

The Ephrata Cloister: Intersections of Architecture and Culture in an Eighteenth-Century Utopia

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ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIANS hold fondly to the belief that architecture and culture are related—somehow. We believe that architecture can influence human behavior and that culture certainly influences architecture. Rarely, however, do we attempt to get more specific than that, to describe precisely how architecture and culture intersect. Part of the difficulty of doing so is, of course, that architecture and culture intersect in different ways in different times and places.

Answering the paired questions of whether particular sociocultural elements have a direct impact on the physical environment created by a society, and conversely whether elements of the physical environment have a direct impact on the ongoing daily life of the members of that society, requires many studies asking specific questions about many different sets of specific and individual circumstances: Is there something unique about the sociocultural complex of a society that can account for differences between its built environment and that of another society of a similar time and place? Are its particular political organization, ethnic traditions, economic structure, religious beliefs, or attitude toward the nuclear family reflected in the architecture it creates? Does the built environment reinforce social values? Does it in any way undermine them?

Utopian communities are excellent places to begin asking such questions. They are typically small, self-contained micro-societies with atypical uniformity in group behavior. Utopias are usually created by a dominant founding personality, with well defined and well-documented ideals (although the ideals are not always achieved—one of the issues which architecture can help elucidate). They often have a specific architectural program that is important, if not necessary, to their way of life, and for which documentation can be found.

This study examines an eighteenth-century utopian community known as the Ephrata Cloister, a religious utopia which formed in Pennsylvania beginning in 1732 around a German mystic named Conrad Beissel. It was the first of the European utopian settlements in America to succeed in sustaining itself for more than a few years; it was, in fact, extraordinarily long-lived by the standards of utopian communities. Although the Cloister itself was legally dissolved in 1814, the membership immediately reorganized as a congregation of German Seventh Day Baptists, and, as late as the early

1990's, a few members of this congregation were still meeting at Ephrata twice a year for religious services (Dechert 71). At its height the Ephrata Cloister was widely-known in the United States and Europe; Voltaire even included a description of it in his *Dictionnaire*.

Ephrata was a society in which religious beliefs formed the central, dominant element of the sociocultural complex; elements such as political, economic and familial organization were all subordinate to and inflected by religion. The specific questions in the case of the Ephrata Cloister thus become: Can the architecture and site planning of the Cloister be shown to have embodied Conrad Beissel's religious beliefs and values? Can they be shown to have reinforced the behaviors he expected from his flock? Are there ways in which they do not reflect—or even undermine—the beliefs and values of Beissel's community?

Beissel immigrated to America in 1720, fleeing trouble with the German authorities over his involvement with radical Pietism and Inspirationism. He settled in Germantown, Pennsylvania, where he joined the local congregation of the German Society of Brethren, better known as the Dunkers. He eventually quarreled with the Dunkers on points of doctrine, and a schism developed in the congregation between the orthodox and those who were drawn to Beissel's beliefs. Beissel, apparently more by personal magnetism than by design, became the leader of a new religious group as his adherents moved to build cabins near his. In November 1724, this group was formally organized into a new congregation with Beissel as its "God-appointed leader" (Alderfer 40). It was in this new congregation that Beissel first organized his followers into three "orders," a celibate order for each gender and a third for married couples.

In 1732 he surprised his congregation by suddenly resigning as their leader and moving into the wilderness of central Pennsylvania, to a spot on the Cocalico Creek in what is now Lancaster County. Within a year a number of his Germantown followers came to join him. As cabins were once again built in the vicinity of his, Beissel became once again the spiritual leader of a group, and the core that was to develop into the Ephrata Cloister was established.

Beissel's religious beliefs were developed largely from a combination of radical Pietism and the mystical writings of Jakob Böhme (1575–1624), leavened with ideas from the Inspirationists and the Dunkers. He followed the radical Pietists in calling for religious liberty, specifically freedom from established churches, from ecclesiastical ritual and from doctrine. He also accepted both the radical Pietists' millenarian belief that the Second Coming of Christ was imminent and their rejection of both church buildings and church furnishings, such as baptismal fonts, because they embodied worldly values.

From his reading of Böhme, Beissel developed the idea of a ladder of spirituality based on sexual behavior. The top rung of this ladder was occupied by the celibate, the next lower by those who were married but lived chastely, the third by those who married and had children in wedlock, and the bottom by those who "pursued sexual pleasures." This conflicted with



Figure 1. General view of the Ephrata Cloister today. (Photo by author.)

the orthodox Pietist belief in spiritual egalitarianism and was to be a source of trouble at Ephrata. Some of his more esoteric, mystical beliefs may have come from Böhme as well, such as his belief in the inherent corruption of matter, or his belief that iron was a symbol of darkness and the antithesis of God because it was the means by which evil entered the world.

Beissel's theology focused on immediate, personal, divine inspiration and mystical union with God as the primary goal of spirituality and a celibate, ascetic life of withdrawal from the world as the means to that union. He believed that he had himself attained this union and that he had received a divine revelation which supplanted parts of the Christian scriptures. Although other issues such as his insistence on celibacy and on the Saturday Sabbath contributed to his conflict with the Dunkers, it was his claim to personal revelation with divine authority that was the fundamental source of the schism (Durnbaugh 23).

At Ephrata the division of members into three congregations or "orders" was continued. By far the largest was always the Householder group, composed of married couples with families, most of whom lived and worked on their individually-owned farms near the Ephrata settlement. They worshiped at the Cloister and supported its economy, but were not subject to monastic-style regulations such as the dress code. They were ranked as lower on Beissel's ladder of spirituality than the members of the other two groups, the female and the male unmarried celibates. The celibates, called the Sisterhood and the Brotherhood, dressed in long, hooded, white robes modeled on the habits of the Capuchins and lived and worked on the Ephrata grounds. Although all three groups were under the direct supervision of Beissel, the celibate orders also had a Prioress and a Prior with authority over their respective groups.

