

THE SCHWENKFELDERS OF PENNSYLVANIA

BY SELINA G. SCHULTZ*

ALTHOUGH the Schwenkfelders have existed as a distinct religious group for more than four centuries, first in Europe, then in Pennsylvania, they are not widely known. In the European period of their life they were driven into obscurity by misrepresentation, intolerance, and persecution. In the American period of privation and impoverishment they shunned publicity for at least the first one hundred and fifty years.

There are also other factors which have contributed to their obscurity. The two hundred and eight Schwenkfelders who migrated to Pennsylvania from 1731 to 1737 constituted the only migration of this unorganized religious group to the New World. No others ever came to augment and invigorate this initial band. Today the Schwenkfelders are found only in the southeastern part of Pennsylvania where they originally settled. They never engaged in proselyting, in making "membership drives," or in any propaganda for their beliefs and teachings. They regarded such practices as infringements on Christian liberty. Not all of their descendants could, or wished to, remain within the confines of the early settlement. Many moved to other parts and affiliated with other religious groups. Today the Schwenkfelders number approximately twenty-five hundred.

This migration was but an infinitesimal part of the flood of immigrants which came to Penn's Woods at his announcement of an experiment in religious freedom. On the other hand, it was a powerful protest against any and every attempt by man and his institutions to rule over the mind and conscience. It was part of man's age-long struggle for freedom of life and thought. Throughout history peoples have surged back and forth over the earth

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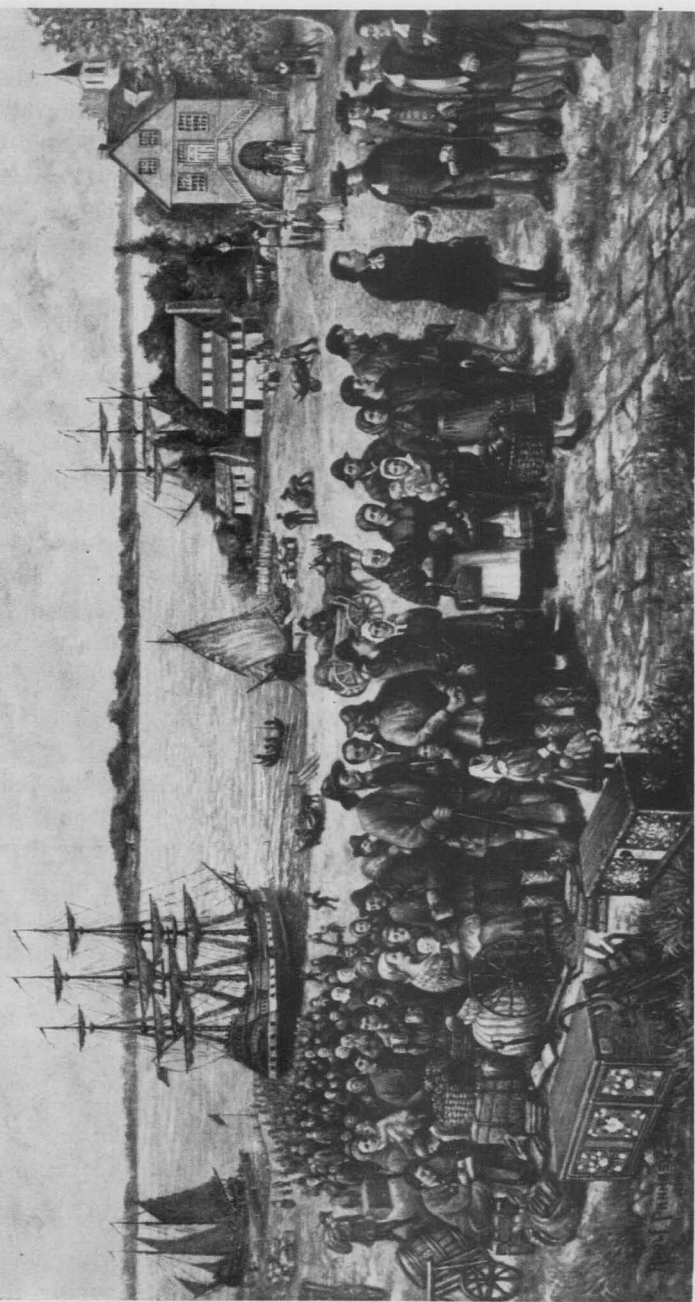
in quest of security from the terrors of war, from insatiable exploiters and religious tyrannies.

Two main types of immigrants came to the New World to obtain religious freedom and the other freedoms dependent upon it. These represented two types of Protestantism which had emerged from the Church Reformation of the sixteenth century, one the conservative, the other the liberal. The conservative wing did not make a complete break with the church of the middle ages. It established rule by divine right, supported the alliance between church and state, formulated dogmas and creeds purporting to be orthodox, and demanded their acceptance on pain of banishment or death. This wing pressed itself into a dominant position by the aid of political and military power. All nonconformists were outlawed, especially the Anabaptists, Mennonites, Quakers, Brethren, Moravians, and Schwenkfelders. These groups stressed the inwardness of religion, the separation of church and state, and denied the right of civil authority to interfere in matters of religion. The achievement of religious freedom guaranteed by the constitution of the United States was largely the fruit of liberal Protestantism. The story of the Schwenkfelder sector of this wing alone is an epic.

The Schwenkfelder religious movement originated in the ideas and principles of Caspar Schwenkfeld von Ossig in Silesia, Germany (1489-1561), a reformer, scholar, preacher, and writer.¹ Rufus Jones has written of him: "Among all the reformers of the sixteenth century who worked at the immense task of recovering, purifying and restating the Christian faith, no one was nobler in life and personality, and no one was more uncompromisingly dedicated to the mission of bringing into the life of the people a type of Christianity winnowed clean from the husks of superstition and tradition, and grounded in ethical and spiritual reality than was Schwenkfeld, the Silesian noble. No one, to a greater degree than he succeeded in going behind, not only scholastic formulations, but even behind Pauline interpretations of Christ, to Christ Himself."²

¹ Selina G. Schultz, *Caspar Schwenckfeld von Ossig. A Biography* (Philadelphia, 1946). The name was originally spelled with a "ck." More recent usage is Schwenkfeld, with a "k."

² Rufus Jones, *Spiritual Reformers of the Sixteenth Century* (London, 1914), p. 64.



"LANDING OF THE SCHWENKFELDERS FROM THE ST. ANDREW."
Oil Painting 51" by 32".

*Copyright by Adolf Pannash, 1934.
Courtesy of the Schwenkfelder Library*

After attending the universities of Cologne and of Frankfort on the Oder in his youth, Schwenkfeld served as an adviser at the courts of the dukes of Silesia. While at the court of Brieg in June, 1518, he heard the first news of Luther's innovation. At once he began to take an interest in religious affairs, to study the Scriptures and the writings of the early fathers of the Christian church. The wretched conditions of the masses were apparent everywhere. Believing that any change, to be lasting and wholesome, must come from within the human heart, he advocated patient instruction of the people. He became a self-appointed lay preacher and the author of the Silesian Reformation. He followed Luther closely at first. But in Luther's reactionary course, turning from spiritual to institutional Christianity after the Peasants' Revolt in 1525, Schwenkfeld no longer followed. He believed that Luther's previous course had been correct, and continued to champion the spirituality of religion; the spiritual interpretation of Scripture; individuality and freedom of conscience, thought, and speech; and the separation of church and state. Yet he always acknowledged his indebtedness to Luther, and read and quoted his books.

