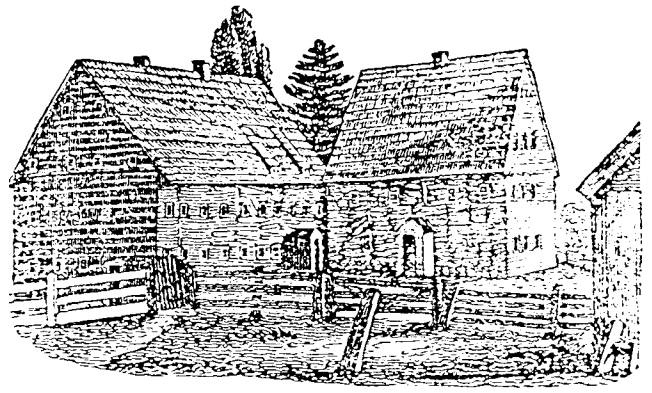


Ephrata Cloister



The earliest image of the Ephrata Cloister was published in 1843.

Imagine for a moment that a series of devastating wars has left your life in turmoil. You are in debt and surrounded by homelessness and starvation. Your own faith is under attack from the government. What could you do? What would you do?

This is the world into which Conrad Beissel was born in the spring of 1691 in his village of Eberbach, Germany. At age 24 Beissel experienced a spiritual awakening. He was no longer satisfied with the trappings and pressures of daily life. Instead, he sought inner peace by shunning worldly ways. In 1720 he joined thousands of other German, Swiss, Dutch, and French Protestants escaping religious persecution by journeying to Pennsylvania.

After spending nearly twelve years in Pennsylvania, some of it as a leader in a local Brethren congregation, Beissel sought solitude in the forest in 1732. His desire for a quiet home free from distractions allowed him to continue on his spiritual pilgrimage to join God in Heaven. Two issues remained important to Beissel. First, that Saturday was the main day for worship. Second, a desire to unite with God leaves no room for earthly marriage.

Other people soon followed the charismatic Beissel to his wilderness retreat. Like Beissel, these first builders of Ephrata sought an escape from life's horrors, and the promise of a better world still to come. By 1750, the community of Ephrata numbered nearly 80 celibate Brothers and Sisters known jointly as the Solitary. At the same time about 200 family members known as Householders, lived on their own nearby farms. These husbands and wives chose Beissel as their spiritual leader, but were unwilling to make all the sacrifices he demanded of the Solitary. The Householders contributed support to the Brothers and Sisters in the community at Ephrata.

Among the Solitary, daily life was regimented and filled with discipline for body and mind. Scant diets, short periods of rest, long periods of work, and times for private meditation were seen as key activities in helping the members regain the pure bodies of Adam and Eve,

and thus preparing them to enter Paradise. Living, working, and worshiping in impressive Germanic style buildings, the Solitary engaged in farming, milling, and domestic work.

The Brotherhood operated a printing press for nearly a fifty years starting in 1743. Their most ambitious work was the translation and publication of the 1500 page *Martyrs Mirror* for the Mennonites, the largest book printed in colonial America.

Musical composition and the German calligraphic writing called *Frakturschriften* were viewed by the members as a discipline for both body and soul. Beissel and his followers wrote hymns which required many hours of practice to perform. Both Brothers and Sisters were also engaged in the creation of magnificent hand-illuminated books and inscriptions.

The community became known for its charity, helping new settlers to build houses, caring for the poor and elderly, operating a school for area children, and offering guest free lodging. During the winter of 1777-1778 Ephrata was the site of a Revolutionary War military hospital.

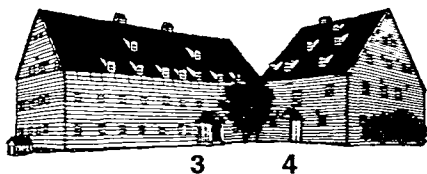
The death of Beissel in 1768, and a lack of interest in the monastic life among a younger generation, led to the community's decline. By 1813 the last celibate members died, leaving the Householders to maintain the site and the faith. Forming the German Seventh Day Baptist Church, these Householders continued to live and worship at Ephrata until 1934. In 1941 the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission acquired the remnants of the historic site and began a program of restoration and interpretation.