The Cloister eventually evolved its own version of regimented monastic life for the celibate orders, with specified hours for contemplation and prayer, for work, for meals, and for attending worship service. The ideal for daily life in the Sisterhood and Brotherhood was ascetic in the extreme. Per-

sonal possessions were allowed but frowned upon. There were very few hours set aside for sleeping, and those few were spent on narrow shelf beds with a block of wood for a pillow. Members were encouraged to live largely on bread with fruit and vegetables, except for the occasional Love Feast when a lamb stew was added to the usual fare. This Feast was a form of communion, a meal often preceded by a foot-washing ceremony, which reflected Beissel's intention to return to a primitive, "uncontaminated," Apostolic Christianity.

Not all members achieved this ascetic ideal, as the historical archeology project underway at Ephrata since 1993 under Stephen G. Warfel's direction has demonstrated. Analysis of artifacts uncovered by this project offer no evidence of smoking equipment or liquor containers, suggesting members did abstain from these worldly pleasures, but large numbers of dietary animal bones show that the injunction against eating meat was not as widely observed as some historical accounts suggest. Excavators have also found evidence of personal possession of worldly articles such as tea services of imported china (Warfel, 1998 *Investigations*, 28). There are also frequent suggestions in the literature on Ephrata that not all Sisters and Brothers were able to maintain the ideal of celibacy, although at least some of this may be no more than malicious gossip. The archeological evidence that Beissel tolerated less than perfect adherence to his ideals in his members is consistent with what we know of his personality and leadership style; unlike the founders of some religious utopias, he does not appear to have sought absolute rule or even to have enforced a strict discipline on his flock.

The economic life of the Cloister was organized communally. Initially, members made voluntary gifts to the communal funds as they chose, and Beissel used the gifts to maintain the settlement and to underwrite charitable activities. Responsibility for providing food and other material wants lay primarily with the Householders. As the number of members grew, a more active economic program became necessary, and members of the celibate orders began to spend more time producing material goods for sale outside the community (Doll, "Social and Economic Organization" 175). Eventually, substantial industrial production facilities were established, including among others a printing press, a paper mill, a sawmill, a tannery, and a weaving workshop.

At first, producing the necessities of daily life in an eighteenth-century frontier community took all the members' working hours, but gradually the life of the Cloister developed an impressive but highly specific aesthetic component. This was a result rather than a goal; aesthetic creation was engaged in as a form of spiritual discipline rather than done for its own sake. The practice of calligraphy and hymn singing in particular were seen as means of achieving a higher spiritual plane. The Cloister developed a unique form of *a capella* choral music for which they became famous; Beissel's treatise on music was probably the first one written in America. Calligraphy was the Sisters' art and discipline; many became very skilled at the creation and illumination of manuscripts, especially in the German Fraktur

script. The desire to create beauty must have figured in these works, but the emphasis was on the disciplined process and not on the product. In no other area of life, including the built environment, were aesthetic concerns encouraged; the existence at Ephrata of such highly refined art is therefore surprising. The choice of outlets for the artistic impulse is, however, not unusual; the creation of music and manuscripts to the glory of God is a long-established monastic tradition.

Worship services for the celibate orders were held at specified times each day, the most important of which began at midnight, lasted at least two hours, and often involved torch-lit processions with incantations and mystic ceremonies. Householders were expected to hold family devotions at midnight in their own homes. A Sabbath service for the entire community took place each Saturday, generally in special buildings known as prayer halls, or Saals, one of which is extant (on right in Figure 2, & #12 on Figure 3). In keeping with Beissel's radical Pietist rejection of church buildings and furnishing, the typical Saal was a plain, open hall with no indication of ecclesiastical purpose. The genders were separated during services, and the celibate sisters seated together behind a screen or in a gallery overlooking the main space.

Ephrata was not a cloister in the strictest sense. Many visitors came to experience its unusual way of life and to hear the unique singing for which Ephrata became famous; in fact, a side-trip to visit the Cloister became a customary excursion for eighteenth-century travelers in Pennsylvania (Dunbaugh 25). Beissel himself avoided interaction with the visitors, but it was only during the fourth phase of community life, after 1745, that contact between outsiders and other members of the community was restricted in any way.



Figure 2. Hebron/Saron and Penial as restored in the 1940-60's. (Photo by author.)

Examination of the architectural history of the Ephrata Cloister both illuminates its sociocultural history and reveals a number of ways in which Beissel's religious beliefs structured its built environment. Any society that endures for more than eight decades is unlikely to be static; there were in fact five stages in the life of the Ephrata Cloister, and a specific type of building can be associated with each stage. In the earliest years Ephrata was a small group of mystically inclined men and women given to contemplation, and the original architectural model was the solitary hermit's hut in the wilderness. As the membership expanded, the community moved to a communal structure; this second phase was marked architecturally by construction of communal group homes and a prayer hall. In the third stage a power struggle developed, in the course of which a unique structure was added to Ephrata's built form, one that combined qualities of church and monastery. This phase was also marked by the construction of industrial and production facilities. The fourth stage began in 1745, when Beissel and his faction won the power struggle; Beissel imposed a stricter, more monastic regime and turned to the convent as architectural model. A final phase can be said to have followed the legal dissolution of the community in 1814, when the German Seventh Day Adventist congregation was formed, but the only changes to the built form of the Cloister itself during this stage were those resulting from the natural processes of decay.

