

# In All the Papers: Newspaper Accounts of Communal Amana, 1867-1924

LANNY HALDY

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ALTHOUGH HE IS PERHAPS THE BEST KNOWN, Charles Nordhoff was not the only—or even the first—newspaperman to visit the Community of True Inspiration in Amana, Iowa.<sup>1</sup> In the period 1867-1924 we find reports, for example, by correspondents in the Elmira, New York *Telegram*, the Somerville, Massachusetts *Journal*, and the Minneapolis *Journal*. In Iowa, the Des Moines *Register* featured the Amana community several times, and the Cedar Rapids *Republican* regularly sent correspondents to cover events in the colony. The Cedar Rapids *Gazette* printed at least 42 articles on Amana in its first 25 years of publication, beginning in 1883. Despite the differences in time, geography, and degree of familiarity, these accounts reveal a remarkably similar view of communal Amana. Furthermore, the newspaper stories demonstrate that from an early date communal Amana was a popular news subject, not an isolated unknown, and provide many examples of how the community opened itself to outsiders.

Bertha Shambaugh's introduction to her 1908 study, *Amana the Community of True Inspiration*, presented an image of communal Amana and its attendant themes that are dominant in late 19th and early 20th century newspaper accounts:

In one of the garden spots of Iowa there is a charming little valley from which the surrounding hills recede like the steps of a Greek theater. Through this valley the historic Iowa River flows peacefully to the eastward. A closer

Lanny Haldy is executive director of the Amana Heritage Society, a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving the cultural heritage of Amana.

1. Nordhoff's often-quoted account of communal Amana can be found in Charles Nordhoff, *The Communistic Societies of the United States*, first published in 1875, (New York: Schocken, 1965).

view reveals seven old-fashioned villages nestling among the trees or sleeping on the hillsides. About these seven villages stretch twenty-six thousand goodly acres clothed with fields of corn, pastures, meadows, vineyards, and seas of waving grain. Beyond and above, surrounding the little valley, are richly timbered hills, forming as though by design a frame for this quaint picture of Amana—the home of the Community of True Inspiration.

A bit of Europe in America, a voice out of the past on the world's western frontier, this unique Community stands as the nearest approach in our day to the Utopian's dream of a community of men and women living together in peace, plenty, and happiness, away from the world and its many distractions. But the communism of Amana is not a dream: it is a fact—an established order of life.<sup>2</sup>

Shambaugh's pastoral lines are well-known and very often echoed by later writers on communal Amana up to the present day. Her image of Amana as an idyllic garden spot, quaint and old-fashioned, where the beauty and bounty of the landscape mirrors the lives of residents living together in peace and plenty, has a powerful attraction that can lure the casual visitor as well as the most hard-nosed academician. Furthermore, Shambaugh in this text presented communal Amana as the realization of the Utopian dream of a harmonious society. Amana was an example of a communist system that is neither fantastic dream nor abstract theory.

The essential features of the garden image that would become common in subsequent news stories and be codified later by Shambaugh were introduced in the first known extant newspaper account of Amana published in the Davenport, Iowa *Daily Gazette*, June 29, 1867.<sup>3</sup> This was a detailed and lengthy (3 full columns) description of the community written by a *Gazette* correspondent who visited Amana several times. This article is the first "outside" account of Amana known to exist. The article was part of a series, neatly delineated in the headline: "Iowa As It Is / Pen Sketches of Town and Country / The Towns on the C. R. I. & P. Railroad / The Amana Society."

The writer stated at the outset why his article on Amana should be of interest to readers. First, the Amana Society is "one of the most interesting examples to be found in the United States of successful associated and co-operative labor." Second, Amana's success is related to "the development of Iowa resources and wealth." Given these justifications, it comes as no surprise that the majority of the article described the geography and economy of the Amana villages.

2. Bertha M. H. Shambaugh, *Amana: The Community of True Inspiration* (Iowa City: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1908), p. 15.

3. *Davenport Daily Gazette*, June 29, 1867, p. 3.

The author provided a description of the physical layout of the seven villages, the farms, and the manufacturing facilities. His primary interest was the development of wealth and exploitation of resources. Still, within this economic frame can be discerned the themes and images that dominated 19th century newspaper accounts of Amana. The Davenport *Gazette* article was an economically oriented description of the "Good Life" led by communal Amana residents.

