

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
WASHINGTON, D. C.

National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings

Ephrata Cloister, Pennsylvania

The group of buildings known as the Ephrata Cloister, erected between 1740 and 1746, is the most markedly German and medieval of all the Dutch Colonial architecture in Pennsylvania. Ephrata, founded in 1732 by Conrad Beissel, a German Pietist mystic, was one of the earliest of the numerous religious and secular communities established in America. At its peak around 1750, the colony numbered some 300 members and was a prosperous and self-sufficient community with its own gristmill, bakery, pottery, oil and fulling mills, barns, and stables. The community declined after the Revolution and by 1800 the celibate orders were practically extinct. In 1814 the remaining householders incorporated the Seventh Day German Baptist Church, which continued as a congregation using the 18th century buildings until 1934. In 1941 the State of Pennsylvania acquired the remaining buildings, which include the Saal (chapel), Saron (Sisters' house), Almonry (Alms and bake house), Beissel's log house, a householders' cabin, three cottages, and the 1837 Academy.

Of special interest are the Saal (1740) and the Saron (1742-1743). The Saal, or chapel, recalls the steep-roofed houses of medieval Germany. The hewn oak frame of this half-timbered, five-story building has a filling of stones and is protected outside by split and shaved red oak clapboards. Two rows of shed dormers light the two stories within the capacious roof, and the east side has a still higher dormer near the ridge. The Saron is a four-story log house of even more primitive construction. Its walls are comprised of oak logs dovetailed at the corners, chinked with wood splints and clay, and covered on the exterior by popular clapboards. Small casement windows, steep gable roof, and multiple rows of shed dormers contribute to the medieval appearance. The narrow central chimneys of both the Saron and the Saal are built of wood and lined with clay.

Maintained in excellent condition, The Cloisters are open to visitors.

NSHSB: 11/17/67
JDM

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL SURVEY OF HISTORIC SITES AND BUILDINGS

1. STATE Pennsylvania	2. THEME(S). IF ARCHEOLOGICAL SITE, WRITE "ARCH" BEFORE THEME NO. XX Architecture (Colonial)
3. NAME(S) OF SITE Ephrata Cloister (The Cloister)	4. APPROX. ACREAGE 95 acres
5. EXACT LOCATION (County, township, roads, etc. If difficult to find, sketch on Supplementary Sheet) Ephrata, Lancaster County	
6. NAME AND ADDRESS OF PRESENT OWNER (Also administrator if different from owner) State of Pennsylvania; administered by The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.	
7. IMPORTANCE AND DESCRIPTION (Describe briefly what makes site important and what remains are extant)	

The group of buildings known as the Ephrata Cloister, erected between 1740 and 1746, is the most markedly German and medieval of all the Dutch Colonial architecture in Pennsylvania.

Ephrata, founded in 1732 by Conrad Beissel, a German Pietist mystic, was one of the earliest of the numerous religious and secular communal societies established in America. In 1735 he organized the Society of the Solitary, a sect practicing a mixture of mystic religious observances, celibacy, handicrafts, and social and economic activities. At its peak, around 1750, this colony of "Seventh Day Dunkers" numbered some 300 members and was a prosperous and self-sufficient community with its own gristmill, bakery, pottery, oil and fulling mills, barns, and stables. It manufactured paper and had one of the earliest (1743) printing presses in the colonies. The community declined after the Revolution and by 1800 the celibate after the Revolution and by 1800 the celibate orders were practically extinct. In 1814 the remaining householders incorporated the Seventh Day German Baptist Church, which continued as a congregation using the 18th century buildings until 1934.

The three main buildings of the Cloister were the Saal or chapel, built in 1740; the Saron or Sisters' House, constructed in 1742-43; and the Bethania or Brothers' House, erected about 1746.

The Saal, or chapel, recalls the steep-roofed houses of medieval Germany. The hem-oak frame of this half-timbered, five-story building has a filling of stones and clay, protected outside by split and shaved red-oak clapboards. Two rows of shed dormers light the two stories within

(Continued)

8. BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES (Give best sources; give location of manuscripts and rare works)

See page 3.

