

Amana

The Community of True Inspiration

Peter Hoover, 2001

In the fall of 1877, three years after our people came to Bon Homme in South Dakota, Michael Waldner (Schmied-Michel) and Samuel Kleinsasser travelled several hundred miles southeast across the prairies to Amana in Iowa—the community of the “Inspired.” They went to buy sheep and make arrangements for young people from Bon Homme to study medicine and cloth dying at their already well-established settlement.¹

Three years ago, leaving Elmendorf on a rainy Sunday afternoon, our family repeated that journey. Trees already stood bare under a dark sky. We missed a turn and with gravel flying under our mud-splattered car we hurried down a narrow road from the open plains, through the woods, around curves, down into the Iowa River valley where, suddenly, we were in High Amana.



A German village in the American Midwest. Unity. Equality. In High Amana we first encountered what remains of a Christ-like way of life from another time and place.

We stopped at the burial ground. Every grave was marked with a simple stone. Every stone was small and exactly alike, inscribed with a brief statement: “Henriette Meier, gest. 15 Juni, 1878. 4M 5T.”

The bodies of Amana’s pioneers sleep in its peaceful burying grounds. With them, we soon discovered, sleeps the vision that built its orderly villages in a time of great productivity and joy.

What was that vision?

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Two hundred years after the Reformation the Protestant church of Europe lay dead and cold. Martin Luther’s unbalanced teachings of “grace alone” and “faith alone” (both of whom, according to the Scriptures, are insufficient for salvation) had done their harmful work, and a partial Gospel preached by those who did not practice it had become worse

¹ Some went, at a later date, and one boy stayed at Amana to marry a girl from there—the origin of the Hofers in that community.

than no Gospel at all. But young men and women still sought for the truth. When the light of Christ within them revealed their lost condition, people still longed for a better way. In their spirits they sensed Christ could lead them to a beautiful life, to peace and happiness together. But where?

Hans Friedrich Rock, a young harness maker of Oberwälden near Göppingen in Württemberg, wished he knew. In the shop where he worked, Hans Friedrich prayed. He prayed while cutting straps, oiling traces, and hammering rivets. He prayed at home and in church. Hans Friedrich's father was a Lutheran pastor and had taught him, as a child, to pray and read the Bible. But the older Hans Friedrich got, the more he realised how utterly different his father and the Christians he knew lived from what the Bible itself described. He knew this because besides praying, he read the Sermon on the Mount.

In the teachings of Christ and accounts of the primitive church, Hans Friedrich learned of the Spirit's movings, of love for enemies, and of peace and equality among believers. "Surely there is more to Christian living than what we know," he concluded, and began to discover friends who had concluded the same.

In the evenings Hans Friedrich Rock and his friends met to discuss what the Lord had shown them, and to pray. It became clear to them that Christ wished to continue building his church on the earth with specially prepared *Werkzeuge* (tools). Christ's *Werkzeuge* are those who repent and believe in him. Every *Werkzeug*, like a hammer, a saw, or a square used in building, works for a special purpose. Using all of them the right way, Christ the master builder erects a pleasing structure (his church community) as a habitation for God.

Hans Friedrich and his friends believed, in particular, that Christ uses *Werkzeuge* to reveal his will to men. They believed in the gift of prophecy and felt certain that just as the Holy Spirit inspired the Scriptures, he keeps on inspiring men and women with their true meaning today. This led them, on the evening of November 16, 1714, to commit themselves one to another in love for Christ and in a "Community of True Inspiration." Those who joined hands in fellowship were Hans Heinrich Rock, Eberhard Ludwig Gruber (formerly a Lutheran Pastor) with his son Johann Adam, Johann Tobias Pott, Johanna Melchior, and Gottfried Neumann.

Light from the little circle fast grew bigger and brighter. "The Inspired" (die Inspirierte), as people began to call them, travelled everywhere announcing the good news of Christ. They spoke boldly against "hollowness and formality" in state religions. They spoke against godless living and showed people a better way in little assemblies that took shape in towns and villages through Germany, Switzerland, and the Netherlands.