It is instructive to detail some of the specific ideas of communal Amana that occurred in this early newspaper account. First, the *Gazette* article abounded in references to the richness and productivity of the land, a key element of the garden image: the inference is that the richness and cultivation of the land determine the richness and cultivation of people's lives. We are told that the soil is "of the excellent black loam variety" and that the colonists are making the best use of this valuable resource: "The soil is thoroughly cultivated. Weeds are kept remarkably scarce . . . Nothing is allowed to run to waste, or rot, or to be lost or injured." Their agricultural skill is unparalleled: "Nowhere else have we seen such cultivation. Nowhere such successful gardening." In short, the colonists' farm management is "an example to all agriculturists who would be successful."

The colonists made great improvements to the land in addition to the villages and fields, such as bridges across the Iowa River and a canal for water power. Also contributing to the wealth, prosperity, and success of the colony were its manufacturing capabilities. Its textiles—flannels, woolens, and calicos—were "held in high esteem by the trade generally." On a smaller scale, the community manufactured all types of objects for itself and for sale to farmers in the surrounding areas. Its retail stores were model establishments in the variety and quality of goods they offered.

Fully three-quarters of the *Gazette* correspondent's account of Amana was a description of the physical layout of the community. Very little was said about the daily lives of the people or the communal structure and governance that made such great wealth possible.

However, the writer did attempt to describe the "peculiarities" of the Amana religion. Of special interest was apparently the first description by an outsider of an Amana Church service. The writer described the outward forms of worship of the community and set forth some of the basic tenets of faith. He recognized that within the community "all are brethren in Christ Jesus" and that "their religion is evidently the bond of union." However, the author evidently knew little about the history of that religion: he mis-translated the community's name as "Direct Inspirationists," and he described the sect as

"an off-shoot of the Lutheran Church," at best a misleading characterization of the community's radical Pietist origins. Perhaps what was most remarkable about this article's discussion of the religious faith of the True Inspirationists was that it did not mention either Christian Metz or Barbara Heinemann Landmann, the two inspired *Werkzeug* leaders of the community, both still living at the time.

The characterization of the Amana people was of a prosperous people in a garden spot. The people were sincere, virtuous, devout, and earnest. Their industrious nature was self-evident, but "it cannot be said that they work hard."

This view of Amana was of a successful and wealthy cooperative society where the richness of the land is reflected in the richness of life. Furthermore, the author was convinced that the wealth of Amana contributed to the growth and wealth of the state of Iowa. Forty years later some local and area newspapers would suggest that the converse was true: that the Amana community was an economic liability to the county and state.

The themes of garden, communist success, and wealth that appear in the Davenport *Gazette* article surfaced again and again in newspaper accounts of the community in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Visitors to Amana from local papers as well as from more distant cities commonly used the same motifs, themes and words to describe the colony. And as time passed the idea of a successful, quaint garden spot in Iowa became more exaggerated. What was already a remarkable example of cooperative success in 1867 was even more noteworthy in 1923; and what was a quaint and peculiar community on the Iowa frontier turned into a picturesque, if anachronistic, paradise in post-World War I America. For the popular press, the Amana Community was the land that time forgot.

Rufus Wilson, staff correspondent for the *Elmira Telegram*, visited Amana in 1888. The headline of his report "At the Amana Community"<sup>4</sup> advertised an account of "The Most Prosperous Communistic Society in the United States." The reader is promised that he will learn about "the quiet, regular life of peace and plenty led by its members" and, in an odd juxtaposition, "their peculiar religious doctrines and practises [sic] and great wealth."

Dr. A. E. Winship, a self-professed student of communistic life, wrote a feature article on Amana for the *Somerville Journal* in 1904.<sup>5</sup>

4. Rufus Wilson, "At the Amana Community," *Elmira Sunday Telegram*, July 8, 1888, p. 6.

5. A. E. Winship, "Life in Amana, Iowa," *Somerville Journal*, September 16, 1904, p. 12.

## 24 COMMUNAL SOCIETIES

Again, the headline declared Amana to be "the most famous community of the New World where 1,800 people live in comfort, peace, and prosperity." Apparently dismayed at the failure of so many other communistic efforts, Dr. Winship exulted that Amana was "one genuinely prosperous, peaceful, and apparently eternal communistic settlement in the New World . . . as secure as the Hawkeye state, as prosperous as Wall street, as harmonious as a honeymoon." Before concluding his account, Winship asks the rhetorical question: "Where in all this broad land is there to be found another group as well off as are these men, women, and children, who are sure of an adequate living, in a good home, with peaceable neighbors, with an undivided interest in property worth a half a million . . ."

