



## The Kelp Family

The Kelp family had a contentious relationship with the Ephrata Cloister, and their story spans the last years of the celibate community and the early years of the German Seventh Day Baptist Church at Ephrata.<sup>1</sup> The eldest of the seven Kelp children, Johann Wilhelm, arrived in Philadelphia in 1750. He and his family had no relationship with Ephrata. Three years later, in 1753, the widower father Johann Peter Kelp came to America with his six children and settled in the Shenandoah Valley of western Virginia. Like her older brother, Maria Catharina Kelp had no connections to the Cloister community. The other children and their families came to Ephrata in 1764 under the leadership of disgruntled former community member Ezechiele Sangmeister. Sangmeister's published journal, titled *Leben und Wandel (Life and Conduct)* provides most of the information about the Kelp family in Virginia.

Sangmeister lived at Ephrata between 1748 and 1752. Unhappy in the community, he left Ephrata and moved to the area of Strasburg, Virginia. Nearby lived Samuel Eckerlin, the last of the Eckerlin brothers who left Ephrata in 1745 in the midst of controversy. The Kelp family also lived in the Strasburg neighborhood. Following Native American attacks on the settlement in the early 1760s, Sangmeister led a group of neighbors back to Ephrata where Eckerlin still held claim to the Cloister land. The Kelps, by that point a larger extended family, came with Sangmeister, some of them remaining on the community's land for the remainder of their lives.

Maria Christina Kelp, daughter of immigrant Johann Peter, married Christian Luther sometime prior to the birth of their son Christian Jr. in 1756. By the time of the move to Ephrata, the family also included children John and Catherine. When they first arrived in Ephrata, Maria Christina received baptism from Conrad Beissel and separated from her husband and began wearing a Sister's cowl. Within a few years, the couple reunited and lived in the abandoned dormitory on Mount Zion at the Cloister. Christian Luther began operating the community's tannery until his death, after which time his wife and son Christian Jr. managed the tannery business.

About 1757, Johannes Martin had come to the Shenandoah region heading a religious awakening. He led a band of followers to a new settlement in western Pennsylvania, where hostile Native Americans attacked the group. Martin escaped and returned to Virginia where he met and married Anna Maria Kelp. They had three children who also moved with them to Ephrata. The Martins lived in a house on the Cloister property, where Johannes attempted shoemaking, but it appears he lacked skill at the trade and was always in need of work.

The last members of the Kelp family to move from western Virginia to Ephrata in 1764 were all unmarried, a pair of brothers and their sister: John, John Adam (also called Johnathan), and their sister, Anna Catharina. When they arrived at Ephrata, sister Anna Catharina lived with the Martins, and the two brothers, John and John Adam (also called Johnathan), lived with Ezechiele Sangmeister, all on the grounds of the Ephrata Cloister. Several years later, the three siblings shared a house where the brothers worked as shoemakers. Eventually, they inherited Sangmeister's possessions.



Mount Zion Cemetery on the Historic Ephrata Cloister property, where it is likely most of the earliest members of the Kelp family lie buried.

<sup>1</sup> Clarence E. Spohn, "The Kelp/Kölp family of the Cocalico Valley," *Journal of the Historical Society of the Cocalico Valley*, vol. XVIII (1993).

Complex legal struggles left Samuel Eckerlin as the owner of the Cloister's land, in opposition to the resident celibate community. During the sometimes bitter disputes for control of the property, the Kelp family remained loyal to Eckerlin and his friend Sangmeister. In 1770, Eckerlin created a deed that allowed the celibates and the Kelp family to live on the site for the remainder of their lives. Sale of the land could not occur without agreement among all parties.

Contrary to this deed, just before their deaths in 1813, the last celibate members created a new deed selling the property to the married members of the congregation. By that time, only the unmarried Kelp siblings and Christian Luther Jr. were the only Kelp family members living on the Cloister land. Seeing the increasing control of the married Householders of the congregation as a threat, Christian Luther Jr. wrote several letters in protest to Dr. Jacob Konigmacher, leader of the married group. In 1814, when the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania chartered the married congregation as the German Seventh Day Baptist Church, an incorporated body, the legislation included special provisions to ensure the security of the Kelp family and Christian Luther Jr.'s residence on the Cloister land.

While the earliest of the Kelp, Luther, and Martin families had come to Ephrata in 1764 and had died on the site, their final resting place is unknown. It is likely they all lie buried in the Mount Zion Cemetery at the Cloister, where some of the later generations of their family rest.

The Kelp family and its branches arrived late in Ephrata, coming from Virginia in 1764. Four years after their arrival, founder Conrad Beissel died, and the community began a slow decline. While present at the Ephrata Cloister in its closing days as a religiously focused community, the members of the Kelp family continued to demonstrate that not all site residents were happy, and peace did not always fill the land.