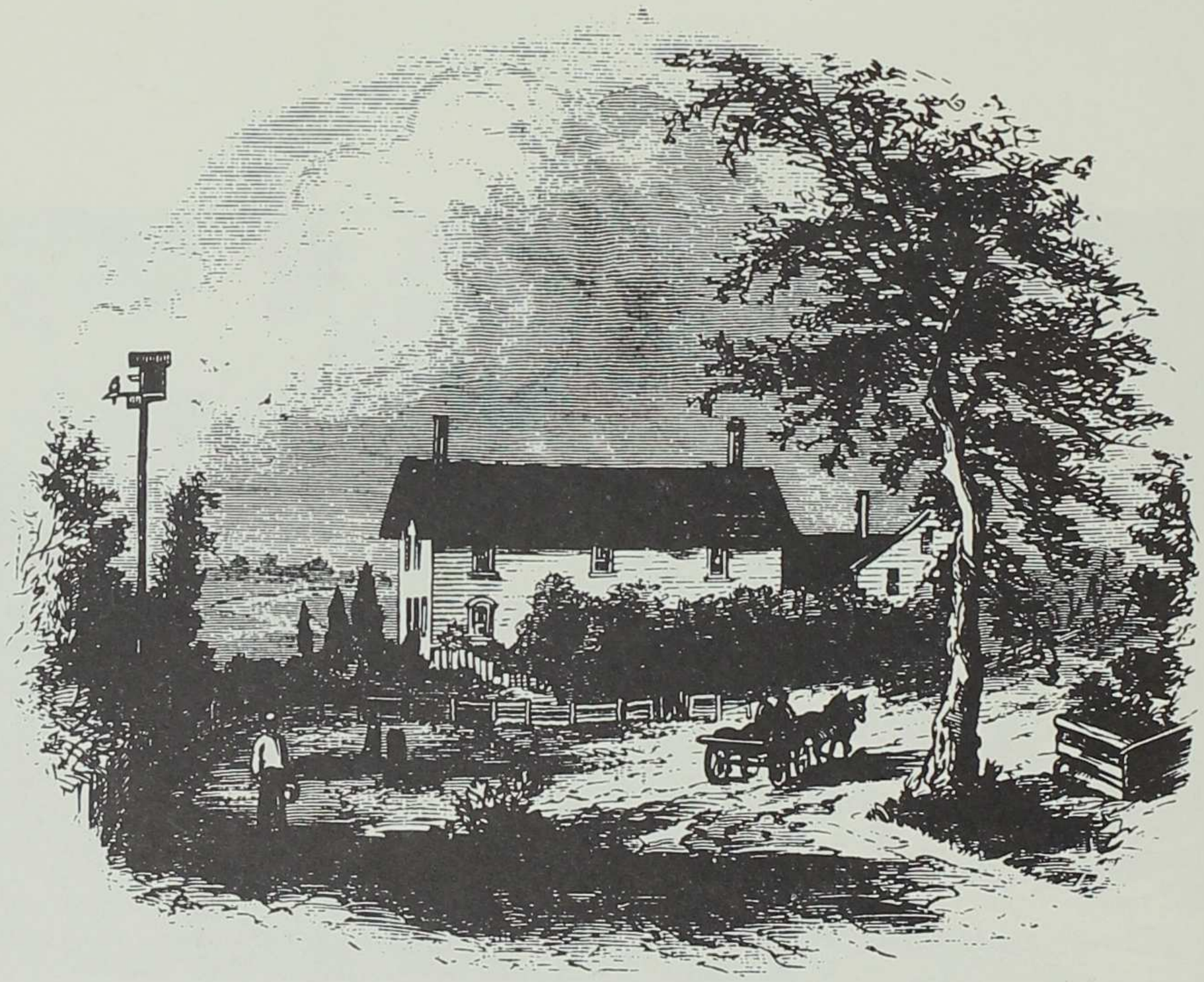
A general view of Amana (from Charles Nordhoff, The Communistic Societies of the United States, *1875).*

your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions."

Such scriptural passages, taken in their literal sense as law, played profound roles in the history of the community. Their interpretation of the Bible and subsequent beliefs forced the Inspirationists into conflict with the governments of the provinces where they sought refuge. Friction arose between the sect and the governments, for example, when the religious group's members refused to serve in the military, to join labor guilds, or to swear oaths of allegiance of any type. They based their refusal on Matthew 5:34: "But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne."

Perhaps the most influential passage from the Bible for the Inspirationists came from the Book of Acts, 2:44, 45: "And all that believed were together, and had all things in common; and sold their possessions and goods and parted them to all men, as every man had need." This passage is not only one key to the community's unified faith in pure Christianity, but it also lead to the sect's common ownership of property when they emigrated to the United States.

The Inspirationists' desire to organize themselves into a community of believers who could revive a simpler, more deeply spiritual religion, based on scrip-



An Amana home (Nordhoff).

ture and prophecy, was frustrated by the persecutions of local churches and government. By 1842, members had begun to look toward America as a haven from this constant conflict. The following year, the first Inspirationists emigrated from Germany and headed for a new home near Buffalo, New York. There, on land formerly part of the Seneca Indian reservation, they hoped to realize their goal. They established the Ebenezer Society, a communally-organized settlement where they could be economically self-sufficient and spiritually free. By the middle of the 1850s their numbers had increased to such an extent they required new land for their community. Land shortages, as well as the disruptive influence of nearby Buffalo, encouraged the Inspirationists once again to move westward. They left New York in 1855.

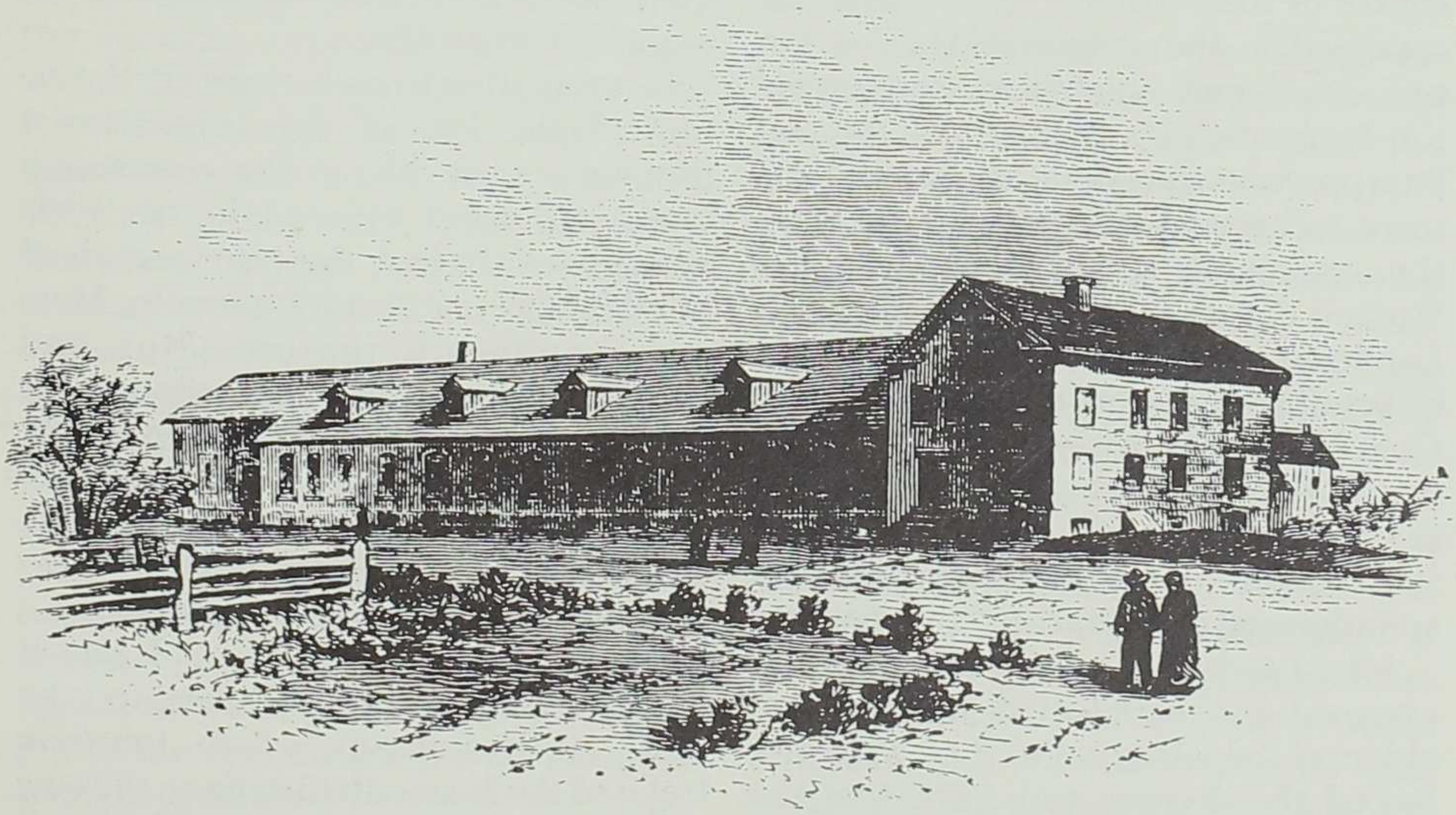
The community moved almost intact to the lovely and fertile Iowa River Valley in Iowa County. The area's beautiful tree-lined ridges and good bottom land seemed perfect for the Inspirationists. The group settled in six villages — East, High, Main, Middle, South, and West Amana — and purchased the town site of Homestead in order to have access to a railhead. In Iowa the Inspirationists set about developing a communal society, based on the religious principles of their founders.