The Inspired asked whoever wanted to join them to answer the following questions. Depending on the answers, and with the consent of all, new members were received:

1. Is it your desire to function as a member of the Community of Jesus Christ (die Gemeinschaft Jesu Christi), and to co-operate with other members in meetings for prayer? Will you co-operate with the order the brothers have established?

2. Are you prepared to suffer all kinds of inner and outer pain, and to surrender everything cheerfully, through the mercy of God—even your body and soul?
3. Do you personally believe in the word and work of true inspiration, and are you ready, for the sake of purification and holiness, to submit to the same?
4. Do unresolved disagreements stand between you and another? Do you hold anything against a brother or sister, or against anyone else? Does anyone hold an issue against you?

Like the early Christians, the Inspired met to share the “treasure and blessing of the Word of God” in their homes. They understood the Word was Christ and met eleven times a week to enjoy his presence together.

Meetings always began with “prayer unhindered by words” (silent prayer). They believed prayer is “a state rather than an act and a feeling rather than a request.” But they also read and sang hymns as prayers in their meetings. First the elders read one, then the men, followed by the women. They recited a form of the Apostles’ Creed together, studied their Bibles, and sang without musical instruments.

The Inspired loved to sing and constantly added new words and melodies to their collection. With time their hymnal, the *Psalter-Spiel*, grew into a book of 1,285 pages with songs divided into the following themes:

- Longing for God and Christ (76 hymns)
- Spiritual battle and victory (61 hymns)
- Denial of self and of the world (51 hymns)
- Suffering and temptation (41 hymns)
- Christian living and conduct (42 hymns)
- True repentance, conversion and change of heart (38 hymns)
- Human misery and sorrow (26 hymns)
- Patience and perseverance (26 hymns)



Brothers and sisters sat separately in meetings for worship, and at least once a year, they gathered from many places for a great love feast, a communion service, and feetwashing celebration that lasted for several days. This took place, year after year by the grace of God, in spite of great trials the brothers and sisters faced from within as well as without.

From the beginning the Inspired needed to exercise special care with the messages Werkzeuge among them delivered. Satan did what he could to confuse and divide—as for instance on the issue of marriage. Some, claiming heavenly inspiration, said it was wrong to marry. But the community saw that no truly inspired message could contradict what the Holy Spirit had already revealed through the Scriptures. So they wrote:

We believe that God established marriage, therefore we keep on marrying among us. But for God to bless marriage in his mercy, it must be done in the Lord. Brothers and sisters must enter marriage in a state of obedience to the Holy Scriptures, chaste, and in the fear of God. At the same time, we regard as important the teachings of the holy apostle Paul who repeatedly states it is good to marry but better to remain single.

What the community took as true inspiration was a testimony² against elaborate wedding ceremonies and divorce. Couples got married simply by standing up and saying their vows in meeting, and regardless of later situations, divorce never became an option for them.

In relationships with their neighbours and European authorities, the devil also made trouble where he could—most of it revolving around three issues.

The Inspired, following the Sermon on the Mount, refused to swear oaths or to take up arms. They also refused to send their children to public schools (taught in Germany by Lutheran clergymen). Time and again, the brothers assured the authorities they would pay school taxes, or even fines for not sending their children. But in obedience to the Scriptures and further inspiration they insisted on training their children themselves.

Two years after their founding as a society, a testimony came:

If you have children, give them to God and do everything in your power to lead them to him. If you stay inwardly close to God he will bless you with wisdom, courage and understanding. He will make you strong and give you an earnest spirit, tempered with love, so that you may live before them in godly fear. Then your training will be blessed—that is, in your children who choose to submit to the hand of God at work in you.

If you have children that disrespect you and refuse to listen to the voice of God in and through you, they will bring the guilt of their blood upon their own heads. But do not abandon hope for them. Wrestle for them in earnest prayer. Struggle and labour for them in the pains of spiritual birth. If you neglect them or show yourself indifferent, half-hearted, disinterested, or lazy toward them, their souls will surely be required of you.

The diligence of the Inspired in training their families and in living by the Sermon on the Mount brought many seekers to respect and join them. But it also brought the wrath of the state church and the government upon them. For refusing to bear arms the brothers had to pay heavy fines. Some spent time in jail. Some had their heads stuck in pillories and got publicly flogged or had their possessions taken from them.

