Religious diversity always was a hallmark of society in colonial Pennsylvania. English Presbyterians, Baptists, and Anglicans quickly settled alongside the colony's first Quakers and the wilderness soon teemed with new and strange religious groups. Thus the German immigrant Justus Falckner observed in 1700 that settlements there were not only divided along familiar Protestant lines, but were overrun with "sects and hordes... Naturalists, Rationalists, Independents, Sabbatarians, and many others, especially secret insinuating sects, whom one does not know what to make of."\(^1\)

Unfortunately, few groups have been as hard to describe as those over which Falckner puzzled. Some were obscure even to contemporaries, such as the German mystics associated with Johannes Kelpius who settled in Pennsylvania in the 1690s.\(^2\) Others came to

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prominence briefly, such as the Keithians studied here, and simply
died out, leaving no one to sustain their historical memory or pre-
serve their records. Yet in recent years many historians have found
that these groups tell us much about the evolution of modern
society. To take just one example, in The World Turned Upside
Down the English historian Christopher Hill has made a strong case
for the significance of popular radicalism in the Commonwealth
period, and in an essay in the New York Review of Books has argued
that even studies of witchcraft, magic, and alchemy—what he
termed “movements of the past that went nowhere”—reveal crucial
phases in the development of seventeenth-century English religious
and intellectual life. Similar trends are evident in American history
as well, although they usually concern less esoteric subjects. His-
torians probing daily life among common citizens have added
immeasurably to our understanding of the social processes that
shaped American society, and some of the most important works in
this field have centered on colonial Pennsylvania—James Lemon’s
analysis of mobility in Chester County and several recent studies
of poverty and wealth in pre-Revolutionary Philadelphia.

The essay that follows examines one of the earliest examples in
Pennsylvania of religious activity in which common and poor people
came to play a dominant role, the so-called Keithian movement,
first led by the Scottish Friend, George Keith, that originated in a
schism among Quakers between 1691 and 1693. Our principal
interest is in the later stages of the movement that cover the period
from 1693, the eve of George Keith’s departure from Pennsylvania
for London to defend himself before London Friends, to the move-
ment’s demise sometime around 1701 and 1702. The study does not
claim any long-lasting effects for the affair. As Hill might put it,
the Keithians indeed “went nowhere,” and we are fortunate to

3 The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution (New
York, 1972); review of Frances A. Yates, The Rosicrucian Enlightenment (Boston, 1973),

4 James T. Lemon, The Best Poor Man’s Country: A Geographical Study of Early South-
eastern Pennsylvania (Baltimore, Md., 1972); Gary B. Nash, “Poverty and Poor Relief in
Pre-Revolutionary Pennsylvania,” William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd ser., XII (1976), 2–30;
Nash, “Urban Wealth and Poverty in Pre-Revolutionary America,” Journal of Inter-
disciplinary History, VI (1975–1976), 545–584; William A. Williams, “The ‘Industrious
Poor’ and the Founding of the Pennsylvania Hospital,” PMHB, XCVII (1973), 431–443.
possess even one set of their records, these covering some of their activity in Chester County. Yet contemporaries viewed the movement nervously. Over the course of a decade it probably had been supported by more than 400 adults in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. It irritated Quakers and Baptists. It launched the career of William Davis, an intriguing if eccentric religious “leader” of early Pennsylvania. And it attracted the interest of Anglicans, who by 1700 could take communion from the very man who had first organized it, George Keith, who had been ordained by the Bishop of London in 1699. Its history reveals how thoroughly common people could shape their own spiritual doctrines, how they extended their movement beyond its original base among disaffected Friends, how they crossed ethnic barriers to associate with German millennarian Lutherans and the directions in which they scattered and contributed to the development of the Anglican and two Baptist groups after 1702.

To begin with, the Keithian schism of 1691–1693 emerged from a critique of Quaker practices which George Keith developed in America between 1685 and 1691 and which he pursued past his disownment by the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting in 1692. In it he alleged that Friends neglected elemental Christian doctrine in a way that stimulated heresy and claimed that the Quakers’ hierarchical system of church government placed so much power in the hands of the Public Friends who acted as ministers that it repressed the spiritual vitality of lesser Friends. 5

