



## The Eckerlin Brothers: Samuel, Israel, Emanuel, and Gabriel

Michael Eckerlin's activities outside the government-controlled church in his home of Strasbourg, France, led to his expulsion from the city in 1705. He took his wife and son Samuel to the area of Germany where the Brethren formed under the leadership of Alexander Mack. Michael Eckerlin died about 1720, leaving his widow, Anna, and his four sons, Samuel (Brother Jephune), Israel (Brother Onesimus), Emmanuel (Brother Elimelch), and Gabriel (Brother Jotham) to immigrate to Pennsylvania in 1725. They first settled among Brethren friends in Germantown but in a few years moved to the Conestoga region east of Lancaster City. There they met Conrad Beissel, who baptized the mother and brothers in late 1720s.<sup>1</sup>



Paper made at Ephrata during the time of Eckerlin control was marked with this symbol.

When Conrad Beissel moved to Ephrata in 1732, the Eckerlin brothers quickly followed him, becoming some of the first members of the celibate Brotherhood. In 1741, with Beissel's support, Israel Eckerlin became Prior of the Brotherhood. This position placed the management of the Brothers' work and lives under his control. Israel caused conflict in the community as a very strict leader, ensuring iron discipline and self-denial among the members. Likely Israel's older brother Samuel helped to expand the community's land holdings, establish the mills, and lay the start of the printing industry. Records state that Israel kept the Brothers working for long hours. He also assumed great control of religious affairs, having specially created robes to wear at worship ceremonies. Israel's increasing power, supported by his brothers Samuel and Gabriel, likely worried Beissel who disliked challenges to his leadership. Working conditions and growing community tension led the Brothers to unite and remove Israel as Prior in September 1745. Israel and Samuel fled Ephrata, moving to the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, where Gabriel quickly followed. After the departure of the Eckerlin brothers, Beissel had an orchard planted by the Eckerlins uprooted, and construction stopped on a proposed expansion to the Brothers' dormitory on Mount Zion. The Brotherhood instead used the accumulated materials to construct a new house, Bethania, and its adjoining Saal (Meetinghouse) in 1746.

Emmanuel Eckerlin missed much of the final uproar caused by his brothers. After having failed as Beissel's representative at fledgling congregations in the Tulpehocken region north of Ephrata and in Amwell, New Jersey, Emmanuel left Ephrata shortly before the flight of his brothers in September 1745. Eventually, he returned to the Brethren in Germantown and after a time began his own congregation in South Carolina.

Once in Virginia, the brothers settled at several locations. First, they lived south of present-day Roanoke, Virginia, at the site of the modern Claytor Lake. Later, they moved south of Pittsburgh to a location known as Dunkard's Creek. By 1757, they lived at Dunkard's Bottom, the site of present-day Kingwood, West Virginia. It was there that Native Americans apprehended Israel and Gabriel, turning the brothers over to their French allies. The brothers may have died in Quebec. Samuel Eckerlin, who escaped capture, settled on Sandy Hook at Strasburg, Virginia. There he established a medical facility of great regional fame.

In 1764, Samuel returned to Ephrata, setting off one final struggle with him at the center. When Ephrata members purchased the land in 1739, the deed listed five men as representatives of the community. Of these, only Samuel and Peter Miller remained living in 1764. In an effort to prevent Eckerlin from gaining control of the land, Miller created a forged deed and removed his name from the original document. This left Samuel Eckerlin as the only living person on the real deed. As such, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court recognized Samuel as the owner of Ephrata. Another six years passed before Eckerlin and the Ephrata community reached a settlement in 1770. The final agreement reached between all parties recognized Samuel Eckerlin as the owner, a set of Trustees he names to oversee the land, and all the celibate members. Sale of the land could not occur without shared consent from all parties.

The Eckerlin brothers demonstrate both conflict and resolution in early Ephrata. Deferring to Beissel's leadership or leaving the community were often the only choices to end conflict. What the written records do not state clearly, but imply, is the presence of personality conflicts at the center of most community disagreements.

<sup>1</sup> Klaus Wust, *The Saint-Adventurers of the Virginia Frontier*, (Shenandoah History Edinburg, VA: 1977).