

# What the Amana Inspirationists Were Reading

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WHEN WE EXAMINE the history of communal Amana for evidence of boundary crossing, we need to consider the movement of people, material objects, and ideas. Of the three, ideas are certainly the vaguest and hardest to define, which may account for the largely impressionistic treatment that the movement of ideas—especially into Amana from the outside—has received from students of Amana history and culture. Changes in the community have often been attributed to the influence of "worldly" ideas, but without any documentation of how and when those ideas made their way into the community. The usual assumption is that they came in at the beginning of the twentieth century as Amana's boundaries weakened.

In this paper I attempt to give some empirical grounding to the flow of exogenous ideas into Amana, not by treating the ideas themselves, but by focusing instead on the medium of their entry, specifically printed matter published outside the community. To my knowledge, this source of information has been completely ignored by earlier students of Amana. Glimpses of the ideas themselves will appear, but a full analysis of them will require more space. My purpose here is simply to demonstrate that a significant number of books, magazines, and newspapers found their way into the Colonies and presumably were read by the Colonists even prior to 1900. Together they reveal that the people of Amana were in touch with the world beyond the Colonies earlier and much more than students of Amana have appreciated.

Literally hundreds of publications printed outside of Inspirationist communities and written by non-members have been preserved in the research library of the Museum of Amana History and

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the archives of the Amana Church Society, and many more would certainly come to light if one searched through the personal libraries and attics of Amana natives. These materials fall into four categories: (1) religious works, (2) materials for young readers, (3) technical writings, and (4) magazines. After describing the items in each category as well as those in a fifth, newspapers, which, though not in Museum or Archive holdings, we know from other sources were present, I will evaluate the significance of this aspect of inward boundary crossing for understanding Amana history.

### *Religious Works*

Nearly a hundred religious tracts written by non-Inspirationists are in the Museum and Church collections. Although many of these are unfamiliar to modern Amana residents, doubtless they were better known to some Inspirationists in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Those that could be identified are given in Table I. A striking feature of this list is that most of the authors were born before the community's founding in 1714, and all were born before the founding of Amana in 1855. The Amana Inspirationists turned mostly to venerable religious writers for spiritual guidance rather than to their contemporaries. The earliest ones (Tauler, a Kempis, Bunyan) are major figures in Christian theology; the others tend to be drawn from the ranks of seventeenth and eighteenth century English and continental mystics and Pietists. Contrary to Shambaugh's claim,<sup>1</sup> Philip Jakob Spener, the founder of "Church Pietism," is not among them, although August Hermann Francke, Spener's godson and a leading Church Pietist, is. Better represented are the "Radical Pietists," among them Gottfried Arnold, Gerhard Tersteegen, and Johann Wilhelm Petersen, who provide the main theological root of Inspirationism.

About one-quarter of the authors are not cited in any of the standard encyclopedias of religion or biography available in academic libraries. Most of their works were published between 1750 and 1850, although the authors themselves may have lived earlier. They are listed in alphabetical order in Table II. Finally, fifteen tracts were published anonymously, again mostly between 1750 and 1850. Given where they were published and their general character, almost certainly none were authored by members of the community.

The relative importance of these various writings to the Inspirationists is difficult to assess. One possible measure is the sheer num-

1. See "Boundaries in Communal Amana," this issue.

Table I  
*Authors of Religious Tracts Found in Amana*  
*(Identity and Lifespan Known)*

	1300	1400	1500	1600	1700	1800	1900	2000
Johan Tauler								
(German mystic)								
Thomas a Kempis								
(Dutch religious writer)								
John Foxe								
(English martyrologist)								
Johann Arndt								
(German theologian)								
Jakob Boehme								
(German mystic)								
Jane Leade								
(English mystic)								
John Bunyan								
(English nonconformist)								
Madame Guyon								
(French mystic)								
Johann Wilhelm Petersen								
(German theologian)								
Francois Maximilian Misson								
(French Protestant writer)								
August Hermann Francke								
(German theologian)								
Gottfried Arnold								
(German theologian)								
Karl Heinrich van Bogatsky								
(German hymnist)								
Gerhard Tersteegen								
(German hymnist)								
Philip Friedrich Hiller								
(German religious poet)								
Johann Jacob Moser								
(German publicist)								
Johann Friedrich Fresenius								
(German theologian)								
Johann Arnold Kanne								
(German theologian)								
Andreas Justinus Kerner								
(German poet)								
F.J. Rutherford								
(American sectarian								
leader)								