The architectural style of the Ephrata Cloister has frequently been described as medieval; Eugene Doll, for example, calls the Cloister "a rare survival of Medieval German architecture," pointing to its "steep roofs . . . many-storied gable ends . . . and shed-roof dormers" (Doll, "Ephrata Cloister," 3). While the German ethnic origin of most of the Cloister's members is certainly reflected in these elements and in the overall style of construction, it is misleading to label this style "Medieval German," as the term suggests that Beissel and his followers consciously reached back into the past to create an archaic setting for their community. This style of construction was in fact the predominant vernacular mode in eighteenth-century Germany; just as cross-timbered construction continued to be the primary vernacular mode in England long past the Middle Ages, vernacular forms and methods of construction in contemporary Germany had remained essentially unchanged for centuries. Beissel and his followers built in the mode with which they were most familiar, that of their homes and villages in the Old Country. What is unique about the built environment of Ephrata is not the architectural style they used but the typology, formal elements, and plans of the buildings they created.

The Solitary Phase

In the first stage of Ephrata's life on the banks of the Cocalico, each celibate member lived alone in a small cabin. An example of what may have been one of these cabins still stands and, though heavily restored, provides some indication of what these individual houses were like (Figure 4, #4 on

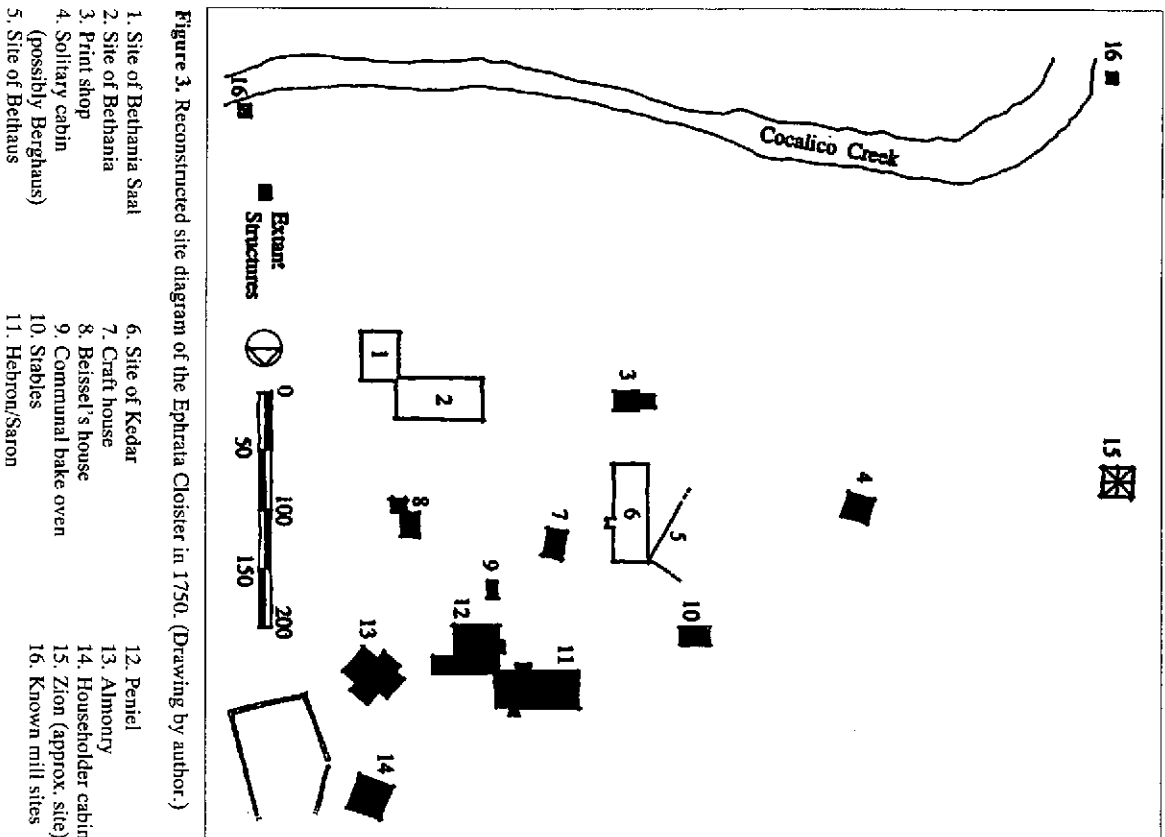


Figure 3). Their interiors were divided into two rooms, a living space with a cooking hearth and a tiny sleeping cell with a shallow closet for hanging robes. The solitary cabins were simple and austere, without any attempt at architectural flourishes, in keeping with Beissel's rejection of worldly show and the demands of spiritual asceticism.

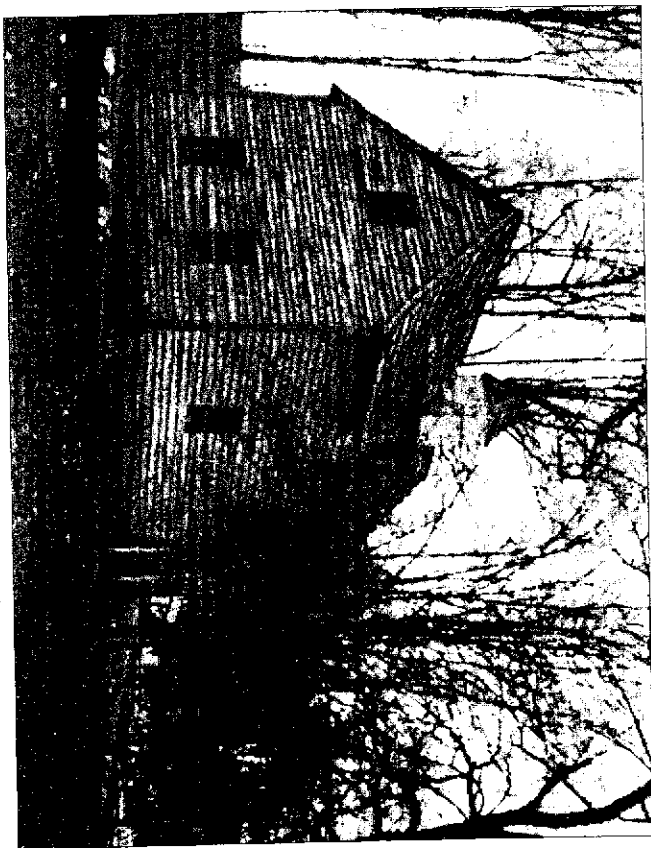


Figure 4. One of the solitary cabins as restored. (Photo by author.)