Today, only a fraction of Ephrata's 18th century heritage remains. Yet, the story of a people anticipating Paradise by starting a spiritual quest to unite with God remains. We may look upon the actions of these pioneers as different than ones we may choose for ourselves, but the desire for a better life rests within everyone. Ephrata is one expression of that desire.

1. The Visitor Center is the place to begin your exploration of Ephrata. View the introductory exhibit and film, purchase admission, and learn about special events. In this modern building you will also find restrooms, a water fountain, and help with information about the Ephrata Cloister and the region.

2. Conrad Beissel's House could have been among many of the surviving or demolished buildings at the site. Between his arrival here in 1732 and his death in 1768 he moved about six times. In the late 1760s the Brotherhood built Conrad Beissel a home located between Bethania (Brothers' House) and Saron (Sisters' House). Here he could study and write in private, hold gatherings, and welcome guests.

3. Saron, the Sisters' House, was constructed in 1743 to house Householders who sought to live celibate lives. After a brief period, this experiment in separate living failed, and the husbands and wives returned to their farms. The building was then remodeled to accommodate the Sisterhood who called themselves the Roses of Sharon. Each of the building's three main floors contains a *Küche*, or kitchen, a room for eating, two common workrooms, and about 12 sleeping chambers, or *Kammern*, one chamber for each Sister. For nearly 15 years Mother Maria Eicher directed the affairs of the Sisters, seeing to their daily duties and maintaining their independence from the Brotherhood. After the death of the last Sister in 1813, the building was divided into apartments and rented to church members.



4. The Saal, the Meetinghouse, is a *Fackwerk* or half-timber building constructed in 1741 as a worship hall for Householders. When the Sisterhood moved into the adjoining building, they took control of this Meetinghouse. Here, Sisters worshiped each evening while the Brothers gathered in their own Saal. The Meetinghouse on Mount Zion was used by the entire congregation on Saturday. The services in each of the Meetinghouses included scripture reading, lessons, and music. Special fellowship gatherings, called Love Feasts, celebrated the coming of God with feet washing, a meal, and the Eucharist with bread and wine. With the Solitary population shrinking in the 1770s, the Householders took a more active part in daily work, and probably added the stone kitchen to the rear of the building as a place to prepare the Love Feast meal.

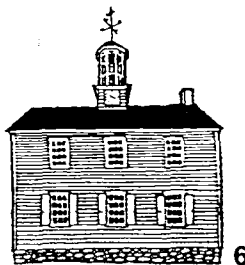
5. A Weaver's House contained work for all members of the Ephrata community. Flax, the plant source of linen, was planted by the Brothers, but everyone helped with the harvest and the cleaning of the



fiber. Both Brothers and Sisters spun linen thread, while the weaving of cloth was a male occupation. Seamstresses and tailors among the commu-

nity constructed the white monastic robes. Laundry duties were likely shared among the Solitary.

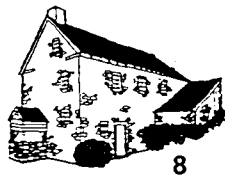
6. The Academy was opened by the Householders in 1837 as a private school for their children and those of the area. The tradition of teaching school at Ephrata dates back to the days when Brother Obed (Ludwig Höcker) conducted lessons for neighborhood children. Most of the teaching focused on reading, writing, and arithmetic.



In the early 1840s the enterprising teacher Joseph Wiggins also offered chemistry, measuring, surveying, and astronomy. In the mid-1800s the building became a public school serving several generations of students until it closed in 1926.

7. God's Acre is the resting place for Conrad Beissel, other Solitary members, and Householders. The earliest marked grave is 1767 and the last burial took place here in 1961. The surrounding stone wall is a 1950s reconstruction of the original.