The Amana Society was governed by a Board of Trustees, made up of 13 elders elected from all the villages. The trustees not only conducted the re-

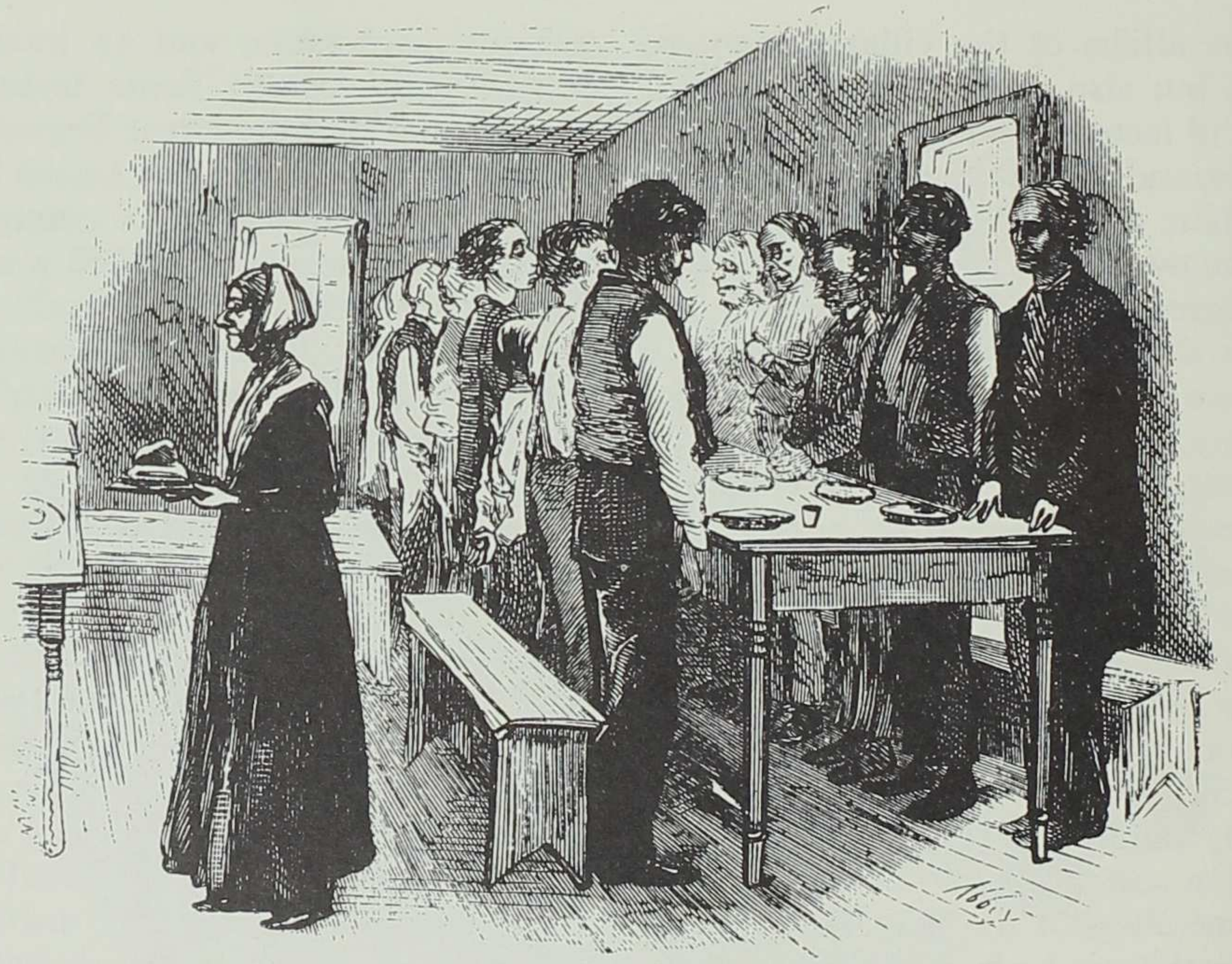
ligious affairs of the village congregations, but also supervised the management of factories, farms, and small businesses, and saw to the material needs of members and employees. With its collective ownership of property, the Society cared for both the spiritual and material welfare of its members. Perhaps the two most important members of the Society at that time were two prophets who came with the group when it moved to Iowa. Together, Christian Metz and Barbara Heinemann Landmann provided the Amanas with religious authority and leadership.

For almost 80 years the Amana Society remained a religious "commune." But in the Spring of 1932 its communalism came to an end, when internal dissension and external pressures brought the members of the Society to vote to divide the secular from the sacred affairs of their community. They formed a separate corporation and an independent church society. Some historians have argued that the Great Depression of the 1930s destroyed the Amana Society as an integrated religious enterprise, but the reorganization of 1932 was not an impulsive response to the world-wide economic crisis. Though the Depression had a drastic effect on the Society's internal economy, the community's inability to harmonize economic with spiritual needs had begun to weaken the fabric of the Society at least 50 years before the crash came in 1929.

The decline of the Society's spiritual emphasis began in the latter half of the nineteenth century. In 1883, during a period of great material prosperity, the community lost its last *Werkzeug* when Barbara Landmann died. Her death was a major break with the spirituality of former times. Belief in the divinity of the prophetic gifts was central to the



The Society church (Nordhoff).



A communal meal (Nordhoff).

Inspirationists' faith, and during the course of their history, 15 prophets had appeared in the congregation. The last two, Metz and Landmann, had served the Inspirationists both in Europe and later in America. Metz, considered the more influential of the two in guiding the community's development in the United States, had died in 1867. Landmann was for 16 years the only direct link between the members and God. When the link was broken at her death, the members only could turn to the voluminous written records of past testimonies to provide them with inspiration and direction.

After Landmann's death authority was assumed by the elected trustees and elders of the villages. But their authority lacked the divinity and spirit that the *Werkzeuge* had commanded. As a result, their administration was often inadequate and quickened the demise of communal life in Amana.

It is tempting to underestimate the effect of the loss of the Inspirationist prophets, since life in the community was not flawless even while the *Werkzeuge* lived. In fact, there are records of hundreds of testimonies given by Metz and Landmann reprimanding and chastising individuals and groups for weaknesses, sins, and unethical conduct. But the prophets had been the embodiments of God within the community, and in their divinely-inspired roles were the only ones capable of maintaining a balance between worldly and sacred things. Without their leadership, the spiritual boundaries which formerly isolated the Inspirationists from the outside were no longer effective. The break

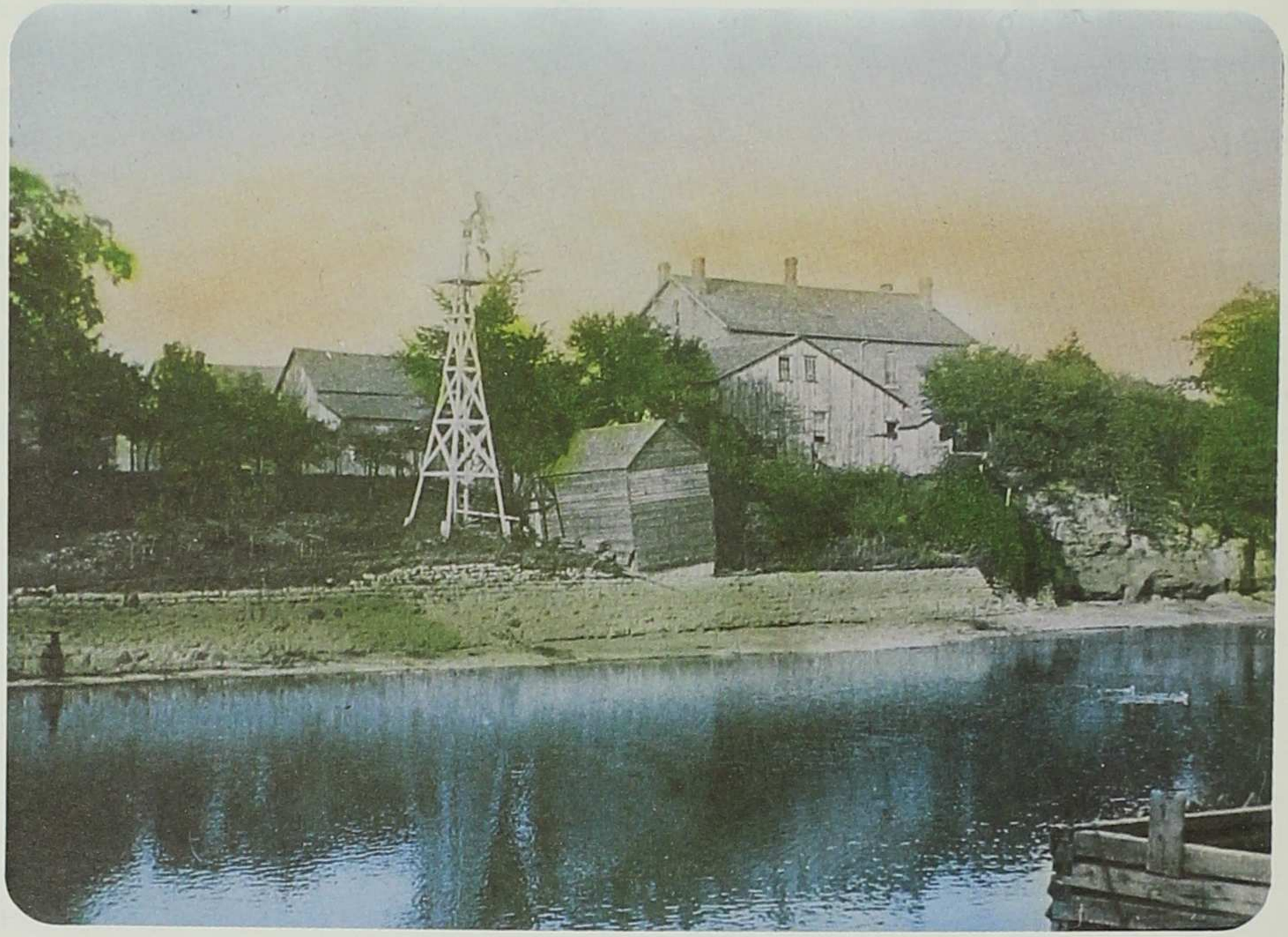
with the prophetic tradition that had been the basis for the community's existence, signified by the death of the *Werkzeuge*, allowed the elders and trustees, although chosen from among the community's most pious men, to introduce a greater degree of secular interest than had the prophets before them. And because their authority was less legitimate in the eyes of the community, the secularizing effect of material values and material goods, as well as the political strain caused by wars and internal dissensions, left the old Amana life style exposed and vulnerable.