On June 25, 1905, the Cedar Rapids *Republican* featured the Amana Society, aspiring to present "a true pen picture of the picturesque colony," as well as "some history of the quaint society."<sup>6</sup> This article is noteworthy in that it devotes a considerable amount of time to a discussion of the history of the Community of True Inspiration in 18th and 19th century Europe. Rufus Wilson also gives a historical background of the Amana Society, but very few of the other 19th century articles recognized the long history of the community prior to its arrival in Iowa.

Louis L. Collins wrote of his visit to the Amana Society in the Minneapolis *Journal* in 1916/ He was impressed by the simplicity and lack of "worldliness" in the community, where punishment took the form of banishment from church services. He also viewed Amana as "the most successful community-project in America."

The attention to detail and background that apparent in the Cedar Rapids *Republican* in 1905 vanished in its feature on the Amana Society in 1917.<sup>8</sup> Below page-wide headlines that declare that the Amana villages had abolished wine-making, "Red and Yellow Wine Poured into the Street Gutters," a short paragraph on that development is followed by 4 columns of text in which the Amana Society was compared to the legendary city of Eleusis in ancient Greece: "Scarcely credible as it may seem, there exists today a counterpart of that Eleusis of old embracing those same characteristics which caused all Greece to marvel, and in addition boasts many extraordinary distinguishing features unknown to the ancient cult of Eleusis." This article demonstrates how the garden image could be abused by an undisciplined pen, as the following paragraph illustrates:

6. "The Amana Society," *Cedar Rapids Sunday Republican*, June 25, 1905, p. 5.

7. Reprinted in "An Iowan Utopia," *Literary Digest*, vol. 52 (April 1, 1916), p. 932.

8. "Red and Yellow Wine Poured into Street Gutters; Seven Amana Villages Have Abolished Winemaking," *Cedar Rapids Republican*, June 24, 1917, p. 2.

The traveler who has crossed the boundary lines of Amana for the first time is at once charmed by the indescribable sense of peace and quiet which seems to reflect the spirit of the countryside. As he journeys farther in this simple paradise, he may perchance meet a group of sweet-faced maidens, singing and chattering in their German tongue, all similarly garbed in the quaint costume of the German peasant of 200 years ago . . . Flowers and foliage are everywhere in sight, while each turn . . . discloses some partially hidden wonder of nature.

A more restrained approach was provided by J. B. Scannell in the *Iowa Magazine* section of the *Des Moines Register* on May 24, 1923.<sup>9</sup> The author interviewed several experts on the community, including Bertha Shambaugh, to analyze the success and problems of the society. This was one of the first articles that confronted issues of discontent, disaffection, and declining population in the community. Still, the opening sentence of Scannell's article reveals his view of Amana to be similar to Shambaugh's: "Uncontrollable turmoil in the world today brings to the minds of Iowans thoughts of a little group of peaceful villages nestling among the gentle hills and fertile valleys of eastern Iowa County." For Scannell, Amana is ultimately "Iowa's Communist Success."

As late as 1923, just a few years before the communal system was abandoned, the *Cedar Rapids Gazette* could still stretch a headline over the top of its second page that praised the endurance of the community: "Amanas—World's Only Successful Communistic Colony."<sup>10</sup> The notion of a prosperous garden spot was still strong, as the sub-headings demonstrate: "Social or Economic Reforms not Preached by the Society, Strife does not enter Lives," or "Big, Happy Family is way one member describes most novel community in United States." This happy state of affairs is all possible of course because the communism of Amana is not that of social theorists, but rather based on religious principles and Christian faith.

We can summarize the feature articles on Amana in Iowa and national newspapers from 1888 to 1923 as follows: First, the garden image was always associated with Amana. Second, the Community of True Inspiration was invariably classified as a communistic success story. The writers of the articles were fascinated by the economic and social success of the colony and the accumulation of wealth made possible by the cooperative system. Furthermore, there was a perceptible pride that such a community existed in the United States and—among the Iowa papers—in Iowa particularly. For example, in an

9. J. B. Scannell, "The Amanas—Iowa's Communist Success," *Des Moines Register*, May 24, 1923, *Iowa Magazine* Section, p. 1.

