NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

Two Christopher Sower Documents

When Christopher Sower I (1693–1758), the man who in 1743 printed the first Bible in America, left his German homeland and emigrated to Pennsylvania, he was an immigrant with small financial means. When in 1777 his son Christopher Sower II (1721–1784) felt that he was approaching the end of his earthly course and sat down to write his Last Will, the Sowers were one of the wealthiest families among the German settlers in the eastern colonies. It seems as if Christopher Sower had had a premonition of the unhappy events that would soon befall the family, his will is a last stocktaking of the vast property of the Sowers—just one year before it was lost. Never could this Last Will be executed, for in the following year, on August 24, 1778, the property of the Sower family was confiscated by the authorities and sold far below its actual value. The fact that Christopher Sower II for religious reasons objected to joining the cause of the Revolution, that two of his sons were very outspokenly on the side of the British Crown, explains the steps taken by the authorities and the economic collapse of the Sowers. The original document, published here for the first time, is in the possession of the Society for the History of the Germans in Maryland.1

Last Will of Christopher Sower II, Printer in Germantown, Pennsylvania, March 23, 1777

In the Name of God, Amen! I, Christopher Sower of Germantown in the County of Philadelphia, Printer, being in good bodily health and of sound and disposing mind, memory and understanding praised be the Lord for the same, Do hereby make my last Will and Testament in manner following, that is to say

First I will that all my just debts and funeral Expenses shall be duly paid and satisfied for which and other purposes hereinafter de-

1 Society for the History of the Germans in Maryland, 337 St. Paul Street, Baltimore, Maryland.
declared I do hereby nominate and appoint my two elder Sons Christopher and Daniel Executors of this my Last Will and Testament Item, I do hereby declare and devise that the general Plan of this my Will and the chief End and Intention of my own mind, to be pursued by my Children and by all persons who by virtue hereof or otherwise shall have any matter to act, settle or determine respecting the Execution thereof, is that all my Lands, Tenements and Hereditaments and all my Goods and Chattels, Rights and Credits whatsoever shall be equally divided among my seven Children, to wit, Christopher, Daniel, Peter, Catherine, Esther, David and Samuel and by them held and enjoyed in Severalty and by their several and respective Heirs Executors and Administrators and that all the particular Devises and Bequests hereinafter contained upon any Question or Difficulty arising in the Execution of this my Will shall be reduced to and explained and determined by the Rules of an equal Division of the whole, so that respect be had to the true value of every part thereof. Item I do hereby constitute and appoint my respected Friends Peter Keyser and Peter Libert, both of Germantown aforesaid, Guardians of such of my Children as shall be minors at the time of my Decease. Item, I will and devise that the several Estates hereinafter devised to my Children shall be appraised or valued by seven discreet and reputable Freeholders of the County of Philadelphia, Each of my five elder Children choosing one of the said Appraisers and the said Peter Keyser and Peter Libert to be the Appraisers on behalf of my two youngest Sons, David and Samuel. And whatever the seven Appraisers so appointed and to be chosen as aforesaid or any four of them shall under their Hands and Seals certify to be the value of each particular Tenement and Lot or parcel of Ground hereinafter Specifically devised to any of my said Children shall be deemed and taken to be the true value thereof and shall be charged accordingly to the equal Share which the Child to whom it is hereinafter devised is to take in my real and personal Estate.