Unfortunately for the spiritual life of the Society, the loss of divinely-inspired leadership came at a time of rapid increase in the community's wealth and membership. Numbers grew both by means of natural increase and by the admission of selected converts from the outside, especially from Europe. When the first Inspirationist community, the Ebenezer Society, was established in upstate New York, it numbered 800, all immigrants from Germany. Growth continued after the move to Iowa and peaked at 1,813 in 1880-81.

The capital worth of the Society increased also. After the move to Iowa, the Amana people built and operated two woolen mills (one at Main and the other at Middle Amana), a calico print shop, granaries, a furniture shop, saw mills, bakeries, and several small service, artisan, and craft shops. In addition, 20,000 acres of community land were producing agricultural goods. Farm enterprises included livestock and dairying, crop cultivation, and vegetable gardening. Moreover, a part of the Society's land remained uncleared, providing a valuable source of timber.

The religious beliefs of the Society may have attracted some new members during this rapid growth, but evidence indicates that "converts" were motivated primarily by the more immediate concerns of family ties and increasing community wealth. A significant number of those seeking membership had relatives already living in the Amanas. Other than the desire to be with family, the major incentives to join seemed to have been an assured source of employment, a guaranteed allotment of food, clothing, shelter, and the other welfare benefits provided by the Society. Letters from Amanaites to their relatives in Europe (primarily in Saxony) described all the spiritual and material comforts of the colonies. The community became for many in the late 1880s a sought-after destination in the "promised land" of America.

The rapid growth of the Amana enterprises required increasing numbers of laborers. By 1900, the Society employed 200 "outsiders" to work at jobs not filled by members. These "outsiders" received many of the benefits of membership such as free meals and housing in addition to regular monthly wages. In these years it might have been economically more prudent for the Society to have increased membership even further. At the turn of the century the cost of Amana's "outsider" labor force was $60,000 annually. The circumstances of this situation presented a great problem for the Society; a conflict arose between religious and worldly interests that eventually led to changes in community life.



A view of Ebenezer, the home of the Inspirationists in New York State (Shambaugh Collection).

As early as 1843, while the first of the Inspirationists were in transit to Ebenezer, Christian Metz expressed suspicion about the motivations of several members. He feared that their desire to come to America rested more on the hope of material gain than on spiritual fulfillment. The economic organization of Inspirationist society was, to Metz, an important means to the ultimate end of piety, and not an end in itself. In light of Metz's doubts, the significance of the newcomers' motivations for seeking membership in the late nineteenth century is apparent. The growth of Amana's economy and its perpetual need for labor was undermining the principal foundation of the community: its dedication to spiritual ideals. Moreover, whether or not labor requirements were met by "outsiders" or by new members, the influence of worldly concerns had made its way into the community.

A number of writers, looking back at the Amanas' reorganization, have concluded that laziness and the abuse of privilege were primary reasons for the Society's decline. Although it is difficult

to document the first of these conclusions, a "getting-something-for-nothing" attitude seemed to arise in the late 1800s and continued through the years prior to 1932. Members questioned why they should labor at all if their needs were cared for by the Society. Further, if all workers were compensated equally for their labors, why not work for oneself and earn double benefits? Abuse of privilege came to be related to a general complacency about the Society's concern for the welfare of its members. Such an attitude had a strongly negative effect on the Amanas in the years before 1932.

Although the Amanas conducted their economic dealings with the outside world in a normal manner, the internal economy of the community was unique. Before 1932, members had no need for money at all. Workers received no wages; instead, each member was entitled to an annual allotment of credit at local stores and businesses. Although no member was supposed to earn income from outside sources, any additional income a member acquired was to be turned over to the Society's common treasury.

Despite these rules, members began to accumulate personal wealth before the end of the last century and the practice became widespread in the early years of the twentieth. Individuals made their money primarily through the private sale of vegetables, grapes, wine, rabbits, pigeons, and antiques. As early as 1859 Christian Metz directed two sharp testimonies against those in the community who had gathered grapes for wine-making and sale on the outside. Although the Amana Society permitted its members to drink wine, its sale was prohibited both by the community and by Iowa laws enacted in 1885.

As use of the automobile increased in eastern Iowa in the 1900s, travelers who passed through the Amanas became willing purchasers of local products. And, as money became more common in the villages, so too did the manufactured goods which that money could buy. The trustees, unable to stop the sale of goods by members, tried to counter the influx of trade by prohibiting the importation and use of new items from the outside. The records of the elders' prohibitions in the late 1800s provide a chronicle of outside influences on the community: card playing in 1875; newspapers in 1885; bicycles and men's trousers with zippers in 1899. As these influences appeared, the elders banned them from use because of their worldly flavor.

It is likely, however, that the elders banned zippered trousers because they felt buttons to be more practical than other fasteners. In the days of the prophets, Metz and Landmann had placed great emphasis on the utilitarian or practical value of the things people did and items they used. For this reason traditional Amana homes were unpainted and for years lacked lawns or decorative flowers and trees. Instead, many homes had trellises for growing grapes, and those trees which were present were

generally of a fruit-bearing variety. The interior of an Inspirationist's dwelling had little in the way of decoration except an occasional wall calendar. Photographs were prohibited for similar reasons, and any artistic expression usually had functional value. The lithographs of Joseph Prestele, a highly skilled artist, were used by seed catalogue companies and other businesses.

Another major threat to the stability of the community after it migrated to America was war and the accompanying problem of military conscription. Pacifism, based on a profound religious conviction, had always been an Inspirationist tradition. Just as their devout belief in Matthew (5:34) had brought them into conflict with governments in Europe, so too did their beliefs cause great friction with the Federal Government at two different times in America — during the Civil War and during World War I. The very persecution the Inspirationists had fled Europe to avoid, became in America one of the primary causes for the loss of their old way of life.

During the 1860s, Christian Metz campaigned to keep Inspirationist men out of the Union army on religious grounds. In 1863, the U.S. Congress recognized the right of conscientious objectors to refrain from participating in actual war. The federal law, however, required payment of $300 per man in order to gain exemption from conscription on religious grounds. Amanaites joined with Amish, Hutterites, Mennonites, Quakers, and others similarly opposed to war and conscription in exercising the right granted by this compromise legislation. The eventual cost to the Amana Society to exercise this right was nearly $5,000.

Most of the Inspirationists were settled in Iowa when the Civil War began. Of the few still remaining in Ebenezer, only two were drafted into the army. Their release from service put little burden on the rest of the county to make up manpower shortages. Erie County, location of the Ebenezer community, sent well over 20,000 men into state and federal service during the war.

In Iowa, however, the situation was quite different. In 1860, the Inspirationists comprised about one-seventh of the total population of 8,029 in Iowa County. The members' refusal to comply with draft calls placed added strain on the rest of the county to meet state draft quotas. Iowa County sent about 1,000 men on conscription between 1860 and 1865. During these years 16 Amanaites were drafted, but each was excused from his obligation by the payment of money.