Not only did this austerity embody Beissel's beliefs, but the Ephrata buildings themselves may have been mystical constructs. Michael Dechert has shown that the footprint of the solitary cabin built for Beissel in 1748 is a Golden Section, a rectangle with the length of its sides in the ratio of one to the square root of two, and that the dimensions of the architectural elements of the structure, both in plan and elevation, are proportionally related in a geometric series based on the same ratio ("La Communia"). In Western mystical tradition this ratio is considered to be a perfect number and used to represent God. Recent archeological excavations have established the footprint of the first communal structure of the community: at 30 feet by 84 feet it is a double Golden Section in plan, adding credence to the possibility that the members of Ephrata lived surrounded by a mystical representation of their God, in a genuine reification in architecture of their faith.

While some of Ephrata's buildings were clearly proportioned by systems of mystical numbers, Dechert's claim that the Golden Section proportional system "appears to characterize all of the early buildings in the community" is not supported by the available evidence (Dechert 76). Beissel's house (#8 on Figure 3) cannot, in fact, be characterized as an "early" building, not having been constructed until 1748. More significantly, there is an apparent flaw in Dechert's analysis of the extant buildings. Working from architectural drawings prepared by the Historic American Buildings

Survey (HABS), he gives the dimensions of the extant prayer hall as 40 feet long by 38 wide feet and nearly 40 feet in height, and then says that "proportions used within the building seem to follow geometric sequences based upon one to the square root of two" (Dechert 76). It is difficult to see how the numbers 40, 38, and 40 can be fitted into such a sequence. Moreover, in no other instance does the footprint of an Ephrata building for which the dimensions are known come close to being a Golden Section or a multiple thereof; a prayer hall that was not "early" but the last of the community's major structures to be erected is closest, at 40 feet by 30 feet, but lacks two feet in length to be exactly at the mystic ratio.² Although the Golden Section proportional dimensions of both Beissel's house and the first major building constructed by the community are certainly suggestive, it would appear that if mystical proportioning did govern the architecture of all Ephrata buildings more than one set of mystical numbers must have been used.

The Communal Phase

As the membership expanded, the community became more communal. Whether this was the result of a decision on Beissel's part or a gradual development is unknown, but in 1735 communal buildings began to appear. The first was called the Berghaus (#4 on Figure 3 may possibly be this structure); while the primary impetus was to create a space large enough for the entire community to meet together for worship, it also contained some living cells into which some of the Brothers moved (Alderfer 53). A common gristmill also was built. Alderfer states that its purpose was not commercial; it was built to process the grain raised by the Ephrata congregation. The excellence of the flour produced, however, soon led other farmers to pay to have their grain ground there, creating income for the Cloister (Alderfer 58).

Almost immediately the worship space in the Berghaus became too small for the growing community, and in the same year a communal building of a new type was constructed. Kedar, as it was named, was a three-story building measuring 30 feet by 84 feet, much larger than anything the community had yet produced and longer by at least ten feet than either of the two later communal residences (Wartel, 1998 *Investigations*, 1-2). It contained multiple individual cells on the first and third floors and a large hall with a cooking hearth on the second. Originally both male and female celibates were housed in Kedar. Brothers on the ground floor and Sisters on the third; Beissel claimed that his people were too spiritually advanced to succumb to sexual temptations. Apparently he decided not to put this to a severe test, as not long after it was occupied the building was turned over entirely to the Sisterhood, and the Brothers returned to solitary cabins.

Recent archeological excavations have discovered the long-forgotten location of Kedar.³ It sat at the heart of the complex, only a few feet west of the cabin built for Beissel in 1748, a position which emphasized the centrality of religion in the life of the community (#6 on Figure 3). It was aligned

with considerable accuracy to the points of the compass, with the longer sides running north and south and at least one entry facing east. We know from textual sources that astrology was used in the site-planning of at least one later building, which also had its sides aligned to the cardinal compass points; it is therefore probable that the orientation of Kedar also reflects the mystical side of Ephrata's religious beliefs.

Unlike later communal structures at Ephrata, Kedar was post-built without stone foundations, possibly the largest post-built structure ever built in eighteenth-century America (Wartel, 1998 *Investigations*, 2). This type of construction was fast and inexpensive, but not long-lasting. The decision to build such a large structure with an impermanent construction method may simply reflect expediency and the need to house many people quickly. Wartel suggests, however, that use of a method associated with short-term construction might be seen as a reflection of the community's millenarian beliefs (Wartel, 1998 *Investigations*, 29); if so, it would be another example of the way Beissel's theology is "built-in" to the Ephrata buildings.

The Ephrata congregation continued to grow rapidly, partly as a result of missionary "pilgrimages" undertaken by Beissel and others. Two years after the construction of Kedar, in 1737, the first prayer hall, or Saal, was built beside it (#5 on Figure 3). This Saal, which was christened Behaus, contained an even larger hall for community worship and meetings as well as special rooms in which to hold Love Feasts. It is now known to have been placed west of Kedar and at approximately a 30-degree angle to it, although its exact dimensions can no longer be determined due to disturbance of the archeological evidence (Wartel, 1996 *Investigations*, 23). Future communal residences and Saals were placed at 90 degrees from each other; no explanation is known for Behaus's unique orientation. It was the first of the Cloister buildings to be built with a stone foundation, possibly because of its status as a sacred space.