Provided, nevertheless, That if any of my Children being at the time of such Valuation of full age shall within three months after, or being then under age shall at his or her arrival at the age of twenty-one years think him or herself aggrieved with the Valuation of his or her own part (no Dissatisfaction to be allowed in one of my Children with the Valuation of the Estate of another of them) then he or she
shall or may within the Space of three months from the time of his or her arrival at the age aforesaid by virtue of the Devise hereinafter made to him or her, by public Auction, of which at least four Weeks public notice must be given in two English and one German Newspapers, sell and dispose of the part and parcel of Land to him or her specifically devised to the highest and best Bidder. And whatever Price the Premises shall sell for at such public Auction, the same shall be charged to his or her equal distributive share in my real and personal Estate—Item I give and devise unto my said Son Christopher Sower All that my Messuage or Tenement and piece or Parcel of Land whereon I now live situate in Germantown aforesaid joining to Main Street, Lands late of Adam Gruber now of Thomas Saltar, a Road leading to George Danhawers Mill, and John Wisters Land. Together with the Appurtenances To hold to him my said Son Christopher his Heirs and Assigns for ever: Charged nevertheless and chargeable to his equal Share in the Division of my whole Estate with the Sum or Sums of Money which the Premises shall be valued at or be Sold for as aforesaid. Item I give and devise unto my said Son Daniel Sower All that my Messuage or Tenement Paper Mill Saw Mill and two parcels of Land near the Falls of Schuylkill on both sides of Wissahicon Road, Bounded by the said River and Road and by Lands of John Dickinson, Esq. and Wife, Jonathan Adams and Doctor William Smith. Together with the Appurtenances. To hold to him my said Son Daniel his Heirs and Assigns forever: Charged nevertheless and chargeable to his equal share in the Division of my whole Estate with the sum or sums of Money which the Premises shall be valued at or sold for as aforesaid. Item I give and devise unto my Daughter Catherine Sower all that my Lot or parcel of Land situate at the Upper end of Germantown aforesaid on the South-easterly Side of a Road commonly called Keysers Lane or Abington Road Bounded by the same and by Lands of Jacob Horter, John Engle, Benjamin Keyser and Joseph Keyser. Together with the Buildings thereon erected and the Appurtenances. To hold to her my said Daughter Catherine her Heirs and Assigns forever: Charged nevertheless and chargeable to her equal share in the Division of my whole Estate with such Sum or Sums of money as the premises shall be valued at or be sold for as aforesaid. Item I give and devise unto my Daughter Esther Sower All that my Lot or parcel of Land situate
in the Township of Germantown on the South Easterly Side of the Great Road leading to the Falls of Schuylkill Bounded by the same Road and another which divides the Townships Germantown, Roxborough and the Northern Liberties and by Lands of Winard Nice, which I purchased partly of Theobald Endt and partly of George Herger containing near Seven Acres. Together with Appurtenances. To hold to her my said Daughter Esther Sower Her Heirs and Assigns for ever. Charged nevertheless and chargeable to her equal Share in the Division of my whole Estate with such Sum or Sums of Money as the Premises shall be valued or sold for as aforesaid. Item I give and devise unto my said Son David Sower All that my Messuage or Tenement and Lot of Ground which I purchased of Thomas Hyam and others Trustees of the London Company's Lands situate in Roxborough Township aforesaid Bounded by the River Schuylkill, the great Road leading from Philadelphia to Reading and by lands of Samuel Powel and Christian Lashet containing Eighty-three acres and three quarters of an acre. Together with the fishing place and all the other Appurtenances. To hold to him my said Son David, his Heirs and Assigns forever: Charged nevertheless and chargeable to his equal Share in the Division of my whole Estate with such Sum or Sums of money as the Premises shall be valued at or sold for as aforesaid. Item I give and devise to my said Son Samuel Sower All that my Messuage or Tenement and Lot of Ground in Germantown aforesaid which I purchased of the Sheriff Samuel Morris situate on the South Westerly Side of the said Main Street and on the Northwesterly Side of the aforesaid Road leading to the Falls of Schuylkill Bounded by the said Street and Road and by Lands of Justus Fox and of the said Christian Lashet. Also all that my other Lot of Ground which I purchased of Hannah Rawlinson situate on the Northwesterly Side of the aforesaid Road to Schuylkill, Bounded by the same and Lands of Henry Hill Esq., John Keyser and William Tusten Containing One Acre and three quarters be it more or less. To hold the said Messuage or Tenement and two several lots of Ground with the respective Appurtenances unto my said Son Samuel Sower his Heirs and Assigns for ever: Charged nevertheless and chargeable to his equal Share in the Division of my whole Estate with such Sum and Sums of Money as the Premises shall be valued at or Sold for as aforesaid. Item I will that