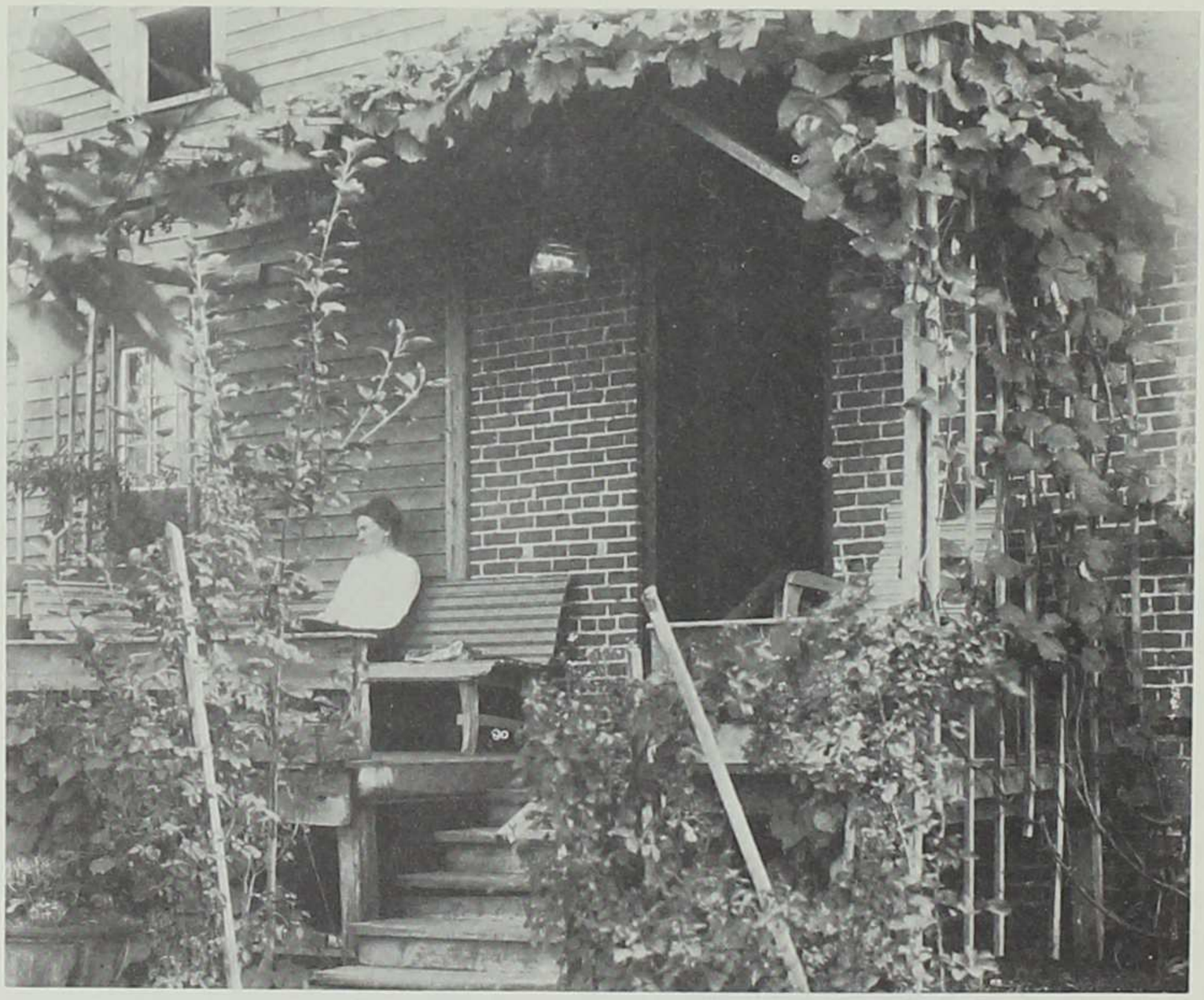
World War I presented new dangers for the community. The problems of Amana's German identity increased greatly with America's entry into war with Germany. Moreover, the compromise that had permitted payment for release from military service during the Civil War was no longer law. As a result, the Society was faced with both conscription and the ethnic enmity of many of its neighbors.

Although German-Americans were the

A schoolmaster and class in Homestead (Shambaugh Collection).

single largest ethnic group in Iowa at that time, the German-ness of the Amana people was glaring due to their unique life style. When "war fever" swept the state after America's Declaration of War in 1917, the elders warned members to exercise caution in dealing with potentially hostile people from the outside.

In June 1917, 78 Amana men were required to register for the draft at Marengo. All of these men were given the highest priority classifications, a move vigorously protested by the Society's elders and trustees. Georg Heinemann, then vice president of the Society, argued before the draft board that military service was forbidden to the Inspirationists because of their religious beliefs. The elders argued further that with many of its young men in the army, the Society would realize economic hardships because of shortages in its labor force. This labor short-



An Amana residence, profusely covered with grapevines and plants (Shambaugh Collection).

age, in turn, would prevent the Society from meeting production quotas for food and clothing established by the wartime government in Washington. The argument for the Amanaites' special case won a reversal of the original classification seven months after it was made.

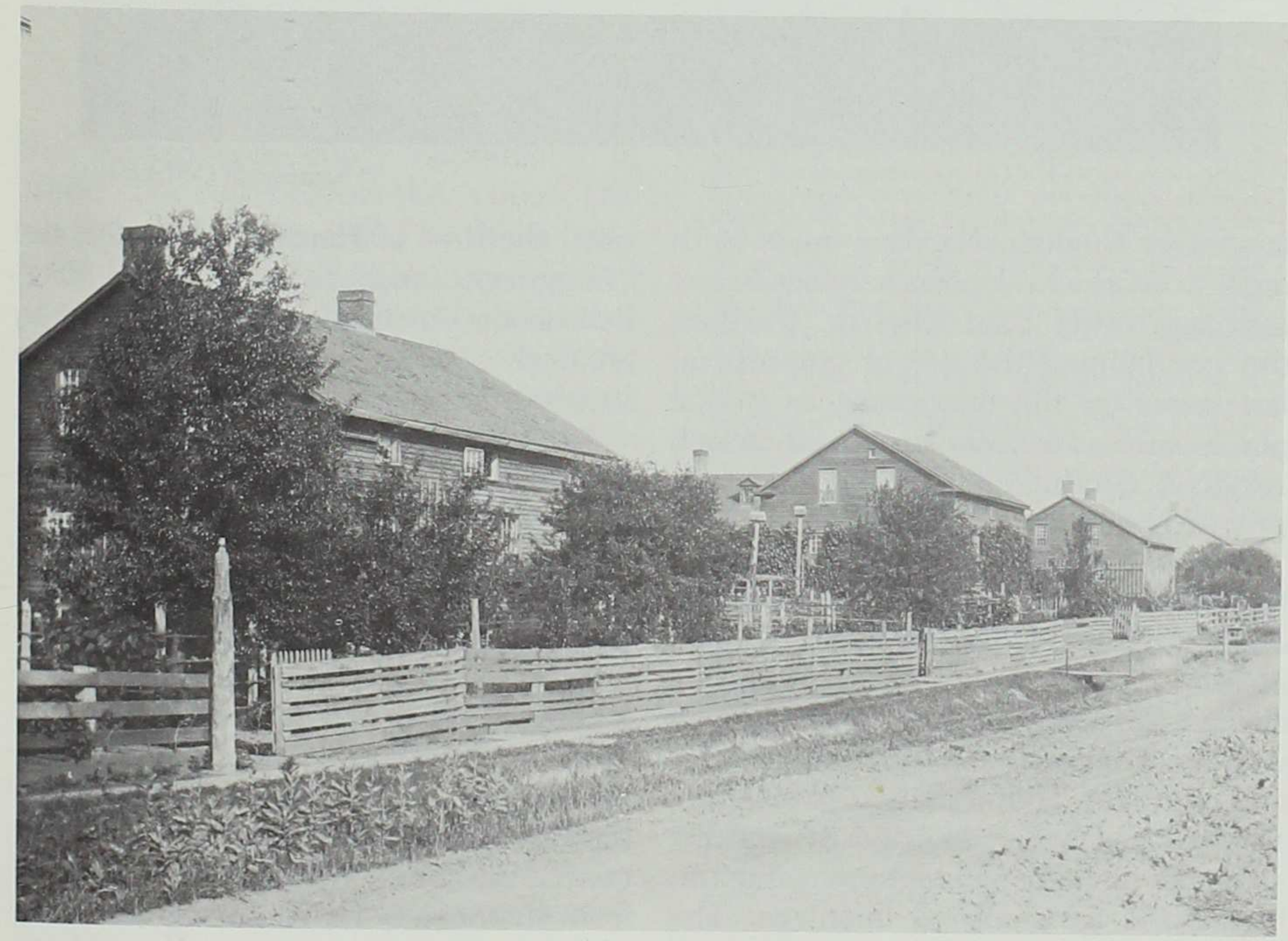
The reclassification episode did little to arrest the growing antipathy of many Iowa County residents toward the Amana Society. In February 1918, the Iowa County Draft Board received a petition, signed by many Marengo residents, protesting the overturning of the original draft orders for the Inspirationists. Local newspapers of the period contain many reports of vandalism against German-American owned businesses and the creation of local anti-German vigilance groups dedicated to establishing for the public record the sentiments of such groups as the Inspirationists.

Tension between county residents and Society members reached its height in late winter of 1918. A plot was hatched in Marengo which aimed at burning down South or West Amana, but the sheriff and a number of assistants uncovered the plan before it could be put into action. Rumor of the plot reached the Amanas, however, and caused fear among many of the members. A minister in Marengo helped to

cool the mob attitude that prevailed there. In South and West Amana, the villages closest to Marengo, concern about future attacks persisted for some time after the original episode. Only the eventual commitment of 22 Amana draftees to non-combat service broke the spell of hatred which threatened to bring dire consequences to the county.

The Amana draftees served in the army at Camp Pike, Arkansas, where they worked primarily in hospital units. Two members of this contingent died while in service, both from influenza.