8. The Bakery was likely a busy place when in operation. In 18th-century Ephrata, each person ate about a pound of bread a day, and the loaves of bread weighed about four pounds each. After mixing the ingredi-



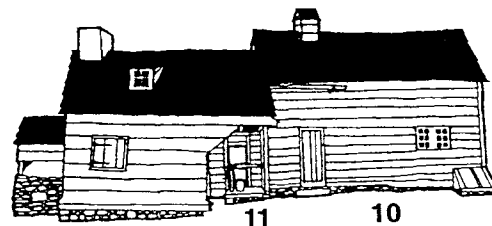
ents in the large wood boxes, dough was left to rise for several hours, then divided into loaves and set to rise in the rye straw baskets. Meanwhile a fire burned inside the dome shaped oven, heating the brick. When the oven temperature was just right, the coal and ash from the fire was scraped out, and the bread placed inside using the long handled peels. Brother Amos (Jan Mayle) served as the baker for many years, and visitors reported that he made a delicious bread.

The upper floor of the Bakery may have been used for several purposes during the

18th-century. It may have served as a work space, or even a storage area. It could have also been a place where the community distributed items such as food or clothing to individuals in need of charity. Among those cared for by the community, there were several widows such as Christina Höhn who moved into the community after the death of her husband. Other non-celibate residents of the site included poor individuals, and for brief periods, newly arrived Householders who had not yet established their own homes. By the late 1790s, this area may have been used as a residence the few remaining Solitary.

9. The Saron Bake Oven was constructed in the early 1820s, likely to serve the needs of the few residents renting space in Saron.

10. The Physician's House likely contained a cupboard holding a few books and homemade herbal remedies. Brother Gideon (Christian Eckstein), and later Samuel Eckerlin, both called themselves "practitioners in physic," in other words, doctors. Their training was minimal, and their cures may or may not have helped those in distress. Most members of the community seemed to appear healthy to 18th-century visitors. The Solitary also tended to live to be 60 or 70 years old or more. Like most early settlers in America, the residents of Ephrata had poor sanitation, and did not bathe often. No wonder one visitor found the Brothers sprinkling the sweet smelling rose water on their clothes as they prepared for a Saturday worship service.



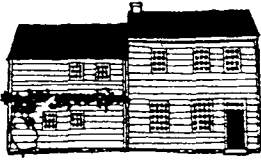
11. The Small Bake House may have also served as a place for seasonal chores such as candle making, soap making, and the regular routine of laundry.

12. Kedar, the first communal dormitory built in America, may have stood at this site. The building which originally housed both Brothers and Sisters was built in 1735. Between 1737 and 1741, a Prayer House was connected to Kedar. By 1746 the building became a residence for widows and widowers. Kedar was probably torn down about 1800. Archaeology conducted at this site in the 1990s has offered the only clues to the size of this important early building.

13. Bethania, the Brothers' House, was built in 1746 and stood until 1908. The

impressive four story building had kitchens, eating areas, work rooms, and sleeping chambers much like the Saron (Sisters' House). Archaeological evidence also suggests that the Brotherhood printing operation was carried on inside Bethania. After finishing its construction, the Brotherhood found they had gathered enough materials to construct an adjoining Saal (Meetinghouse) which was demolished about 1855. The front door of this Saal faced the Cocalico Creek, and a small structure about 25 yards ahead. The small building was likely a workshop.

14. The Printing Office of the Brotherhood was originally located in Bethania (Brothers' House) next door, but may have looked similar to the exhibit in this building. The west end of this structure,



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built about 1735, is among the oldest structures on the site. About 1810 an addition to the east offered Householder Able Witwer more space and light to operate a clock making shop.

15. The Cocalico Creek and The Spring offered a constant source of cool fresh water, attracting animals and people alike. A number of Native American tools found at Ephrata suggest this land was a prime hunting spot for the first human inhabitants of the region. When Conrad Beissel arrived in 1732, he chose to live near the spring. New members were received into the community with the rite of baptism, performed in the creek. The Cocalico Creek also offered water power to operate several mills. About a mile down stream the Brotherhood had a saw mill, a grain mill, a paper mill, a fulling mill, and an oil mill. Eventually, the Brothers also built a second paper mill about 500 yards up stream from this spot.