Impelled by the diversity of interpretations of the Lord's Supper, Schwenkfeld early engaged in a study of the words of its institution by Christ. He maintained that at the Last Supper Christ spoke a parable to His disciples about bread and wine, that He was speaking of a spiritual sustenance. "The bread and wine are physical elements and remain such regardless of the words spoken over them; Christ did not say: 'Here is forgiveness of sin,' but 'This do in remembrance of me.' . . . The Supper does not make Christians; it was instituted for those who already are Christian. In Christianity the course of procedure is from within outward. We become righteous not through external things, the ministry, the sacraments, but solely through Christ. However, God uses His servants, the ministers, the scriptures for the instruction of the external man." Soon he was accused of rejecting the Scriptures, the office of the ministry, and the observance of the Supper. These charges followed him through life. No amount of explanation and denial ever sufficed to silence the accusations.

As a genuine reformer in his homeland, Schwenkfeld had advocated the establishment of a university to supply the need

for better educated clergymen and teachers. He also advocated the institution of catechetical instruction for young and old, the conduct of conventicles for spiritual nurture, the suspension of the observance of the Lord's Supper until the laity had received proper instruction in its correct understanding, and the relief of poor peasants from economic and religious oppression. His integrity, his sincerity, his courteous manner and kindly tolerant spirit won him friends and audience wherever he went on his evangelistic work. Groups of interested hearers gathered in conventicles to seek his help, to discuss his religious ideas and to engage in worship. The preachers of the established churches found this response detrimental to church attendance and to their own prestige. Hence they hurried to municipal halls to persuade officials to enact decrees against him and to forbid anyone to shelter him or any other nonconformist.

Schwenkfeld expressed his opinion of Christian liberty in these words:

God does not give everything to one alone, at one time, or in one place, but gradually, as it is profitable, wholesome, and intelligible to man. Let no one permit his mind to be bound by creeds and dogmas that he may not accept something better. The mind and conscience must be free and unfettered by human creeds and human authority. The spirit does not allow itself to be bound, forced or fettered to articles of belief any more than does the wind permit itself to be confined. Constraint of conscience makes hypocrites not Christians. Government was ordained to maintain an orderly society; it has no right either to influence or to interfere with religious convictions, or to dictate what men shall believe, or to coerce anyone in matters of faith, or to exercise any kind of tyranny therein.

His evangelistic work was widespread and the fruits of his labors were substantial notwithstanding the vehement opposition. He was acquainted and in sympathetic touch with all ranks of humanity. He understood their spiritual hunger and endeavored to bring sustenance. He hoped and worked also to bring all the dissident parties to see that they had strayed from Christ the Way. The spiritual way was the Middle Way between all ways, as he described it. Consequently, his movement came to be called "the

Reformation by the Middle Way." He was not primarily a theologian; his interest was purely religious. Throughout the colloquies, disputations, and controversies with his adversaries, there appears on his part no spirit of bitterness, resentment, garrulous argumentation, but one of intelligent, calm and forceful reasoning, and above all a spirit of reconciliation toward his opponents. As time went on he resorted more and more to teaching and preaching to small groups in secret; to the writing of many books, letters, discourses; to individual evangelistic work from the "pulpit of his pen." Melancthon called him the "hundred-handed Schwenkfeld." "Schwenkfeld was one of the greatest soul-winning strategists between St. Francis of Assisi and John Wesley. . . . Religion is the one all-pervading issue in the life and literary production of Caspar Schwenkfeld—religion, not theology."³

Schwenkfeld never sought a following. He formulated no creed, and founded no church based on his beliefs and teachings. In his opinion spiritual life and experience were of far greater importance than creeds or theologies or any church organization bearing his name. He was branded as a visionary, a fanatic, by many of his contemporaries. Relentless persecution drove him eventually into continual hiding. In his last days, broken in health and haunted by the constant fear of martyrdom, he was secretly sheltered by a family who had befriended him for years in the city of Ulm. Here his life ended on December 10, 1561.

The dissemination of his works in manuscript and in printed form continued after his death through the loyalty of his co-believers, and his ideas spread through Europe. His works were carried into Italy, Spain, France, the Low Countries, Scandinavia, Austria, Hungary, eastward to Riga, Russia, westward into the British Isles, and finally to the New World. His books are extant in all the large and some of the small libraries of Europe in astounding numbers. Fifteen volumes of the seventeen-volume edition of his works collected from libraries in Europe and from co-believers in America have been published by the Schwenkfelders in Pennsylvania as the *Corpus Schwenckfeldianorum*, 1907-39. His known literary productions number 1,250 pieces. One hundred and eighty of these are books. The remainder are letters, treatises, discourses, and annotations.

³ Joachim Wach, in the *Journal of Religion*, Vol. XXVI, No. 1.

The dramatic story of Schwenkfeld's co-believers in Lower Silesia begins about the middle of the sixteenth century.⁴ Silesia was then under the crown of Austria, as it had previously been under that of Bohemia. There were large Schwenkfeldian communities in many of the Silesian cities and in the country districts and villages stretching southward to the Bohemian border and beyond it. Although Schwenkfeld was absent from his homeland from 1529 to the end of his life in 1561, the influence of his religious principles continued in wide areas until the confines of the Augsburg Confession were prescribed for all Protestants by the Peace of Augsburg, 1555. All who refused to conform thereto were outlawed. Pressure was brought upon the overlords of the villages to suppress the movement in their domains. Records are unanimous in stating that the unrest and persecutions suffered during the period 1554-1700, at the hands of the overlords, were instigated by the clergy of the established churches.

About the year 1580 many in Silesia were cast into prisons and dungeons far from their homes. Some were kept in prison eight to ten years—men and women, young men and young women. Others were left to die there. In 1590 the surviving women were released; twenty-eight of the men were taken to Vienna, forced to work in the trenches, and finally chained to the galleys to serve in the war against the Turks. All but three perished. Meanwhile the persecution of those who remained at home continued. Numerous letters and accounts which were written, copied and preserved give ample evidence of the violence and the crimes perpetrated against a quiet, law-abiding, industrious, but non-conforming Christian people by those who claimed to be orthodox Christians. The writer of some of the letters—himself a prisoner for many years and eventually dying in prison—said: "One would crawl away from such a Christianity if one could not run."

During the period of the Thirty Years' War, 1618-48, the Schwenkfelders had intermittent peace, the persecutors being otherwise occupied. More than once, it is said, they were offered permanent peace if they would consent to attend services at the

⁴ Christopher Schultz, *Erläuterung für Herrn Caspar Schwenckfeld . . . (1771)—A Vindication of Caspar Schwenckfeld*, by E. S. Gerhard (Allentown, 1942); Selina G. Schultz, *op. cit.*, pp. 163-170; Oswald Kadelbach, *Ausführliche Geschichte Kaspar Schwenckfelds und der Schwenckfelder in Schlesien, der Ober-Lausitz und Amerika . . . von 1524-1860* (Lauban, 1860).

established church just once a year. They spurned the offer. To agree to such an arrangement, they believed, would be an ignoble surrender and betrayal of the principles of freedom of soul and conscience which they cherished. As guardians of religious truths, precious to them, they felt obligated to stand true to their convictions. However, any lull in persecution usually induced some of them to be less steadfast, particularly the young people. Some disliked to be made objects of contempt. Others desired to enter into marriage with members of the established church. And thus their number gradually decreased.

