

## The Amana Colonies

Amana is a well known home appliance brand name, yet its origin as the name of a strict religious sect at the Amana Colonies in northeast Iowa is less well known. The Amanas were German Lutherans who immigrated to America in the 1820s and 1830s because of religious persecution, settling first in New York, where they established a place called Ebenezer, then resettling in the Iowa River Valley (just off today's I-80, near Cedar Rapids) in the 1840s and 1850s. They named their original settlement Amana and as the community grew expanded to West Amana, South Amana, High Amana, and Middle Amana.

The Amanas were a communal people, meaning that the community owned everything—individuals did not own private property. None of the houses had kitchens because they cooked and ate together in communal kitchens. They grew almost all of their food and produced almost all of what they needed. If they needed a certain trade or profession, the elders would select someone to learn it (for example, this was how they got a doctor).

In 1932, facing huge debts, the Amanas ended their communal way of life and divided most of their property among the community members. Today, there are about a thousand Amanas, and most still live in the Amana Colonies. One of their members, in the mid-1930s, soon after the “Great Change,” as they called it, began manufacturing refrigeration equipment as Amana and ultimately it became the huge company manufacturing refrigerators, ranges, washing machines, etc. The plant is in West Amana, although the company was sold a few years ago to Raytheon. It employs some 2,500 people, including many Amana people.

The Amanas are also great woodworkers and manufacture some very nice pieces in several different small shops. At one, we bought a small cribbage board. They make grandfather clocks, grandmother clocks (slightly smaller), and now granddaughter clocks (smaller still), along with rockers, chests, beds, and other wonderfully crafted pieces from wood.

We enjoyed seeing their place but thought the Amana people we encountered cold and unfriendly (no doubt in keeping with their tradition of being a closed society). But we did enjoy their cooking—soup, followed by three “salads” (such as sweet sauerkraut, applesauce, cottage cheese, pickled ham, pickled carrots, or cole slaw), then an entree such as baked Swiss steak, bratwurst with mustard, fried veal cutlet with applesauce and horseradish sauce, or baked chicken, plus vegetables served family style (in bowls), such as fried potatoes, corn, sauerkraut, baked beans, and so on, followed by pie for dessert. Delicious—and *very* filling!

We stayed at Lucille's Bett und Breakfast, just off I-80 a few miles from the Amana Colonies, and we thoroughly enjoyed meeting Lucille Bell and her husband Dale. Though not an Amana, Lucille grew up speaking German and is a very devout German Lutheran. Her first husband died of a sudden brain aneurism when he was 38 and she raised their two children and continued to farm. Likewise, Dale's first wife died quite a number of years ago. They met and married 18 years ago and have run the B&B in their home for the past nine years.

On the way back from Iowa, we made a brief stop to see the Little Brown Church in the Vale, made famous by the hymn *The Little Brown Church in the Wildwood*. It is very quaint in a lovely setting.