In Protestant Zürich, authorities publicly burned Inspired literature, flogged their messengers—each one with sixty-two lashes—and drove them from the city followed by an angry mob shouting curses and insults. From Alsace the Inspired had to flee into the

² Inspired messages, delivered by *Werkzeuge*, were called *Zeugnisse* (testimonies).

German Wetterau, and from Germany some found their way to Pennsylvania in America. Yet more and more seekers kept joining.

In the Wetterau, where a large group from the Unity of Brothers at Herrnhut settled alongside the Inspired, the movement grew faster than ever. Many of the Herrnhut people had become disappointed with Ludwig von Zinzendorf's leanings toward Protestantism, and preferred the simpler, warmer fellowship of the Inspired community. But with peace and prosperity in the Wetterau came new dangers. After Hans Friedrich Rock and other much-used Werkzeuge died, the movement slipped into lethargy and materialism for fifty years.

The Spirit did not abandon them.

In 1817 a new Werkzeug, Michael Krausert, a Strasbourg tailor, appeared among the Inspired. He called them to repentance and new life came to the struggling community. A 21-year-old furniture-maker, Christian Metz, gave his life to the Lord. The community regrouped in the village of Schwarzenau in Wittgenstein and with renewed activity, new persecution began.

People threw rocks into the windows when brothers and sisters met to pray. Some suffered attack on the streets, and the German government renewed its demand for children to be baptised, to attend public schools, and for young brothers to serve in the army.

Seeking refuge once more in the old Ronneburg castle the Community of True Inspiration moved back to the Wetterau. But with the revival of Spiritual life among them, their numbers grew rapidly. Soon they also filled the old cloister of Marienborn. Then they rented the great Herrnhag complex, a communal town abandoned by the Unity of Brothers seventy years earlier. When even this would not hold them, they rented two more abandoned cloisters at Arnsburg and Engelthal. New members kept arriving from Switzerland and German lands from East Prussia to France, while everyone, through the Lord's grace learned how to surrender themselves to live and work together. One historian described what happened:

It is here [in the Wetterau] that we discover the beginnings of the communistic life the Inspired afterwards adopted. . . . Under a common roof there were rich and poor, educated and uneducated, professional men, merchants, manufacturers, artisans, farmers and labourers—brave souls who generously sacrificed their individual for the common welfare. . . . At each community, in a large room, school was conducted and worship services held. . . . The rich gave freely of their means, the merchants of their business ability, and the artisans and farmers of their labour. It was not long before the community acquired a degree of prosperity that promised the free, simple, quiet and peaceful life foretold in the early prophecies and for which its members had been striving for many years.³

³ Shambaugh, Bertha M. H., *Amana: The Community of True Inspiration*, Iowa Historical Society, Iowa City, 1908, pg. 50-51

Under competent and stable leadership, the communities of the Inspired grew steadily more crowded. At the same time dry years and fines for not sending children to public schools made money scarce. After a great lovefeast in the Arnsburg cloister in 1842, the Spirit directed four brothers to look for land in America.

They landed in America on October 26. Throughout that fall and winter they looked for land in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and places further north. Finally, with the Lord's help they purchased a five thousand acre tract from the Seneca nation at Buffalo, New York, and Christian Metz felt led to call it Ebenezer.

The first brothers and sisters from Germany arrived in the spring of 1843. During the summer more groups came. First groups of fifties and sixties, then larger ones—some numbering over two hundred people—arrived.

The Inspired moved in an orderly way and helped one another. Of eight hundred settlers in the first groups, most were craftsmen and masters at small trades, but under the Spirit's direction they all worked together "like so many bees in a hive." Within three years they cleared hundreds of acres of farmland, and built sawmills, woollen mills and flour mills in villages with schools, stores, shops, and meetinghouses. When a German family from across the Niagara River joined, they built two more villages in Canada.

Not only did the Inspired work well together. Under the Lord's direction they planned how take care of their physical needs and who was responsible for what, in their new home. In 1843 they wrote up a plan and everyone who wished to work with it, both men and women, signed it.