10. John R. Battin, "Amanas—World's Only Successful Communistic Colony," *Cedar Rapids Evening Gazette*, July 7, 1923, p. 2.

editorial box accompanying Scannell's article on "Iowa's Communist Success," the editor of the Des Moines *Register's Iowa Magazine* section exclaims "Communism in Iowa!" and remarks that it is broadening and stimulating to come into contact with uncommon ideas and people living in a way not ordinarily practiced.<sup>11</sup> There appears to have been no fear of or animosity toward the community. Capitalism, it seems, was not yet on the defensive, not yet challenged by stock market crashes, depressions, or Soviet power. The *Register* editor made a point of mentioning that the Amana colonists were "not un-American." America could accommodate a community such as Amana. This attitude changed somewhat by the time of the community's reorganization in 1932, when much of the American press delighted in reporting on the failure of Amana's communistic experiment and its adoption of a capitalist corporate identity.<sup>12</sup>

While this quick survey of various national and state articles provides insight into the popular press's image of Amana, a more comprehensive analysis of one nearby newspaper's treatment of Amana over a period of time can reveal how its neighbors viewed the Amana community. From 1883 through 1908, the Cedar Rapids *Gazette* published at least 42 articles on Amana, the mere number indicating a good deal of interest in the Amana Society by the Cedar Rapids community.

The *Gazette* published numerous general news stories on events in Amana during the period. These were usually straightforward factual accounts of occurrences in the colony; many deal with fires, windstorms, and hail damage. The tone was sympathetic to the community. When the *Gazette* reported, for example, that contrary to rumors circulating in the city, the Amana Society was not contemplating moving to Texas,<sup>13</sup> one gets the impression that the editors were genuinely pleased that the colony would remain. Some of the stories are inquiries into how outside events, such as Iowa prohibition or women's suffrage, might effect the community. The community's wine-making seems to have been an especially fascinating subject.

Some of the pieces in the *Gazette* were feature articles that examined the "history and habits" of the Amana Society. Five such articles

11. Scannell, p. 1.

12. For a discussion of the popular press view of Amana's reorganization, see Diane L. Barthel, *Amana: From Pietist Sect to American Community* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), chapter 10.

13. On the move to Texas, see *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, June 9, 1888, p. 4. Storm damage reports occurred for example on July 7, 1884, p. 2 and August 11, 1891. "Amana News" was reported on August 12, 1891. Winemaking was the subject of an article as early as March 29, 1884.

appeared in the period, and each conformed to the garden/communist success stereotype summarized above. The first feature on Amana appeared on October 1, 1883,<sup>14</sup> just a few months after the *Gazette* began publication. It is noteworthy that despite its advantage of proximity to the community, the *Gazette's* features were not noticeably more accurate than the national stories. In fact, it seems the *Gazette* never really understood the community's religious beliefs: reports refer to the Amana Society variously as "Quaker," "Lutheran," "Mennonite," and "Amish."<sup>15</sup>

One of the few analytical articles that appeared was written as a special to the *Gazette* in 1904 by Barthinius Wick,<sup>16</sup> a professor at the University of Iowa who had studied and written on Amana earlier. Wick, too, was pleased with the success of Christian Communism at Amana, but his scholarly inclination caused him to examine some of the troubles and problems—primarily the dissatisfaction of Amana youth—that also faced the community. Interestingly enough, however, a companion piece to Wick's article, along with accompanying photographs of "Picturesque Amana," once again articulated the garden image and emphasized the quaintness of the colony.

In his 1904 article, Wick provided an insight into why the Cedar Rapids community and the *Gazette* were interested in the Amana Colony and why he in particular had been asked to do the story: Amana was, as Wick so matter-of-factly stated it, "the most popular destination for Cedar Rapids excursionists." The *Gazette* catered to this interest in Amana by city residents, printing notices and reports on excursion trips to the colony. Amana was a source of pleasurable entertainment, and its image of a quaint and old-fashioned garden spot helped draw visitors to it.

As early as May 1884 the *Gazette* printed a notice of an upcoming excursion sponsored by the Methodist Church and subsequently reported that the trip was voted by one and all a great success.<sup>17</sup> The reporter went on to tell the reader something about Amana, but with this important caveat: "There are few people who have a good sense of Amana . . . (and) we are liable to make some errors in this article because of the difficulty experienced in getting the facts regarding any of the important matters."