Table II

*Authors of Religious Tracts Found in Amana  
(Identity and Lifespan Not Known)*

Georg L. Conrad  
 Augustin Fuhrman  
 Albert D. Hauck  
 Wilhelm Hoffman  
 Johann Huebner  
 Daniel Ernest Jablonski  
 Johann Friedrich Jacobi  
 F.L. Joergens  
 Johann von Bernieres Louvigni  
 Martin Moller  
 G. Mueller  
 Heinrich von Nuernberg  
 Johann Philip Schabalie  
 Elizabeth von Schoenau  
 Johann Friedrich Stark  
 Thomas Wilcocks  
 Matthes Wyers

ber of copies surviving in Amana archives and homes. (Nearly all of the Amana Museum's holdings came from the private libraries of Amana residents.) The most widely read non-Inspirationist religious works were:

Thomas a Kempis, *Der Nachfolge Christi* [*The Imitation of Christ*]  
 Johann Arndt, *Wahres Christentum* [*True Christianity*]  
 Johann Wilhelm Petersen (various works)  
 John Bunyan (various works)  
 Anonymous *Christlichen Martyrthums* [*Christian Martyrdoms*]  
 Anonymous, *Evangelium Nicodemi* [*The Gospel of Nicodemus*]<sup>2</sup>

A considerable number of copies of each of these are known to exist, and perhaps hundreds did at one time. In keeping with the personal, non-intellectual emphasis of Inspirationism, this list reflects a preference for unaffected devotional writing over theological treatises. The more esoteric or complex writers—Boehme, Arnold, Leade, Tauler, and some of Petersen—probably were familiar to only a small number of Inspirationists.

The traditional scholarly view of the boundary between Amana and the world is difficult to apply to the evidence of non-Inspira-

2. "Historical Report on the Life of Jesus Christ, written by Nicodemus, a Rabbi and Head Elder of the Jews." This apocryphal book, possibly a forgery, is cited in *The Lost Books of the Bible and the Forgotten Books of Eden* (New York: New American Library, 1974; originally published in 1926 and 1927).

tionist religious writings that came into the community. The Inspirationists clearly did not reject the work of other Christian writers and were in fact quite open to them in Europe. They apparently added few new authors once they arrived in America, which is compatible with the traditional view of Amana's boundary, but there is no indication that, as far as this kind of material is concerned, the boundary weakened over time in America, at least not before 1932.<sup>3</sup>

### *Written Material for Young People*

The largest number of non-Inspirationist books in Amana falls into the category of books for children and youths. Over one hundred different titles are displayed in the museum's collection, and again this represents only a fraction of the total number used in the Colonies. These publications can be divided into textbooks used in school instruction and books such as almanacs, story books, and picture books used in the home.

While the textbooks cover a wide range of topics, the subjects most commonly represented are grammar, geography (including atlases), language arts (through "readers"), and arithmetic. Less common are books on American history and natural history, including one general history of peoples and countries of the New World. Most of these books were published in the mid- to late 19th century, with a few titles published after 1900. Three were published earlier: a French grammar from 1761, an arithmetic book from 1810, and a reader from 1818. A slight majority of the books were in German, but most were published in the United States, many by German-language or bilingual publishers, including a number with titles such as *Rechenbuch fuer Deutsche Elementarschulen in Amerika* (*Rule Book for German Elementary Students in America*). The books appear to be the standard fare of American (or at least rural) public schools of the time. There are, for example, many copies of McGuffey's Eclectic Readers. Only a few of the textbooks were issued by publishers with a religious orientation.