The building of Kedar and its Saal both acknowledged and facilitated a truly communal life for the Sisterhood. The solitary life of the individual mystic in a hermitage was replaced by a life governed by external regulation. A Priestess was appointed to oversee life in their new home, and what may have been the first tower clock in America was built to ensure the coordination of group life (Alderfer 58). The female celibate "order" had now completed the shift to the second phase of Ephrata's existence. While only a few of the male celibates lived communally in the Berghaus, the life of the Brothers also reflected this shift; Beissel appointed a Prior to oversee the male celibates and put another Brother in charge of overseeing the internal economy of the entire Cloister.

The Power Struggle Phase

In 1738 a communal structure for male celibates was built. It was not, however, a communal residence on the pattern of Kedar. Beginning in the late 1730's the Prior of the Brotherhood, Prior Israel Eckerlin, began

attempting to take over control of the Cloister and to change its direction. The form and location of this new building was the first architectural indication of the split his attempt created within the community; its construction reflects the third stage of Ephrata's life, one of tension and power struggles.

The new communal structure was called Zion and was built to accommodate a new Order established by Eckerlin within the Cloister, the Order of the Brotherhood of Zion. Those initiated into Eckerlin's new Order began to form an elite inner circle within the community. Zion was for their use only; the other Brothers remained in their solitary cabins and the Berghaus.

To join the Zion Brotherhood an initiate had to undergo a forty-day ordeal, during which an attendant three times gave him an elixir of *matéria prima*, the primordial matter God created to make men immortal. Only the highest-ranked members knew the formula for this elixir, consumption of which caused convulsions and loss of skin and hair. On completion of this ordeal the new brother was considered physically regenerated and ready to participate in the esoteric rites of the Zionitic Brotherhood, rites in which the members attempted to communicate with angel spirits, learn the ineffable name of God, and achieve moral regeneration.

The building designed to house initiates during these forty-day mystic retreats is described in contemporary accounts as having been very different from anything else built at Ephrata. Since, however, it was used as a hospital during the Revolutionary War and then burned in an attempt to destroy infection, it is difficult to tell precisely how it differed. The only extant image of Zion is from the Frontispiece of a Christian alphabet book printed by the Cloister (Figure 5) where the four main communal buildings are all represented.



Figure 5. Frontispiece of *Der Christen ABC* showing Zion complex at the top right. (Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission Archive)

The Frontispiece shows Kedar, the first communal building, and the later communal structures housing the Sisters and Brothers almost identically, as simple rectangles with pitched roofs and a few square windows. Zion, on the other hand, is drawn as more than twice the size of the others. From this image and from textual sources⁴ we know that it had three floors, each laid out in a mystical arrangement suited to the rites conducted in it. The first floor was one large room with three closets to store provisions and ceremonial equipment used during the retreats. The second floor has an odd form in the Frontispiece image which may be an attempt to draw an octagon in perspective, which accords with the report that this floor housed a room with no windows "so arranged as to form a circular chamber" where initiates slept (Sachse 1: 357-8). The third story was used for the special rites of the Order and was reportedly a single square room eighteen feet on a side. The walls were aligned to face the cardinal compass points and each was pierced by one small oval window. The Frontispiece image further shows the structure with an arched doorway, a huge multioned window, the only belfry ever built at Ephrata, and a curiously drawn roof structure that appears to be a small round dome placed on top of a saucer dome.

The representation of the roof as domed raises questions about the accuracy of this depiction, as the description of Zion in the *Chronicon Ephrataense*, a history of the community written by two of the brothers, never mentions a dome. The drawing's literal accuracy is, however, less important than the fact that it reflects the artist's perception of Zion as very different from and much grander than the other buildings of Ephrata.

This grand structure was placed on top of the hill overlooking the rest of Ephrata where by its size and placement it visually dominated the physical environment; Eckerlin's seat of power literally "oversaw" the rest of the community.⁵ The bell tower extended his dominion even farther. Not only was it visually prominent, but the sound of the bell controlled the daily schedule; its voice now told even the Householders on their farms when they were to get up to conduct their midnight family worship service.

Little is known about the exact location or dimensions of Zion (#15 on Figure 3 indicates the general area in which it was located),⁶ but these and the building's orientation are reported to have been determined astrologically, reflecting the mystical emphasis of this new Order. Dechert points to this and to the use of the Golden Section discussed above as evidence of "a distinctly medieval sense of design" (Dechert 81). Once again the term "medieval" is misleading. While the use of mystical proportioning systems and astrological calculations in architecture was common during the Middle Ages such usage was, and is, hardly limited to "medieval" times; even as iconic a twentieth-century Modern architect as Le Corbusier has been known to use the Golden Section as a proportioning system in his designs. The mystical reliance on astrology does, however, reveal the Ephrata community's profound sense that their religious beliefs should be manifested in their built environment. The combination of the building's location, its use of architectural forms unique in the context of Ephrata, and its introduction

of a new element, the bell tower, into the Ephrata built environment leave little doubt that Prior Eckerlin intended Zion to be an expression of his power and of his assumption of hierarchical authority.

The design of a new combination prayer hall and communal residence constructed next to Zion in 1740 is a further indication of Eckerlin's efforts to assume authority. It too was three stories tall. The top floor contained eight individual cells, while the second floor was a communal hall for Love Feasts. Although its exact dimensions are as yet unknown, the building was so large that the ground floor worship area had sufficient space to accommodate the entire community at one service, and it soon became the main worship hall. Even within the prayer hall, hierarchy was emphasized; Sisters sat in a gallery as had become customary, but Brothers were now seated on a platform at the front of the hall and elevated above the benches where Household families sat.

