

every year through their shop as well as several distributors in various states. The 1,700 acres surrounding the shop and as far as you can see is where the Yoder family grows white and yellow corn, with more coming from farms within a 100-mile radius.

While munching on free samples (scooped straight from the popper into red-and-white paper sacks), browse the quaint shop's trove of packaged kernels, with names like red, sunburst, and the trademarked hull-less Tiny Tender and Lady Finger. Yoder's specializes in unpopped corn sold by the sack, jar, or gift basket. In addition, they stock an assortment of salts and oils, as well as old-fashioned popcorn poppers and new-fangled kettles.

Plan a visit to Amish country in early September if you want to take in the Valparaiso Popcorn Festival. The nation's second oldest popcorn parade is a highlight of the one-day event, held since 1979 in honor of hometown hero Orville Redenbacher, who died in 1995. The bow-tied Farm Bureau agent developed a new corn hybrid that produced plump, fluffy popping corn, and in 1969 launched a commercial popcorn empire that still reigns supreme.

**WHERE:** 150 miles north of Indianapolis; 7680 W. 200 S. Tel 800-892-2170 or 260-768-4051; yoderpopcorn.com. **VALPARAISO POPCORN FESTIVAL:** Tel 219-464-8332; popcornfest.org. *When:* the Sat after Labor Day (early Sept).

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*Old-World Living in a Modern Age*

## AMANA COLONIES

Amana, Iowa

Iowa's rich immigrant heritage is alive and well in the group of seven villages called the Amana Colonies. The villages are filled not with costumed reenactors but with the German founders' descendants (some 1,600), who still

weave blankets, make fine hardwood furniture by hand, and attend Sunday services where men sit on one side and women on the other. Unlike the Amish (to which the Amana Colonies have no connection), the people of Amana Colonies long ago embraced such modern inventions as electricity and the automobile, and actively welcome tourists while sharing their time-honored ways.

Laid out on orderly Old World lines, each village has one main street for shops, with sprawling farm buildings on the outskirts; large, perfectly manicured 19th-century residences are shaded with grape trellises. A 17-mile drive through a pretty landscape of mixed farmland, pasture, and forest takes you through all seven colonies, founded by the Community of True Inspiration, a German religious society that

came to the U.S. to escape persecution. Between 1855 and 1862, its members bought 26,000 acres of prime farmland in Iowa and built seven villages—Homestead, Amana, Middle Amana, High Amana, West Amana, South Amana, and East Amana—all no farther apart than an hour's drive by oxcart. When demand for their hand-crafted woolens and other goods shrank during the Great Depression, they were forced to set aside communal life, an event known as the "Great Change."

You'll see (and smell) right away that food is a big draw here—not just fresh-baked streusel cakes and crusty breads, smoked sausages, and dark, sweet blackberry wines, but traditional German fare like wiener schnitzel served family-style with bowls of sauerkraut and fried potatoes. The Ox Yoke Inn in Amana,

the first and largest of the villages, is a longtime favorite. Amana is also home to the Amana Heritage Museum, which offers an overview of the Colonies' history.

As you might expect of a place long noted for its handicrafts, good shopping is plentiful. Quilts, furniture, clocks, ironwork, baskets, pottery, handmade knives, and woolens are especially prized. (Amana manufactured the first upright freezer for the home in 1947; Whirlpool now owns the brand and still has a plant here.) Plenty of local microbrewed beer flows during Oktoberfest, the largest of Amana's many festivals.

The biggest and oldest of the plentiful B&Bs here is Die Heimat, an 1854 inn that was originally a stagecoach stop in Homestead. All the rooms are decorated in the simple Amana style—walnut and cherry furniture, hand-sewn quilts, and calming pastel walls that soothe the weary tourist today.

**WHERE:** 20 miles southwest of Cedar Rapids. *Visitor info:* Tel 800-579-2294 or



The Amana Heritage Museum comprises three original 19th-century buildings.

319-622-7622; amanacolony.com. **OX YOKE INN:** Tel 800-233-3441 or 319-622-3441; ox-yokeinn.com. *Cost:* lunch \$16. **AMANA HERITAGE MUSEUM:** Tel 319-622-3567; amanaheritage.org. **DIE HEIMAT COUNTRY INN:** Homestead. Tel 319-622-3937; dieheimat.com. *Cost:* from \$80. **BEST TIMES:** 1st weekend of May for Maifest; 1st weekend of Oct for Oktoberfest; 1st weekend of Dec for Prelude to Christmas.

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*The Artist Behind American Gothic*

## ON GRANT WOOD'S TRAIL

Cedar Rapids, Iowa

**A**merican Gothic, by Iowan artist Grant Wood, depicts a stereotypical Midwestern farmer and his dour-faced daughter, and it is arguably the nation's most famous—and most parodied—painting. Wood is now

recognized as the first of the Regionalists, a group of American artists who favored rural realism over the abstract styles developing in the early 1900s. The Art Institute of Chicago (see p. 483) bought *American Gothic* for \$300 after it won third place in its 1930 juried exhibition. This enigmatic work and others painted at the peak of his career were created in a Cedar Rapids studio that's open to the public.

The son of modest farmers, Wood moved

with his family to Cedar Rapids at the age of 10. In 1924 his longtime patrons, John B. Turner and his son David Turner, owners of a funeral home in Cedar Rapids, offered him the top floor of their 19th-century carriage house as a studio, rent-free. Dubbing it "5 Turner Alley," Wood finished the interior himself, aiming for a European peasant look, with exposed wooden beams, roughly textured walls, and built-in niches for flowers or art.