14. "An Iowa Commune," *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, October 1, 1883, p. 1.

15. For example, in the feature article "An Iowa Commune" the Inspirationists were compared to the Quakers. Examples of the Mennonite/Amish confusion are given below.

16. Barthinius Wick, "The Amana Society," *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, January 9, 1904, p. 61.

17. *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, May 1, 1884, p. 3 and May 29, 1884, p. 4.



Another excursion was reported on August 27, 1901,<sup>18</sup> when 700 sightseers from Cedar Rapids and Marion took the train to Amana and spent the day visiting the shops and homes of "the most successful communistic society now existing in the United States." We should note that the population of this "isolated" village at that time was 530. The report concluded: "... the fact that a visit to the homes of the quiet people . . . never grows tiresome was proven by the large crowd which left for that place this morning."

What must have been one of the more interesting excursions to Amana occurred when the local Cedar Rapids press hosted the German-American Press Association, reported on September 14, 1908.<sup>19</sup> This again consisted of a trainload of people who were treated "royally" to a tour of the woolen mill, songs, and food at one of the inns. The headline announced that "Newspaper Men Invaded Amana," and the article reported extensively on the activities enjoyed at "the seven or eight different Amish settlements in Iowa County."

In addition to covering excursions to the Amana Society, the *Gazette* attempted to satisfy the tourist interest in the colony by running special photographic features with titles such as "Springtime in Amana"<sup>20</sup> and cute captions such as "Amana milkmaids" and—under a photo of a team of oxen—"Amana busline."<sup>21</sup>

The *Gazette's* coverage of Amana in news, feature and tourist articles was aimed primarily at a Cedar Rapids audience which looked to Amana as a source of entertainment. The Amana Society was an old-fashioned and quaint community, in rich and beautiful countryside, where its German-speaking residents/hosts shared their bounty with their Cedar Rapids neighbors. The *Gazette* articles further demonstrated that this interest in Amana did not imply an understanding of the basic principles and *raison d'être* of the community. The colony was significant mostly as an excursionist's destination, and the excursionist had no need to know any of "the facts regarding the important matters." Furthermore, the *Gazette's* attitude toward Amana was obviously patronizing and perhaps a bit proprietary.

The final group of articles that appeared in the *Gazette* in the period 1883-1908 related to a lawsuit filed against the Society in 1905. Between February 1905 and November 1906, the *Gazette* printed 18 articles on the subject. This suit, and inside and outside reaction to it, is of great interest in itself, but cannot be discussed in detail here.

18. "Visit Old Colony," *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, August 27, 1901, p. 5.

19. *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, September 14, 1908, p. 2.

20. *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, June 15, 1907, p. 3.

21. *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, September 14, 1908, p. 9.

The suit, filed by an Iowa County resident, challenged the Amana Society's communal structure under Iowa corporate law which allowed it to exist as a religious and benevolent society. The suit maintained that the Society was going beyond its powers in that many of its enterprises brought pecuniary profit. Obviously threatened, the Society hired outside counsel to represent it; a decision in its favor was granted by the Iowa County Court. After appeal, the Iowa Supreme Court settled the matter by ruling in favor of Amana.

The extensive coverage of this litigation by the *Gazette* conformed to the image presented in the other articles. The story was of major consequence to the colony, and threatened its very existence; the *Gazette* was interested. For the most part the coverage was very sympathetic to the Amana Society. The day after it first reported the case ("Mennonites Sued for Taxes"),<sup>22</sup> the *Gazette* wondered, "what is the animus of the suit?"<sup>23</sup> It felt that public sentiment was generally with the colony whose members were good citizens, peacefully inclined. On February 8, 1905, it published a half-page article on the topic defending the Amana community and attempting to correct "some misstatements."<sup>24</sup> Mystery surrounded the origin of the suit. Rumors were apparently circulating that the impetus for the suit came from inside the community, from younger members who wanted their share of the wealth. The *Gazette* addressed this question, printed an interview with an Amana leader, and concluded in its headline of the February 9 story: "All the Trouble on the Outside."<sup>25</sup>

But trouble is trouble, inside or outside. The suit, as well as the *Gazette's* coverage of it, revealed a different attitude toward the economic wealth of the community than we have seen so far. This lawsuit, more than anything previously, put the Amana Society, its wealth, tax burden, governing structure, and internal troubles, on display to the neighboring public. It caused a close examination—by people outside the community—of the Society's wealth and its economic role and impact on Iowa County. Generally, the attitude we can discern here is that the socialist success in the middle of capitalist Iowa County might in fact be a detriment to local economic growth, if not outright unfair competition. Even the *Gazette*, for all its support of the community, concluded that "by the nature of their

22. "Mennonites Sued for Taxes," *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, February 6, 1905, p. 10.

