Snow Hill
In the Shadows of the Ephrata Cloister

DENISE A. SEACHRIST
Snow Hill
For My Mother
Eloise Rapp Seachrist
# Contents

Preface and Acknowledgments  ix

1 “I welcome any effort such as yours”  1
   *My Introduction to the Nunnery*

2 “A spiritual flock hath need of thee westward”  30
   *The History and Life of Snow Hill*

3 “We used to delight in singing lower bass, by which a man can bring out all the talent he can find”  58
   *Music in the Life of Snow Hill*

4 “The genius of America runs to active doing and not contemplative introspection”  85
   *The Demise of Snow Hill*

Epilogue  109

Appendix: German Seventh-Day Baptist Constitution, Adopted April 4, 1976  111

Notes  116

Selected Bibliography  134

Index  160
Nestled in the Cumberland Valley along a branch of the historic Antietam River in Pennsylvania’s Franklin County are the remnants of a nineteenth-century communal society known as Snow Hill. On Route 997, heading north toward the village of Quincy, a road sign placed by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission hints at the significance of this site as an American communal experiment: “SNOW HILL CLOISTER: An offshoot of Ephrata Cloister in Lancaster County deriving its name from the Snowberger family active in its foundation. Composed of widows, widowers, and single persons, with goods held in common, it prospered from 1814 until the Civil War.”

Snow Hill was a nineteenth-century attempt to continue the communal lifestyle practiced at the famed Ephrata Cloister, a Protestant communal order established in 1732 by Christian mystic Georg Conrad Beissel (1691–1768). Ephrata was founded in the first half of the eighteenth century when the doctrinal turmoil precipitated by pietism and separatism in Europe led to the migration of a great number of Germans to Pennsylvania. Beissel’s Ephrata was one of a variety of religious groups that flourished in William Penn’s colony; others included Mennonites, Dunkers, Amish, and Moravians, along with a host of unallied separatists who regarded formal creeds with suspicion. Penn deliberately recruited such dissenters as Beissel, and soon the territory was flooded with a variety of German-speaking sectarians who had rebelled against the oppression of the state churches of Europe and
formed their own communions, settling in the New World in search of freedom from religious persecution and the opportunity to follow the dictates of conscience to worship God in their own way.

Enthusiasts and scholars of Pennsylvania German history and folklore are well aware of the contributions and achievements of the Ephrata Cloister. For many years of the early republic, this small community, located near the present-day heart of Amish country, just sixty miles west of Philadelphia and fourteen miles north of Lancaster, was a center of learning and fine arts. Many prominent families from Philadelphia and Baltimore sent their children to be educated at the Cloister Academy, and many prominent individuals, including Thomas Penn and Lady Juliana, Nicolaus Ludwig Count von Zinzendorf, David Nitschmann, Augustus Gottlieb Spangenberg, David Zeisberger, and Declaration of Independence signer George Ross, visited the site. The Library of Congress has in its collection a manuscript volume of hymns entitled *Das Gesäng der Einsamen und Verlassenen Turtel-Taube* (The Song of the Lonely and Abandoned Turtle-Dove), produced at Ephrata in 1746. This volume was once owned by Benjamin Franklin, who printed three of the early Ephrata hymnbooks. The Ephrata Cloister even enjoyed a reputation in Europe. Voltaire, who mentioned Ephrata in his *Dictionnaire Philosophique*, praised the celibates as being “the most inimitable Christians,” and Guillaume Raynal included a reference to Ephrata in his history of the Indies.

Beissel, who served as pastor of the Conestoga Dunker Church east of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, from 1724 to 1728, brought with him an eclectic assortment of ideas and practices borrowed from all the various orders and individuals with whom he had come in contact. As E. G. Alderfer commented, from the beginning of his ministry, Beissel was an advocate of “strange doctrines, such as the denunciation of the marriage state and the advocacy of the seventh day as the Sabbath. The communal core of Ephrata displaced the natural family altogether; members dropped their family names and adopted new given names to eliminate blood-tie loyalties in favor of spiritual cohesion. Marriage was eliminated because it perpetuated not only a divisive concern for property and the materialistic instincts of acquisitiveness but also the ‘fatal flaws’ of sexuality.” The acquisitive instinct, whether for mate or
property, was eradicated in the act of rebaptism (i.e., Anabaptism), preferably by trine immersion (total immersion three times). Several of the early Dunker congregations united with Ephrata, which also drew from the Reformed Church. As with many pietistic groups, religious values permeated the entire system and determined the other aspects of cultural, social, and economic organization.