my whole Apparatus of the Printing Business shall be appraised by three Master Printers, One to be chosen by my said Son Christopher, another by my said Son Peter and the third by the Guardians of my younger Children. And being so appraised I give and allow the same to my said two Sons Christopher and Peter who shall as near equal as can be divide among themselves every Assortment of Types, the Presses, Moulds and Matrixes for a Letter-Foundry and all other Tools Implements and Materials to the Printing Business belonging and Shall be charged with, each of them one Moiety of the Sum found by the said Appraisers. Item, Whereas I have not devised any part of my Real Estate to my said Son Peter, because he rather seems to decline settling in or near Germantown, so I will that his Seventh part of my whole Estate as near as can be guessed at, Shall as soon as possible be made up to him in Cash, deducting the Moiety of the Value of the Printing Office in order to enable him to make any purchases of Land elsewhere, whether he be then of Age or not. Item, Whereas a considerable part of my personal Estate consists in printed Books: and if either of my said two Sons Christopher and Peter should for his own Private Advantage undertake to reprint any of these Books whilst a considerable number of the same Sort belonging to my Estate remains on hand and unsold the Interest of all my Children must be greatly affected thereby. For preventing of which I will and direct, that if either of my said Sons should think proper to reprint any Such Sort of Books altho it was under the Pretense of Additions or Improvements in matter and form he shall be obliged to take all such Books of the same Sort belonging to my Estate to himself at the Common Price for which they are sold to Stationers or Bookbinders and the Amount thereof shall be charged to his distributive Share or Seventh part of my Estate. And in case he should refuse to comply with the above Directions he shall forfeit to my other Children his full Share and Dividend in all the printed Books that shall belong to my Estate at the time of my decease and in the Monies which shall from time to time arise by the Sale thereof. Anything in this my Will before or after contained to the contrary thereof in any wise notwithstanding. And for the better enforcing this Direction I will that my Son Daniel and the Guardians of my younger Children at the Delivery or Assignment of my printing Office to my Sons, Christopher and Peter shall take Bonds from them for
the Performance thereof. And I further will and direct that the said Stock of printed Books shall be sold either at my said Dwelling-house by my son Christopher or elsewhere by any other person or persons whom my said Executors and the Guardians of my younger Children shall intrust therewith keeping always the same Price at which I usually have sold them or as near to it as can be. And the Sale of these Books Shall in the same manner go on from time to time untill they are all sold or untill the 20th day of March, 1788 when my said Son Samuel shall come to age and then the whole Stock remaining on hand shall be sold by public Auction giving first four Weeks Notice thereof in the English and German Newspapers. And for as much as the Keeping such large Quantity of unbound [books] the taking care thereof that they may not be destroyed or damaged by Rain, Snow or Vermin, I will and direct that my said Son Christopher or whoever shall be intrusted with the Care and Management thereof shall from time to time be allowed a premium of Ten per cent upon the Amount of the Sales thereof. For and in Consideration of which Premium he or they shall also answer to my Estate such bad debts as shall happen by their Selling Books on Trust to indifferent Persons. Item I will and devise that the said Guardians of my younger Children shall take care of and manage the interest and Shares of them in my Estate and for that purpose inspect the Accounts of my Executors and provide that such of my Children as have more than their Seventh part of my Estate in lands and personal Estate Shall will and sufficiently secure the Overplus in their Hands to their younger Brothers and Sisters, and in particular that the Account of the Sales of my printed Books shall at least once a year be settled and the Shares of the said Children paid or secured to them respectively. And in the year 1788 or sooner if all my printed Books shall be sold before that time then a final Settlement of all my Estate shall be made between my said Executors and the Rest of my Children. And I will that the aforesaid Guardians Peter Keyser and Peter Libert shall be handsomely allowed and paid for their Trouble in the Premises [one line omitted because of a crease in the paper which makes it illegible] than their younger Brothers and Sisters shall in consideration of the equal Share left them administer gratis on my Estate. Item if any of my Children shall die under age unmarried and without Issue, I will that the particular Estate in
Land hereinafter given or assigned to him or her shall by my Executors and the Guardian of my Children be sold at public Auction after a previous notice of at least four Weeks given in the English and German Newspapers. And I do hereby impower and authorize them the said Christopher Sower, Daniel Sower, Peter Keyser and Peter Libert and the Survivors and Survivor of them upon Receipt of the Purchase Money by proper Deeds and Assurances in the Law to grant and convey the Fee simple and Inheritance of the Premises to the Purchasor or purchasors thereof. And the Monies arising by the Sales of such landed Estate and all other such Childs Monies and Effects part and Share in my Estate the Hands of my Executors or of the Guardian of such Child shall be equally divided among my surviving Children and the Issue of such of them as Shall then be dead. Such Issue taking such part as their deceased Parent would have taken if living. Lastly I do hereby revoke all other Last Wills by me heretofore made and published declaring this to be my Last Will and Testament only.