As stated in their Community Plan, the Inspired held their land and buildings in common. They expected everyone who joined them with money or possessions to use them for the good of all—especially for expenses involved in moving to America—and all craftsmen and labourers pooled the income from their work.

Nevertheless, the Inspired did what they could to keep membership in their society voluntary. They kept track of what every member contributed upon joining. If anyone later wished to leave, the community paid that amount back, if not immediately then over an agreed period of time.

The community did not pay wages, like in the world. But the brothers committed themselves to meeting one another's needs—fairly. For that reason they kept all houses, clothes, and furnishings simple. "Simplicity and equality," they believed, "are twins that cannot live one without the other."

Every village on the Ebenezer lands had its *Bruderrath* (council of sixteen brothers) to evaluate families' needs. On the basis of that evaluation, done carefully and with

directions given if necessary, families received allowances from the common fund. These allowances could be adjusted at any time if a need arose, and got “revised and fixed anew” no less than once a year.

From their allowances, every family of the Inspired—and every responsible single person—paid their own expenses and for the upkeep of common property they lived in or used. Everyone was free to spend his allowance as he thought best.

At the same time, every able brother and sister agreed to contribute a specific amount of time or resources to the community’s well-being. The limits of these contributions, set by the Bruderrath, were not unreasonable but challenging. Laziness or mismanagement in the community earned prompt reminders for the Inspired believed “the one who refuses to work should not eat.”

All the Ebenezer villages kept their own books and work records. Members of the Bruderrath stayed in close touch with the families and handled applications for larger or smaller dwelling places, for heavier or lighter workloads, for trip privileges or days off work, on a strictly individual basis.

In every village responsible people cared for the aged, sick, or handicapped out of the community’s general fund. Widows and orphans lived as comfortably as everyone else. No one lived sumptuously, yet no one suffered debt or need. And in a short time, under wise management and the gracious blessing of Christ, Ebenezer had prospered beyond everyone’s expectation.

Prosperity did not only involve the material. Neither did the Inspired only grow in numbers. Living in strange foreign surroundings drew everyone closer together, and to Christ. Growing spiritually, they enjoyed particularly rich times of fellowship one with another, and with interested people who came to visit them. But before long their prosperity itself brought problems.

The Seneca people, after selling the land, saw no reason for leaving it. In fact, after the Inspired built their villages, more and more Seneca people arrived to sit around their fireplaces, eat their food, and ask for curious tools and supplies they saw the settlers had brought from Germany.

The Inspired tried to treat the Seneca people like Christ wanted them to. But in the end, there were not enough things and they did not have space for everyone. On top of that, the more land they cleared at Ebenezer the more stones they turned up, and the town of Buffalo—at the head of the Erie Canal—fast grew into a city around them.

By 1854 Christian Metz with two brothers travelled to Kansas to look for a new piece of land. They found nothing suitable. A second delegation, to Iowa, brought back a favourable report and the brothers made a third trip at once. Along the Iowa River, just west of Cedar Rapids, they bought eighteen thousand acres of fertile land with deep, black soil. Wooded bluffs stood along the northern edge of the land. On them the brothers

saw an unlimited supply of firewood and building material. Along the river they found limestone to quarry, but the rest of the land was a beautiful green prairie, ready for the plough.

While standing on the bluffs, looking out over what the Lord had given them, a witness came through Christian Metz: "*Bleibtreu soll der Name sein, dort in Iowa der Gemein*" (the name of the community in Iowa shall be "Hold Fast"). He understood "Hold Fast" or "Faithful" to mean the same as "Amana" in the Song of Solomon 4:8, so with that name the new community became known.

Back in New York the brothers and sisters prepared with great excitement, but carefully, for their move. Believing that "more communities die for lack of common sense than for lack of money" they tempered their enthusiasm with hard work and careful planning.

First they subdivided the Ebenezer lands and began to sell them piece-by-piece. As the land sold, families with young men moved west to build new villages of plain but spacious limestone houses, every one alike, among new shops, mills, and meetinghouses. To move the whole community took ten years, but by that time the new settlement was already as prosperous, or more so than the old. Its size had increased to 26,000 acres. Its orchards, vineyards, and croplands stood in full production. Hundreds of brothers and sisters worked in its mills, bakeries and dairies.