All of this of course violated the original principles of the community. A special temple and special elevated seating for an inner circle which ranked itself above the rest of the membership made a mockery of spiritual equality within the celibate Orders and emphasized the inferior spiritual status of the Householders as never before. Church buildings were themselves a violation of the community's professed beliefs, and Zion with its belfry tower was perceived as coming perilously close to being a church. Beissel insisted on simple austerity, but Zion was a large and ostentatious complex—a display of wealth that caused one member to resign from the community and write that he had protested in vain against "the prevailing pomp and luxury, both in dress and magnificent buildings" (quoted in Alderfer 98).

Despite Eckerlin's increasing deviation from the original pattern of the Cloister, Beissel appears never to have wasted time in protests or to have attempted to use his own prestige to curb Eckerlin's power directly. Perhaps he was practicing his principle of nonresistance; perhaps it was beneath his dignity to appear to be squabbling over earthly authority. He did not, however, remain completely passive. Eckerlin's hierarchically organized Saal at Zion had visibly put the Householders in a subordinate position; it can hardly be coincidence that the very next year Beissel ordered the construction of a separate Saal for the special use of the Householders.

Peniel, as it was called, not only gave the Householders their own worship hall and space for Love Feasts, but like the Zion Saal it too was large enough to accommodate the entire community (Figure 2, #12 on Figure 3). In at least one recorded instance it was to this space, not to Zion on the hill, that Beissel called his members when the entire community was to meet together. Moreover, although this Saal was primarily for the use of the Householders, the third floor contained a number of cells for Brothers, providing those male celibates who were not under Eckerlin's sway with a substantial communal living space for the first time (Alderfer 86). With the construction of Peniel, Beissel reaffirmed the importance to the community of the Householders whom Eckerlin's Saal denigrated, provided the Brotherhood with a communal alternative to Zion on par with that already

enjoyed by the Sisterhood, and created a second gathering place for the whole community outside of Eckerlin's new complex. The building and use of Peniel suggests a Beissel who was not, in these years, humbly allowing his flock to go astray if they chose and hoping, as Alderfer proposes, that given enough rope Eckerlin would hang himself (Alderfer 100). Instead, Peniel shows Beissel to have had a subtle understanding of the power of the built environment and to have used this understanding to oppose Eckerlin without violating his own nonresistance principles.

As soon as Peniel was completed Beissel further ordered the demolition of the oldest Saal, the one associated with Kedar. Exactly why he did so is not clear. With the addition of Peniel each of the three Ephrata "orders" had a Saal: Peniel for the Householders; the 1740 Saal adjacent to Zion for the Brothers, albeit with the complication of the inner and outer circles within the larger Brotherhood; and Kedar's Saal, which had become closely associated with the Sisters. It has been suggested that he did so at the urging of Eckerlin, who wanted to emphasize the dominance of the Order of Zion within the community, but, if Peniel was indeed a passive reproach to Eckerlin for the hierarchical form of Zion's Saal, such a motive seems unlikely (Alderfer 88). Kedar's Saal has been described, on the basis of contemporary reports, as "the largest and most imposing room for public worship in the Province"; although this seems unlikely to have been strictly true, it was apparently a large and imposing building (Sachse 1:256). Its demolition may also have been a passive reproach to the community which had permitted another and even more "magnificent" building to be added to its built form. Beissel's rejection of worldly materialism was not just a rejection of luxury for monastic poverty; it was founded in his spiritual belief that all matter was inherently corrupt. Three large Saals may have seemed to him corruption beyond the necessary minimum. Whatever motivated Beissel to order its destruction, its removal left Ephrata with two spaces large enough to accommodate the entire community for worship or meetings, one built at Eckerlin's orders and one at Beissel's, a result which may in itself give an indication of Beissel's motive.

A combination of personal ambition and a genuine concern for the financial security of the community led Prior Eckerlin to establish industrial enterprises at Ephrata. He was eager to secure the future of the celibate orders by making them economically independent from the Householders, whose largesse in the form of tithes and special gifts had until now been their primary support. Beissel had administered these communal offerings, keeping no accounts and giving away to charity all but the bare minimum needed by the celibate orders. The Cloister had neither economic reserves nor regular sources of income.

Eckerlin set out to change this. Brothers and Sisters were encouraged to work at various kinds of handicrafts, making such saleable items as shoes, sulphur matchsticks, wax tapers, and artificial flowers (Doll, "Social and Economic Organization" 175). The gristmill was already producing occasional income; at his direction a sawmill, a barkmill, a flaxseed-oil mill and

a falling mill were constructed (two known mill sites are indicated by #16 on Figure 3). The most elaborate enterprise was the creation of the first complete book production facilities in America; the Brothers operated a paper mill, a tannery, a printing press (#3 on Figure 3) and a bindery shop. Under Prior Eckerlin's leadership, Ephrata became an industrial center, supplying merchants as far away as Philadelphia and Baltimore.

By 1745 Eckerlin's industrial revolution had become so successful that the mills and shops could not keep up with the demand for their products. Brothers worked long hours every day, and still outside laborers had to be hired to meet commitments. In one sense, Eckerlin became the victim of his own success. The time and energy this level of production demanded came to be seen as excessive, especially by those like Beissel who had never shared Eckerlin's concern for a stable economic future. The piling up of earthly wealth was in direct contradiction to Beissel's beliefs and gradually, perhaps in part because they were being physically exhausted by the constant hard work, more and more Brothers became disenchanted with Eckerlin.