16. The Carpenter's House is typical of the earliest homes in Ephrata, and may be one of the oldest surviving structures on the site. Conrad Beissel originally sought to lead the life of a hermit in a cabin similar to this one. Even after the large dormi-

tories were constructed for the Brothers and Sisters, some Solitary members chose to live by themselves, or in smaller groups, outside the communal houses. Members of the Brotherhood, such as Brother Sealthiel (Sigmund Landert) and Brother Kenan (Jacob Funk) were skilled carpenters who not



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only built structures, but produced furniture for the community's use.

17. The Amphitheater was constructed in the 1970s as a backdrop for special programs, including weddings.

18. The Maintenance Barn was constructed in the 1960s to provide work space for the site staff. (Not open to the public)

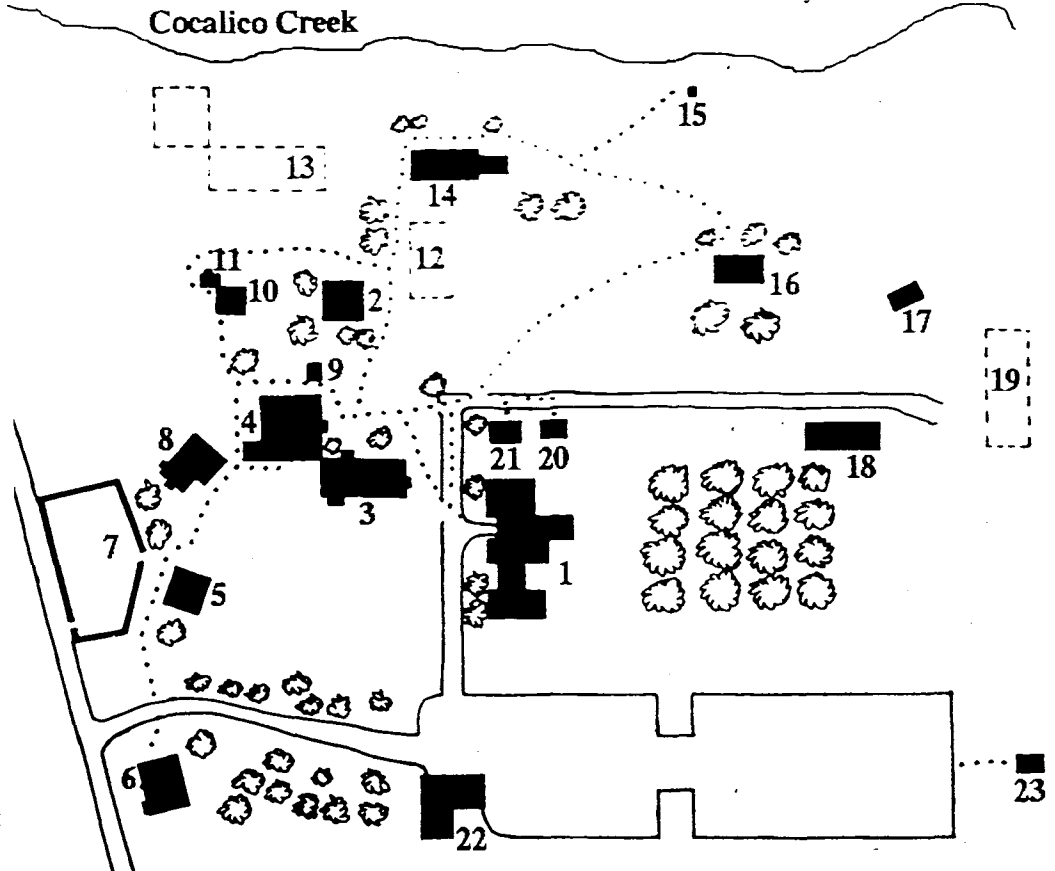
19. The Mount Zion Buildings were constructed by the Brotherhood between 1738 and 1745 and included both a dormitory and a Saal (Meetinghouse). The Brothers only lived here until 1745, when they moved back to the building called Kedar for a year until a new Brothers' House was built near the creek. The buildings on Mount Zion then served as a refuge for poor and widows, and a Meetinghouse for the entire Ephrata community. During the Revolutionary War, some of the Mount Zion buildings served as a hospital for ill men from the American army camped at Valley Forge. Mount Zion was also the home for a group of dissenting Brothers who left Ephrata in 1745 and returned 20 years later, leading to tensions within the community during the last years of the 18th century. Archeology is uncovering new clues about the structures and the people who once lived on Mount Zion.