As in Europe, the Inspired in their new American home aimed to spend all their time and energy for Christ. They only planted trees that bore fruit or yielded lumber. The only vines they planted were grape vines. They took no pictures, read no fiction or magazines, and wasted no money on Christmas gifts, but they loved to visit one another in the evenings. They took walks among their crops and fruit trees, and the sisters planted many flowers.



Striving for harmony among them, the Inspired did not give special honours, nor recognise titles. But they saw the worth of individual contributions and appreciated them all. Bertha Shambaugh described their attitude in 1908:

Individual accomplishments account for nothing in the Amana Society except in so far as they promote the interests of the community as a whole. . . . In the old apothecary shop in one of the villages the chemist has worked with such zeal and to such purpose for half a century that his compounds are known throughout the Mississippi Valley as products of the Amana Society. But who knows the name of the skilful chemist? The patterns of Amana calico are known from ocean to ocean. But who knows the name of the designer? Some of the machinery in the woollen mills has been copied (the members of the Society do not patent their inventions) in almost every woollen mill in the country. But who knows the name of their young inventor? . . . The "me spirit" is subordinated to the "we spirit." Men of excellent attainments

throughout the villages perform unhesitatingly the commonest kind of work. . . . A musician of rare ability hoes thistles in the springtime and digs potatoes in the fall. A graduate of the State University of Iowa, and a man of unusual ability in his profession, works with his hands.⁴

Along with this description, Bertha Shambaugh related how one of the “First Brothers” at Amana (a member of the Bruderrath) handled the issue:

Some years ago a talented member appealed to one of the First Brothers for a higher allowance on the grounds that the service rendered by him was of greater value to the community. The First Brother to whom he spoke sat by an open window overlooking the village pastureland where Eduard, a half-witted shepherd, was tending his flock of sheep. “Do you see Eduard over there on the pasture?”

“Yes, brother.”

“Does he not perform the task allotted to him faithfully and to the utmost extent of his ability?”

“Yes brother.”

“Go then, and do likewise. Thank God for the greater gifts he has given to you, for in them you have already received a fuller allowance—then give your best service to the community.”

Even though the Inspired lived close to one another in their villages they did not think it wise to live in crowded conditions. Bertha Shambaugh wrote:

With the growth of the family, larger quarters are provided by the Elders. Sometimes a brand new house is built, for there is no crowding in the Amanas. The same spirit that led the community to adopt the village system has led it to provide plenty of room for its people. While the community of True Inspiration aims at the widest possible community of goods there is in the homes of its members a fine blending of individualism and communism that would hardly be possible in a community established with communism alone as its ideal. The Germanic instinct of individual freedom, coupled with an intense love of home, led its members to preserve a wholesome sphere of domestic independence. Each family lives in a house that is the property of the Society. But the Amana home is nevertheless the sanctuary of its occupants. And to each member of the community there is allowed, out of the common fund, enough personal property to assure personal comfort and to satisfy that desire of every human heart to have something of its very own. Indeed, the separatism of the Amana home, though not in accord with the principles of complete communism, has been an important factor in the perpetuity and prosperity of the Community of True Inspiration.

The Amana houses are substantially built, and quite unpretentious. It has been the purpose of the community to construct the houses as nearly alike as possible. There is no hard and fast rule, but the aim is to make one as desirable as the other. . . . In addition to the general family sitting-room, each member of a household has as a rule his own individual sitting room as well as his own individual bedroom. Here he is at

⁴ Shambaugh, Bertha M. H., *Amana That Was and Amana That Is*, Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City, 1932

liberty to indulge his own taste in decoration—provided he does not go beyond his allowance or violate the rules of the community. Here he may pursue his hobbies or store his keepsakes without being disturbed—which accounts in part for the general content of the young people.