In 1743, as part of Prior Eckerlin's attempt to consolidate control over the Cloister, he had a new communal residence for the Householders erected. This structure, originally called Hebron, was built next to Peniel, the prayer hall constructed for the Householders on Beissel's order two years earlier (#11 on Figure 3). Ostensibly the purpose was to bring the Householders into closer relationship with the celibate community. Household couples agreed to move into Hebron, voluntarily divorce each other, and live chastely, with the men on one side of a dividing wall and women on the other. Eckerlin also had a second agenda, however. He wanted to move the Householders off their farms so that he could communalize their property under his control (Kirschner 40). Furthermore, he moved two of the Brothers of his Order of Zion into the new residence to oversee the Householders, thus suggesting that the new occupants came under his authority.

The attempt was unsuccessful. The now chaste Householders were not treated as spiritually equal to the celibate members, despite their divorces and celibacy, but only as having moved up to the second rung of the spiritual ladder. The parents worried about their children, who were not brought into any communal setting but, astonishingly, left on the farms to fend for themselves. Unhappy about this and about the failure of the celibate members to welcome them as equals, in about six months most Householders went back to their former lives and were given back ownership of their farms. The failure of his attempt, and the fact that the sheer size of Hebron was considered ostentatious and worldly by some members, worked against Eckerlin in his struggle for power.

Eckerlin had many followers among the Brethren, and for a time he succeeded in making himself leader of the community and ruling over it from his tower on the hill. Eventually, however, enough members became sufficiently outraged at his rejection of the community's original values that in 1745 he was deposed and expelled from the Cloister. Eckerlin left for West Virginia, taking with him only a few members of his immediate family.

Everything that he had written, even his music, was publicly and ceremonially burned.

The Monastic Phase

The fourth phase of life at Ephrata began when Beissel's faction won this power struggle. A stricter, very monastic, rule was now adopted for the celibate orders. The new architectural model for the fourth phase became the convent. Beissel quickly had a large new residence constructed for the renunfied Brotherhood and named it Bethania. No longer extant, it was located with the earlier communal buildings at the foot of the hill, near the creek (#2 on Figure 3). Like Kedar, Zion, Peniel and Hebron, its sides were oriented to the cardinal compass points. The placement of Bethania in relation to Kedar and Hebron must have created a sense of enclosure, of a central quadrangle defined by the three tall communal residences. This enclosure turned its back to Zion; the new location thus established Bethania as part of the community and presented the three central residences as equal in status, proclaiming an end to inner circles and to overemphasis on hierarchy.

The new Brothers' convent was architecturally extremely simple; a rectangular three-story volume articulated only by a setback of the long side walls on the top floor (Figure 6). A 1753 visitor described its lack of comfortable seating, its narrow doors and steep stairs, its simple whitewash finish on the interior walls; all underscore the return to a more austere and ascetic life in this phase of Ephrata's history (Acretius 3).

Beissel clearly understood the way that Eckerlin had used architecture to claim and assert power; he used the lumber that had been prepared for an expansion of Zion to build the new Brothers' house, a telling gesture in a community so attuned to symbolism. The grand and expensive Zion was turned into a residence for poor and widowed members; the symbolic seat of the man who had tried to put himself at the top of a hierarchy was given to those at the bottom.

Hebron, the communal hall Eckerlin had built for the Householders (#11 on Figure 3), was remodeled, a move which both resulted from and refitted the return to Beissel's vision for the community. The extent to which this building was associated with Eckerlin and became a symbol of his time in power is revealed by its transformation at the time of his expulsion. As Ann Kirschner has pointed out, it was symbolically transformed in three ways: its occupants and function were changed, as it became a convent-like residence for Sisters; it was renamed Saron, in reference to the Rose of Sharon; and it was remodeled (Kirschner 59). In the remodeling the original central dividing wall was taken out, completely or in part, on all three floors, creating a single communal kitchen on each floor. The rest of the original kitchen space was used to make additional work rooms for the Sisters. The two doors that had served the male Householder occupants were turned into windows, leaving a single front and rear direct entrance to the



Figure 6. View of Bethania in 1910. (Lancaster County Historical Society.)

building. Each of the three transformations contributed to the re-presentation of this building as a new thing, cleansed of its association with Eckerlin.

All of these changes were to make the building suitable as a residence for the Sisters—but a Sisterhood as redefined in this fourth, monastic, phase. Both the new name and the removal of the male entrances feminized the building, as Kirschner has noted, thus creating what the *Chronicon Ephratense* called a “necessary tempering of male willfulness,” which is to say the malign influence of Eckerlin, with what Beissel believed were the female qualities of order, harmony and submission (Kirschner 62). Interior doors were made low, so that one had to bend into the posture of humility to pass through them. The reduction in the number of exterior doors also underlined the new tighter rules, under which the Sisters were to receive no more visitors and stop what the *Chronicon Ephratense* referred to as “unseemly comings and goings.” Under the new regulations, in fact, the Sisters almost never left what had now become very like a cloistered convent, doing their work inside the newly christened Saron with the two remaining doors locked for a good part of the day. What had been Hebron was transformed and became Saron, which Kirschner aptly describes as “an instrument in the Sisters’ attainment of the solitary life and mystical experience of Christ” (61), thus reasserting Beissel’s original plan for the community and architecturally reinforcing the behaviors he wanted in his flock.

The expansion of industrial facilities that had occurred under Eckerlin's leadership ended. Beissel saw these activities as worldly and marked his return to full power by insisting that the operation of mills and workshops be scaled back so that the members' energy could once again be focused on spiritual efforts. The level of production was dropped to meet just the needs of the community and a few local customers (Doll, "Social and Economic Organization" 175). The new tighter regimentation was thus able to include more hours spent in prayer, contemplation, and spiritual exercises, constituting a return to the original practices established by Beissel.