23. "Animus of Amana Society Suit Unknown," *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, February 7, 1905, p. 8.

24. "Amana Society in Great Danger," *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, February 8, 1905, p. 8.

25. "All the Trouble on the Outside," *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, February 9, 1905, p. 5.

organization [colony members] are not as much benefit to the community as if living as ordinary citizens."<sup>26</sup>

Cedar Rapids is approximately 20 miles northeast of Amana, in a neighboring county. The attitude toward the Amana colony displayed by newspapers in the community's home county, Iowa County, was markedly different than that of national or other Iowa papers. Surprisingly, the newspapers of Marengo, the county seat of Iowa County, rarely mentioned Amana—with one major exception: during World War I. If the bright garden image of Amana was tarnished a bit by the law suit of 1905-6, it was completely eclipsed in Iowa County by a negative image associated with the patriotic fervor of World War I. Here the garden image was replaced by the image of communal Amana as a repressive place that quashed individual freedom and initiative and retarded area economic development. The series of editorials printed in the Marengo *Sentinel* in the Spring of 1918 indicated a latent resentment of the wealth and influence of the Amana Society by its near neighbors.

In some respects the hostility toward the Amana Society shown in the *Sentinel* editorials was merely part of the larger wave of patriotic zeal and accompanying anti-German animosity that swept the United States and manifested itself in Iowa, for example, in legislation against the use of foreign languages. In Iowa County, the three Marengo newspapers—with the *Sentinel* taking the lead—railed against all unpatriotic individuals, slackers, and those who failed to do their fair share to support the war effort. The *Sentinel*, for example, spent some of its editorial vitriol to condemn as anti-American and pro-German those farmers who planted untested seed corn and consequently did not maximize their harvest.<sup>27</sup> However, the *Sentinel* editorials revealed that reinforcing this anti-German attitude toward the Amana Society was a deep-seated economic resentment that preceded war-time patriotism.

On the surface, the issue concerning the Amana Society—as well as for all other American individuals and organizations—was whether or not it was doing its part in support of the war effort. The degree of support was measurable in three general categories: 1) participation in the draft; 2) financial contribution in the form of donations to the Red Cross, Liberty Loans, and other facets of the war effort; and 3) a somewhat less quantifiable measure of contribution to the cause through demonstrations of "patriotism" and "loyalty,"—what we might call flag-waving today.

26. *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, February 7, 1905, p. 8.

27. *Editorial, Marengo Sentinel*, February 26, 1918, p. 4.

The *Sentinel's* position—expressed with vehemence—was that the Amana Society was deficient in all three. But its attacks went beyond a call for greater conformity to its standards of patriotism, to a rhetoric of undisguised prejudice and hate. The solution it advocated was the abolition of the colony, and its rhetoric was meant to incite the patriotic populace of Iowa County to effect that end. At best, the courts ought "to sweep the whole unwholesome mass into the Iowa River with a stub broom." If not, "one of these days we are all going to get together to knock the darn colony higher than the scaffold of Hamen," and "make it so dam [sic] warm in Amana township that Hell itself will seem like a refrigerator in comparison."<sup>28</sup>

This hostility was present because at least some of its close Iowa County neighbors saw the Amana Society—perhaps quite naturally given its communal, ethnic and religious nature—as apart from the greater county's economic and social life. At best, it did not contribute to the general wealth; at worst, it was in direct competition with the ordinary citizens of the county.

The issue of the military draft clearly showed this "us versus them" attitude. The question of the draft began the series of editorials on February 26, 1918. The District Exemption Board had placed Amana Society draft registrants in deferred classes. The *Sentinel's* editor perceived this as a direct trade-off: "This means that seventy-three young men and boys from the farms of Iowa County must go to take the places of the seventy-three Amana registrants." And these boys would be productive "lads from good American homes" as opposed to the "slack farmers" of Amana: "One legitimate Iowa County farmer will produce as much as ten Amanaites."<sup>29</sup> The war effort demanded that quotas be fulfilled and production maximized. If the Amana Society did not contribute its share of the Iowa County quota in men, money, or commodities, then the remainder of the county would carry an extra burden.

