

Musical Treasures of the Snow Hill Cloister: Manuscripts, Monographs, and Monastical Mysteries

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THE SNOW HILL celibate commune, established in 1798 on the property of Andrew and Barbara Snowberger was the direct outcome of a settlement of Sabbatarians located in Franklin County, Pennsylvania. Here an attempt was made early in the nineteenth century to perpetuate the mysticism taught and practiced at the Ephrata Cloister of Lancaster County. Subsequent efforts were made to reproduce and to teach both the ornate calligraphy known as *Fraktur* and the music originated by Ephrata's founder, Georg Conrad Beissel (1691-1768).

By 1830 the Snow Hill commune numbered five brothers and ten sisters; however, the productivity of the enterprise far exceeded the size of the membership. The entire commune was housed and fed in a great double-winged brick common house; the first portion of which was built in 1814, with three additions constructed between 1835-1843. The structure reached a total length of 150 feet with more than fifty rooms (not cells as at Ephrata) and nine larger community rooms. The community erected a white plastered stone meetinghouse in 1829, and with the establishment of a grist mill on the property, Snow Hill was a self-contained community. At its peak the commune also operated a cooper shop for barrel making, a tin and copper shop, a blacksmith enterprise, a cabinet shop, a broom shop, and a brick kiln. The greatest increase in membership came in 1845, when membership grew to thirty.

The Snow Hill Life Style

Members were awakened at 4:30 a.m. with the ringing of the great bell. A half-hour later, a second bell summoned them to breakfast. Devotions usually lasted for fifteen or twenty minutes, and hymns from the Ephrata *Weyrauchs Hugel* were sung. After the meal, verses were sung from the *Psalterspiel*, a prose book of psalms. Thanks were

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returned for the food, and then the day's tasks were assigned for each celibate.¹

These many tasks and duties kept the monastic members occupied until 11:30 a.m., when the great bell summoned them to the dining room. After eating, work resumed until 5:30 p.m., when the bell called the members to a hearty supper. Singing and prayers accompanied each meal. Immediately after supper the use of the time was not prescribed.² Evenings were devoted to reading, quilting, sewing, or doing *Fraktur*.

At 8:00 p.m. every evening except Friday and Saturday, the large bell called all the celibates to service in the *Saal*, a devotional room inside the commonhouse. The order of service was hymn-singing for about fifteen minutes from an Ephrata work known as the *Turtel-Taube*. This hymnbook became known at Snow Hill as the *Tauben-Gesange* or *Song of the Dove*. After the song service, there was a reading from the Epistles or one of Beissel's theosophic dissertations for another fifteen minutes. Following prayer, the service ended with more singing, after which the brothers and sisters retired for a night's sleep.³

Snow Hill did not reject physical comforts, as did Ephrata. One finds no evidence here of the extreme Ephrata diet, the narrow board benches for sleeping, nor the square wooden blocks for pillows. Nor did Snow Hill practice the night watches and limit sleeping hours so drastically. It was a regimen of moderation rather than abstinence.

The Decline of Snow Hill

By 1872 the Snow Hill Cloister had dwindled to eight sisters and eight brothers. The society itself came to an end in 1889, and the last celibate brother, Obed Snowberger, died in 1895, at the age of seventy-two. Snowberger was devoted to what he referred to as "the Old School," those who adhered to the mysticism of Ephrata. America had turned away from mysticism, and Obed Snowberger stated that Snow Hill was "doomed because the genius of America runs to active doing and not contemplative introspection and also because no mystic church existed in southern Franklin County as in Germany two hundred years ago."⁴

1. Emma Monn, *Historical Sketch of Snow Hill (Nunnery)* (Waynewboro, Pa.: Caslon Press, 1929), 18; Charles W. Treher, "Snow Hill Cloister," in *Publications of the Pennsylvania German Society, II* (Allentown, Pa.: Pennsylvania German Society, 1968), 56; and Julius F. Sachse, *German Sectarians of Pennsylvania, 1742-1800* (Philadelphia: author, 1900), 368.

