



The Konigmacher Family

From the late 1700s through the 1850s, members of the Konigmacher family became thriving business owners and leading members of the German Seventh Day Baptist Church at the Historic Ephrata Cloister.¹ While some Konigmacher descendants may remain in the area, the family no longer shares the dynamic presence in the community their ancestors once held.

Adam Konigmacher (1738-1793), the first family member in Ephrata, came to America from Germany with his mother and step-father in 1749. He lived at the Cloister under the name Brother Neaman until at least 1765. Family tradition says he returned to Germany and married Christiana Eicher prior to 1768. The couple took up residence near the Ephrata area, possibly living at the Cloister between 1772 and 1776 when Adam's name appeared in tax records as owning no land. By 1777, tax records list him owning one acre of land. Over time, he increased his holdings to as much as one-hundred forty-four acres in 1788. Tax records also list his occupation as stocking weaver and storekeeper. Adam and Christina Konigmacher had five children: Hannah, Abraham, Jacob, Benjamin and Adam, Jr.

Hannah Konigmacher (1768-1830) married Dietrich Dishong (1767-1745), and they operated a general merchandise store about five miles east of Ephrata in the village of Hinkletown. The Dishongs had no children, and while Hannah appeared in congregation records at the Ephrata Cloister, Dietrich did not. In his will, he left money to both the Lutheran and German Reformed congregations near his home. Dietrich also appeared to have been in business with his brother-in-law Adam Konigmacher, Jr. The youngest child of the family, Adam Jr. (1775-1821) spent most of his life in Philadelphia, operating a mercantile business and likely serving as the purchasing agent for Dietrich Dishong near Ephrata.

Adam, Jr. may have also been making purchases for his brother, Abraham Konigmacher (1769-1825), who operated a store about two blocks from the Cloister along with his wife Susanna (1780-1868). Abraham and Susanna were active members of the German Seventh Day Baptist Church at the Cloister. Their son Timothy (1811-1906) served as minister to the congregation in the 1860s and early 1870s.

Jacob Konigmacher (1771-1839), son of Adam and Christina, served the Ephrata neighborhood as a doctor. He also took a leading role in helping to establish the German Seventh Day Baptist Church at the Cloister, and served among the first group of Trustees of the congregation, holding the position from 1814 until 1836. Jacob and his wife Rebecca Fahnestock (daughter of Householders John and Catherine Fahnestock) initially lived in a house they built in 1795 across the street from the Mount Zion Cemetery at the Cloister. By 1807, they moved to a house about three blocks from the Cloister, where in addition to practicing medicine, Jacob became a storekeeper like two of his other brothers.



Second home of Dr. Jacob and Rebecca Konigmacher.

The home occupied by Dr. Jacob and Rebecca in 1807 also contained a tannery just yards from the house. Benjamin Konigmacher (1773-1850) purchased the tannery from his brother and was the only member of his siblings not to operate a store. Like his brother Dr. Jacob, Benjamin became an active member of the Cloister congregation, also serving as a Trustee from 1814 through 1850. During his service, he pushed for the construction of the Ephrata Academy, one of the historic structures surviving at the Cloister. When the Academy opened in 1837, the congregation managed it as a private school, but by the Civil War, Ephrata Township leased the building, continuing to operate the school until 1926. In 1835, Benjamin sold a tannery on the east end of Ephrata, about a mile



Ephrata Academy, 1837, built at the encouragement of Benjamin Konigmacher.

¹ Clarence Spohn, "The Konigmacher Family of the Cocalico Valley," *Journal of the Historical Society of the Cocalico Valley*, Vol. 14, (1989): 1-43.

from his home, to his son Joseph. In 1837, he sold a second tannery, the one near his home a few blocks from the Cloister, to his nephew William Konigmacher, son of Dr. Jacob and Rebecca. Today, McDonald's sits on the tannery site, and in 2020, the Konigmacher home contains a real estate office.



Joseph Konigmacher c. 1845.

Joseph Konigmacher (1805-1861) became one of the most noted figures in Ephrata prior to the Civil War. An entrepreneur, Joseph moved the tannery he purchased from his father to Lancaster and converted his home at the tannery site into the Mountain Springs Hotel. The hotel became a fashionable summer resort where visitors from Philadelphia and Baltimore could come to “take the water”—spring water said to have health restoring qualities. In addition to serving as a Trustee of the Cloister congregation for several years, Joseph served a term in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives and a term in the state Senate. During his time in public office, he pushed for the creation of the Harrisburg State Hospital, the first state-supported hospital for the aid of people with mental disabilities. He

also used his political influence to help create the Reading and Columbia Railroad, of which he served as president. In 1844 he began a movement to erect a monument to commemorate the graves of the soldiers who died at the Revolutionary War hospital at the Cloister. While considered a gracious host at his hotel, a booster of civic works, and a wealthy citizen, Joseph died in debt before the arrival of the railroad and the construction of the monument.

Later generations of the Konigmacher family continued as merchants, tanners, and members of the German Seventh Day Baptist Church at the Cloister. The Konigmacher family played a major role in the Ephrata area prior to the Civil War. Today, only portions of their legacy and name remain visible, with most of their story available only in history books.