20. The Log Building once stood several miles away and was moved to the historic site in the 1940s. Its architecture is similar to other buildings constructed by the Pennsylvania Germans in the region. The building is used for special programs and exhibits.

21. The Stable is a reconstruction of the original building which once stood on this site. Agriculture was an important activity of the Brotherhood, who grew much of the community's food supply. Tax records from the mid-eighteenth-century also indicate the community owned one or two horses and a few cows.

22. Shady Nook Farm was located in the surviving historic area of the Ephrata Cloister and was home to some of the last members of the German Seventh-Day Baptist Church members at Ephrata. The farm house stood across the driveway, beside the present Visitor Center. The Barn, which once housed animals and equipment, is now **The Museum Store at Ephrata Cloister**. Inside you'll find a selection of books, postcards, and hand crafted gifts and items reflecting the heritage of Ephrata and the area.

23. The Mount Zion Cemetery contains the graves of several early members of the Ephrata Community. A large monument marks the traditional location of the mass grave of Revolutionary War soldiers. When the monument was dedicated in 1902, legend said that hundreds of soldiers died at Ephrata in the winter of 1777-1778. Official records, however, can only account for about 60 men who did not survive the winter. The land to the south and west of the cemetery was called Fairview Farm in the late 1800s. The farmhouse, home to some of the last members of the German Seventh-Day Baptist Church at Ephrata, stood just to the west of the cemetery.



VISITING HOURS

Monday - Saturday: 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Sunday: 12 noon to 5:00 p.m.

Closed holidays (except Memorial Day, July 4, and Labor Day).

Hours subject to change without notice

Admission Charged

An admission receipt from the Ephrata Cloister is good toward reduced adult admission at any of the P. H. M. C. Historic sites and museums listed in the Pennsylvania Trail of History brochure, and at any of the Museum council of Lancaster county member institutions. Free unlimited visit at all P. H. M. C. Historic sites and museums is available through membership in the Pennsylvania Heritage Society. For information inquire at the Visitor Center, or call (717) 733-6600.

SPECIAL EVENTS

CHARTER DAY

Free admission to the site on the second Sunday of March in commemoration of the signing of the Charter of Pennsylvania.

CHRISTMAS AT THE CLOISTER

Presented two evenings in December. Advance tickets required.

CHRISTMAS CANDLELIGHT TOURS

Held on designated evenings at Christmas time. Advance tickets required.

For more information on these and other special events please call (717) 733-6600.

EPHRATA CLOISTER

632 West Main Street

Ephrata, Pennsylvania 17522

(717) 733-6600

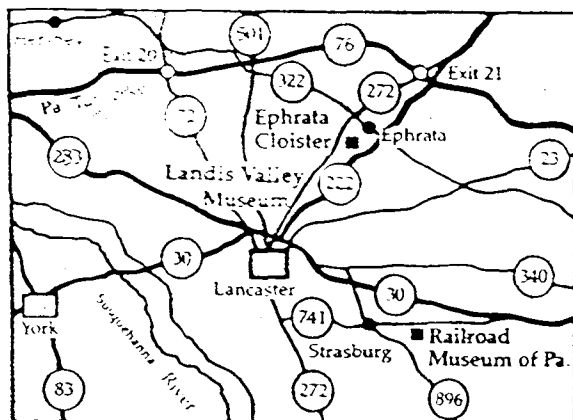
Ephrata Cloister is administered by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission

Tom Ridge, Governor

Mrs. Janet S. Klein, Chairman

Brent D. Glass, Executive Director

with support from the Ephrata Cloister Associates



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