2. Treher, *Snow Hill Cloister*, 58.; Monn, *Historical Sketch of Snow Hill*, 20.

3. Treher, *Snow Hill Cloister*, 58; and Monn, *Historical Sketch of Snow Hill*, 20.

4. *Ibid.*

Many glowing accounts have been written about Obed Snowberger. His obituary in the local newspaper is quite complimentary. It reveals that he was highly gifted mechanically. He made musical instruments, tuned pianos and organs, was a teacher and composer of music, performed on the piano and other instruments, and repaired clocks. "His disposition was kindly, benevolent, and he was everywhere liked."⁵

However, in an article for a local newspaper, historian C. W. Cremer wrote:

Obed was a strange man, and, a man of odd moods, he chose to tell only such things as he pleased.... I spent an afternoon with him almost a quarter of a century ago and I was told, afterward, that I had been accorded an unusual honor and one that he showed few people, yet I had much difficulty in getting him to speak of the things about which I most wanted to know. I wanted to know of the daily life of the people of the convent; he bade all others stay back and took me to the saal and started to translate Fox's *Book of Martyrs* to me. I asked him how to interpret the Ephrata music: he led me from the saal to his private residence nearby and played an unrecognizable tune on a disabled pipe organ his own mechanical ingenuity had constructed.⁶

Music at Snow Hill

In his personal manuscripts, Obed Snowberger often wrote of the music traditions at Snow Hill. The following is an excerpt from one of his writings:

I learned to sing the music in 1842 and sang it almost every day for four years. I composed one tune on five parts which was quite good. I have one of Bi-sels pieces at Philadelphia now to have electrotyped on five parts.⁷

As in the Ephrata music, the movable C-clef has been used for the soprano, alto, and tenor parts, and the F-clef for the bass parts. Unlike the Ephrata music, which often is written in five, six, or seven parts, the Snow Hill music found in the extant collection is written in four-part harmony. In writing about the Snow Hill music, Obed Snowberger addressed the use of clefs in one of his manuscripts. He wrote:

The arrangement of the music is strictly in accordance with the German and English systems. The top staff is the air or leading part. C is on the lower line. The third staff next to the top is the Treble or rather counter C is on the third

5. "Obituaries," *Record Herald*, 26 November 1985.

6. C. W. Cremer, "Told of Customs of Religious Sects," *Record Herald* 13 (March, 1920).

7. Obed Snowberger, unpublished manuscript, 1890.

line. The second staff is the tenor or second C is on the fourth line. The lower staff is the Bass. F is on the fourth line.⁸

In an account dated April 1890, Snowberger wrote:

The Ephrata church music is composed on the feminine system. There is a lower and an upper Bass. Each to be sung by the men. Now no man can learn to sing Bass unless he can change his voice to the feminine or treble pitch. The air is sung by a good female voice, the tenor by a rolling female voice, the counter by a brilliant female voice. We used to delight in singing lower bass, by which a man can bring out all the talent he can find.⁹

Snowberger also reported that on one occasion he "heard Elizabeth Snowberger sing the sixth part" and that Snow Hill singing "ceased to be heard about 1880-85 when the voices were too old and feeble."¹⁰

In 1835 Dr. William M. Fahnestock wrote "An Historical Sketch of Ephrata," which later appeared as a veiled passage in Thomas Mann's *Doktor Faustus*. About the music at Snow Hill, Fahnestock wrote the following:

Some years since I sojourned in the neighborhood of Snow Hill during the summer season, where I had a fine opportunity of hearing their music frequently and judging of its excellence.... This music is lost, entirely now, at Ephrata—not the music books, but the style of singing; they never attempt it anymore. It is, however, still preserved and finely executed, though in a faint degree, at Snow Hill Their singing, which is weak in comparison with the old Ephrata choir, and may be likened to the performance of an overture by a musical box, is so peculiar and affecting that when once heard, can never be forgotten.¹¹

The Hymnals and Music Manuscripts

Just as Snow Hill borrowed its *Fraktur* art from Ephrata, it also borrowed its music. This was based entirely on Beissel's musical system and objectives, and some of the Ephrata manuscripts and hymnals were simply brought to Snow Hill until the sisters there began to make their own copies. Of the thirty-six music manuscripts catalogued in the Snow Hill Collection in 1991, thirty contain music for the

8. Snowberger, unpublished manuscript, n.d.

9. Snowberger, unpublished manuscript, April 1890. However, I found no music at Snow Hill with two bass parts. All the Snow Hill music is four-part choral music consisting of soprano, alto, tenor, and bass.