Although anti-German sentiment declined in Iowa County in the last months of the war, it persisted in Iowa as a whole. Out of the continuing agitation arose the infamous "Language Proclamation" of 1918. In this law, Iowa's Governor William L. Harding declared that English was the only official language of the state. Disregarding the spirit of the U.S. Constitution, the Governor declared that "free speech" pertained only to speech in the official



(Shambaugh Collection)

(Shambaugh Collection).

language, English. Harding made it illegal to conduct religious services in any language other than English. Further, the law banned the use of non-official languages on the telephone, in public places such as schools, and in all church services conducted anywhere but in private homes.

This law was rescinded at the close of the war, but its effects on the Amanas increased with the passage of time. The elders feared government reprisals against the community because German was the language used in Amana schools and churches, and in daily conversation. English had been regarded as worldly, although it had been taught in community schools as a second language. The elders had generally discouraged its use until the time of Harding's law. But the "Language Proclamation" forced English on the Amanas and, in the process, created a deep schism between the Inspirationists and their heritage.

Another major threat to the unity of the Inspirationists' faith during these years took the form of another religion — Christian Science. Beginning around 1910, Christian Scientists won several converts in South Amana, thus becoming a point of concern for the elders and trustees. The elders' proclamations against Christian Science did not stop the spread of this and other new religions from Marengo and other nearby towns. Although no one was expelled from the Society for following Christian Science, there were several members

who resigned in order to pursue their new interests openly. The hostile position taken by the Amana elders to Christian Science earned them criticism for their religions intolerance on the editorial pages of several neighboring town newspapers.

The most drastic result of the intrusion of Christian Science on the community came in 1930, when the elders voted to abolish celebration of the *Liebesmahl*, the "love feast." This observance, a reenactment of the Lord's Supper, had been the most sacred Inspirationist rite. The elders feared that an impurity had been introduced into the congregations — an impurity capable of eroding the foundations of the faith. *Liebesmahl* was reinstated in 1956, long after reorganization had occurred.

Internal and external religious, economic, and political conflicts in the Amana community culminated in 1932. The effects of the Great Depression were intensified by those problems which had begun to develop around the time of Barbara Landmann's death in 1883. The 50 years in which the Inspirationists were without a *Werkzeug* was a period marked by the secularization of Amana's traditions. The emergence of the new corporation in 1932 seemed almost inevitable when viewed against the kinds of changes that occurred during the half century of transition prior to reorganization.

It would be improper to say that in the end, the Inspirationists openly rebelled against their old way of life. Rather, the younger members of the Society began to find greater personal satisfaction in the new life style existing in their community. These young people came to adopt new values and attitudes primarily because the old Amana no longer effectively isolated them from the outside. The passing of traditional life in Amana in the Spring of 1932 was not heralded by a wild celebration. Instead, it was marked by thoughtful respect for a way of life no longer suited to a rapidly modernizing world. The young members of the Amana Society hailed the reorganization of 1932 as a change for a better future, not a loss of the values of the past. □

Note on Sources

The best known descriptive work on the Amana Society is Bertha H. Shambaugh's *Amana That Was, Amana That Is* (Iowa City: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1932; reprinted New York City: Benjamin Blom, 1971). This work deals with the origins of Inspirationism, life in the Ebenezer and Amana communities, and contains a section describing some of the changes which occurred after the reorganization of 1932. Other accounts of Inspirationist communities and history include those by W. Perkins and B. Wicks, *History of the Amana Society or Community of True Inspiration* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1891), and Frank Lankes' *The Ebenezer Society* (West Seneca, New York: West Seneca Historical Society, 1963). Brief accounts of the Amana Society appear in William Hinds' *American Communities* (Secaucus, N.J.: Corinth Books, 1961; originally published in 1878), and Charles Nordhoff's *The Communistic Societies of the United States* (N.Y.: Dover Publications, 1966; originally published in 1875). Interesting and varied information pertaining to the Amana Society in Iowa can be obtained from newspaper files of the *Marengo Republican* and the *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, among others. Additional works consulted for this essay include James Dinwiddie's *History of Iowa County* (Chicago: S. J. Clarke, 1915), and *Iowa and War* (Iowa City: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1918). Documents available only in the Amana community archives or owned by private individuals in the villages include numerous volumes of testimonies *(Jahrbucher der Wahren Inspirations-Gemeinden oder Bezeugungen des Geistes des Herrn)*, local histories *(Inspirations-historie, oder Beschreibung des Gnadenwerks des Herrn in den Gemeinden der Wahren Inspiration)*, and others. The author has also written a more technical and detailed historical analysis of the years prior to the reorganization of Inspirationist society, "Sectarian Ideology and Change in Amana" (Unpublished M.A. Thesis: McGill University: Montreal, 1973).

An Amana Album

The photos on the following pages as well as many of those seen earlier in this issue are from a collection of pictures taken by Bertha M. Horack Shambaugh. Even today, Bertha Shambaugh remains one of the principal authorities on the Community of True Inspiration. She published her first article on the Amanas in 1896 in *Midland Monthly;* in 1908, her book *Amana — The Community of True Inspiration* appeared. Following the changes in the structure of the community, the book was republished in an updated version in 1932 as *The Amana That Was — Amana That Is.*

Living to some extent in the shadow of her husband Benjamin Shambaugh, Superintendent of the State Historical Society and head of the Political Science Department at The University of Iowa for many years, Bertha Shambaugh was not only an author, but a skilled artist and photographer as well. Throughout the 1890s and the first decades of this century Mrs. Shambaugh photographed the villages and people of Amana. She also apparently gave illustrated lectures on the Amanas. In 1975, a set of glass lantern slides was discovered among unprocessed material at the State Historical Society. Subsequently, glass negatives of the same images were found — and some additional pictures not included in the slide collection.

Most of the pictures in the Shambaugh Amana collection are not well known, although a few (notably "The Knitting Lesson") have been widely published.

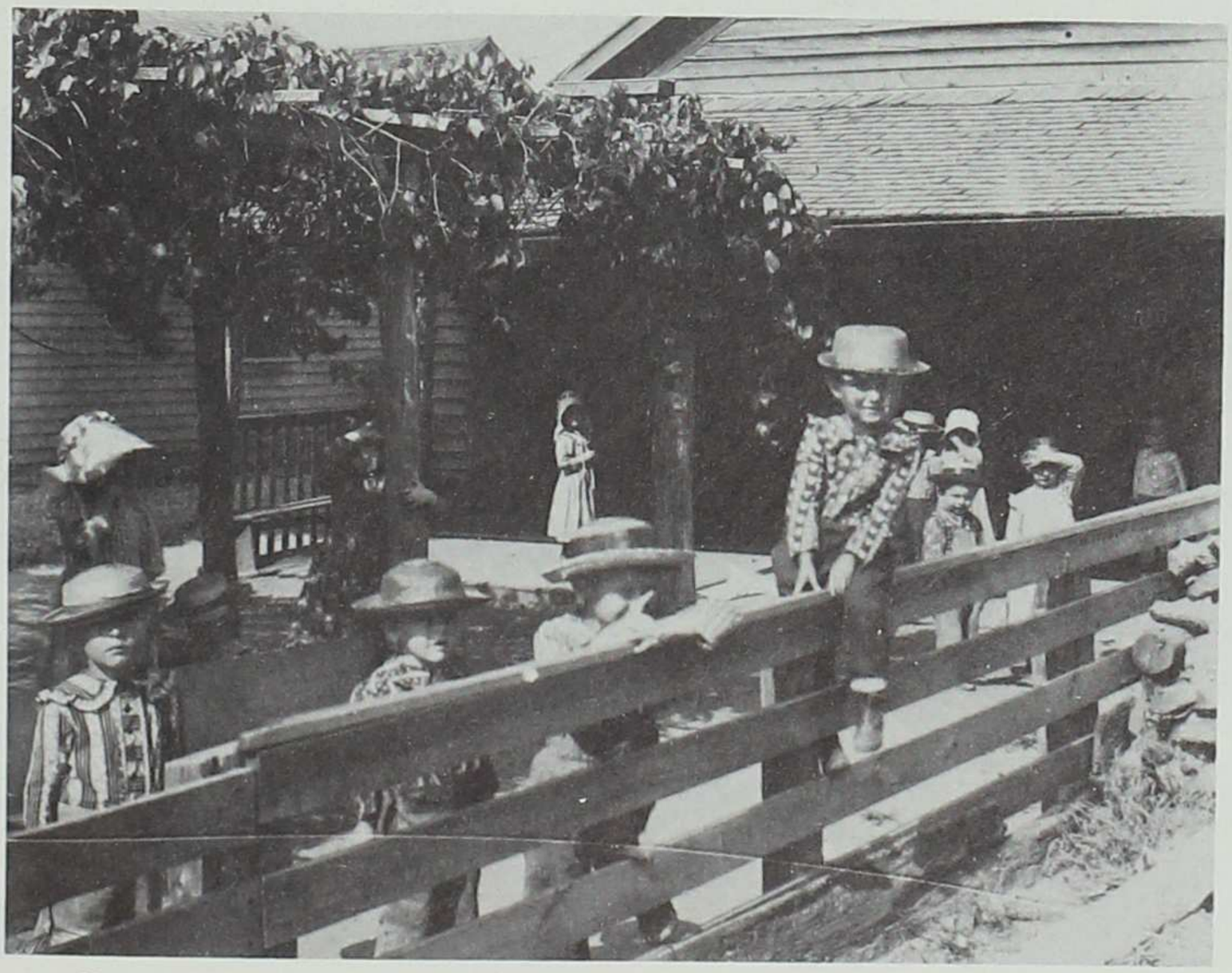
Bertha M. Horack Shambaugh, dressed in an Amana costume (Shambaugh Collection).