While Keith undoubtedly shaped the schism, three considerations suggest that the turmoil from which it emerged was neither unique to America nor dependent on his presence. First, the Quaker movement had itself been born of flux. Seventeenth-century Friends stressed discipline because their membership was heterodox and argumentative, not merely because they feared persecution from

the state. Dissidents like John Perrot, John Story, and John Wilkinson—as well as Keith—were important participants in processes that shaped a Quaker order from diverse sources; they were not exceptions to some "normative" pattern of Quaker homogeneity. This flux and the fears it engendered were not lost on the voyage to America either. Pennsylvania's first Quaker leaders worked hard to re-establish discipline through the Quaker system of meetings because they knew from experience in England that chaos often churned beneath the surface of apparent peaceableness.6

In addition, Gary Nash has described how the schism emerged from a milieu of political disruption and economic discontent so serious that Pennsylvania's first decades are a model of disequilibrium in early colonial societies. Not only did Keith's religious criticisms intersect fortuitously with disputes about political rights and tax policies, but they reflected important distances between Pennsylvania's early social classes. Even Keith's best known early adherents came from the ranks of those already experienced at protesting the privileges granted to the colony's wealthiest Quaker merchants and farmers. As Nash puts it, Keith's original protest was supported by "a whole spectrum of lesser merchants, shopkeepers and master artisans," and farmers, of course, who tired of being taxed and ruled by a sometimes arrogant elite.7

A search of Quaker meeting records reveals that protests against Quaker leaders already had emerged independently of Keith in the infant settlement before 1692. In 1685 unknown persons in Philadelphia complained about drunkenness among also unnamed Public Friends, while from England George Fox criticized the ministers as a group for their domineering behavior in Quaker worship.8 This

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8 Minutes, Philadelphia Monthly and Quarterly Meeting, Apr. 7, 1685, Department of Records, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting (microfilm copy at Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore, Pa.); George Fox to Christopher Taylor, *et al.*, May 10, 1685, *PMHB*, XXIX (1905), 105-106. The accusation about the drunkenness of the Public Friends was silently omitted from the Monthly Meeting minutes printed in *Genealogical Society of Pennsylvania, Publications*, I (1895-1898), 280-281. Dates have here been modernized by using the names of the months, rather than by numbering the months.
trend increased after 1685, although by exactly how much is difficult to determine since Quaker meeting clerks tended to ignore a good many disputes when writing their minutes. Fortunately, this was not true in Chester County where the Keithian movement later proved especially strong. Between 1685 and 1691 the clerks of the Concord Monthly and Quarterly Meetings recorded several dangerous challenges to local Quaker leaders there. In 1686 the Quarterly Meeting removed a worship meeting from the house of John and Margery Gibbons because of their unruly “behavior and carriage.” Two years later, in 1688, Margery Gibbons disrupted meetings with long and argumentative sermons, demanded the right to preach, and publicly circulated slanderous attacks on the Friends. Then in 1690 Frances Harrison tacked a paper to the door of the Chichester meeting house that charged Robert Pile, one of the meeting’s most prominent members, “with the destruction of Thomas Usher’s soul”—this by the manner in which Pile had carried out the meeting’s orders to discipline Usher. The meeting minutes also suggest that Harrison challenged the hierarchical exercise of power at Chichester, since they note Harrison’s complaint that Pile “doth sway the meeting” improperly. And in another two years Thomas More interrupted a sermon by Jacob Chandler to say that “his soul was grieved to hear such abominable doctrine” from a Public Friend, a protest that was by then connected to the Keithian schism. Not only did all the complaints except More’s precede the Keithian schism, but they also came from poor and modest settlers in Chester County. According to the rent roll drawn up for Governor William Blackwell in 1689, John Gibbons then owned 100 acres in Chester County and Frances Harrison owned 250, the latter being the average amount of land held in the county at the time.


The first of several altercations that turned the Keithian affair from a Quaker protest toward a more independent movement occurred in the winter of 1691–1692 when Keith and his followers began to worship apart from the Quakers they were criticizing. Then in July 1692 the Public Friends bitterly denounced Keith, while in September he was disowned by the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. These events forced a crisis on his followers. The few prestigious Friends who first supported him now remained loyal to orthodox Quakerism. Other followers had to decide whether to become sustaining members of a new religious group. The result was a leadership vacuum which especially obscure persons now stepped forward to fill. These included William Davis, a “turner” and small landowner in Chester County, Thomas Martin, also a Chester County farmer, James Chick, Thomas Builder and William Bradley, the latter all but impossible to trace in early Pennsylvania records. They probably were residents of Philadelphia but figure in no important way in the city’s known history; certainly they left behind no signs of wealth or political power, only their name attached to a few surviving Keithian documents.\textsuperscript{11}