Another important category of books for young people are the short novels and story collections. Many of these bear no date of publication, although occasionally their young owners wrote their name and/or a date on the inside cover. The earliest of these books with a confirmable date are story collections by Franz Hoffmann and Oscar Hoecker published in 1857. A collection of Bible stories dates

3. One exception involved the writings of Mary Baker Eddy and other Christian Scientists, which began to find favor with a minority of Amana residents early in the twentieth century (see Diane Barthel, *Amana: From Pietist Sect to American Community*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln (1984), p. 76).

from 1859, as does a moralistic novel, *Jerry Creed*, the adventures of a young sailor. The majority of these books are dated around 1880, and virtually all are in German.

More relevant is the observation that many of these books were stories with religious overtones which tended to reinforce the Inspirationists' world view. Many were published in an inexpensive series format with such titles as *Perlen (Pearls)*, *Gold und Silber Nuesse (Gold and Silver Nuts)*, and *Immergruen (Evergreen)*. These stories were intended to impart basic Christian values and as such probably did not differ substantially from what young people in other small, rural or religious households were exposed to. However, not all of the books were of this type, however. For example, one series was called *Tom Shark, Der Koenig der Detektive (Tom Shark, the King of Detectives)* and included such gems as *Das Haus an der Themse*. They were printed in Dresden but bear an American copyright and date from the turn of the century.

Other books read by Amana's youth do not support an image of a community largely insulated from knowledge of the world. Along with a large number of biblical and moralistic stories (which in any event involved "worldly" situations and characters), one finds books with factual information about people and places around the world, past and present. Some are purely for entertainment, although these generally date from a later period. Above all, the same or similar books were being read by young people elsewhere in this country and even abroad. Unfortunately, we do not know what the elders and teachers succeeded in withholding, and although their ability to control the flow of materials into Amana may have been greater than in some communities, their advantage in doing so was a matter of degree. Thus, we cannot conclude that Amana youth were ignorant of the world outside the community before 1900.

### *Technical Manuals*

Another type of outside publication available to residents of Amana was the technical book or magazine. Although less common than the two preceding types of publication, and in some ways less remarkable, they should be noted.

Many of these manuals contain technical knowledge about elements of Amana's economy. Two books published in 1848 discuss the techniques of calico printing. Other nineteenth-century publications treat animal disease, weather, and farming problems. A book on milling was published in 1913. There are texts on pharmaceuticals and a large number, spanning a lengthy time period from 1705 to

1869, on health and disease. No scholar has ever claimed that the Inspirationists advocated primitive technology or operated exclusively in terms of traditional knowledge, so it is not surprising to find these works. What would be surprising, if the "Inspirationist-as-introversionist" thesis were true, is that the Amana Colonists had such ready access to the latest "worldly" sources of information.

Traditionally female activities are also represented in this category. Several cookbooks were available, the oldest published in 1863 in Philadelphia. Two editions (1879 and 1898) of the *Cookbook for Germans in America* must have been well-used, since additional recipes on hand-written slips are carefully tucked into them. Several booklets on knitting, published in Nuremberg but unfortunately undated, are present.

### *Periodicals*

In some ways, the most noteworthy of the outside publications to have reached communal Amana were the magazines and newspapers. They differ from religious works, school books and technical manuals in that their function was more to inform and entertain than to uplift or instruct. In this way they more closely resembled the serialized children's literature, although they more often dealt with secular topics, and their presence in the community can be documented much earlier. Magazines will be discussed in this section, while newspapers, for reasons that will become clear, will be covered in the next.

Popular magazines, mostly in German, began to cross the boundary into the community almost as soon as the Inspirationists arrived in America. Possibly the first was the *Neuer Deutscher Jugendfreund* (*New German Youth Friend*), published in Stuttgart. The oldest issues found in Colony archives date from 1846, three years after the founding of the Inspirationist settlement at Ebenezer, New York. Another early arrival was *Das Buch fuer Alle: Illustrierte Monatsschrift*, also from Stuttgart. It contained novels, engravings, accounts of natural phenomena, and small news items. *Das Buch fuer Alle* began publication in 1866, and the 1867 volume is in Amana.