Toward the close of the seventeenth century, fewer than one thousand Schwenkfelders remained in the villages of Lower Silesia. They continued to hold their religious meetings in their houses, refusing to attend the churches with whose teachings and practices they could not agree and from whose pulpits they were derided and condemned. They were thrifty farmers and were also engaged in raising flax, weaving linen cloth, and carrying on a lucrative linen trade with the cities. This fact aroused the imagination of an ambitious young preacher, Johann Samuel Neander of Harpersdorf, who made complaint to the authorities about these unchurched people through whose non-attendance at his services the church was losing much revenue.⁵

In 1718 an unexpected persecutor appeared. The preacher and the overlord of the village of Harpersdorf, Silesia, represented to the government that, if supported in their efforts, they could readily force the Schwenkfelders into the local Protestant church. This was reported to the imperial government in Vienna, which was Catholic. The court in Vienna concluded that if the Schwenkfelders could be so easily won, it would win them for the Catholic faith. In December, 1719, by order of the Emperor Charles VI, two Jesuits appeared in Harpersdorf as missionaries. The first year was spent by them chiefly in taking a minute census of these people and their assets, in expounding their own doctrine, and in questioning the Schwenkfelders regarding theirs. However, threats were not lacking that more strenuous measures would be taken soon.

The duress became more severe year by year. Finally no Schwenkfelders were permitted burial in the church cemetery, but

⁵ Christopher Schultz, *op. cit.*

were consigned to what was known as the "Driftway," an enclosed plot of land just outside the village where the cattle were assembled every morning prior to being taken out to pasture in the adjoining fields by a cowherd. The burials were conducted as ignominiously as were those of animals or of criminals in the same place. No relatives or friends were permitted to accompany their dead. In a period of twenty years about two hundred were thus interred.

Meanwhile representatives to the court of the emperor in Vienna submitted some seventeen petitions for tolerance. The last petition beseeching the emperor for a gracious verdict was dated July 28, 1725. The verdict was not long in coming. An edict dated at Vienna July 30, 1725, was published in Silesia in September of that year, containing the following decrees: that the Jesuit mission was to exert every possible effort; the children were to be catechised; neither old nor young were to absent themselves from the worship service of the mission under threat of severest punishment; all orphan children under age were to be cared for by Catholic guardians; and the Schwenkfelder deputies were not to submit any more petitions. Fines were to be doubled. Parents were threatened with being chained to wheelbarrows and forced to labor in some fortress, and their children were to be taken from them.

The climax had now been reached, the final test of their faith and endurance. Their cup was full and indeed overflowing when the threat came to take their children from them. Their last and only hope now lay in flight. This also had been forbidden. How and whither could they flee? They made oral and written inquiries in various German provinces. Sometimes religious tolerance and accommodations for continuance of their linen production were offered, but they feared that tolerance in any of these places would not be permanent. They also made inquiry in Holland, but there was no solution there. Pennsylvania was considered, but they could not flee to that distant country directly from their homes; that undertaking would require much preparation. Through acquaintances an appeal was made to the council of the city of Goerlitz in Saxony, and also to Count Zinzendorf in that province. Both of these readily promised a haven. Later it was learned that Goerlitz considered it would prove commercially beneficial to have

the Schwenkfelders settle in that city. The Count's domains of course would also be none the poorer. Saxony seemed to them to be the best immediate solution of their plight, for they must gather somewhere before they could undertake the journey to Pennsylvania which they had in mind as the ultimate goal.

The flight from their Silesian homes was planned and carried out with the utmost secrecy, in small groups, and at intervals. The first families fled at night, January 29, 1726. Others followed in February. Week by week the nightly drama was repeated by family groups until by May 5, 1726, one hundred and seventy had fled. The distance to Saxony, to be covered entirely on foot in those days, was about fifty miles. It was winter; there were many little children and aged people who could not travel with speed. The majority of parents were between thirty-five and forty years of age. What of their earthly possessions could they take with them on the trek? They took their clothing and their books and as much as they could carry on their backs or on wheelbarrows. The books they brought are still preserved in Pennsylvania. Before leaving their homes, they once more filled the troughs and racks of their cattle with food in order that they might not suffer hunger before someone discovered that the owners had departed. It so happened that the lowing of the cattle gave the first sign of the flight of the owners.

According to the records, five hundred and nineteen individuals fled, in violation of the order not to flee. There was at first only silence and consternation, for their persecutors knew that the imperial government would look with much displeasure (as it did) upon this outcome of measures which had been carried too far. Several hundred Schwenkfelders remained behind and continued to exist as outlaws under renewed persecution until in 1740 they obtained tolerance under Frederick the Great. The last Schwenkfelder in Silesia died in 1826.

It had been the hope and expectation of those who fled into Saxony that from the sale of their properties in Silesia they would realize enough to pay their passage to Pennsylvania. In this they were cruelly disappointed. Furthermore, the hazards of the ocean and the dangers from pirates were reported to be great. As a result, they settled down temporarily in Saxony. Some plied their linen-weaving and other trades, and eventually acquired small properties. From generous and sympathetic Mennonite merchants

in Holland, financial aid for the poor among these refugees was secured by influential men in the city of Goerlitz.

With the Moravians, as well as other religious groups who sought tolerance, they came under the protection of Count Zinzendorf. He now conceived the idea of welding all the refugees into one Pietistic-Lutheran Church under his jurisdiction. But the Moravians were not so minded, nor were the Schwenkfelders, who continued to hold meetings at first in their houses and later in a modest building erected for that purpose. Seven years passed in quietness and peace, at least outwardly. They, however, sensed the undercurrent of duress coming now and then from the Count's determination to form a great united church in his domain. But he, too, was beginning to face uncertainty. Early in 1732 pressure came from the Austrian government upon the Saxon government at Dresden for the return of its citizens. The Count was advised by letter not to withdraw any more people from the Austrian empire, and that it was doubtful whether the Schwenkfelders could still be maintained. On July 17 of that year, he was requested to give information about them.

The persecutors of the Schwenkfelders now again caught up with them. On April 4, 1733, the Count was advised by an official of the Saxon government that they could no longer be protected. The Saxon government, however, would grant them one year to prepare for departure.⁶ Meanwhile, in 1730 and 1731, three sons of one of several Schultz families had ventured forth from Saxony to Holland to engage in the saffron trade. One went to the Dutch East Indies, one remained in Holland, and the third went to Pennsylvania. In 1733 the remaining members of the family also migrated to Pennsylvania. Accounts of their safe arrival and entire satisfaction came back to the group in Saxony. Pennsylvania now seemed to be their definite goal. Count Zinzendorf and the Moravians became interested in a colony in Georgia, and the Schwenkfelders were willing to consider Georgia as a possibility, but their conditions were not met and the project fell through.⁷

Having secured permission from the English government to settle in Pennsylvania, the Schwenkfelders started on their journey. On April 20, 1734, the first family left Saxony on the

⁶ *Schwenckfeldiana*, Nos. 1 and 2 (published by the Board of Publication of The Schwenkfelder Church, Norristown, Pa.).