Most of the photos in this issue, including many hand-colored versions of black and white photos, have never before been published in *The Palimpsest.* Prints were made from Bertha Shambaugh's original glass negatives by Robert A. Ryan of Iowa City.

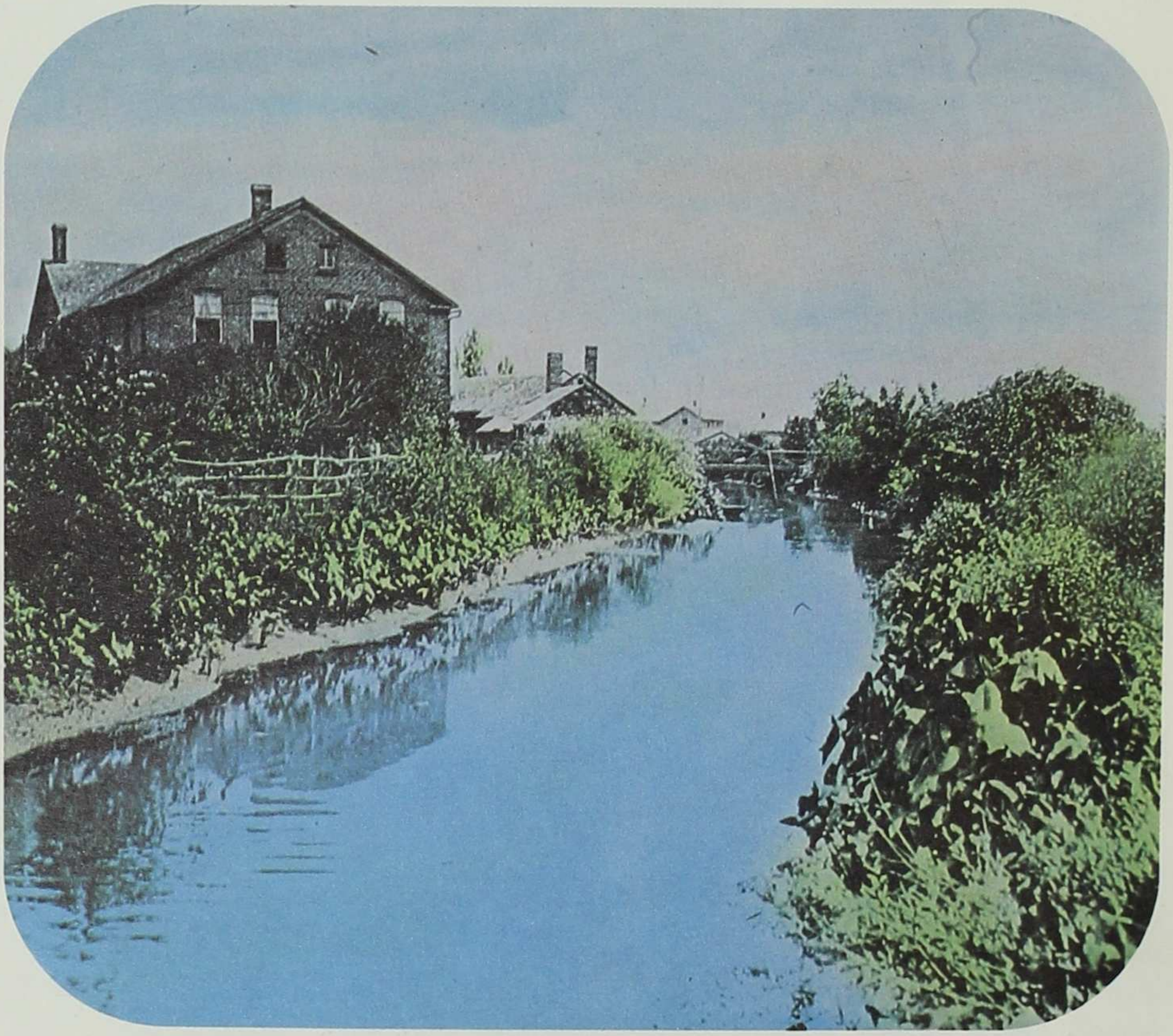
Mary Bennett

(Ms. Bennett is a work-study assistant in the Society's Photograph Collection.)

One of Bertha Shambaugh's most famous photos, "The Knitting Lesson" (Shambaugh Collection).

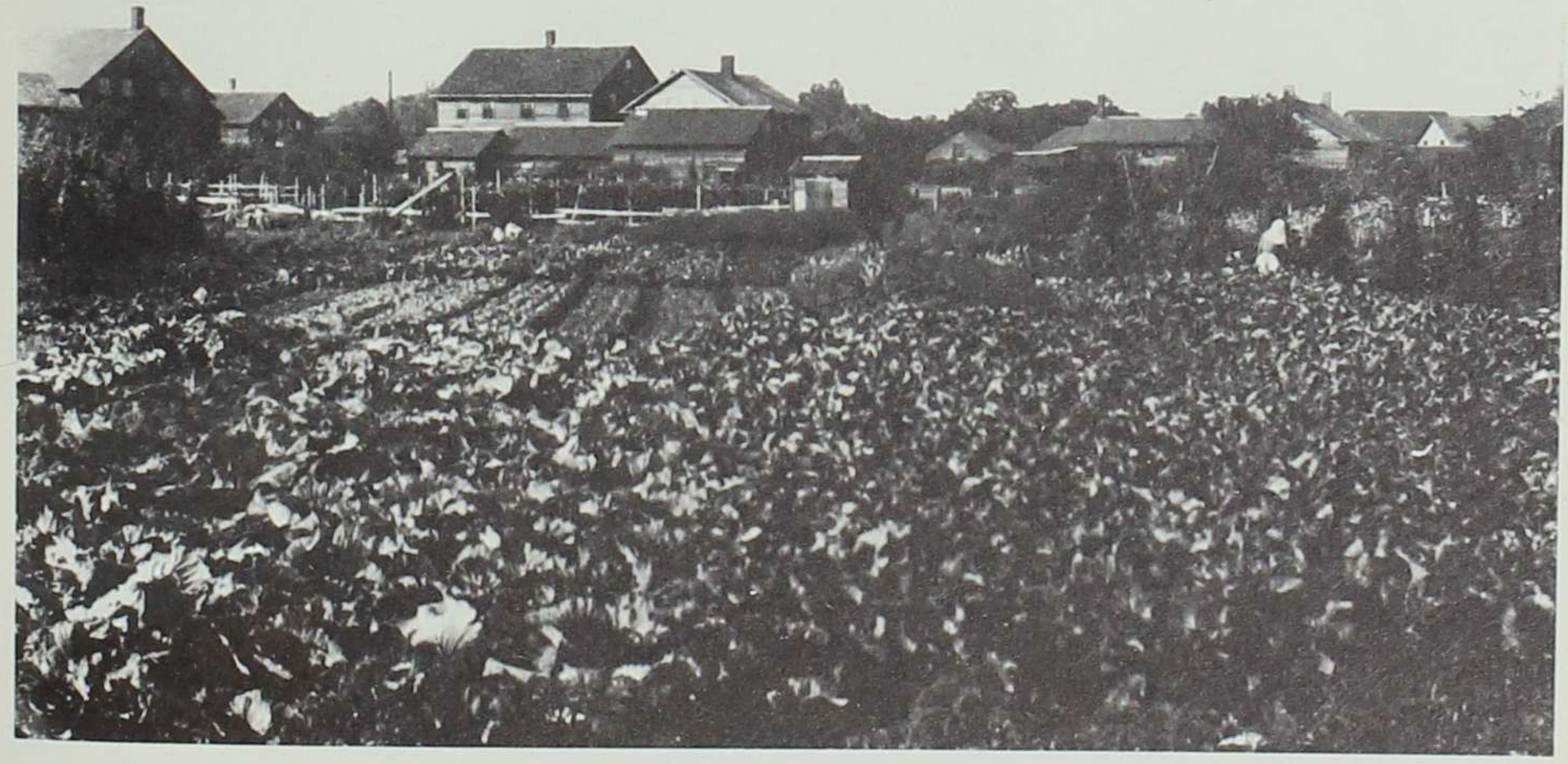


A *village* Kinderschule *(children's school) in the 1890s (Shambaugh Collection).*



The millrace in Amana (Shambaugh Collection).

