



The Michael and Maria Catharina Miller Family

Michael Miller (Müller) identified himself on the first page of his personal record book as “a Seventh-Dayer.”¹ He and his wife Mary Catharina were part of a group of Ephrata members who joined the community as a result of the “Tulpehocken Awakening” in 1735. The religious unrest in that area’s Lutheran and German Reformed churches caused great turmoil in the congregations. During the same period, Conrad Beissel, Ephrata’s founder, visited the Tulpehocken area, attracting new followers such as Native American interpreter Conrad Weiser, German Reformed leader Reverend Peter Miller (no relation to Michael), and Michael and Maria Catharina Miller.

Michael Miller was born in Germany before 1704. His father Ludwig was killed working in a quarry, and his widowed mother, Anna Margeretha, remarried several years later. In the 1720s, the family left Germany for Pennsylvania.

They purchased land in Heidelberg Township, Berks County, Pennsylvania in the midst of the Tulpehocken region. There, Michael met his wife, Maria Catharina Klop. Maria Catharina’s family had also come from Germany, settling first in the Schoharie Valley of New York and then coming to the Tulpehocken about 1723.

Though the Millers joined the Ephrata community in 1735 by receiving baptism, they remained living in the Tulpehocken until 1742 when, according to Michael, “we moved our household from Tulpehocken over the hills to Cocalico, near Ephrata and set up our tent between Zoar [present day Reamstown] and Hebron [present day Ephrata].” Likely most of their eight children were born before the family moved to Ephrata, but the exact birth date of only one child is known, that of their daughter Veronica born in 1734. For several months in 1764, Maria Catharina’s widowed mother, Magdalena Klop, also lived with the Millers.

While Michael’s trained profession was as a window maker, judging from the tools in his estate inventory and the entries in his “Debt Book,” he seemed to have done a wide variety of jobs including weaving, woodworking, blacksmithing, and perhaps some tinsmithing. His record of purchases and debts provides a rare look at eighteenth century Pennsylvania German agricultural life.

Michael made windows for many neighbors and for Ephrata’s celibate community. In 1753, according to entries in his book, he began making other domestic and farm implements including grain cradles, wagon tongues, flails, benches, and plows. He was a very productive woodworker, as indicated by the number of tools appraised as part of his estate following his death in 1785. Michael and other members of his family were involved in textile production. His accounts refer to weaving cloth, spinning thread, harvesting flax for creating linen cloth, and enlisting the Sisters of the Cloister to spin wool for his use. Clearly they made some of their own clothing, likely from their own fabric, and may have also sold some of this clothing.

Not only did Michael pay the Ephrata Sisters for spinning wool, he fixed a lantern, repaired some spinning wheels, and made windows for their house. He also employed the Brothers to publish two religious books in 1748 and 1749 with one title page carrying his initials and the other displaying his name.

Michael Miller died in 1785. In his will, he left all his property to his wife for the remainder of her life along with provisions for her care. After Maria Catharina’s death in 1786, their property passed to their children. A detailed list survives to show how family members divided the tools, kettles, furniture, and clothing belonging to Michael and Maria Catharina’s estate.

The Michael and Maria Catharina Miller family provides clues to the relationship between Ephrata’s married and celibate members. Michael did business with members in both parts of the congregation. His “Debt Book” also provides clues to the financial affairs of both the celibate community and rural Pennsylvania families in the eighteenth century.



An original window, with lead between the glass panes, survived in the Sisters’ House. This is the type of window Michael Miller made, and in 1762 he made windows for the Sisters. Did he make this one?

¹ Clarence Spohn, “Michael Müller/Miller of Cocalico Township Lancaster County and his “Debt Book” (1748-1786),” Translated by Alan G. Keyser, *Journal of The Historical Society of the Cocalico Valley*, 20, (1995): 1-76.