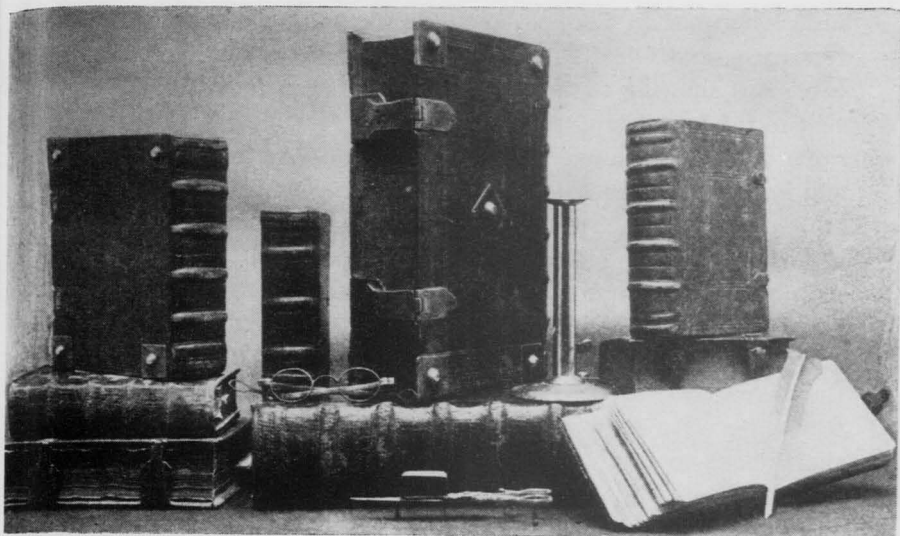
⁷ *Ibid.*

trek to the Elbe River, fifty or more miles westward. They had been advised not to travel in one body for fear of attracting attention. Emigration was looked upon with disfavor. Moreover, their former persecutors in Silesia might intercept them. Other family groups followed daily, at intervals, for eight days until forty families numbering 180 individuals had arrived at Pirna on the Elbe, above Dresden. When all had assembled there, they embarked on the same day on boats for Hamburg-Altona where Mennonite merchants, the Van der Smissen family, to whom the Schwenkfelders had been commended by their erstwhile Holland benefactors, provided food and lodging gratis for eleven days, engaged three sailing vessels, and paid for their passage to Holland. On the North Sea a violent storm separated the vessels. Each feared the others lost, but all arrived safely. In Haarlem another merchant family, van Buissant, entertained them for fifteen days, engaged an English sailing vessel (the *St. Andrew*, John Stedman, Captain) to convey them across the Atlantic. They also lavished upon them provisions for the voyage, gave them money for the poor when they reached Pennsylvania, and paid the passage thither for the whole group, in spite of the Schwenkfelders' grateful protest.

On June 28, 1734, they sailed from Rotterdam. Palatines swelled the number of passengers on board to three hundred. A diary of the entire journey, written by Christopher Schultz, an orphan sixteen years of age, relates that at one point the vessel lay still for a long while in a great calm. At another time a violent storm dashed the waves over the side of the ship, drenching their bedding and baggage. Their books, still preserved, show the water stains. Death took nine of their number: six little children, a young man of twenty years, a young mother, and an aged grandmother. The bodies were weighted and committed to the sea.⁸

The *St. Andrew* docked at Philadelphia, September 22 (New Style), 1734. The captain's list of passengers is preserved in the Schwenkfelder Library, Pennsburg, Pennsylvania. On the 23rd all males sixteen years of age and over were required to promise allegiance to the King of Great Britain and to the Proprietor of the Province. This document with signatures appended is also preserved. On the following day, September 24, George Weiss,

⁸ *Schwenkfeldiana*, II, No. 5, pp. 46-52.



Specimens of Volumes of Manuscripts written and bound by the Schwenkfelders; postils, hymns, letters by Schwenkfelders in prison for religious beliefs; correspondence, sermons, and copies of rare printed books.
Courtesy of the Schwenkfelder Library

their spiritual leader, conducted an all-day Thanksgiving Service.⁹ This day of Remembrance and Thanksgiving has been observed by the Schwenkfelders in Pennsylvania annually to the present time, at first in their log-cabin homes and barns, or under the open sky, if weather permitted; later in their school and meeting houses; and latterly in their modern church edifices. This day has never been vulgarized by feasting. It is observed as a day of worship, thanksgiving, remembrance, spiritual edification, and new vision.

The vast and intriguing panorama of the New World now lay stretched out before them. Like panting deer who have escaped the hunter's missiles, the little company separated and scattered into Penn's Woods. Unable to acquire a large tract of land whereon all of them could settle in close proximity to each other, the individual families settled in different localities, wherever smaller tracts were available, within a radius of about fifty miles northwestward of Philadelphia in what are now the counties of Montgomery, Bucks, Berks, and Lehigh; at Germantown, Chestnut

⁹ *Schwenckfeldiana*, I, No. 2.

Hill, Towamencin, Skippack, Frederick, Goshenhoppen, Milford, Macungie, and Oley. In 1767, David Schultz, a surveyor, drafted two maps showing the location of the different families. These he sent to the friends and relatives who had remained in Silesia. The same maps were found in the parish house in old Harpersdorf and brought back in 1919 to the Schwenkfelder Library in Pennsburg, built on land originally owned by the surveyor.

The immigrant Schwenkfelders endured all the hardships and privations common to pioneer life. Land had to be cleared by primitive tools. Seeds were picked up by wild birds, and growing grain eaten by the deer. The Indians, however, in the forests in their immediate area were not unfriendly and the settlers did not fear to have the doors of their log cabins without locks, permitting the Indians to enter at will on cold nights to sleep on the cabin floor in front of glowing embers in the fireplace. At sunrise they silently departed, one by one, as they awakened.

Eight years of their pioneer life had passed when in 1742 Frederick the Great of Prussia, who had snatched Silesia away from Austria and established religious tolerance, sent the Schwenkfelders an invitation to return to their fatherland and repossess their properties. But no one had any inclination to return to the scene of former tribulations. A little later, from their position of security in the woods of Pennsylvania, they met the last threat from the Old World. It came from Count Zinzendorf, their erstwhile host in Saxony. He had sent three commissioners to follow the Schwenkfelders on their journey to Holland and to accompany them to the New World as spies to ascertain their destiny. Subsequently he sent a special agent to endeavor to convert them, and a few years thereafter he himself followed, and again tried to corral them into his fold. But his aims were frustrated by Schwenkfelder composure and steadfastness supported by Pennsylvania justice.¹⁰

Before leaving Saxony it had been recommended by their leader, George Weiss, and decided, that they pursue agriculture as the most suitable means of livelihood in the New World. Recovering from their exhaustion, they contributed loyally and substantially to the democratic life of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, though they received no recognition as a group. In none of the ship lists or other public documents of that early period are they called

¹⁰ *Schwenkfeldiana*, I, Nos. 2 and 4.