10. Treher, *Snow Hill Cloister*, 92.

11. William M. Fahnestock. "An Historical Sketch of Ephrata, Together with a Concise Account of the Seventh-Day Baptist Society of Pennsylvania," *Hazard's Register of Pennsylvania* 15 (March 14, 1835): 161-67.

Ephrata hymnals. In most cases these are nearly identical to the Ephrata music manuscripts and are made of paper bearing Ephrata watermarks.

Examination of the six music manuscripts containing original Snow Hill musical compositions reveals similarity to the Ephrata style, particularly in terms of melodic content. The hymns are composed in four parts, SATB, that are freely barred with the *alia breve* time signature. Key signatures encountered in these pieces never exceed three sharps or three flats. These six works contain music to the hymn texts found in the small *Psalterspiel*. The *Psalterspiel* was the first distinct hymnal published for the use of the Separatists and was first printed in Berleburg in 1718. It included a favorite Separatist revival hymn titled "Auf! ihr Christen, Christi Glieder." In America the hymn was incorporated into the celebrated 1739 *Zionitischer Weyrauchs Hügel*. There is no evidence that the small *Psalterspiel* was used at Ephrata; however, it was used at Snow Hill, and twenty-two copies remain in the Snow Hill Collection.

The Snow Hill Collection owns one copy of the *Zionitischer Weyrauchs Hügel* published by J. Christopher Saur in 1739 at Germantown. The Snow Hill copy is missing some of the initial pages; however, the three-page index is complete. Within the collection are two manuscripts, which include the music that accompanies the *Weyrauchs Hügel*. Both copies have the harmonization charts Beissel devised for his musical composition, both have the printed index found in the hymnal, and both bear Ephrata water marks.

There is one copy of the *Turtel-Taube* hymnal in the Snow Hill Collection, missing its title page and opening pages and beginning with a torn page eleven. The book is inscribed with Catharine Snowberger's name, and as observed in several copies in the Library of Congress, it has music written in the margins of several pages. However, there are twenty-five manuscripts in the Snow Hill Collection that possess the music which accompanies the *Turtel-Taube*. Eight copies are similar and begin with the harmonization charts that depict Beissel's rules of musical composition and include three pages and one recto of a printed index. All consist of paper bearing Ephrata water marks. Four copies are also similar; however, they are incomplete.

Currently the Ephrata Cloister has in its possession two copies of the 1749 edition of the *Turtel-Taube*. In 1991 one copy was on display in the glass case in the Visitors' Center. According to a card inserted in the back of that manuscript, there are two other known copies of this work. One is at the Free Library at Philadelphia and one at Juniata College, which has the printed titles crossed out and new titles and tunes substituted. The card asserts "these are the only four books known to be extant of this edition of the *Turtel-Taube*." However, there are four

copies of this work in the Snow Hill Collection. One of these is like the one found at Juniata College with new titles and tunes substituted. All four of these manuscripts begin with the charts to Beissel's rules for harmonization. Three have three pages of the *Turtel-Taube's* printed index. One, by comparison, has three pages and one recto of a handwritten index. Three of the four contain Ephrata water marks in the paper.

One manuscript in the Snow Hill Collection contains the music of the *Nachklang* of the *Turtel-Taube*. The titles from the 1749 *Turtel-Taube* are printed in the manuscript; however, these are crossed out and handwritten titles and music from the *Nachklang* are substituted. Various names are written in the margins of some pieces. Printed on paper bearing the Ephrata water marks, the volume contains a handwritten index.

In the Snow Hill Collection, there is one copy of *Ein Angenehmer Geruch der Rosen und Lilien* of the Brotherhood dated 1756, bound with the Sisterhood dated 1756, and the *Nachklang zum Gesang der einsamen Turtel-Taube* of 1755. While missing some pages, this copy is valuable because within it the authors of several texts are identified.