In keeping with their simple homes, brothers of the Community of True Inspiration wore homemade shirts, pants held up with suspenders, beards and plain hats. Women wore black cap-type head coverings, and dresses with shoulder capes and aprons, usually of finely printed cotton materials. Everyone, from the least to the greatest, dressed in precisely the same modest way, little boys like their fathers and little girls like their mothers. All mothers made their own families' clothes in line with one of the community's written instructions:



Do not adorn yourself in dress for luxury's sake as a feast for the eyes or to please yourself and others, but only for necessity's sake. What you seek and use beyond necessity is sin. Take care however that you wash and cleanse your spiritual dress in the blood of the Lamb.

In every Amana village children attended schools, run by the community, all year. Their teachers—appointed couples that lived on the school grounds—divided their time between *Lehrschule* (academics), *Spielstunde* (play time), and *Arbeitsschule* (time spent in the school garden, learning how to sew, or work with tools and wood). Once a day, or oftener, everyone met in plain meetinghouses—whitewashed walls, bare floors, and long wooden benches—to pray. The First Brothers sat behind a table.

The Community of True Inspiration lived around prayer. One of their instructions read:

Before you go to bed, review with God what happened during the day and diligently scrutinise your heart. If you have been unfaithful, repent of it sincerely and pray for mercy. Then, when you have prayed let nothing further enter your thoughts. Go to bed, sink into the peace of God and the wounds of Jesus, and sleep. Then the enemy will have no power to torment you with bad dreams and fantasies. And when you wake up at night, lift your heart at once to God.

When you undress pray to the Lord that he may free you from the tatters of sin.
When you dress, pray for the clothing of salvation and the purple robe of Christ.
When you wash yourself, pray for true cleansing from sin and for holiness in the blood of the Lamb.
When you start the fire, pray that the fire of divine love may ignite and burn in your souls.
When you see the sunlight, pray that the Sun of Eternity may enlighten your heart, freeing it from pride and all that is not for real.

When you work the soil, pray to the heavenly gardener that he may prepare the seedbed of your spirit for the right harvest, that he may turn your mind toward heaven and away from earthly things.

Do this with every material pursuit and you will find God in all things. Everything will be a ladder and guide to God. And finally, watch out that your praying does not become just a habit.

The Inspired feared nothing more than the possibility of their spiritual life becoming “just a habit.” In the 1870s, when they noticed their young people talking and whispering in meetings and old people paying scant attention, they suspended meetings entirely until everyone repented and they could worship “in Spirit and Truth” again. While “in the Spirit” they recorded many instructions (Sittenregeln), and constantly renewed or improved them as new inspirations came. Some of the following examples date from as early as 1819:

- Direct your eyes ever and only to Jesus, your beginning, aim, and goal.
- Count every word, thought, and work as done in the immediate presence of God. Give constant account to God, in sleeping and waking, eating or drinking, for whatever you do. Then you will see whether it is done in his love and fear.
- Accustom yourself to being silent. Let your heart speak more than your tongue— that is, speak mostly with God.
- Deliberately choose whatever serves to break your will, or to make you more humble. Choose what kills self and the old man, for whatever inflicts pain on self-love brings pleasure to the Spirit. The cross brings salvation
- Bear all sufferings—both the inner and the outward—in silence. Tell God alone about your pain, and accept with deep respect and obedience whatever he lets happen to you.
- Always think better of others than of yourself.
- Give up your plans gladly, and submit to the advice of others.
- Do not conceal your faults. Cover no sin. By exposing your enemy you will weaken his strength.
- If you, or if the work you are doing, is treated with disregard or contempt (even though it is blameless in your own eyes), let it produce no bitterness in you. It is a test of humility and patience.
- Learn to take admonition and punishment willingly.
- Avoid useless words for they deprive your soul of strength.
- Flee from wicked, talkative, boastful, and vain companions. They will do nothing but infect and corrupt you.
- Seek and love seclusion, concealment, and separation.
- Let every one seek to be the most humble. Flee ambition and exaltation of one over another.
- The smaller you become in your own eyes the better you will see the grace of God.
- Think often of how you will die. Remember your time is short and you do not know when your last day will come. Use your time in the best way while the season lasts.
- Guard against mental and physical idleness. It is the state in which the enemy is most likely to overpower you.
- Let your words be few. Do not be overbearing and rude, but chaste and modest.