"Schwenkfelders," but "Palatines," "Quakers," or, as in the publication of the Huguenot Society of London, "foreign Protestants."

As a religious group they were opposed to war and oaths, and stood by their convictions. They cooperated with the Quakers in forming "The Friendly Association for Preserving Peace with the Indians by Pacific Measures." They subscribed funds for that purpose and responded to Conrad Weiser's call for provisions and wagons to carry them to those harassed by the Indians along the frontier. Several Schwenkfelders took part in the conferences with the Indian chiefs at Easton for the preservation of peace. When war loomed between the American colonies and Great Britain, they were not unaware of the impending dangers to the liberties of the colonists and the perplexities it would bring to all who had conscientiously promised allegiance to the mother country. Two Schwenkfelder delegates, Christopher Schultz and Melchior Wagner, attended the provincial convention in Philadelphia in January, 1775. This convention adopted a resolution "that it is the earnest wish and desire of this convention to see harmony restored between Great Britain and the colonies . . . but if the British administration should attempt to force a submission to the late arbitrary acts of the British Parliament, we hold it our indispensable duty to resist such force, and at every hazard to defend the rights and liberties of America."

On May 1, 1777, the Schwenkfelders drafted "A Candid Declaration of some so-called Schwenkfelders concerning present Militia Affairs," stating that for conscience's sake it was impossible for them to take up arms and kill their fellowmen, but they were willing to bear their due share of taxes and burdens.¹¹ All males between the ages of eighteen and fifty-three were enrolled in the militia. Ten Schwenkfelders were enrolled. It is not known whether any of them served in the army. Several served as teamsters. Seven were listed as non-associators. Exorbitant sums had to be paid to escape service. During the War Between the States, in a later generation, most of those who were drafted avoided military service by paying for volunteer substitutes.¹²

¹¹ Howard W. Kriebel, *The Schwenckfelders in Pennsylvania* (Lancaster, 1904).

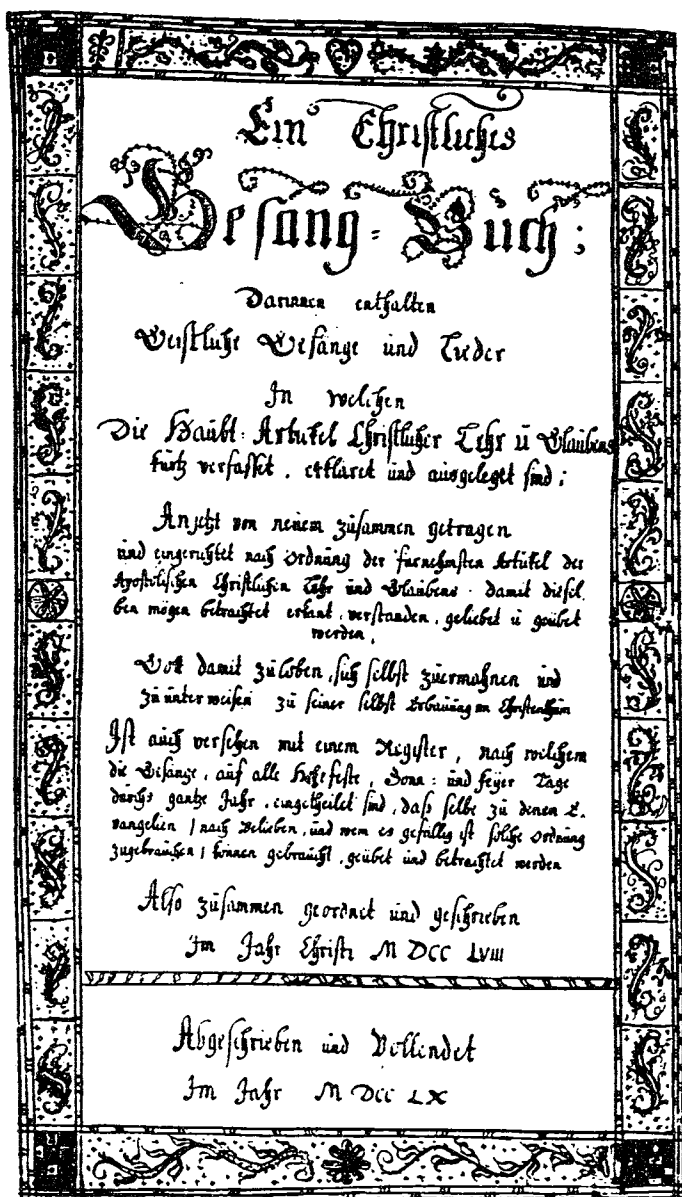
¹² Two prominent descendants of the immigrant Schwenkfelders served in the Civil War, namely, John F. Hartranft, as General, later Governor of Pennsylvania, and his cousin, Chester D. Hartranft, later President of Hartford Theological Seminary, Connecticut. A few lesser known persons may have served of whom we have no definite record.

Although an unorganized religious group from the beginning of their history, the Schwenkfelders were not without religious leadership and instruction either before, during, or after their migration. In the early period of their life as pioneers in Pennsylvania, they had no fixed times or places of meeting. Their religious life and literature which were centered entirely in the family saved them from the disintegrating influences of transition from one culture to another. One of their number, George Weiss, who had volunteered religious instruction before they left Silesia and continued such in Saxony, was chosen to be their religious leader on the migration and continued his ministrations until his death in 1740. He and his successor, Balthasar Hoffman, traveling on horseback, visited the widely scattered families in their humble homes, conducted religious services for the parents and instruction for the children.

In 1753 a system of religious meetings was instituted in specific homes where those not too far removed could attend. On Sundays, religious devotions were conducted in the forenoon by the house-fathers. The afternoons were devoted to the instruction of the children arranged in classes according to age. Four volumes of religious instruction—a thousand pages each, in manuscript—were prepared for use in these very early Sunday Schools, by Christopher Kriebel, one of the early ministers. Topics and questions were assigned for the succeeding Sunday.¹³ Gradually their Sunday Schools progressed and developed into the modern Sunday School. Next to the Sunday School came catechetical instruction of the young people. For this purpose the early ministers used their own methods and materials in manuscript form until Christopher Schultz prepared a catechism, printed 1763. The transcribing of religious literature was also a major part of the religious education of Schwenkfelder youth in pioneer days.

The Schwenkfelders carried with them on their long and wearisome migration a large quantity of literature which they had contrived to save from seizure in their Silesian homeland: many of the printed works of Schwenkfeld; books of sermons by former scholars and preachers; a manuscript collection of 1,500 hymns, some of them from the early Christian era; letters written by imprisoned Schwenkfelders and others from 1580 onward; historical

¹³ *Schwenckfeldiana*, I, Nos. 1 and 2.



Specimen title-page of a manuscript volume of Schwenkfelder hymns.

