

THE ORIGINAL "TURTLE TAUBE" OF THE EPHRATA CLOISTERS

The original manuscript of the "Turtle Taube" one of the most treasured documents in the world, written by the brethren in the Ephrata Cloisters more than a century and a half ago, has been turned over to the Congressional Library in Washington. For more than a century the manuscript was considered lost.

Ornamented with nearly six hundred original designs drawn with pen and ink, the 935 pages of the book contained 750 songs and hymns written or composed by Conrad Beissel and the "Dunker" brethren and sisters of the Ephrata Cloisters in 1746.

The volume was presented to the Library by Gabriel Wells of New York, a noted book collector. He recently purchased the rare treasure at an auction, but the price has not been revealed.

It is the first work produced in America consisting of an original system of music and ornamental design, both invented by Beissel and is the first hymn book in which all the hymns were of original composition.

The work was presented to Beissel, as a token of love by the brethren. It is recorded that the brethren worked three-fourths of a year on it. Apparently the book was once in the possession of Benjamin Franklin for inside the cover is a note dated April, 1775, written by John Wilkes, notorious English agitator and mayor of London. It reads, "This curious book was lent to me by Dr. Franklin just before he set out for Pennsylvania."

Franklin and Beissel are known to have been friends. Many of the hymn books for Ephrata were printed in Franklin's shop. Shortly before the Revolution, all trace of the book was lost. It finally found its way to the auction block, through a London collector. The pen and ink designs differ on each page and are extremely delicate.

The lettering is based on Gothic but the ornaments partake of the mysticism of the mediaeval convert. A stipple effect predominates through the work and compares favorably with the finest engravings.

The first double page folding leaf contains the dedication to "Fridsam" the name by which Beissel was known to the community. Above the first line of each hymn are written the inspiring words of the hymns. Apparently the cloister brethren and sisters had memorized them all. In later printed editions, all the words are in German.

The above is the substance of a historical note which appeared in the Public Ledger of Philadelphia, May 1, 1927. It is thought to be of sufficient importance to be preserved in the records of this Society.

H. F. E.

Author: Eshleman, Henry Frank, 1869-1953.

Title: The original "Turtle Taube" of the Ephrata Cloisters / by Henry Frank Eshleman.

Primary Material: Book

Subject(s): Beissel, Conrad, 1690-1768.
Ephrata Cloister.
Ephrata (Pa.)--History.

Publisher: Lancaster, Pa. : Lancaster County Historical Society, 1927

Description: 67 p. ; 23 cm.

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Notes: Original manuscript entitled "Turtle Taube."

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