9. REPORTS AND STUDIES (Mention best reports and studies, as, NPS study, IIABS, etc.)

Historic American Building Survey (60 sheets, 1936), (107 photos, 1936, 1937).

10. PHOTOGRAPHS ATTACHED: YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>	11. CONDITION Excellent, orig.	12. PRESENT USE (Museum, farm, etc.) Historic house museum	13. DATE OF VISIT April 18, 1967
14. NAME OF RECORDED (Signature) <i>Charles W. Snell</i> Charles W. Snell		15. TITLE Historian	16. DATE June 24, 1967

DRY CONTACT COPY ON X 10 1/2 SHEET OF FAIRLY HEAVY PAPER. IDENTIFY BY VIEW AND NAME OF THE SITE, DATE OF PHOTOGRAPH, AND NAME OF PHOTOGRAPHER. COPY LOCATION, NEGATIVE ATTACHED, ENCLOSE IN PROPER NEGATIVE ENVELOPES.

IF ADDITIONAL SPACE IS NEEDED USE SUPPLEMENTARY SHEET, 10-217e, AND REFER TO THIS FORM.

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NATIONAL SURVEY OF HISTORIC SITES AND BUILDINGS
SUPPLEMENTARY SHEET

This sheet is to be used for giving additional information or comments, for more space for any item on the regular form, and for recording pertinent data from future studies, visitations, etc. Be brief, but use as many Supplement Sheets as necessary. When items are continued they should be listed, if possible, in numerical order of the items. All information given should be headed by the item number, its name, and the word (cont'd), as, 6. Description and Importance (cont'd) . . . Page 2.

STATE Pennsylvania	NAME(S) OF SITE Ephrata Cloister (The Cloister)
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7. Continued:

the capacious roof, and the east side has a still higher dormer near the ridge. Of particular interest are the shingles: oak shakes, side-lapped as well as end-lapped, in the manner of certain parts of the Rhine Valley and Bavaria. A small hood shelters the entrance on the west, and at the east side is a small stone kitchen, which was added about 1780. Inside, the heavy ceiling beams, great fireplaces, and winding stairs are eloquent of the medieval tradition. Typical is the chapel with its white plastered walls and its plain and simple furniture. The building also contains a meeting hall and community dining room. The plainness of the interior is relieved somewhat by the hand-illuminated German scripts hanging on the whitewashed walls.

The Saron was originally built for use as a double convent for both the celibate orders of Brothers and Sisters, who were comprised of voluntarily divorced couples. The idea, however, did not work out in practice and within a year the structure was reserved for the Sisters, while a separate Brothers' House was added shortly afterward. The Saron is a four-story log house of even more primitive construction than that of the Saal. The walls of the Saron are comprised of oak logs dovetailed at the corners, chinked with wood splints and clay, and covered on the exterior by poplar clapboards. Small casement windows, steep gable roof, and multiple rows of shed dormers contribute to the medieval appearance. The narrow central chimneys of both the Saron and Saal are built of wood and lined with clay. Each of the first three floors of the Saron is occupied by 12 narrow cell-like sleeping rooms and by three common rooms that were used for working and prayer. The fourth floor contained a loft. The walls are hand-plastered and the ceilings are supported by massive exposed beams. The sleeping rooms are furnished with handmade wooden sleeping benches that have blocks of wood for pillows, and with small tables and chairs.

The third large structure, the Bethania or Brothers' House, was demolished about 1910 and no longer exists.

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Page 3.