Contributing to Ephrata’s renown was its thriving culture of printing and bookbinding. Also, as early as 1740 the first Sabbath school on record was established there by Ludwig Höcker and others, a full forty years before Robert Raikes’s much-lauded system in England. But it was the hymnody, music composition, and illuminated music manuscripts that brought Ephrata its greatest fame.

Snow Hill never received the attention of other nineteenth-century religious communes, such as Ann Lee’s Shakers and George Rapp’s Harmonists. Nor did it achieve the celebrity or enjoy the legacy of Ephrata, but Snow Hill did carry on both the theology and the unique system of music and harmony originated by Beissel. These bold experiments in communal living remained just that—experiments. For, as Snow Hill historian [Image of a music manuscript depicting three hymns and an ornamental illumination displayed at the Ephrata Cloister]
Charles Treher noted, “Usually these groups were born of the vision of one man, a leader who drew a small nucleus of those who were willing to be led into a more perfect existence.” And when that one man died, his followers strayed and the cloisters and villages and colonies faded away. As membership at Ephrata declined following the death of Conrad Beissel, the less austere Snow Hill, led by Peter Lehman (1757–1823), a Seventh-Day Baptist clergyman, became the most flourishing of the German Seventh-Day Baptist communities in America well into the twentieth century, providing modern scholars of communal and religious history, and of musicology, a rich source of information and material.

When I first encountered Snow Hill in 1990, my research objective was to be the first to study and examine Snow Hill’s music and musical life contextually as both a continuation and evolution of Ephrata. However, research often leads the scholar in divergent directions, and I now understand that my greatest contributions during my residence at Snow Hill were the compilation of an inventory and catalog of the written documents located there and my role in securing these materials for the Special Collections at Juniata College. Many of the volumes are German-language works printed in Germany or America during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Several belonged to members of the Ephrata Cloister and had found their way to Snow Hill during the evangelistic period when the younger congregation was established on the Schneeberger farm. Two of my most significant discoveries were an original Ephrata imprint of the *Martyrs’ Mirror* and a complete five-volume set of Martin Luther’s edition of the Bible, published between 1739 and 1760. None of the volumes and manuscripts comprising the Snow Hill collection is included in the inventory by Karl Richard Arndt and Reimar C. Eck published in 1989 by the Pennsylvania German Society because, until my work at the site, access to the collection had not been permitted.

Snow Hill: In the Shadows of the Ephrata Cloister is a first-person account of my fieldwork and research conducted at this closed site. It is a story of people, then and “now,” as well as of place, then and “now”; my
approach is primarily ethnographic, in keeping with, and important to, a study of community. However, because it also provides insight into how relationships with the informants were cultivated that could serve as a template for successful interview techniques critical to this type of methodology, this book should be as useful to the casual reader as to scholars of Pennsylvania German history and culture, communal and utopian studies, Sabbatarianism, music, hymnody, and folk arts.

During the summer of 1991, I kept a detailed journal, recording everything I observed and was told by my informants. The entries were recorded using three different colors of ink—black for what I observed personally or notations I made from written materials, blue for formal interviews and casual conversations with informants, and red for my personal contemplations and reactions. The journal was my constant companion, serving as a welcome diversion when I became lonely living in the quiet community of Waynesboro. It has proved indispensable in allowing me to maintain such a deep impression of the people and the place. It is because I chronicled long passages of dialogue almost immediately following each interview or encounter that I now am able to provide such vivid recollections in this book. All correspondence I received from anyone associated with Snow Hill is still in my possession, and all of the photographs were taken during my initial visit and subsequent fieldwork there.