In Witness whereof I have hereunto set my Hand and Seal the Twenty-third Day of March in the Year of our Lord One Thousand Seven Hundred and Seventy-Seven.

(signed) Christopher Sower

Signed, Sealed and Declared by the Testator Christopher Sower for and as his Last Will and Testament in the presence of
[First witness' signature illegible due to crease in paper]
Thomas Langstroth
Edmund Langstroth

II

The second document, likewise preserved in the library of the Society for the History of the Germans in Maryland, is not written by Christopher Sower II, yet he is the main topic of the piece. It is a letter written by his oldest son and addressed to his youngest child, a letter from Christopher Sower III (1754–1799) in London to Samuel Sower in Baltimore, Maryland.²

² The best and most extensive sketch of the life of the last Christopher Sower is to be found in the Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society, N. S. XL1 (1931), 235–253, James O. Knauss, “Christopher Saur the Third.”
Christopher Sower III, and his brother Peter, both ardent Royalists in the Revolutionary conflict, had left Philadelphia in 1778 when the British gave up the city. Christopher Sower III lived in New York for the next few years, took a short trip to England in 1782 to induce the Crown to compromise with the American colonies, returned to America and at the end of the Revolution again went to England. This time his private business was the main purpose of his two years’ stay; he wanted to push through the claim of the Sower family for indemnity for the losses of property suffered in the Revolution. This affair he handled most skilfully. His claims ran up to £7000 (£2500 for himself, £4500 for three brothers and one sister). The claims commissioners finally allowed him the sum of £1289 and £518 for each of the four others.\(^3\) Besides, in recognition of his faithful services to the Crown of England, he was granted an annuity of £40 a year and became King’s Printer and Postmaster of St. John, New Brunswick, in Nova Scotia. In the beginning of May, 1785, he arrived with his family in Nova Scotia and, true to the family tradition, started a newspaper, *The Royal Gazette and Weekly Advertiser.* After fourteen years in Nova Scotia he moved to Baltimore, where his brother Samuel had established a very successful printing business. However fate had not granted him much more time; he arrived in Maryland in the spring of 1799 and died on July 3 of the same year.

The following letter, hitherto unpublished, was written during his second stay in London, shortly after he had been informed by his youngest brother of his father’s death.

*Christopher Sower III to his Brother Samuel*

London Feby 2d, 1785

My dear Brother,

I received your Letter of the 1st Sept. last, and was much affected at the Information it contained. The Father then who raised us with tenderness, in whose Lapp and from whose Lipps we have received so much and such salutary Instructions, as must appertain to life everlasting if practiced by us, is no more. I never was more unmanned than when I received this news, all my philosophy forsook

\(^3\) Knauss, *op. cit.*, 252.
me at once, which is the more extraordinary, as my Soul wished
him well, and I am convinced that his change is for the better—He
lived the Christian and died the Death of the righteous—Oh may
our latter end be like his!—he is numbered among the Children of
God and his Lot is among the Saints—he has fought a good fight,
has finished his course has kept the faith—he knew his redeemer
liveth—merciful men are taken away from the evil to come—they
have no continuing City here—they enter into Peace and rest in
their Beds—and although I am sensible of all this I grieved and
sorrowed as if I was ignorant concerning them that are asleep—even
as others which have no hope. Forgive me dear Brother this digres-
sion—forgive me this burst of Sorrow!