But the issue of quotas only accentuated the feeling that the Amana Society was not contributing to the county. On March 5, 1918, the *Sentinel* commented on a recent news report in which figures showed that Marengo was the only town along the Rock Island Railroad from Davenport to Des Moines (about 175 miles) that did not have an increase in population in the last twenty years. The reason for this was clear to the editor of the *Sentinel*:

The territory to the east of Marengo is populated with a liability, not an asset. The Amana Colony is but a clog in the wheel of progress; it is not worth a

28. *Ibid.*

29. *Ibid.*

dam [sic] to Iowa County nor to the State of Iowa. If the Amana country were populated with good, thrifty farmers; if the insidious commercial organization known as the Amana colony were taken out of Marengo territory, Marengo would have grown as her sister cities.<sup>30</sup>

The notion here of an "insidious commercial organization" is of particular importance and relates back to the lawsuit of 1905-6. As the *Sentinel* maintained in its first editorial, the Amana Society had long been "undermining our business under their sham cloak of religious belief."<sup>31</sup> Clearly, as far as the *Sentinel* was concerned, communal Amana's religious life is merely a front for unfair business advantage.

On March 26, 1918 the *Sentinel* reprinted an editorial entitled "Put the Colony Out" that had appeared in the Rock Island (Illinois) *News*.<sup>32</sup> This editorial provides an interesting contrast to the paper in which it was reprinted. Although it shared the *Sentinel's* view that German ethnicity was un-American, it completely lacked the economic animus of the *Sentinel*. Economic issues are local issues.

The Rock Island editorial claimed that because of its adherence to German language and customs, the Amana Colony was subversive, an agent of the German Kaiser, and a "menace to the peace of the state." But we also find a new notion that went beyond anti-Germanism. The subversive, "un-American" nature of the colony was the system itself and its accompanying moral life. This was the first time that the popular press expressed the idea that Amana's communal structure was anti-American. This argument did not take the form of anti-communism as such, but rather was anti-oligarchical: Amana was an oligarchy, ruled by a few for their own benefit and financial advantage. The common man had no free will and was in fact uneducated and exploited, a poor German slave. Therefore to abolish the colony would be to free these poor souls.

The *Sentinel's* editorials embraced this anti-oligarchical view. In July 1918 it printed a 4-stanza poem entitled "Flag Day at South Amana," signed by one J.H. Murphy. The second verse read:

How long will Iowa continue  
To permit a German cult  
To maintain an Oligarchy  
Our patriots to insult?  
How long will the villages continue  
To exist in a by-gone age;

30. Editorial, *Marengo Sentinel*, March 5, 1918, p. 4.

31. Editorial, *Marengo Sentinel*, February 26, 1918, p. 4.

32. "Put the Colony Out," *Marengo Sentinel*, March 26, 1918, p. 1.

While the fruits of human progress  
 Are their rightful heritage?  
 How long will the people continue  
 The dull, monotonous grind  
 That supports the body whole-  
 somely  
 But alas! neglects the mind?<sup>33</sup>

"Flag Day at South Amana" can stand as a summary of the Marengo *Sentinel's* attitude toward Amana in this period. However, not all newspapers—even in Marengo—printed such strong opinions. The *Sentinel's* rhetoric was extraordinary and revealing. The Marengo *Republican* reported on developments with the Amana Society and the draft board fairly matter-of-factly. It printed information on quotas and their fulfillment and exhorted the Amana Society to give the maximum to the war effort so that people everywhere, like the Society, could live according to their beliefs. It invited the Amana Society to reply to charges against it and printed the Society's letter. The *Republican* could also get caught up in the patriotic fervor—"It looks like a few more good old American flags could be passed around and studied in Amana with good effect."<sup>34</sup>—but it never reached the extremes, or voiced the underlying economic resentment, that the *Sentinel* did. The Marengo *Democrat*, it seems, virtually ignored the whole issue.

In fact, as soon as we leave Marengo, we find in the newspapers a much different attitude toward the Amana Society's war support and loyalty. The Society scored something of a public relations coup when in August 1918 about 160 soldiers training in Iowa City were treated to an outing at the Amana Colonies. The Iowa City *Daily Press*, the Iowa City *Citizen*, and the Williamsburg *Journal-Tribune* (an Iowa County paper) reported on the event in glowing terms.<sup>35</sup> All concluded that it demonstrated that, in the words of the *Journal-Tribune*, "the Amana Society is heart and soul with the cause in which this country has pledged its men, its wealth, and its honor."