Courtesy of the Schwenkfelder Library

records and memoranda; the pre-migration Schwenkfelder-Mennonite correspondence; the writings of Balthasar Hoffman,¹⁴ scholar, deputy to Vienna, preacher, and teacher. Hoffman carried from Vienna to Saxony, then to Holland and across the ocean to Pennsylvania, his three large unbound volumes of Bible studies, a Hebrew-Latin lexicon, a Latin-German lexicon, and a Latin Bible—each a thousand pages or more—as well as the letters he wrote to his family from Vienna. In 1890 Schwenkfeld's personal copy of the Worms edition of the Bible, 1529, bearing his marginal notations, was obtained from a European book dealer.¹⁵

In the latter part of the nineteenth century the Schwenkfelders secured a copy of the records of the Jesuit Mission (1719-98) in the ancestral village of Harpersdorf, Silesia. Later, in the early twentieth century, they secured photocopies of the Protestant church records (1699-1721) of the same village, and copies of the church records covering the eight years of their stay in Saxony. The correspondence of the Schwenkfelders with relatives and friends who remained in the old homeland is also preserved; it contains interesting personal items as well as historical data regarding events in Europe, Pennsylvania, and other colonies in the Revolutionary period.

Records were kept of their annual observance of the Day of Remembrance, September 24, instituted on the second day after landing. The early ministers were requested to write the sermons they delivered on these occasions for preservation. Prayers and hymns and introductory remarks were included in these records, constituting an almost unbroken series covering a period of one hundred years, 1734-1834, and many of succeeding years.¹⁶ Duplicate copies of these sermons were made. These volumes of sermons are a part of the extensive devotional literature of the

¹⁴ *Schwenckfeldiana*, I, No. 2.

¹⁵ Schwenkfeld bequeathed his personal copy of the Bible printed at Worms, 1529, to be the property of several of his closest friends successively, as he wrote on the inside cover. After a few generations it got into England in the hands of a book dealer, was purchased from him by a book dealer, Otto Harrassowitz, in Leipzig. He at once offered it to the Schwenkfelders of Pennsylvania who had been his customers for some years prior thereto; they still are customers of the same firm. This Bible bears Schwenkfeld's annotations, in abbreviated Latin, in exquisite penmanship, on the margins and between chapters and printed lines. The date of the purchase by the Schwenkfelders was 1890. These annotations will be printed as Document MCCXXXIX, Vol. XVII of the *Corpus Schwenckfeldianorum*.

¹⁶ *Schwenckfeldiana*, II, Nos. 3 and 4.

Schwenkfelders. The sermons are plain and earnest, logical in arrangement and original. The early ministers had no Bible commentaries or prepared outlines to assist them in sermon preparation. They were dependent on their own ingenuity, intuition, and on hours of diligent study and thought. Most of them pursued also another vocation, particularly agriculture, for a livelihood. None of them was college-bred until near the close of the nineteenth century.

They kept faithful records of births, marriages, and deaths after their arrival. These became the source for *The Genealogical Record of the Schwenkfelder Families*, 1879 (2nd edition, 1923). The forty immigrant families bore only twenty-four different family names. There was considerable inter-marriage among these families, which was in part due to their social isolation both before and after their migration. To this fact may be ascribed the survival of the body as a religious group for more than two centuries of their life in this country. A unique example of their inter-relationship is provided by two seventh-generation descendants. One hundred and five of the Schwenkfelder passengers on the *St. Andrew* were their ancestors, they being descendants both on their father's and their mother's side. These two also can visit the burial place of every one of these ancestors. They will find on an appropriate monument the name and dates of each. A draft of all burial plots was kept from the beginning of their settlement. The early graves were marked by simple field stones. In 1934, as one of the projects of the bicentennial celebration of the landing, these stones were replaced by marble or granite markers and the respective names and dates inscribed on a monument erected on each burial plot.

Living was an art in colonial America. Thrown on their own resources to obtain food and to make and repair all their own implements, they became also domestic manufacturers. This was the experience of the Schwenkfelders no less than of others. They could bring but few of their Old World possessions on the five months' journey from Saxony beyond the Elbe River to Pennsylvania. In addition to agriculture they had plied other trades. There were among them carpenters, cabinet-makers, shoemakers, spinners, and weavers of fine linen. By their industry and frugality they soon acquired some property and the necessities of simple living.

The journals and papers of David Schultz (1717-97),¹⁷ the surveyor, are among their historic treasures. After writing a diary of the migratory journey with his parents from Saxony to the New World, he continued to keep a diary or journal of events and of his activities, using old almanacs for that purpose. These journals are written in three languages—German, Latin, and English. They tell of surveying lands, making drafts, laying out roads, farms, townships, writing wills, adjusting disputes, writing tax lists; and, in addition, there are entries of historic events in foreign countries as account of them appeared in colonial newspapers.

Among the immigrant families were several who had inventive mechanical and artistic ability, notably the Krauss and Heebner families. One member of the Krauss family had brought from the old country a tuning fork. With the aid of this little instrument and some crude tools, two of his young grandsons built an organ. Soon this innocent venture developed into an industry which made the Krauss brothers famous as organ-builders. For more than one hundred years they built pipe organs for the churches in a wide area in Pennsylvania. They also were engaged in clock-making. The most illustrious and versatile member of this family was John Krauss (1770-1819). As a young man he was a student of languages at the Schwenkfelder Academy, 1790-92; of mathematics and surveying at the Chestnut Hill Academy, Philadelphia, 1793; and he was a teacher in one of the Schwenkfelder Public Schools, 1794-95. In addition to building organs, he was a surveyor, farmer, wool-carder, maker of wool-carding machines, writer of deeds, organizer of a choral society and of a literary society, publisher of a book on household and industrial economy including prescriptions and helps selected from the best English and German works for the benefit and use of farmers, housekeepers, mechanics, craftsmen, and lovers of art. Many of his school notebooks on geometry, trigonometry, and navigation, and three volumes of diaries comprising several hundred pages of interesting records of his activity and of the life and work of his neighbors and friends, written on paper of excellent quality, are preserved in the Schwenkfelder Library.¹⁸

¹⁷ Andrew S. Berky, *The Journals and Papers of David Schultze*, Vol. I, 1726-1760; II, 1761-1797 (The Schwenkfelder Library, Pennsburg, Pa., 1953).

¹⁸ *Schwenckfeldiana*, I, No. 5.

