

THE AMANA IOWA CALICO WORKS

In the early 18th century the German Lutheran Church splintered due to difficulties in theology and form of worship. One of the sects which broke away was the Community of True Inspiration, later known as the Amana Society. The group came to America in 1842 and purchased Indian land near Buffalo, New York. They moved along the Iowa River in 1855. In the society, all property was held in common and each member over 14 had a job assignment. They had farms, cabinet and wagonmaking shops, woolen and flour mills and a calico printing shop. In 1932 the group voted to incorporate their holdings and they established a private enterprise. They established a hazelmark design on a wooden printing block as their logo. It was taken from a wooden calico printing block dating back to the time when their cloth was hand printed.

The Amana Calico Works was founded in the mid-1800s. They were shipped white muslin which they dyed indigo blue or black, then starched and pressed it. The dyed muslin went into a printing machine which had several copper rollers with raised designs attached. The rollers, bathed in acid, came in contact with the fabric and removed the dye on the protruding design leaving a white figure on the dark background of the material. During World War I indigo dye was no longer available from Germany and the Calico Works closed. The brick part of the factory can still be seen today as it forms part of the Amana Furniture and Clock Shop.

The material was mostly purchased for use by the people in the community, although the surplus was sold to the outside market. Some of these Amana calicoes found their way into one of my favorite quilts, "The Heritage Quilt," an original design by Mary Barton of Ames, Iowa. This outstanding quilt was displayed at the Ames Bicentennial Quilt Exhibit held in 1976. The Amana Colonies are now a Registered National Historic Landmark. I hope you can visit the Museum of Amana History and see the calico display, open 10 to 5 daily, 12 to 5 Sunday, April through Nov. You can tour the woolen mill, visit the furniture shops, dine in the restaurants and eat their breads.

For information write: Amana Colonies
Travel Council, Amana, Iowa 52203.

--Jean Mitchll
Lawrence, Kansas

Four samples of indigo fabrics manufactured by Amana Colonies in Amana, Iowa. From left to right, top row, blue and white, blue and yellow... bottom row: blue and yellow, blue & white.