On September 1, 1918, the Cedar Rapids *Republican* printed an article, "The Case of The Amana Colonies,"<sup>36</sup> in which the writer

33. J. H. Murphy, "Flag Day at South Amana," *Marengo Sentinel*, July, 1918.

34. *Marengo Republican*, April 10, 1918, p. 8. The Amana Society's reply to charges against it was printed in the *Marengo Republican*, March 5, 1918, p. 2.

35. *Iowa City Daily Press*, August 7, 1918. *Iowa City Citizen*, August 7, 1918. *Williamsburg Journal-Tribune*, August 8, 1918. These articles appear in a reprint pamphlet published by the Amana Society (Amana, n.d.).

36. "The Case of the Amana Colonies," *Cedar Rapids Republican*, September 1, 1918, p. 5.

reported on his visit to Amana in order to "ascertain how the people felt toward the war." This investigation was in response to "much misunderstanding and some misrepresentation of the attitude of the people ..." The writer concluded that "the stars and stripes are flying over the various settlements," and wrote a testimonial to the loyalty and support of the Amana Society.

The *Republican*, it will be recalled, had printed the extravagant comparison of communal Amana and Greece's Elysian fields just a year earlier. Its sentiments as the war progressed remained in favor of the Amana community, and its image as an idyllic rural garden spot—now a paradise that supported the war—endured. The stark difference between the image of Amana presented in the *Republican's* Elysian fields article and that presented in the Marengo *Sentinel* editorials demonstrates that popular opinion of communal Amana was to some degree dependent on proximity to it: the more distant, the more detached and romantic could the observer be. In Cedar Rapids, Des Moines, and across the United States, communal Amana was seen as the essence of a successful communal paradise, a garden of peace and prosperity. For the residents of Cedar Rapids in Linn County just 20 miles away, it was in addition a pleasurable diversion and excursionist's destination. But in Iowa County, economic reality made the colony a commercial enterprise, an employer, a merchant and salesman, and because of its status as a religious corporation, perhaps an economic rival with a perceived unfair advantage.

After the war and into the 1920s the image of a repressive Amana as articulated in the *Sentinel* was submerged again, the Amana Society regularly advertised its products in Marengo newspapers, and we find the garden image once again the predominant view of communal life. In 1923, for example, the Marengo *Republican* reported on the disastrous fire that destroyed the mills of Amana in great detail and with obvious sympathy.<sup>37</sup> Significantly, the editor used the occasion to make a plea "to bury the hatchet" of animosity between the two communities. By 1924 even a Marengo newspaper could unashamedly subscribe to Shambaugh's imagery: the Marengo *Pioneer* began an article on the history of Amana with the (unattributed) words of Mrs. Shambaugh:

Situated in a charming little valley through which the historic Iowa river flows are the seven old-fashioned villages of the quaint Amanas—the home of the Community of True Inspiration.<sup>38</sup>

37. "Fire Destroys Amana Mills," *Marengo Republican*, August 15, 1923, p. 1.

38. "History of Amana Colony," *Marengo Pioneer*, October 1924, Special history of Iowa County Section, p. 2.

Only rarely is the antithesis of this idyllic garden image present in the newspapers examined. The notion of communal Amana as a repressive oligarchy in which the common man was ignorant and virtually enslaved appeared most strongly in the neighboring press during the patriotic fervor of World War I.

After the reorganization of the economy of communal Amana in 1932, both images—garden paradise and repressive oligarchy—remained part of the popular notion of Amana's communal experience. Authors could lament the passing of a glorious experiment in communal living, as did Marcus Bach: "Amana—The Glory Has Departed."<sup>39</sup> Or the reorganization could be seen along with Everett Webber as a liberating event: "Amana: Where the Lord Usually Said No."<sup>40</sup> The historiography of communal Amana has in fact rarely transcended these two stereotypical interpretations of the communal experience of the Community of True Inspiration.

39. Marcus Bach, "Amana—the Glory Has Departed," *The Christian Century*, vol. 52 (1935), pp. 1083-1086.

40. Everett Webber, *Escape to Utopia* (New York: Hastings House, 1959).