The most widely read of the periodicals was undoubtedly the *Welt Bote* (*World Messenger*), a weekly German language newsmagazine published in Allentown, Pennsylvania, between 1854 and 1916. The first mention of the *Welt Bote* in Inspirationist records is contained in an 1862 Ebenezer ledger book. An 1867 document from Middle Amana reveals that several copies of the *Welt Bote* were ordered in that village and that each was circulated among nine or ten house-

holds. The existence of such an organized distribution system almost certainly indicates that the subscription was approved by the leadership of Middle Amana, and something similar was probably occurring in the other villages as well. In conjunction with the magazine, the community also received the *Welt Bote Kalendar*, a "farmer's almanac" type of publication; issues of this exist in Amana for the years 1883 to 1894. Other evidence indicates that members of the community continued to receive the magazine until it ceased publication.

We do not know whether all of these early subscriptions were approved by the leaders of the community, or how many of the members actually saw the magazines. Based on the general similarity among these publications, one might want to argue that the others were, like the *Welt Bote*, both permitted and widely read. Also intriguing is the fact that copies have survived for so long, but whether this indicates that they were cherished because of their rarity or simply forgotten in attics because of their prevalence is unclear. In any case, the important thing about these magazines from our point of view is that they crossed the boundary into Amana very early: Christian Metz was still alive,<sup>4</sup> the religious fervor engendered by immigration and the relocation to Amana in 1855 was still strong, and the ideology of separation from the world was routinely proclaimed by the Elders.

In light of the preceding, it is surprising that the archives contain fewer periodicals from the 1870s and '80s than from earlier decades. The number increases again in the 1890s and in the early years of the 20th century, when at least eight German-language periodicals not previously noted are found.<sup>5</sup> The possibility must be entertained that

4. Christian Metz (1794-1867) was the principal leader of that period in Inspirationist history known as the "Reawakening." He was the third divinely inspired leader to appear after the Reawakening began in 1817, and the only one to remain inspired for the rest of his life. He gathered the scattered Inspirationists onto estates in Germany, planned and organized the immigration to America, and presided over the adoption of communal living.

5. These are (with the date of the oldest issue in parentheses): *Haus und Herd* (*House and Hearth*) (1890), an illustrated monthly with news, letters, history, stories, and religious items (the issues of the 1890 volume were bound together in the Society's bindery, probably at the time, and are in the author's possession); *Der Haus und Bauernfreund der Germania* (*The House and Farm Friend of Germania*) (1895), first published in Milwaukee in the 1880s; *Der Familien Freund* (*The Family Friend*) (1893), from Columbus, Ohio; *Daheim: Ein Deutsches Familienblatt* (*At Home: A German Family Magazine*) (1900), which bears the distinctly non-isolationist motto, "Aus der Zeit, Fuer die Zeit" (Out of Time, For Today); *Die Abendschule: Ein Deutsches Familienblatt* (*The Evening School: A German Family Magazine*) (1905) came from St. Louis; *Payne's Familienkalendar* (1905) contained stories, jokes, puzzles, paintings, and news; *Das Moderne Journal fuer deutsche*



the community's leaders blocked the entry of such publications after Christian Metz's death, although there is no evidence for this and no reason to suspect it. I find it more plausible to think that the gap in the 1870s and '80s is an accident of what was saved and what has been donated to the museum. These magazines, like the earlier ones, contained mostly items for entertainment along with some practical information about meteorology, plants and animals, health, and farming. They contained some news though little analysis, and did not emphasize religion.

Only two English-language periodicals have come to light. *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* from 1872 and '73 is in the museum library. Given the sophisticated tone of this magazine, its presence is somewhat surprising; perhaps it was a gift from an admiring outsider. The other is *Wakefield's Annual Almanac and Account Book*, published by Dr. C. Wakefield, the manufacturer of "Wakefield's Family Medicines." The almanac contains advertisements, calendars, and testimonial letters about the effectiveness of Dr. Wakefield's nostrums. Most likely, Dr. Wakefield distributed it free-of-charge as a promotion for his medicines.