With the challenge to Beissel's authority and values overcome, life at the Ephrata Cloister continued in the new, more monastic, pattern for many years. No major structures were added to the built environment once the Brothers' Bethania and Saal had been completed, reflecting both the lack of change in the pattern of daily life and a slower rate of growth in membership. With Beissel's death in 1768, however, the community began to decline. Membership in the celibate orders dropped off as the first generation of believers began to die and fewer new recruits were added to the fellowship. Archeological evidence suggests that Beissel's rules for an ascetic life of withdrawal from the world were less strictly observed.⁷ The last Prior of the Brotherhood, Peter Miller, oversaw the Cloister's final decades.

The Final Phase

Miller's death in 1796 signaled the transition to the final and longest phase of Ephrata's history. Communal life was gradually abandoned. In 1814, the Cloister was legally dissolved and Ephrata was reincarnated as a congregation of the church of the German Seventh Day Baptists. The remaining members of the celibate orders transferred their title to the land and buildings of Ephrata to this congregation. Although single Sisters continued to live in the remaining Cloister buildings for a number of years, Ephrata continued primarily as a religious association of what had been the Householders. Archeological evidence shows that the use of the Cloister grounds themselves changed under the administration of the Householder association (Wartel, 1998 *Investigations*, 10). If a new architectural model is to be associated with this phase, it would be the Pennsylvania Dutch farmhouse, home to the nuclear family and far removed from the utopian communal architecture of the Ephrata Cloister. Finally, in 1934, the congregation turned the buildings at Ephrata over to the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, which restored the remaining buildings and today maintains them for visitors.

Conclusion

The many ways in which the structures built by the Ephrata Cloister reflect Beissel's religious beliefs range from the obvious—placing Kedar at the center of their property to emphasize the centrality of religion in their

lives, building special rooms for Love Feasts so that members could practice the rituals of Apostolic Christianity—to the extremely subtle—using mystical numbers and astrology to determine the dimensions and locations of buildings. The fundamental simplicity and unadorned character of the buildings constructed under Beissel's direction express his belief in the inherent corruption of all matter, his consequent rejection of worldly goods, and the asceticism he believed was necessary to attain spiritual goals.

Specific elements of Ephrata's physical environment clearly reinforce specific behaviors Beissel encouraged—the narrow shelf beds and asceticism, the physical separation of the genders and celibacy. The most telling instances of his use of architecture and planning to influence the actions of this flock, however, come out of the power struggle era. The multiple ways in which the design, location and program of Peniel can be interpreted as a critique of Eckerlin's regime and the way in which it quietly provided alternate venues for activity outside Eckerlin's sphere of influence reveal a subtle use of the built environment to guide his followers into the paths he preferred. His transfer of the site (and the very materials) for the planned communal residence for male celibates to a location which emphasized community instead of separation further suggest that Beissel understood the symbolic power of place relationships and used site planning to reinforce the attitudes he encouraged.

The many ways in which the architecture and planning of the Zion complex were antithetical to Beissel's beliefs have been discussed above. Eckerlin's other monument, the industrial plant, undermined the sociocultural structure created by Beissel not by its design but by its very existence. Not only was it in direct opposition to his rejection of material wealth, the time and energy it drained from the members left them unable to live the contemplative life.

The architecture and planning of the community does embody Beissel's religious beliefs and values, in many different ways; there are indications that he used the built environment to reinforce the behaviors he valued; and both the Zion complex and the industrial production facilities are examples of architecture and planning that worked to undermine the sociocultural structure Beissel had created. This study of the intersections between architecture and culture at the Ephrata Cloister over time thus revealed positive answers to all three of the specific questions posed about this eighteenth-century utopian society.

NOTES

1. The following offers a very condensed summary of the history, beliefs, and social structures of the Ephrata Cloister. The most thorough discussions of the community are found in Sachse 1899 (AMS reprint 1970) and Alderfer 1985; Sachse, however, includes many unsubstantiated tales.
2. Dechert's article also contains other, factual, errors. He attributes construction of Bethany, the last-built communal residence, to the Eckerlin brothers, when it was actually built after their expulsion from the community, and gives the dimensions of the prayer hall built next to

it as 36 feet by 99 feet. The latter error is particularly curious since the ratio of the actual dimensions of this hall, 30 feet by 40 feet, comes much closer to the Golden Section than do the ratios of any factors of the dimensions he gives. The erroneous dimensions are accompanied by a tale, unfortunately without attribution, which quite specifically explains the choice of 99 feet in mystical terms. It seems possible that Dechert has conflated Bethany with the planned expansion of the Zion complex built by Prior Eckerlin, a structure which ultimately was not constructed.

3. See the series of annual *Reports on Investigations* by Stephen G. Warfel available from the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. The 1993–1998 excavation seasons focused on what was revealed to be the site of Kedar.
4. Most descriptions of Zion in the Ephrata literature rely on Sachse 1899.
5. Alderfer reports, although he gives no source for the information, that Eckerlin wanted to locate Zion in the heart of the settlement, "near the creek," but Beissel thought it better to have a greater distance between it and the "temptation" of the Sisterhood's Kedar (Alderfer 69). This, however, would not have necessitated building on a hilltop. It would appear that Eckerlin, having been denied his first choice of a power position at the center of the settlement, chose a second power position by locating his new building above and overlooking the center.
6. During the 1999 season the Ephrata Cloister Archeology Project began excavation of the area thought to be the site of the Zion complex, hoping to add to our scanty knowledge about the structures. The annual *Report on Investigations* for this season will be available in June, 2000.
7. Excavated levels which date from after Beissel's death contained increasing amounts of dietary animal bone and European-made ceramics (Warfel, 1993 *Investigations*, 18).

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