While conducting the fieldwork, I worked every day at Snow Hill under George Wingert’s watchful eye. As I worked to compile an inventory of all the books and music manuscripts, I began to unravel the long and loopy history of Snow Hill—the story of the place and the people, the rich contextual history that made my research into this long-lost community of believers fascinating and meaningful. My inventory grouped similar works into definable categories. Bibles, New Testaments, and psalters dealt with the written word or texts of scripture. Hymn texts consisted of both handwritten and printed volumes containing only the words to the hymns. Like the psalters, hymn texts may be viewed as the religious poetry to which music could be added for the creation of hymn singing. Hymnals, songbooks, and sheets of shape notes shared the combination of text and music. The various hymnals were all twentieth-century English-language works, representative of those used by the members of the Snow Hill
congregation. The songbooks contained music and texts to hymns and songs used during the singing school movement in late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century America. The sheets of shape notes were stored in ten small boxes with eleven to fifty-nine individual sheets of original music set to preexisting texts. Ledgers and miscellaneous documents had nothing to do with music or scripture. The ledgers contained a variety of accounts of the community members, the church, and the business ventures of the farm, gristmill, and cooper shop from the years 1803 to 1988. The miscellaneous documents were just that: a wide and varied assortment of monographs, among them volumes printed at the Ephrata Cloister, religious histories and tracts of various denominations, Bible study books, schoolbooks, government reports, and children’s books. Music manuscripts were the original and copied hymn music composed and transcribed by the monastic members at both Ephrata and Snow Hill. Some volumes were partially printed, with the notation added by hand; others were entirely handwritten.

In cataloging the items, I assigned each a number consisting of a simple alphanumeric component: the prefix DS (the compiler’s initials) followed by a three-digit figure ranging from 001 to 586, determined by the order cataloged. Following protocol common to cataloging procedure, I then stamped the assigned number on each volume’s title page and on a randomly selected separate page inside to mark and identify each volume. Presently, the entire Snow Hill Collection is housed in the Special Archives of Juniata College.

A note on my use of these materials in this account: When quoting directly from any of these documents, I have preserved their often eccentric spelling, capitalization, and internal punctuation. To avoid the jarring effect of constant interpolation within such quotations, I have refrained from using sic to signal these eccentricities.

These tangible artifacts brought to life the characters of Snow Hill, so that my research evolved to encompass not just the community’s music and manuscripts but also the people and the community at Snow Hill. I was first drawn to Snow Hill by the music, but the relationships that I formed with the informants came to matter just as much, as did my respect and concern for the people of Snow Hill, their history and stories, and even the artifacts of their community—their woven coverlets, their everyday tools, even their furniture.
Many individuals provided valuable information that was unobtainable elsewhere, and all were gracious in welcoming me to their worship services each week. (I was even granted the privilege of playing the piano for them during their Sabbath worship services.) I thank Crist and Marie King, Harris and Jane Baer, Elder and Sallie Myers, Lydiabelle Linebaugh, Hazel Monn, Irene Funk, Todd Dorsett, Katie Kernes, and especially George Wingert for opening their community and sharing their beloved Snow Hill Nunnery with me. Don Valentine, Ted Carbaugh, Helen Martin King, Ruth Clopper, Bill Erdenbrack, Joseph Mentzer, Edward Rosenberry, Catherine Huber, and Shirley Baker provided many details about the local communities of Waynesboro and Quincy, Pennsylvania. I am also grateful to the library staff at the Mont Alto Campus of Penn State University; to Tamra Hess, director of the East Palestine Memorial Library; and to Donald and Hedwig Durnbaugh and the staff at the Special Archives of Juniata College. My thanks to Nadine Steinmetz and Clarence Spohn for making the Ephrata manuscripts available for my study, and to Glenn, Timothy, and Thomas Horst for permitting me to videotape the Snow Hill Auction.

I am deeply appreciative of the 1998 Summer Research and Creative Activity Appointment sponsored by Kent State University’s Research Council, which supported my travel to Juniata College to conduct further research on the Snow Hill music manuscripts, as well as of the continued advice and counsel of Kent State University Emeriti Professors Terry Miller and Richard Shindle. Thanks to Kazadi wa Mukuna for his advice regarding documenting the informant interviews.

I am grateful to Geoffrey Koby for his critical review of my German translations and for providing “singable,” poetic English translations of the German hymn texts. I thank Meghan Naxer for resetting my musical examples from Score software into more accessible Sibelius notation examples.