STATE	NAME(S) OF SITE
Pennsylvania	Ephrata Cloister (The Cloister)

Condition

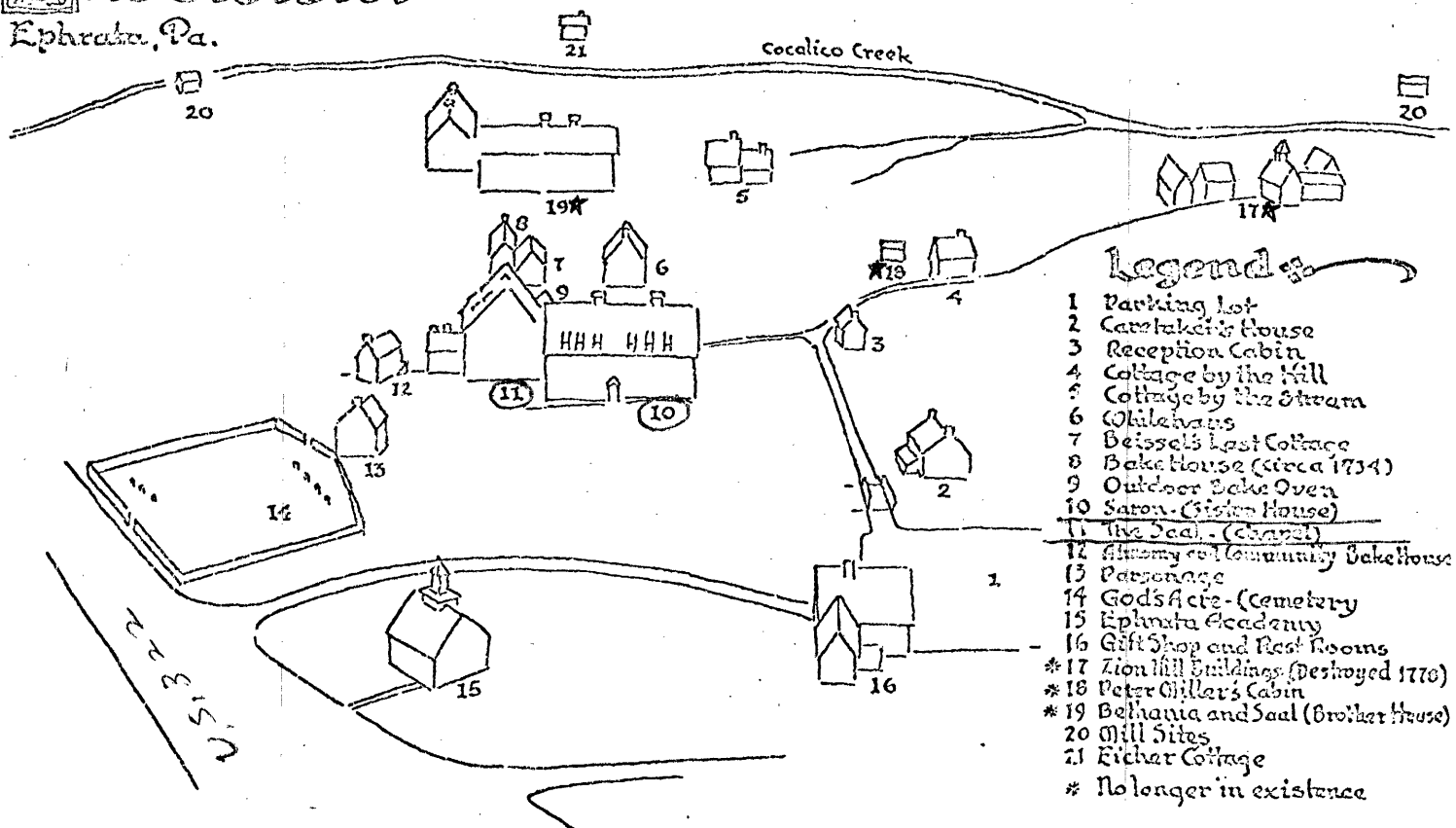
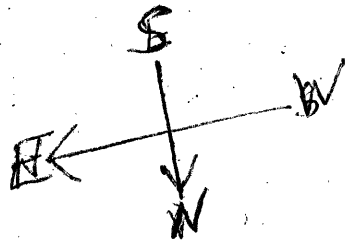
In 1941 the State of Pennsylvania acquired The Cloisters. The surviving buildings, extensively restored, include the Saal (chapel), Saron (Sisters' house), Almonry (Alms and bake house), Beissel's log house, a householders' cabin, three cottages, and the 1837 Academy. Maintained in excellent condition, The Cloisters is open to visitors daily: on weekdays from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and on weekends from 1 to 5 p.m. The admission fee is 50 cents.

