



The Heinrich Miller Family

Heinrich Miller's story is one of support for the early Ephrata community; unfortunately, that support did not always receive proper payment. As a young man, Heinrich traveled from his home in Switzerland and settled in Germantown, Pennsylvania. There he practiced the trade of a stone mason. Israel Eckerlin, later to become leader of the Ephrata Brotherhood in the early 1740s, met Miller when Eckerlin needed help to repair a farmhouse in the Conestoga region east of Lancaster. Miller took Eckerlin on as an apprentice to learn the mason's trade. Together the two men began to explore the new religious movement led by Conrad Beissel. In 1728, both men received baptism by Beissel, entering them into the developing society of Seventh Day believers.



“Stone Mason” from Jan Luyken’s *Book of Trades*, Amsterdam, 1694.

Beissel moved to the site of Ephrata in 1732, and Miller may have quickly followed the religious leader. When Heinrich arrived, he came with his wife Clara and their four children, Maria, Dorothy, Johannes, and Heinrich Jr. The eldest daughter Maria joined the Ephrata Sisterhood, taking the name Sister Pauline. She spent more than fifty-five years at the Cloister, dying in 1799 at the age of seventy-seven.

On July 15, 1740, Heinrich Miller paid the expenses for the dedication of the meetinghouse on Mount Zion.¹ Unfortunately, Beissel declared that the use of the newly-built structure should be limited to the celibate members, and the Householders would need to construct their own house of worship. The Mount Zion meetinghouse does not survive, but the one built by the married members in 1741 remains as the center of the historic site.

Heinrich and Clara Miller may have been among the couples who participated in the “Hebron Experiment.” In 1743, married members were encouraged to divorce and move into a new building at Ephrata named Hebron where they would live as celibate members. In Hebron, former husbands lived on one side of the structure and former wives on the other with a center wall dividing the spaces on each of the building's three floors. Those who lived in Hebron were encouraged to surrender their land to the community. The experiment did not succeed, and within two years the married members reunited and returned to their homes. With some alterations, the new building became the home of the celibate Sisters. The community history reports repayment of the expenses for the failed program with one unnamed Householder receiving one hundred acres of land.² The historic records are not clear, but the Hebron experiment could be the reason the community felt the need to give Heinrich Miller one hundred acres. The transaction never occurred in Heinrich's life, but his son, Heinrich Jr., did eventually receive the land in 1761. Two years later, Heinrich Jr. built a fine stone house on the land. Today, the house survives one block from the Historic Ephrata Cloister and provides hospitality as a bed and breakfast.

Clara Miller died in 1748, and Heinrich Sr. died in 1757, still without the one hundred acres promised him by the community. The place of their burial is unknown, but their son Heinrich Jr. is buried in God's Acre Cemetery at the Historic Ephrata Cloister. His burial at the historic site has given rise to some confusion over time. While his parents, Heinrich Sr. and Clara, appear in community records as members of the congregation, Heinrich Miller Jr. was not a member of the church. Heinrich died in March 1778, at the same time the community served as a hospital for sick American soldiers from the Revolutionary War. Perhaps Heinrich Jr. caught the contagious disease carried by the soldiers.

Heinrich Miller demonstrated his willingness to provide financial support to the community with the payment of dedication expenses, probably including a Love Feast fellowship meal, and likely participated in an experiment requiring surrender of property to the congregation. Unfortunately, he may not have received a return on the investment he anticipated.

¹ Lamech and Agrippa (Peter Miller), *Chronicon Ephratense: A History of the Community of Seventh Day Baptists at Ephrata, Lancaster County, Penn'a*, [Ephrata, 1786], Translated J. Max Hark (Lancaster, PA: S. H. Zahm, 1889), p. 127.

² *Chronicon Ephratense*, p. 159.