Five manuscripts in the Snow Hill Collection constitute the music to be used with the 1762 issue of the Ephrata Brotherhood press with the title: *Neu-vermehrtes Gesänge der einsamen Turtel-Taube*. Two each have a one-page printed index. One has a handwritten index consisting of two pages and one recto. Two do not have either the printed or the handwritten index. Ephrata water marks are found in three of the works.

There are ten copies of the 1766 *Paradiesches Wunder-Spiel* hymnal in the Snow Hill Collection. Three manuscripts that consist of the music corresponding to the *Paradiesches Wunder-Spiel* are in the Snow Hill Collection. These manuscripts are nearly identical, and all have a handwritten index of two pages and Ephrata water marks.

Shape-Note Music

The Snow Hill Society was at its height of activity during the singing school movement prevalent in America during the nineteenth century. The Society's members must have been aware of the main source of music education throughout the Shenandoah Valley and surrounding areas. Some of the most interesting musical works found in the Snow Hill Collection are the individual sheets of hymns written by Obed Snowberger. These sheets were kept in ten small boxes and consist of pre-existing texts set to both well-known church tunes and to original music, making a total of 343 individual hymns. Eighty-six percent are written in shape-notes on the basis of the "four-syllable or

'fasola' solmization system"¹² found in *The Easy Instructor* of William Little and William Smith (1801). This seems quite logical when one considers that the Snow Hill Collection contains copies of John Wyeth's *Repository of Sacred Music*, John Rothbaust's *Franklin Harmony*, and David L. Clayton and James P. Carrell's *Virginia Harmony*, all of which use the four-shape system.

Hymnody

The Snow Hill Collection has three copies of the *Marburger Gesang-Buch*. Two bear the imprint of Marburg and Frankfurt: Heinrich Ludwig Bronner, 1771. One was printed in Germantown by Christopher Saur II in 1770. The Snow Hill congregation used the M. Kieffer Company to print copies of their hymnal *The Christian Harmony*, which contains all original material written by the members from 1825 to 1850. Thirty-seven copies remain in the Snow Hill Collection. Two other compilations of hymn texts found in the Snow Hill Collection are nine copies of the *Kleine Lieder-Sammlung* and twelve copies of *The Little Harp*, which also was printed by the M. Kieffer Company.

Other Important Works Found in the Snow Hill Collection

Besides the works previously discussed, there are several volumes that warrant citation. Two of the four volumes (1726 and 1739) of the *Berleburg Bible* as well as the five volume *Biblia Parallelo-Harmonica-Exegetica* are found in the Snow Hill Collection. The complete set of the latter work was once owned by Samuel Fahnestock, M.D., of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, who inscribed all five volumes with the date August 22, 1824.¹³

Snow Hill also has in its collection two copies of the famed *Martyrer Spiegel* (*Martyrs' Mirror*) which, next to the Bible, was treasured by Dutch, German, and American Mennonites after it was published in the late seventeenth century. It relates the persecutions and sufferings of those Christians who were opposed to war from the time of the apostles to the Mennonites in the seventeenth century. There is one copy of the first German edition printed in 1748 at Ephrata and one copy of Joseph Ehrenfried's 1814 Lancaster edition in the collection.¹⁴

12. Stanley Sadie, ed., *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (New York: Macmillan, 1980), s.v. "Shape-note Hymnody," by Harry Eskew.

13. *Biblia* (Berleburg: Haug, 1726-1742), eight volumes; *Biblia Parallelo-Harmonica-Exegetica* (Freiburg and Leipzig: Christoph Matthai and Bernhard Christoph Breitkopf, 1739-1760).

14. *Der Blutige Schau-Platz oder Martyrer-Spiegel der Tauff-Gesinnten oder Wehrlosen Christen ...* (Ephrata: Bruderschaft, 1748-1749), first published in the Netherlands in 1660; (Lancaster: Joseph Ehrenfried, 1814).

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In keeping with the philosophical tenets on which Beissel based his doctrine at Ephrata, the Snow Hill Collection claims works of Jacob Bohme, Johann Arndt, Gerhard Tersteegen, and Thomas von Kempen, as well as many Ephrata imprints. The tracts of Arndt and Tersteegen have a mystical theme quite in accord with the religious temper of Ephrata.