8. Bibliographical References.

Harold E. Dickson, A Hundred Pennsylvania Buildings (Bald Eagle Press, State College, Pa., 1954), 27; Pennsylvania--A Guide to the Keystone State (American Guide Series) (New York, 1946), 218-19; Hugh Morrison, Early American Architecture (New York, 1952), 545-48, figures 466-68; James G. VanDerPool, "Historical Development of Architecture in the U.S.A., 1632-1912" (N.P.S. Typescript, 1966), 52-53; Dorothy and Richard Pratt, A Guide to Early American Homes--North (New York, 1956), 186; Philip B. Wallace and William Dunn, Colonial Churches and Meeting Houses, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware (New York, 1931), plates 115-118; Eleanor Raymond, Early Domestic Architecture of Pennsylvania (New York, 1931), plates 1-9; Fiske Kimball, Domestic Architecture of the American Colonies and of the Early Republic (New York, 1922), 50-51.

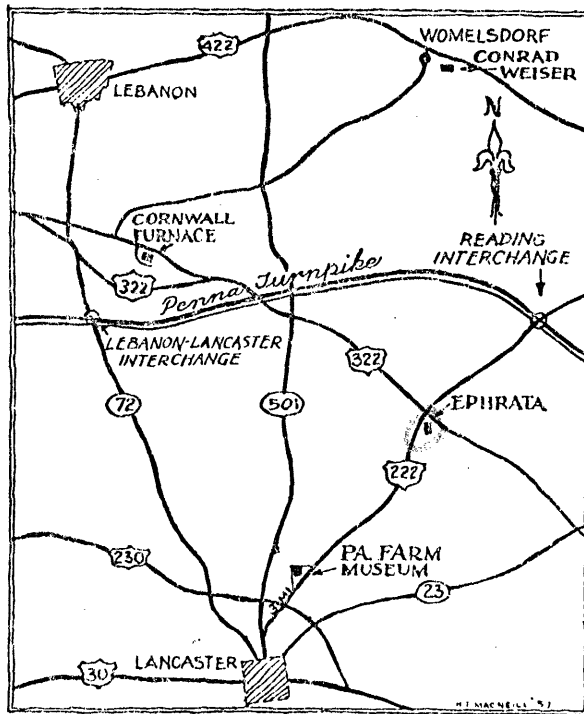
The Cloister

Ephrata, Pa.



Legend

- 1 Parking lot
 - 2 Carthaker's House
 - 3 Reception Cabin
 - 4 Cottage by the Mill
 - 5 Cottage by the Stream
 - 6 Whitmans
 - 7 Beissel's Last Cottage
 - 8 Bake House (circa 1734)
 - 9 Outdoor Bake Oven
 - 10 Saron - (Sister House)
 - 11 The Seal - (Chapel)
 - 12 Almsy and Community Bakehouse
 - 13 Passenage
 - 14 God's Acre - (Cemetery)
 - 15 Ephrata Academy
 - 16 Gift Shop and Rest Rooms
 - *17 Lion Hill Buildings (Destroyed 1770)
 - *18 Peter Miller's Cabin
 - *19 Bethania and Saul (Brother House)
 - 20 Mill Sites
 - 21 Eicher Cottage
- * No longer in existence



Visiting Hours

DAYLIGHT SAVING TIME: 8:30 A.M. to 5:00 P.M.
weekdays; 1:00 to 5:00 P.M. Sunday.

WINTER: 9:00 A.M. to 4:30 P.M. weekdays;
1:00 to 4:30 P.M. Sunday.

Hours subject to change.

Telephone: Ephrata, Code 717, 733-6600