Together with Keith, the movement’s new leaders created an extraordinarily muscular, almost physical Christianity which they developed out of their criticism of orthodox Quakerism. During arguments held in the previous year, some Friends seemed to reveal religious sentiments that reflected little more than an ignorant commitment to mysticism. Thus one Friend so hinged his Quakerism upon the Inward Light that he reputedly wondered just “what good or profit can the name of Christ do us?” In reaction, Keith and his followers emphasized the historical reality of Jesus’ existence and the effects of salvation, especially the resurrection of the body. In a statement signed by Keith, Davis, Chick, Builder and Bradley in April 1692, the Keithians insisted that a belief in the historical Jesus was essential to true Quakerism, and reminded Friends that “the outward name of Christ was given by God to him as well as

\textsuperscript{11} Shifts in the Keithian leadership can be detected by comparing the names associated with Keith in several documents, including Some Reasons and Causes of the Late Separation (Philadelphia, 1692); An Exhortation with Thomas Lloyd . . . [Philadelphia, 1692]; An Appeal from the Twenty-Eight Judges . . . (Philadelphia, 1692); and An Epistle from the Yearly Meeting at Burlington, the 4th 5th 6th and 7th days of the Seventh Month, Anno 1692 [Philadelphia, 1692].
the names Jesus and the Name Light,” This declaration rang with references to Christ and to Christ’s body that would continue to characterize Keithian interests throughout the next decade: “Christ both within us and without us,” “the man Christ Jesus,” the Christ who existed “forever in his Soul and Spirit and glorious Body.” Similarly, another list of Keithian principles, circulated in manuscript somewhat later, perhaps between 1693 and 1695, described the first principle of religion as one also concerned with the human body—that “bodily sickness and death came in by the fall,” and continued in this vein to note that “Christ now hath in Heaven a Soule and Body” and that the “man Christ Jesus will come again in that body without us to Judge the Quick and the Dead.”

How did such ideas fare and the composition of the movement’s leaders change after Keith’s disownment in 1692, and especially after his departure for England in January 1694? Until now we have known simply that the movement died out, with Charles P. Keith’s Chronicles of Pennsylvania offering the only description of its fragmentation. The Keithian movement did die, but from a process of extravagant and instructive motion. Between 1694 and 1702 different members espoused new versions of reformed Quakerism, adopted quasi-Baptist principles, joined hands with a German Lutheran millenarian, secured membership in a Particular Baptist congregation and destroyed a “Keithian Baptist” congregation in Chester County, in a way that opens up new views on the dynamics of religious disputes and mobility in late seventeenth-century Pennsylvania.

Within months of Keith’s departure for London his followers

12 “Some Propositions to heale the Breach that is amongst us,” Apr. 18, 1692, in Box 572, Papers Relating to the Keithian Controversy, Department of Records, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting.

13 This document, untitled, is also in Box 572, ibid., and has been printed in Frost, “unlikely Controversialists,” 24. Frost treats the document as having been written by Keith. But it is unsigned and clearly sent from one group to another since it is headed “Some of our Principles to which if you agree we are likely to agree with you on other things.”

already had divided into at least two groups. One was led by John Hart and contained Keithians from Pennepek, north of Philadelphia where Hart's farm was located, as well as others from Philadelphia and Chester County to the south. This branch promoted a radical egalitarian Quakerism that emphasized the work of the Holy Spirit in all members. According to a description written in 1700 by the Keithian William Davis, Hart appeared before a meeting of Keith's followers in May 1694 with a list of queries to reaffirm the group's claim as reformed "Christian Quakers." To the question "whether the Quakers were wrong from the beginning" and whether baptism was a legitimate Christian rite, Hart's answer was, firmly, "no." But to the questions "whether we have the Spirit of Discerning, that we can know a man without words and works," and whether the preaching of women, alleged to be declining among orthodox Friends, was legitimate, Hart answered "yes." Davis claimed in retrospect that Hart's followers believed "that the Light within, or Word in the heart was to be preferred before the written Word," and that Christian Quakers "did pretend to know men's hearts without words or works" through the Holy Spirit.15

The second group followed the aforementioned William Davis, whose peculiar 1700 treatise, Jesus Christ the Crucified Man, the Eternal Son of God, provides crucial information about the later Keithians. Raised in England, he grew up as an Anglican and underwent a Quaker conversion at age eighteen. After some fourteen years as a Friend he left the movement briefly when he reputedly discovered that some Quakers accepted only as allegories the doctrines of the "Eternal Judgment and the Resurrection of the Dead," although he rejoined the Friends before emigrating to Pennsylvania in 1681. Then in 1692, after listening to George Keith, he "left them again," never to return.16