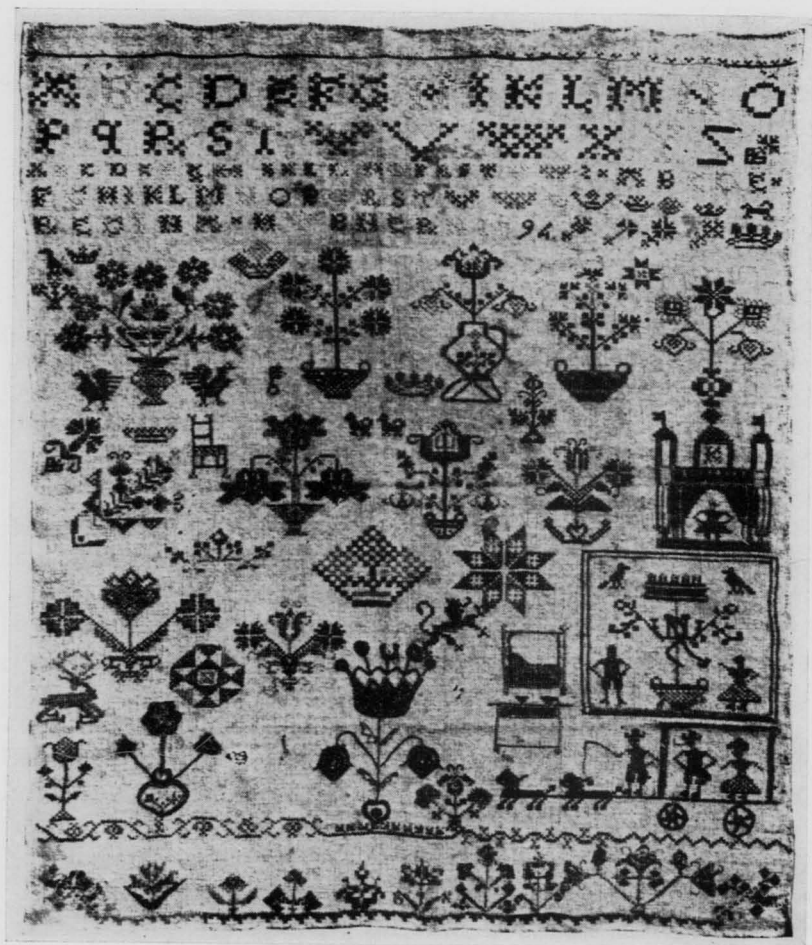
The inventive and mechanical genius in the Heebner family was David S. Heebner (1810-1900).¹⁹ Although early established on a farm by his father, he followed his innate mechanical bent by making clocks and acquired a reputation as a clock maker. Soon there came to him a call from his neighbors and friends for labor-saving farm machinery. He responded and began the manufacture of farm implements. Taking two of his sons into partnership, he founded the firm of Heebner Sons & Co. This company later sent farm machinery to all parts of the civilized world. They made horse-powers, grain threshers, fodder-cutters, and many kinds of small tools. The Heebner Level Tread Horse-Powers and Little Giant Pennsylvania Threshers were carried on the backs of pack mules through the mountain passes of Mexico, and into Asia on camels' backs. Before the First World War, Germany and Russia bought the Heebner machines.

A member of another Heebner family was George Heebner. His particular talent was artistic. Supplemental to his trade as a farmer and miller, he made and decorated various kinds of pottery. It may have been a family trade before the migration from Silesia and Saxony, as was expert spinning and weaving among many of the Schwenkfelders. Artistic talent was inherent in another branch of the Heebner families—the making of illuminated writings. Traditionally, the site of Heebner's pottery was in Limerick Township, Montgomery County. In addition to the manufacture of simple, practical pottery needed by the settlers, George Heebner had learned the art of graffito and slip decoration. "Among the most elaborately decorated and inscribed earthenware of the Pennsylvania German settlements was that produced by George Hübner (Heebner), 1785-98."²⁰ His most elaborate and ornate pieces may have been made only for good friends as tokens of esteem.

The most consummate scholar among the Schwenkfelders was Balthasar Hoffmann, whose writings and studies have already been mentioned. A close rival was his pupil and successor, Christopher Schultz, the young diarist of the migration, who as a young shepherd boy on the hills of Saxony, diligently carried on his studies and brought his notebook of exercises in Latin, and other books, with him to the hills of Pennsylvania. Here he continued to edu-

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*



*Sampler made by Regina Heebner Schultz in 1794. Regina Schultz was the wife of an early Schwenkfelder minister in Pennsylvania. From "The Schwenkfelders in Pennsylvania" by Kriebel.
Courtesy of the Pennsylvania German Society*

cate himself; transcribed letters and manuscripts; wrote historical notes; composed hymns and helped in the compilation of the first Schwenkfelder hymnbook, published 1762; composed by request a catechism, 1763; was the leading advocate and organizer of the Schwenkfelder public school system; and was the principal author of the "Articles of Agreement" for its conduct, 1764. He served as minister to his people, 1764-89; wrote *A Vindication of Caspar Schwenkfeld*, 1769, which was printed in Jauer, Silesia, 1771;

composed a *Compendium of the Christian Faith*; drafted the constitution for the organization of the Society of Schwenkfelders in 1782, which was incorporated in 1909 as The Schwenkfelder Church. Withal, he took an active part in the public affairs of his country, and was simultaneously engaged in the struggle to procure the necessities of life under the exigencies of primitive conditions which encumbered the cultivation of spiritual values.²¹

As early as 1759 the Schwenkfelders contemplated the undertaking of an educational enterprise.²² At a meeting of the house-fathers in 1764, Christopher Schultz presented to them, for their earnest consideration and conscientious solution "personal questions"—sixteen in number—"regarding the need of schools," the calibre of which may be judged from a few selections:

1. Is it not the bounden duty of a Christian people that they be intent and exert every effort to the end that youth be taught, reared, nurtured and instructed in Christian doctrine? 2. But since religious instruction cannot be presented except in words, utterances, and speech, how can youth come to an understanding of the said grammatical sense of the words? 3. Can we not note the reason why all righteous persons who have taken an interest in the welfare of a people have at all times since the beginning of recorded history, both of church and state, paid special attention to the establishing of schools? It is the real foundation upon which all human life and being are grounded. 4. Should we not also consider why our predecessors who were learned and trained people were in a position not only to fathom the truth thoroughly, but also to withstand with reason every error and falsification through the misuse of natural skill? Thus it came about, as honorable men acknowledge, that God through the awakening of certain persons, first brought forth learning, and in particular the science of language, as a preparation for the Reformation. 5. Is it proper to feel content so long as youth can read and write the mother tongue a little without giving them the opportunity to apply their faculties further? 6. To serve God and your neighbor—does not that contain the sum total of all commandments and duties? If we could so prepare youth by the grace of God that it might be adapted to serve God and man, be it in spiritual or material things, even though it cost us notably of our possessions—which

²¹ *Schwenckfeldiana*, I, Nos. 1, 2, 3.

²² *Ibid.*

are after all not ours but the Lord's, and are to be employed to the advantage of God and our neighbors—what a blessed people we would be?

In answer to these soul-searching questions, the house-fathers pledged 840 pounds at a meeting on March 1, 1764, for the support of a Public School System. In June of the same year, at another meeting, Christopher Schultz and his uncle, Caspar Kriebel, presented "Certain Agreements and Fundamental Articles for the Establishment and Support of a School System in the District of Skippack and Goshenhoppen" in Montgomery County. The Preamble stated, in fourteen points, their ideals for these schools and the conduct of them. The interest of the money pledged and invested by the trustees was to be applied to the conduct of the schools; two trustees were to visit the schools each month; the schools were to be open to children of all creeds, boys and girls, rich or poor, and for the latter there was provision made by charitable bequests; religious instruction was to be impartial; the majority of the teachers were non-Schwenkfelder. Most of these schools were conducted for many years in private homes until funds were at hand to build schoolhouses which subsequently were enlarged and used also for worship services.

The Schwenkfelders had no houses for public worship at this time; they conducted their worship services in private houses as they had been accustomed to do prior to their migration. Throughout the years of their conduct of these non-sectarian public schools, they permitted no religious indoctrination of any type whatsoever. Any teacher who disregarded this stipulation was dismissed. These schools provided educational advantages for all classes of children, rich and poor alike, Schwenkfelder and non-Schwenkfelder, far in advance of those enjoyed in farming communities generally and at a time when educational life and interest in the colony were at a low ebb. The principles upon which these schools were established and conducted made them free public schools in every sense of the term.