I cannot say that I am pleased with the manner in which you
have deposited his remains—our dear Mother, nor never one of the
Family was ever buried in a Walnut Coffin, nor do I believe it would
have been agreeable to him if he had known it in his Life time.
I note, what you have said of your intentions of erecting to his
Memory ornamental Tomb Stones, and am fully persuaded that
it would be much greater ornament to his Memory to have his
virtues engraved on the Hearts of his Children of which number
I am one—I shall not however oppose you, in showing him this
mark of your affection and respect, and if you put your design into
execution, you will send me the inscriptions on them.

Our Parents being now transplanted into a world where the Clock
doeth not strike and from where no one returneth it becomes my
duty as elder Brother to enjoin you never to loose Sight of those
Instructions you have from time to time received from them⁴—put
them into Practice and you will be benefitted by them—you will
find them an ample compensation for our terrestrial Losses and
disappointments—Let your spare time be spent in reading Books,
on Religious, Moral and Historical Subjects, they will enlarge your
mind, disclose the wiles of Satan and lead you to the Knowledge of
man. In the first must be your delight, and the others you will con-
sider only as secondary things. Make Piety, Industry and, honesty
the indeviatable Rule of your whole Life. Make yourself Master of
your Trade or the Profession you are now learning and do not for

⁴ Christopher was thirteen years older than Samuel, which explains the somewhat patroniz-
ing tone of the letter.
any pauly reasons change it for another. It gives me singular satisfaction to reflect that you live in the Neighborhood with Brother Martin Urner, and let me earnestly recommend to you to Counsel him on all occasions and take Advice as that from a Father, salute him and his Family most cordially from me and Hannah, and assure him that although at this great distance, I am open, both to instruction and Reproof—And finally, dear Brother, remember what I have said unto you I say unto you all.

In your next you will give me further particulars of Dady’s latter end, his last sayings, who those three Persons were he baptized last, and from whence Br. Urner and Sam’l Hopkins took the subject of their Admonitions at his funeral—The most trivial Circumstances will be a treasure to me. Within these few days I have received a Letter from Brother Peter, dated Nassau, New Providence the 25th Nov. in which he tells me little more of himself than that he is a Practitioner of Physic at that Place and hopes to do well. I have this day wrote a long letter to Uncle Henry, in which I gave him a full and I trust a Satisfactory Account of William Pipers receipts.

About 7 Months ago Divine Providence favored us with a young Son who still remains nameless. Hannah has never been right well since; but is not intirely laid up. I have had an inflammation in the Plura but am now much better of it. The Children are in perfect Health, Priscilla desires her Love to you and all her Uncles and Aunts. I have not yet had a hearing before the Commissioners of American Claims about Father’s Estate; but expect it will come on, in the Course of this Month or the beginning of the next, when I shall send you such Accounts as I may be able to give.

I shall go with my Family to Nova Scotia the ensuing Spring, perhaps in the Month of April; the King has appointed me his Printer and Deputy Post Master General of that place; this latter appointment gives me in so far pleasure as it affords me an oppor-

5 Martin Urner (1725-1799) was one of the leading men in the United Brethren Church to which both Sowers belonged. In 1761 Martin Urner, descendant of an old Swiss family, had settled in Frederick County, Maryland on Sams Creek. For many years he was presiding bishop of the Pipe Creek Church. See Jerry Maurice Henry, History of the United Brethren in Maryland, (Elgin, Illinois, 1936), 94.

6 Christopher Sower III had married Hannah Knorr on January 8, 1775, in Philadelphia. Hannah Knorr was the sister of the wife of Zachariah Poulsen, publisher of the Philadelphia Daily Advertiser.
tunity of corresponding more safely and freely with my Relations in Pennsylvania—On my arrival there I shall send you my address.

As so many of my Letters have miscarried, I have wrote this in English, that in Case it should be intercepted——

Here our manuscript ends. However, we may well assume that not much more than two or three sentences followed. A remark like the last one about his writing in English would generally be made either at the very beginning or at the very end of a letter, and the tone of the last lines suggests that the writer is coming to the end of his communication.

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