

Denise A. Seachrist. *Snow Hill: In the Shadows of Ephrata Cloister*. (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2010) Pp. xvi, 167. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. Cloth, \$45.00.

As a native of Franklin County, Pennsylvania, I read Denise Seachrist's *Snow Hill* with great interest. I was surprised to discover a part of my home country's history that I had never known. *Snow Hill* combines two fascinating stories: the history of the Snow Hill Cloister and congregation and the narrative of the author's research and fieldwork at the Snow Hill site during the 1990s.

Snow Hill provides a general overview of the history and music of the Snow Hill Cloister and congregation throughout the nineteenth century, particularly during its peak period in the early part of the century. Seachrist demonstrates the ways in which Snow Hill served as a branch of the more famous Ephrata Cloister in nearby Lancaster County while illuminating the differences between the two cloisters as well. While the brothers and sisters of Snow Hill shared doctrines, particularly the insistence on adult baptism, foot washing, and the Love Feast, and even ministers with Ephrata, they also focused more on economic activities, adopted a less rigid organization, and remained more isolated from the outside world than their counterparts at Ephrata. Most important, Snow Hill continued the unique tradition of music and harmony begun by Georg Beissel at Ephrata in the eighteenth century, although the main composer at Snow Hill, Obed Snowberger, added a few distinctive touches of his own. Finally, Seachrist documents the tragedy of Snow Hill's gradual demise during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries as its membership dwindled and the remaining members became embroiled in legal battles over the cloister's property.

Interspersed with this history of Snow Hill, Seachrist tells a more poignant story of the professional and personal friendships she formed with the people who have preserved the history and beliefs of Snow Hill into the twenty-first century. The author is the first scholar to gain access to the grounds, buildings, and manuscript archives of the Snow Hill Cloister. In a series of vignettes, the reader meets a cast of fascinating characters who for the past several decades have struggled to keep the legacy of Snow Hill alive. The most moving story is the development of the friendship between the author and George Wingert, the caretaker and protector of the Snow Hill property. The description of the growing friendship between

the young, urban academic from Kent State and the elderly recluse from rural Franklin County is the thread that ties the book together. As the person who grants and oversees Seachrist's access to the cloister's records, Wingert symbolizes the author's link to Snow Hill's past; at the same time, Seachrist's conversations with Wingert while conducting her research reveal the devotion and sincerity of the congregants in the present day. Unfortunately, the more recent stories also end in misfortune, as the author describes the squabbles among the remaining small group of dedicated Snow Hill congregants that led to the auctioning off of the cloister's material possessions in 1997 and Wingert's removal as caretaker of the grounds two years later.

Snow Hill is not intended to be an exhaustive examination of the cloister's place in nineteenth-century American history. Instead, the book is designed to tell the story of Snow Hill—the people and the place—then and now. Scholars seeking a deep analysis of the beliefs and actions of the congregation in the context of other early nineteenth-century utopian and religious communities will have to await future studies of Snow Hill. Readers searching for a heartwarming yet heartbreaking story of the people who have struggled to preserve the ideals and legacy of Snow Hill for two centuries, however, will be richly rewarded. What the book lacks in analysis, it more than makes up for in narrative and warmth. Seachrist has successfully combined an introduction to Snow Hill's history and music with a fascinating human drama filled with engaging characters and emotions set in both the past and the present. Indeed, the author's realization of the importance of the human dimension of history, both in the past itself and in the efforts of people in the present to preserve the legacy of the past, could be a model for other young scholars in many academic disciplines.

In the end, Seachrist's greatest contribution is more than simply introducing the world to a little-known segment of Pennsylvania's history. She has helped to preserve the written and musical records of Snow Hill by facilitating their placement in the Special Collections Archive at Juniata College, and she has preserved the memory of George Wingert and others who have cared for Snow Hill for so long. Through Seachrist's efforts, the legacy of Snow Hill and George Wingert will live on.

KEVIN YEAGER

Oldfields School