The archival holdings of exogenous religious works, works for school-age children, technical manuals, and periodicals are sufficient to demonstrate that the Inspirationists were not living behind an impermeable boundary of religious separatism, even in their first decades in America. They may not have "gone into the world," but they knew a great deal about it, at least about things that could be described in words and pictures. Certainly their knowledge was spotty; they probably knew little of politics in Washington, D.C., or of the arts in New York, but they knew history, natural history, geography, general current events, and something of the life of people in the United States and around the world. The journalist Charles Nordhoff, who visited Amana in 1874, noted this, as the following anecdote illustrates:

The innkeeper, a little to my surprise, when by chance I told him that I had spent a winter on the Sandwich Islands, asked me with the keenest delight and curiosity about the trees, the climate, and the life there; and wanted to know if I had seen the place where Captain Cook, "the great circumnavigator

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*Frauen* (*The Modern Journal for German Women*) (1906), published in Milwaukee and Berlin, contained stories and news and, unlike some of the others, was liberally illustrated with advertising; Another very popular and widely available magazine was *Die Hausfrau* (*The Housewife*); its contents were much the same as the others: stories, news items, and housekeeping and sewing ideas.

of the world," was slain. He returned to the subject again and again, and evidently looked upon me as a prodigiously interesting person, because I had been fortunate enough to see what to him was classic ground. An American would not have felt one-half this man's interest; but he would probably have dreamed of making the same journey one day. My kindly host sat serenely in his place, and was not moved by a single wandering thought.<sup>6</sup>

Apparently, for many others in Amana at this time, too, reading was enough.

### *What Was Not Allowed*

It remains to consider the evidence for boundary *maintenance* that exists with respect to printed matter. Information comes from two sources: the inspired testimonies given through the community's spiritual leaders, Christian Metz and Barbara Landmann, and the minutes of decisions made by the Council of Elders, the formal ruling body in the Colonies.

Only one inspired testimony given in Amana in fact addressed the question of what the Inspirationists should and should not read. It was delivered on August 11, 1861, by Christian Metz during a Sunday afternoon church service at which only young men were present. In this testimony, Metz singled out a number of men for specific words of admonition, including Johannes Bronner, Jr.

You have heard it, Bronner, that the Lord will burn with His flame all such useless things on which men try to take nourishment, and [you have heard] that the souls of such [men] will sweat and feel a pain, because they have invented such unholy teachings and extracted them from the Star Spirit [*Sterngeist*]; and such vain knowledge, in which the sensuousness finds pleasure and a pasture [in which to graze], but which in the end causes death, the death of faith, of childlike faith, and life, all of which comes from God. Therefore it is vile and damned and shall not be read in the community as entertainment, nor be kept; for you have teachings enough: the love of God pours into those who love Him . . . a better nourishment.<sup>7</sup>

Bronner at this time was 20 or 25 years old. According to the preface of this testimony, written at the time by the community's scribe, he was being castigated specifically for reading books by the German poet and dramatist Johann Friedrich von Schiller (1759-1805). Why Schiller's works were singled out for censure was not explained. Ac-

6. Charles Nordhoff, *The Communistic Societies of the United States*, (New York: Hillary House Publishers, Ltd., 1960 [orig. pub. 1875]), pp. 41-2.

7. *Jahrbuecher der wahren Inspirations-Gemeinden. Oder: Bezeugungen des Geistes des Herrn. Sammlung* 36, p. 164 (August 11, 1861). Amana Society: Amana, Iowa.

cording to community records, Bronner caused his parents much pain and eventually married and left the community.<sup>8</sup>

In contrast to Metz's single injunction, the Great Council issued many resolutions over the years proscribing certain printed materials. Interestingly, all related to newspapers.<sup>9</sup> For example, on June 8, 1875, we find: "The reading of newspapers on Sunday shall be forbidden." We can infer both that newspapers were entering the community at this time and that they were tolerated so long as one did not desecrate the Sabbath with them. Ten years later (December 8, 1885), however, possibly in response to more widespread reading of newspapers, the Council issued a more pointed statement:

It was discussed about the many newspapers and other papers read by the members, and which sometimes are against religion. It shall be remembered that such are not allowed and should not be read. No one may get a newspaper without permission of the local [i.e. village] Council. Young people not 21 years of age have no right to have a newspaper. Also, young store workers shall keep no newspapers or books without the permission of the older Elders.

A month later (January 5, 1886), some specific papers were singled out: "In accordance with last month's ruling about newspapers, it was announced that the two, the *Detroit Free Press* and *The West*, cannot be read in the community." The basis of the special offense of these two papers is not recorded.