- Use moderation in food and drink. Remember that nature is satisfied with plain fare, and that in small amounts. Give to the body what it needs, but make sure its needs are legitimate. Bridle your appetite.
- Keep busy. Work quickly, industriously [fleisziglich] and carefully.
- Avoid too much sleep. When in good health, do not be quick to sleep in the daytime. Battle against physical and spiritual laziness. Keep watch!
- Do not let the sun go down on your anger. Struggle to keep a conciliatory attitude toward those who offend you.

Christian Metz died in 1865 and other capable leaders, Gottlieb Scheuner and C. L. Meyer (formerly of the Zoar community in Ohio) took his place. But growth continued. By the early 1900s some Iowa residents became alarmed. “Will the whole state go communist?” they began to ask. “What shall happen to individual rights if the Amana colonies continue to grow?” These residents accused the community of “threatening society with the peril of communism” and brought their case before the Iowa district court. Failing settlement it proceeded to the Supreme Court of the United States that dismissed it with a remarkable ruling:

The fate of other similar enterprises during the past century, such as Brook Farm, the Phalanxes, and other experiments of the followers of Fourier, Owen and others, indicate that the peril is not at all imminent. So long as selfishness is the controlling passion of the human heart, the individual in all probability will be safe as against the encroachments of communism. At any rate it will be time enough to obviate the danger, when, if ever, it is seriously threatened, with appropriate legislation.

Most neighbours of the Amana community did not, however, feel hostile toward it. Some viewed it only with curiosity. Others respected the community and pondered its Christian challenge. Bertha Shambaugh wrote in 1908:

In language, in manners, in dress, in traditions, as well as in religious and economic institutions, the Community of True Inspiration is foreign to its surroundings. . . . The Inspirationist is by nature and by discipline given to attending quietly to his own business, and much impertinent inquiry on the part of visitors has intensified this reticence. But Amana has no secrets to hide from the world. Full liberty to worship God in their own way and to be let alone are all that the men and women of this community have ever asked of their neighbours. And the stranger who comes with honest intentions, sympathy, and a fair degree of common politeness finds at Amana a naïve frankness, a whole-souled heartiness, and a hospitality that for genuineness are rarely excelled in the outside world.

There is much in the life of the people of Amana that seems plain and monotonous to the outside world. And yet we are compelled to acknowledge that in many respects theirs is a more rational and ideal life than that which is found in the average country village. It is more genuine and uniform. There is less extravagance, less of shallow striving, no keeping up with one’s neighbours, and fewer attempts to seem what one is not. There are fewer of the cares that we of the outside world are prone to accumulate in our hectic pursuits in a hurrying age—the cares that clatter the loudest and mean

the least. There are more of the quiet places for self-collection and meditation—more of the solitude that enables one to regain a balanced sense of values.

Right here, in 1908, is where I would like to end this story of the Community of True Inspiration. But the story has not ended.

On June 1, 1932 Amana <<http://www.jeonet.com/amanas>> became an incorporated society. An appliance factory grew from colony workshops. Things changed.

Christian Metz once wrote: “True Christianity will always remain a secret to the one who only practices its empty form. But real Christianity is so humble, so lowly, and so simple that even a child can understand it.”



Those who seek Christ with childlike minds may yet discover him behind today’s Amana, in the songs of the “truly inspired”:

Lord have mercy on me, in your great kindness! Deliver me from sin’s distress that fills my heart, my soul, and mind. Sin gnaws at my being and drives me to sadness and despair.

Rescue me! Lift me up when I sink! Help me in my weakness and drive from me whatever ensnares or drags me down to earth. When on the verge of falling, let me hear your voice, for blessed is the one who flees from sin.

Holy Trinity, lead me away from earthly things! Direct me, body and soul, toward eternal life! Let me become united with you here so that I may be with you in glory.

Jesus, you alone shall be my one and all. Test and try my sincerity. Free me from hypocrisy. See whether I am on an evil path and lead me in your ways. Grant me the grace to count all else for nothing, except to be with you.

May we stay with Jesus in our time and place!