In 1825 the Schwenkfelders united with their Protestant neighbors of all denominations in conducting so-called subscription schools, the parents paying tuition for their children. However, the Schwenkfelders continued until 1842 to use the income from their own school fund to help the poor and the orphans, for repairs of

buildings, for equipment, and for supplementing teachers' salaries. This was eight years after the establishment of the state public school system of Pennsylvania. From that time to the present, the income from their fund has been used for publication purposes.

Their public school system functioned smoothly and was successful. Latent mental ability was awakened and developed; intellectual talents were discovered which showed promise of great usefulness. After twenty-five years they felt an additional challenge—to make provision for the advanced education of young people. Accordingly an academy²³ was planned and opened in 1790, in a combined school and meeting house, newly constructed for that purpose, as well as for public worship, in the Hosensack Valley in Lehigh County. A teacher from Halle, Germany, was engaged to teach English, German, Latin, Greek, and other subjects. Nine of the textbooks used have been identified. The teacher drafted the rules of conduct for his students. This school, too, was a success, but two years later it had to be discontinued owing to economic dislocations following the war of the Revolution; it was then converted into a public grade school, and was continued as such until 1842 when the state system of 1834 finally became operative in the community. In order to reduce expenses after 1792 the Schwenkfelders engaged teachers from their own group, among them some who had been students in the Academy.

They were always concerned about the education of their children and those of their neighbors. They believed that liberty depended on the education and enlightenment of all the people. In vain they had almost exhausted their physical and spiritual resources to win mere tolerance in the Old World. In the New World to which they had come at great sacrifice, not tolerance but liberty, to their astonishment, had become the law of the land with the adoption of the Constitution in 1789. "If we ever lose this liberty," said George Kriebel, one of their school trustees, "it will be our own fault."

One hundred years after the closing of their Academy, the Schwenkfelders had a new vision—the establishment of a private school²⁴ for the pursuit of advanced studies. Funds were promptly subscribed. A building and grounds were purchased, and teachers

²³ *Schwenckfeldiana*, I, No. 3.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

engaged. Dr. Oscar S. Kriebel, Schwenkfelder preacher, was appointed as Principal, and Professor Howard W. Kriebel, the historian, Vice-Principal. The standards adopted for its conduct harmonized in every respect with those adopted for their Public School System in 1764. The school was first of all non-sectarian and its advantages were made available to rich and poor alike. Two-thirds of the members of the board of trustees were to be Schwenkfelders; one third, non-Schwenkfelders. This was the origin of Perkiomen Seminary in 1892, a co-educational, college-preparatory school. Two years later the number of students had reached such proportions as to make necessary the erection of a large new building. In a short time this institution ranked among the foremost. In 1916 it was converted into Perkiomen School for Boys. As such it has continued to uphold its high standard of scholarship and Christian principles.

In 1884 on the occasion of their celebration of the Sesqui-centennial of the landing of their forefathers, the Schwenkfelders had a literary vision—to collect, edit, and publish the works of Caspar Schwenkfeld von Ossig, as a memorial to “the founders, confessors, martyrs, and apologists of the Middle Way,” and as evidence of their conviction that the principles of Christian love, brotherhood, liberty, and spirituality for which Schwenkfeld had stood are eternally true. This vision was conjured up before them by several descendants: General John F. Hartranft, former governor of Pennsylvania; the Honorable Christopher Heydrich, Judge of the Superior Court of Pennsylvania; and Dr. Chester D. Hartranft of Hartford Theological Seminary, Hartford, Connecticut. The Schwenkfelders were then about four hundred strong—an agricultural people accustomed to making liberal sacrifice for the securing of spiritual values. To this enterprise they contributed heavily to provide the financial requirements. The editorial staff also came from their ranks. The printing of the seventeen-volume edition of the works of Schwenkfeld is nearing completion.

The original nucleus of the Schwenkfelder Library of the present century is the religious and historical literature, printed and manuscript, which the immigrant Schwenkfelders brought in 1734. During the first fifty years of their life in Pennsylvania they made many manuscript reproductions of it. These were bound in tooled leather over boards, with brass mountings and

clasps, by one of their number, Christopher Hoffmann, son of Balthasar Hoffmann, the scholar.

New interest in their literature and history was awakened among them in 1879 by the publication of *The Genealogical Record of the Schwenkfelder Families*; in 1884 again by the observance of the sesquicentennial of their landing at Philadelphia; and on the same occasion by the initiation of the publication of the works of Schwenkfeld—the *Corpus Schwenckfeldianorum*. The collection and preservation of Schwenkfelder literature was assigned to Howard W. Kriebel, the historian, in 1885 by the General Conference of The Schwenkfelder Church. This collection was vastly increased by his successor, Dr. Elmer E. S. Johnson, and in 1919 by the addition of the working-library of the editors of the *Corpus Schwenckfeldianorum* from their headquarters in Wolfenbuettel, Germany. Through the generous bequest of the Moderator of The General Conference, Dr. Wayne C. Meschter, a fireproof library building was erected at Pennsburg, Pennsylvania, and dedicated in 1951 to the preservation, growth and use of this historical treasure.

The promotion of their educational and literary projects was, however, by no means the exclusive interest of this people. From the beginning of their life in this country they have taken an active part in home and foreign missions, in welfare work everywhere as it came to their attention, in the Far East, the Near East, and in Europe; in the support of the World Literacy Campaign, and of missionaries, in particular those from their own midst serving under the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions; and in the succor of escapees from Eastern Germany, 1945-49.²⁵

This little band of immigrants and their descendants continually and consistently placed strongest emphasis on spiritual values, on religious and secular education and the production and preservation of cultural riches. They could well afford the long postponement of the building of modern, spacious, and attractive houses for public worship to take the place of their simple meeting houses. During the last half century, however, with enthusiasm

²⁵ *Schwenckfeldiana*, I, No. 6; II, No. 1; Andrew S. Berky, *The Mosquito Coast and The Story of the First Schwenkfelder Missionary Enterprise among the Indians of Honduras, 1768-1775* (Board of Publication of The Schwenkfelder Church, Norristown, Pa., 1953).

and devotion, they have built five modern churches centrally located and equipped for worship services, Sunday Schools, and other religious and cultural activities. The Schwenkfelders have ever been believers in the principle of unity in diversity. They are in active sympathy with the growing thought that spiritual ties bind all religious groups together. In this spirit they have welcomed and fostered fellowship with other denominations through worship services and meetings.

Religious freedom, and all the other freedoms our country enjoys today were not the product of narrow, intolerant, and persecuting spirits who, having attained such freedom for themselves, denied it to others. It originated in those little companies of men and women who came in search of that freedom and insisted that it be granted to all men. But for the very substantial contribution of such builders of democracy in Pennsylvania, there might have been no keystone to brace the arch of American independence. It was such as these who made possible the ringing of the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia, and who hailed with unqualified satisfaction and gratitude the religious liberty guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States. These commonly so-called "Sects" have recently been more correctly designated "the Historic Peace Churches." Their faith is in the brotherhood of all men as the hope of the world.