I am indebted to the staff of the Kent State University Press for their professionalism and support of this project—Will Underwood, director; Joyce Harrison, acquisitions editor; Mary Young, managing editor; Susan Cash, marketing manager; and Christine Brooks, design and production manager.
Throughout the years, Simon Bronner, Don Yoder, Donald Durnbaugh, and Allen Viehmeyer, along with my mentors Richard Shindle and Terry Miller, encouraged me to publish a book on Snow Hill. The time never felt right. Now I know why. It was because of George. There was a personal story to be told with sensitivity, compassion, and candor. It is now, since George Wingert's death and with the encouragement of Joanna Hildebrand Craig over countless lunches of Thai food throughout the years, that I am finally able to freely tell this story. Rather than telling two separate stories, one strictly scholarly and one more personal, I have attempted to blend the two. Others will judge my success.

Finally, my heartfelt appreciation to my three biggest fans—my big brother, Dan, my sweet and supportive Mama, and my dear husband, Charlie.
CHAPTER 1

“I welcome any effort such as yours”

My Introduction to the Nunnery

My interest in Snow Hill came about quite by accident in 1989 when I was a doctoral student at Kent State University enrolled in ethnomusicologist Terry Miller’s North American music seminar. Richard Shindle, a musicologist who shared an office with Miller, introduced me to a microfilm copy of a Snow Hill music manuscript located in the Free Library of Philadelphia. I had never seen any musical notation like this before and became completely absorbed in attempting to analyze it. I was fascinated by this music that appeared to have no discernable rhythmic pattern and a complete absence of metric organization. I struggled with the harmonic progressions until I realized that every staff was written with a different clef sign at the beginning of the line. I soon realized that before I could perform an adequate analysis of this music, I needed to make a complete transcription into modern notation. And so my journey into the musical world of Snow Hill began, and my relationship with Miller and Shindle intensified when both eventually agreed to coadvise my dissertation, which would encompass the theories and practices of both musicology and ethnomusicology in a study of the Snow Hill manuscripts.

I acquired my own microfilm copy of the music, along with two additional canisters containing related material, and, working every free hour, painstakingly copied the music by hand onto sheets of manuscript paper. I could then see that unusual chord progressions and strange doubling of the parts were evident in piece after piece and that there appeared to be no
sense of a consistent underlying metrical accent. The harmony produced was extremely simple, while the bass line often appeared unimaginative and even “wrong” by the rules of conventional music theory.

Shindle introduced me to one of the volumes produced by the Pennsylvania German Society: Charles Treher’s work on Snow Hill researched and published in the sixties, the only in-depth study of the Snow Hill Cloister. Excited by Treher’s account, I became increasingly determined to learn everything I could about Snow Hill; my interest grew beyond the music. I knew I needed to visit the site, but first I would need to obtain permission to gain access to the private, church-owned property—but from whom? I managed to track down Treher and learned from him that “the person who could give you the best information concerning your interest in the music is Crist M. King.”1 Within a week of sending off my letter of introduction and request, I received King’s response: “The Snow Hill Nunnery is not open to the general public for security reasons and also lack of personnel, but as president of the board of trustees of the Snow Hill Society, I welcome any effort such as yours.”

After months of exchanging letters and phone calls, and after I had answered numerous questions about my family background, religious beliefs and practices, and other personal information, King invited me to visit Snow Hill to meet several members of the church, encouraging me to have my mother accompany me on the visit. This struck me as odd—certainly not the experience of my fellow doctoral candidates in their fieldwork—but, with my mother’s amused compliance, I scheduled our visit.

When King learned that my mother and I were willing to meet with the church members in March 1991, he sent me a letter in which he revealed that he was hoping to turn Snow Hill into a research center and that a Dr. Kathryn Oller was preparing the Snow Hill material to be microfilmed. “Realizing the value of these materials,” he continued, “we have placed the four sealed cartons in which they are contained, in the headquarters of the Kittochtinny Historical Society located in the old restored jail in Chambersburg, about twelve miles from the Nunnery. When the time comes for you to make your study, you shall have access to this collection.” This was good news. King also included a photocopy of a newspaper article that detailed a legal dispute in which four mem-