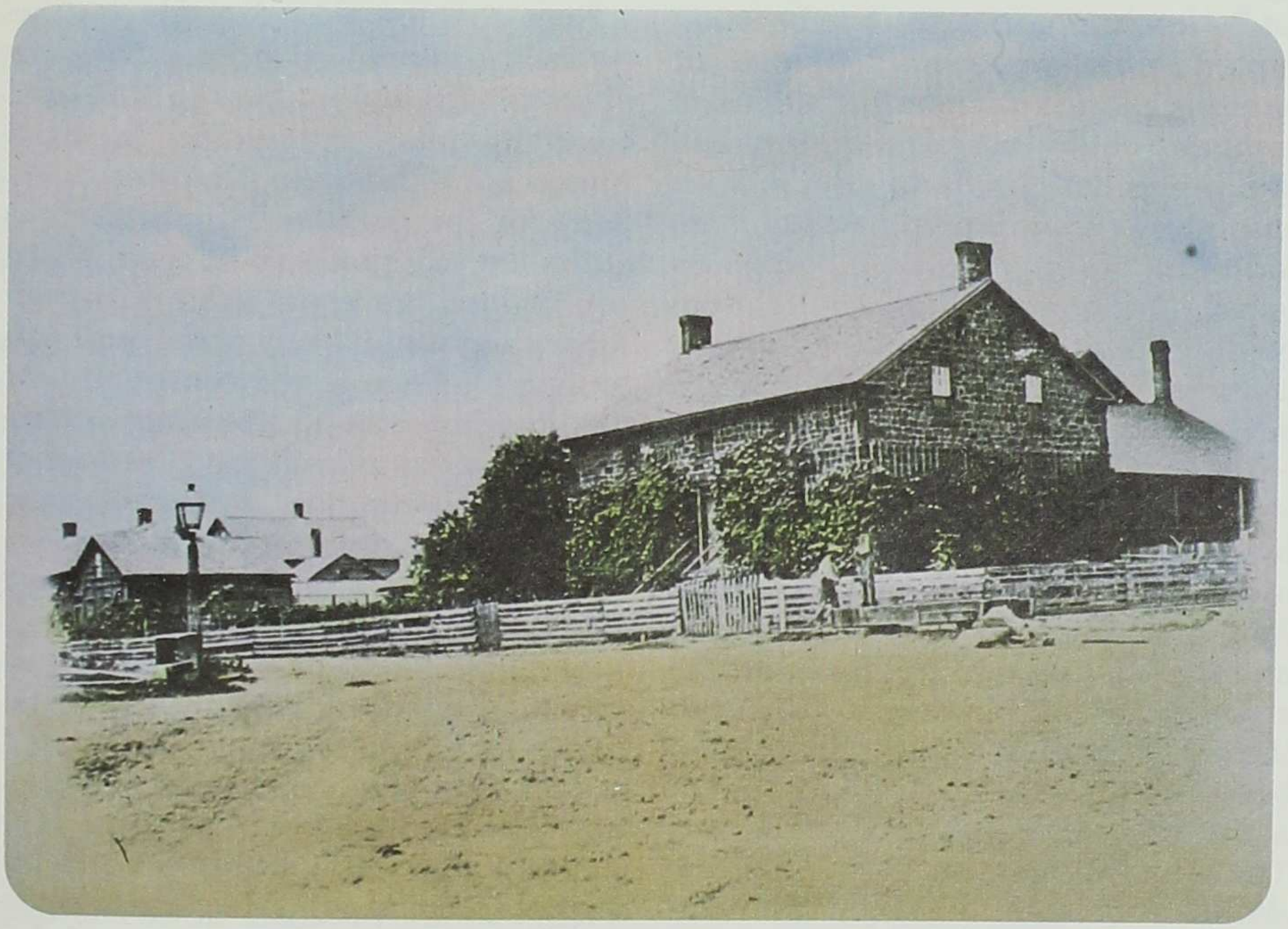
(Shambaugh Collection).



Amana gardens (Shambaugh Collection).

A young girl, Homestead (Shambaugh Collection).

Making kraut at the communal kitchen house (Shambaugh Collection).



(Shambaugh Collection)

Amana Folk Art and Craftsmanship

by
James R. Dow
and
Madeline Roemig

In 1929, Grace Chaffee wrote: "things produced in the Amanas were a dreary lot." Her pronouncement has been accepted generally as an artistic judgment on the Amanas, a community that placed emphasis on the useful, the plain, and the communal. In those days church elders discouraged personal art, even forbade it. They considered it frivolous to have paintings on the walls — the only decorations allowed were religious pictures, samplers, and calendars passed out by the Society and its stores.

Yet, in Amana there was — and still is — a wealth of beauty in articles created by the people of the community. As is usually the case with closed societies (as Amana was for its nearly 89 years of communal life) outsiders seldom saw the artistic creations. Of late, however, these examples of Amana folk art have been emerging, in part through display at the Amana Heritage Society Museum. The objects are beautiful, they are skillfully wrought, and they are filled with the most important element of all: the ability to engage the eye and artistic sense of the receptive viewer.

Even a society that placed high value on tradition produced articles that show concern for color, innovation, and creativity. Many of the older homes of Amana are storehouses for such articles. Some of the traditional forms such as quilts are still produced at the quilting bees which are even today a part of Amana social life. Many of the quilt patterns are unique to the community. At the other extreme (in size if not art) are tiny crocheted animals made as toys or for table decoration during seasonal celebrations. The variety seems endless, and the colorful array is challenging even to the casual viewer.

The community of the seven Amana villages, because of its utopian bent and its desire to be self-sustaining, fostered craftsmen of extreme virtuosity and imbued them with a strong sense of efficiency and a deeply-rooted concern for thrift *(Sparsamkeit)*. When these traits pushed against the human need for

creative self-expression the result was an outpouring of art within the confines of local tradition — most often in utilitarian forms. A man might spend his working hours in the cabinet shop, then turn in his free time to using his skills for building a child's china cabinet or a carefully wrought whatnot shelf to decorate his walls. A woman was required to work in the kitchens or gardens, but she found time to knit and crochet. These skills were used to decorate her everyday life with colorful house blessings, newspaper holders, and the omnipresent keyholders. These objects show a consistency of form that reflects the strength of tradition, but within the traditional structure there is a remarkable variety. Simplicity of life may have been preached, but the folk art of Amana shows a complexity worthy of more investigation.

The delightful toys of Amana show the work of the people during off hours. The china cabinet in Fig. 1 was built as sturdily as its full-sized counterpart; its drawers, handles, glass work, and wood inlays show the skill of a master craftsman. The choice of wood suggests that the cupboard was not necessarily made of left-over pieces, but was conceived and constructed to evoke the response "it's just like a real one." The child who received the beautifully-painted sled shown in Fig. 2 must have felt pride of ownership at least in part because of the artistically pleasing qualities of the sled. In turn, the maker must have been equally as proud to have

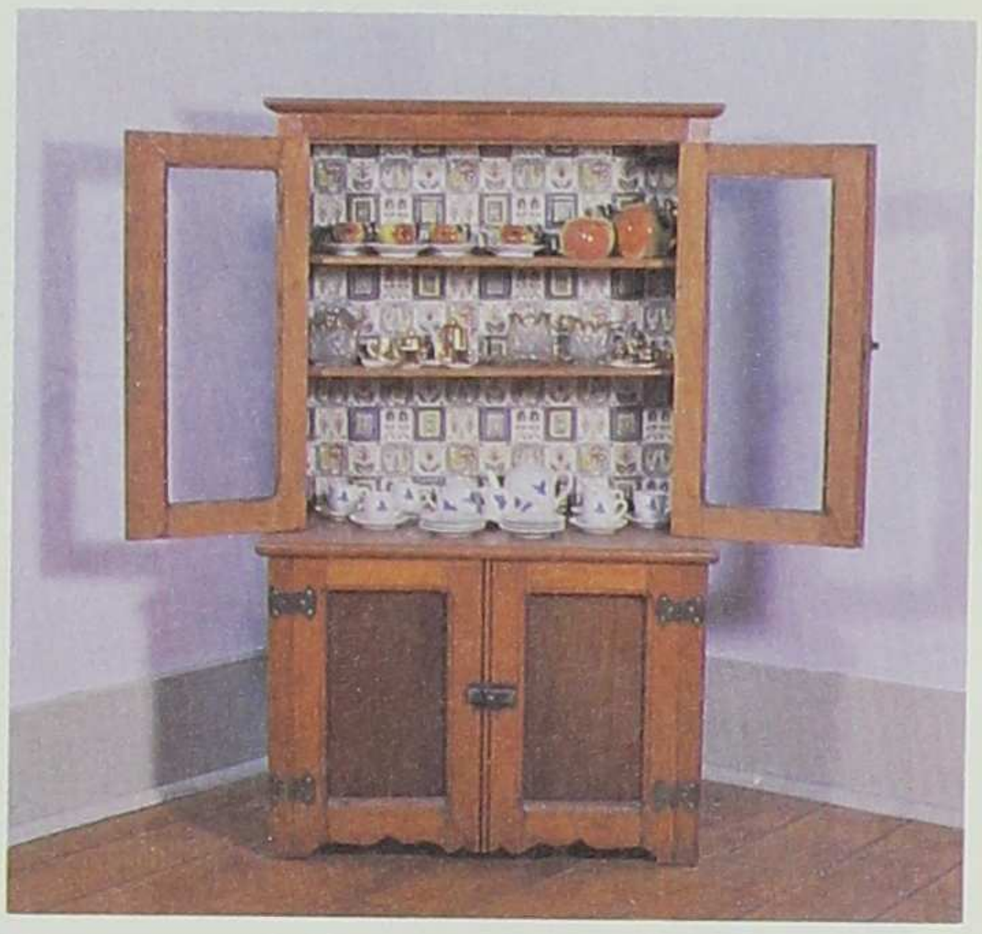


Figure 1. Children's china cabinet (courtesy Museum of Amana History).