Conclusions

With more than 570 items, i.e., monographs, Bibles, ledgers, music manuscripts and hymnals, etc., in its collection, Snow Hill has left a legacy for the future. For scholars interested in Pennsylvania-German history, genealogy, American religions, finance, architecture, *Fraktur*, and hymnody, there is much to be discovered. The Snow Hill Collection is now housed in the Special Collections of Juniata College's Library, Huntingdon, Pennsylvania. There this treasure will be preserved and cared for in a safe environment and the rich heritage of Snow Hill will be available for further research and scholarship in the years to come.

Important Manuscripts, Hymnbooks, and Songbooks in the Snow Hill Collection

Music Manuscripts

Das kleine Davidische Psalterspiel der Kinder Zions, five copies - 1833

Zionitischer Weyrauchs Hugel, two copies - 1745

Turtel-Taube, twelve copies - 1747; five copies - 1762

Nachklang zum Gesang der einsamen Turtel-Taube, one copy - 1755

Paradisches Wunder-Spiel, one copy - 1766

Turtel-Taube combined with *Das kleine Davidische Psalterspiel*, one copy

Weyrauchs Hiigel combined with the *Turtel-Taube*, one copy; one copy [soprano and bass parts only]

Ein Angenehmer Geruch der Rosen und Lilien of the Brotherhood bound with that of the Sisterhood and the *Nachklang zum Gesdng der einsamen Turtel-Taube*, one copy - 1756

Shape-Note Books

Repository of Sacred Music - Part One, one compilation of three printings - 1810, 1814, 1821 (Harrisburg: John Wyeth)

Die Franklin Harmonie by John Rothbaust, one copy - 1821 (Harrisburg: John Wyeth); one copy - 1830 (Chambersburg: Henry Ruby) [English]

The Virginia Harmony by David L. Clayton and James P. Carrell, one copy - 1831 (Winchester: Samuel H. Davis)

Hymn Texts

Zionitischer Weyrauchs Hugel, one copy - 1739 (Germantown: Christopher Saur)

Turtel-Taube, one copy - 1747 (Ephrata)

Paradisisches Wunder-Spiel, ten copies - 1766 (Ephrata)

Vollständiges Marburger Gesang-Buch, one copy - 1770 (Germantown: Christopher Saur); two copies - 1771 (Marburg and Frankfurt: Heinrich Ludwig Bronner)

Das kleine Davidische Psalterspiel der Kinder Zions; two copies - 1791 (Chestnuthill: Samuel Saur); one copy - 1797 (Baltimore: Samuel Saur); one copy - 1797 (Germantown: Michael Billmeyer); one copy - 1813 (Germantown: Michael Billmeyer); two copies - 1817 (Philadelphia: B. and D. Billmeyer); one copy - 1825 (without place of publication); two copies - 1829 (without place of publication); eight copies - 1833 (Philadelphia: Georg W. Mentz and Son); two copies - 1843 (Philadelphia: Mentz and Rovoudt); one copy - (without date and place of publication: Wm. G. Mentz)

Kleine Lieder-Sammlung, two copies - 1838 (Harrisburg: G.S. Peters); two copies - 1841 (Gettysburg: H.E. Neinstedt); one copy - 1843 (Uniontown, Maryland.: H.E. Neinstedt); one copy - 1845 (Gettysburg: H.E. Neinstedt); one copy - 1848 (Gettysburg: H.E. Neinstedt); one copy - 1850 (Poland, Ohio: Heinrich Kurtz)

Ein kleines Blumen-Gartlein, von Rosen und Lilien aus dem Thal zu Schneeberg, gewachsen unter der Führung des Geistes, unter den Brüdern, und Schwestern zu Zion und Saron. Theils aus Trubsal, Theils aus Freude hervor gesprossen, one copy (Snow Hill)

Die Christliche Harmonie: enthaltend eine Auswahl geistlicher Lieder zum Allgemeinen Gottesdienst, thirty-seven copies - 1852 (Chambersburg: M. Kieffer and Company)

Die Kleine Harfe, twelve copies - 1858 (Chambersburg: M. Kieffer and Company)