The subject was addressed for the last time in a resolution dated March 12, 1888: "It shall be seen to that no newspapers shall be bought by the members without the permission of the Elders." Compared to the earlier resolutions this one sounds restrained. Does it represent the mere reiteration of a principle that the Elders realized they had little hope of enforcing? That may be reading too much into the words of the resolution, but clearly the outer boundary of the community was permeable to newspapers.

Why did the Elders single out newspapers for censure? Ostensibly, their main purpose was to restrict any communication that di-

8. This information comes from the obituary of Bronner's father, Johannes Bronner, Sr., and can be found in the community's official history, *Inspirations-Historie, oder Beschreibung des Gnadenwerks des Herrn in den Gemeinden der Wahren Inspiration*, in the volume covering 1884-1891 (published by the Amana Society in 1918), pp. 788-791.

9. All references to rulings by the Great Council are taken from a bound, hand-written manuscript of *Bruderraths Beschluesse* (Council Resolutions) covering the period from 1846 to 1900, now in the library of the Museum of Amana History. The translations were made by the late Richard Seifert of Homestead, Iowa, and are in the author's possession.

rectly questioned religious authority. Without conducting a content analysis of the newspapers in question, we can only speculate that they were more threatening on this score than the other reading matter. I believe other considerations may have been equally if not more important to the Elders. Some of the newspapers were dailies, and others arrived semi-weekly or weekly. Thus, they represented a more constant flow of ideas and information than other printed material. They also dealt more in points of view. Even when their content had nothing to do with religion they threatened the status quo, or so it may have seemed to the Elders. Furthermore, newspapers, unlike most of the other publications, not only were in English but made Amanans more aware of the surrounding American culture. The ultimate threat in boundary penetration, I suggest, was cultural, not religious, and lay more in the knowledge Amana residents acquired of present social conditions in their immediate vicinity than of science, technology, natural history, or even history, Hawaiian or otherwise.

### *Conclusions*

The boundary for printed matter between communal-era Amana and the outside was more permeable than earlier writers have indicated. A term like "introversionist" simply will not work, and an emphasis on "separation" must be qualified. While it is true that Amana's leaders tried in various ways to reduce the amount of contact between members of the community and the wider society, the injunctions to this end were actually more cautionary than absolutely prohibitive. Furthermore, "the boundary" between Amana and the world cannot simply be assigned to a point somewhere along a continuum of strong to weak. One must examine many items separately. The injunctions against newspapers, for example, did not apply to *all* newspapers, and the injunction against contact with "worldly minded men" did not necessarily rule out contact with their writings. Finally, the evidence regarding printed matter does not support the view that Amana's boundary was "strong" in the nineteenth century and gradually weakened in the twentieth, culminating in the dissolution of most boundaries with the Great Change in 1932.

An alternative hypothesis is that the ultimate goal and vision of the founders of Amana was to create a pious community, not an isolated one *per se*. Their vision of boundary control was not absolutist, but rather selective. Printed material, as well as objects, people, and activities, that interfered with the members' pious lives of devotion to God were to be prohibited. This did not mean *all* printed

material, any more than it meant all objects, people, or activities from the world. But the Elders' definitions of what was acceptable and what was unacceptable, or "worldly," were not always accepted by the members. Hence, the periodic reiteration of rules and occasional reprimands. Furthermore, a fair claim can be made that the twentieth century simply brought more and more new kinds of printed matter, objects, activities, and even people, challenging the traditional, largely local culture of small towns across the country. In Amana's case, the relationship of these novel things to a pious way of life may not at first have been clear either to the Elders or to the members, as seventeenth- and eighteenth-century religious tracts became less and less helpful in making the necessary discriminations between the acceptable and the unacceptable as time went on.

As for the books and periodicals, although most reinforced traditional values, they also contained images of a world beyond the Colonies. Such images were available to the Colonists from the beginning. It was not in the breakdown of boundary maintenance, therefore, but rather in changes in Amanans' interest in those images, in conjunction with their proliferation and increasing novelty in the twentieth century, that explanations for changes in Amana culture must be sought.