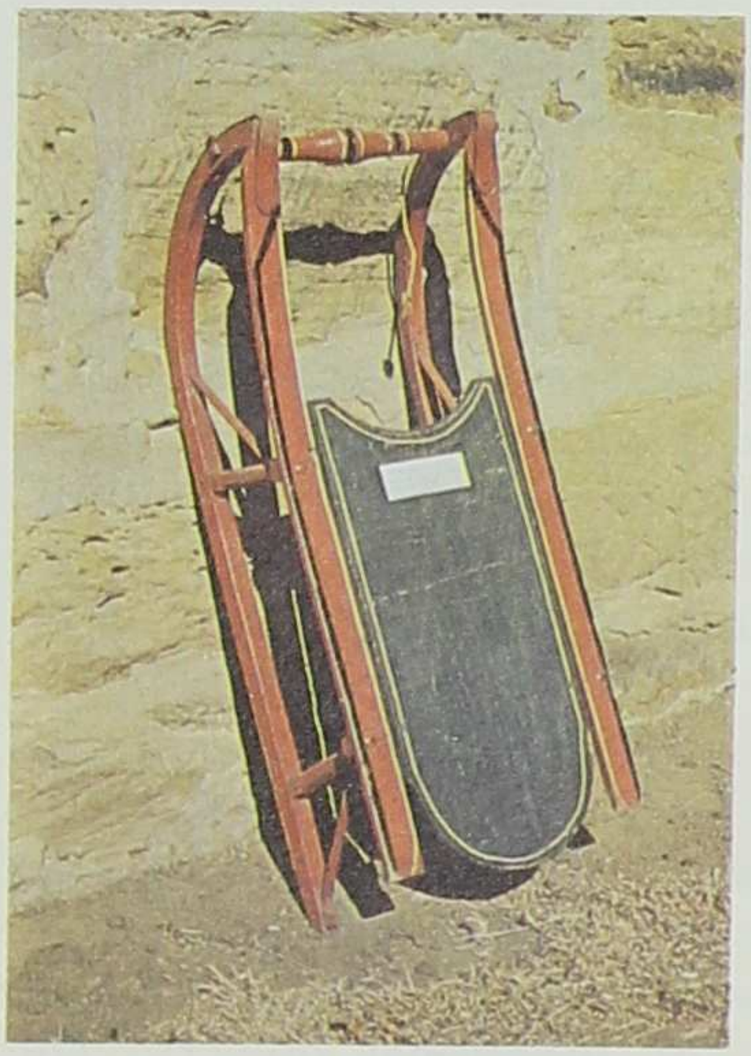


Figure 2. Child's sled (courtesy Museum of Amana History).

Figure 3. Rocking horse (courtesy Museum of Amana History).

his craft displayed for all children to see. Other toys such as the large rocking horse (Fig. 3) carved from wood with real horse hair and the doll house furniture (Fig. 4) made to imitate the furniture of the communal houses suggest some of the variety and skill of Amana folk craftsmen.

Although only religious pictures, samplers, and standardized calendars were "allowed" by the Society, other wall adornments crept into homes in the guise of functional objects. The ingenious display devices for otherwise utilitarian things received much more than casual decoration. The dust cloth holder in Fig. 5, made from leftover sateen quilt material with cross-stitched letters and tatted edging, is a good example. An object as mundane as a dust cloth stirred someone to create the holder and to decorate it with the finest stitchery known to the women of Amana. What might have been stored in a drawer or a closet received instead a charming, skillfully-executed, and colorful enclosure, which was placed on the wall for all to see. It was a rare dust cloth indeed

Figure 4. Doll house furniture (courtesy Madeline Roemig).

Figure 5. Dust cloth holder (courtesy Museum of Amana History).

that had such a wonderful resting place.

Elaborate key holders were fashioned of velvet, usually painted or decorated with stitchery (Fig. 6). The typical motif was the flower. Other holders for everyday objects were adorned with a variety of designs ranging from geometric patterns to painted floral designs. The whisk broom holder (Fig. 7) made of leather and velvet and delicately colored with tiny blue flowers, the pocket watch holder (Fig. 8), and the comb and brush holder (Fig. 9), made by a local saddle maker, show the same artistic concepts as the key holder. Many of these things were made as gifts for friends or relatives — a lack of cash in the early communal Society may have motivated some of the artful creations.

Figure 6. Keyholder (courtesy Museum of Amana History).

Some of the most impressive Amana artifacts, because of their size and wide occurrence, are the wall decorations. Samplers or "House blessings" *(Haussegen)* were commonplace and found in nearly every home. The tradition of making and displaying samplers is evidently a long one, as some examples reach back to before the arrival of the colonists in the United States. Many of the samplers appear to have been made by children just learning the skills of stitchery. The colorful pieces show the unfinished quality of learning pieces with frequent misspellings and uneven stitching. The most elaborate samplers, made by adults, express religious piety and love of family. Along with the newspaper holders, they are prized possessions.

Figure 8. Pocket watch holder (courtesy Museum of Amana History).

Figure 7. Whisk broom holder (courtesy Museum of Amana History).

Figure 9. Comb and brush holder (courtesy Museum of Amana History).

Figure 10. A wall hanging with the German motto "Ohne Kreuz keine Krone" worked into the visual motif (courtesy Harvey Oehler family).

Figure 11. Knitted animals (courtesy Madeline Roemig).

Figure 12. Nähstein (courtesy Museum of Amana History).

Figure 13. Nähstein (courtesy Museum of Amana History).

Some of the wall decorations were sewn on punched papers, a tradition that reached back to Germany; others were sewn on canvas. All have some form of religious saying *(Spruch)* which served to legitimize them for the sake of the community elders and allowed them to be hung on the wall for general viewing. Frequently, wall hangings employed a visual and linguistic riddle. Figure 10 shows a clever use of the German word *Kreuz* (crown), for example.

Perhaps the most obvious case of skill and originality in Amana appears in the needlework of the women. Many of the patterns and ideas have been adopted from elsewhere, but the quality of the workmanship and the adaptation of designs point to the discipline, skill, and creative ability of the Amana women. Some individuals stand out, such as the late Mrs. Louise Rettig who was well known in Amana for her small crocheted animals, Christmas trees, Easter bunnies, and a barnyard full of animals (Fig. 11). Working without patterns, Mrs. Rettig simply "created" for the delight of her family and friends.

One of the most unusual pieces is the functional sewing stone *(Nähstein)* (Figs. 12 and 13), a heavy stone or piece of lead whose base was covered with fancy veneer or inlaid wood. An interesting contrast is seen in the two *Nähsteine* shown. One was used in a communal sewing room *(Nähstube)* and seems to be strictly functional, as dictated by the Amana life of the day. The stone is covered in a gray-green plush material and

the base by ticking and a patch of denim, undoubtedly leftover scraps. Two pockets were carefully sewn onto the side to hold sewing instruments. The other sewing stone has a base of intricately inlaid wood and a beautiful needlepoint pincushion. Attached to the *Nähstein* is a tape with a sharply-pointed hook at its end. Large pieces of material, such as sheets, curtain, or tablecloths which had to be hemmed, were attached to this hook and the heavy *Nähstein* served as a firm anchor as a woman doing the sewing moved farther along the hem. A simple stone or a brick would have served the same purpose, but the woman working at the hemming task had before her, in a "functional" object, a challenging example of sewing skill.

The rather drab rooms of Amana buildings were relieved by the colorful, handwoven carpets on the floors and stairways (Fig. 14). The carpets were made to fit into individual homes in yard-wide strips, then sewn together to fit particular rooms. They not only added color but used up scraps of material. Every carpet was an "original" because exact patterns and colors could never be duplicated — each carpet was different. In the past, carpets were generally shades of brown with colorful contrasting stripes. An additional practical quality allowed the strips to be interchanged when traffic wore down one section of the carpet. From the earthy browns, laced with flashes of green, to calico blue or even reds and pinks, Amana people walked on an everchanging array of color as they moved from room to room and one communal building to the next. Amana carpets are still woven and used in Main Amana homes — a tribute to the artistic quality of the carpets and a love for tradition.

And, not to be overlooked in Amana are the design and craft seen in wooden whatnot shelves (Fig. 15). These were cut with a jig saw and almost invariably featured a stag design, a style brought from Germany. There is even a special vocabulary in Amana German to refer to these creations. Some are large, but many of the whatnot shelves are small and appear to have been made from leftover scraps.

As must be apparent from the number and variety of examples of Amana folk art, everyone in the community was a potential contributor. Everywhere in the communal houses, on the floors and the walls, were colorful creations, growing out of the Society's strong traditions, but still expressive of self and the inner need for beauty. Men contributed woodwork, women stitched and made carpets, even the children learned needed skills by working on wall samplers. The Amana principles of thrift and simplicity were real, but so too was the art of the people. □

Note on Sources

Readers interested in the topic of folk art might wish to read Michael Q. Jones, "The Concept of 'Aesthetic' in the Traditional Arts," *Western Folklore*, 30, 2 (1971), 77-104; Thomas C. Munro, *The Arts and Their Interrelations* (Cleveland, 1967); or Robert P. Armstrong, *The Affecting Presence* (Urbana, 1971). The quotation from G. Chaffee is found in *Antiques Magazine*, 15 (August 1929), 114-18. The aid of the Museum of Amana History is acknowledged with gratitude. Part of the research was funded by two Iowa State University Research Grants and one Sciences and Humanities Research Institute summer grant. For these, grateful acknowledgement is herewith expressed.

Figure 14. Carpeting (courtesy Museum of Amana History).

Figure 15. A whatnot shelf, with the popular stag motif (courtesy Museum of Amana History).

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