In May 1694 Davis and another Keithian, Thomas Rutter, owner of a small iron furnace in Chester County and a former

15 These developments are described in William Davis, Jesus the Crucified Man, the Eternal Son of God . . . [Philadelphia, 1700], unpaginated introduction. The demand for a "Spirit of Discerning" echoed Keith's vocabulary of 1691 when Keith was attempting to reform orthodox Quakerism. See Butler, " 'Gospel Order Improved,' " 438.
16 Davis, Jesus the Crucified Man, unpaginated introduction.
German Mennonite turned Quaker who supported Keith’s schism, rebuked Hart and began to “Preach and assert, that the Scriptures were the Word of God,” meaning that they denied Hart’s claim to possess a “Spirit of Discerning” that superseded the Gospels. They accepted the rite of baptism and charged that Hart and his followers were still “one with the Quakers” on the “person of Christ, and the Resurrection.” In 1695 Davis and Rutter invaded the Yearly Meeting of Hart’s Keithians to argue these views. According to Davis, Hart’s followers called Rutter a “blasphemer” and compared Davis “to Simon Magus the witch, because I continued to preach Christ (in imitation of G[eorge] K[eith] as they rendered it) as Simon Magus did in imitation of the Apostles.”

Davis’ religious principles continued to prove fleet of foot. Having already split with John Hart, he now associated himself with Henry Bernard Koster, a German millenarian. Koster arrived in Pennsylvania with other Germans led by Johannes Kelpius in 1694. Although the group’s background and principles remain mysterious and need systematic study, Koster may have been one of its more orthodox members, a Lutheran who later authored a millenarian work, *De Ressurrectione Imperri Aeternitatus*, published in Europe in 1702 after his permanent return there. These Germans soon contributed to Pennsylvania’s religious turmoil through their own discord. Soon after arriving, Koster fell out with Kelpius and began to preach at the home of Isaac Jacob Van Bebber, a former Mennonite turned Quaker, then Keithian. There he met William Davis, Thomas Rutter, and other unnamed Keithians. Their interest in Koster is revealed in a work by Ernest Ludwig Rathlef on German religious eccentrics published in 1743. Working from an interview Rathlef held with Koster in the 1730s, Rathlef described Koster’s sermons as extraordinarily Christocentric. Certainly they were superbly suited to the Keithians’ theological concerns, since Koster spoke often on the “human nature of Christ, His death, His merits, His ascension, His second coming, the use of Scriptures,” and, to

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please the Keithians' new interests, on “the Lord's Supper and of Baptism.”

For the next three years Koster, Davis, and Rutter pursued a new ecclesiastical discipline. They worshipped together at Germantown and appeared at the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of 1696 in an attempt to debate the Delaware Valley's leading Quakers. However, substantial information about their union comes only from hostile sources. A pamphlet by Francis Daniel Pastorius, a converted Mennonite who remained loyal to orthodox Quakerism, asserted that Koster, Davis, Rutter and their followers settled near Germantown at a place they named “Irenia, that is to say, The House of Peace.” But the group soon engaged in so many disputes that according to Pastorius the settlement “not long after became Erinnia, The House of Raging Contention.”

Evidence drawn from the minutes of the Pennepek Baptist Church, a Particular Baptist congregation north of Philadelphia, suggests that the Germantown congregation briefly attempted a commutarian experiment. The Pennepek clerk described the congregation as one in which “William Davis, with one Henry Bernard Koster a Germane, and some more made up a kinde of Society, did Break bread, Lay on hands, washed one anothers feet, and were about having A Community of Goods. But in a little time they disagreed, and broke to pieces.”

Yet in his interview with Rathlef, Koster insisted that he only agreed to exorcise the spirit of Quakerism from Davis, Rutter, and their followers using Lutheran liturgy and to baptize them in the Delaware River, which he did in 1697 or 1698, but never became their minister.


20 Minutes, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, Sept. 27, 1696. George Hutcheson, then apparently associated with John Hart's Keithians, also appeared at the Burlington meeting, but the reference to him does not indicate that he and Davis had joined forces.

21 Quoted in Marion Dexter Learned, The Life of Francis Daniel Pastorius, the Founder of Germantown (Philadelphia, 1908), 213.

22 Minutes, Pennepek Baptist Church, 25–26, American Baptist Historical Society, Colgate-Rochester Theological Seminary, Rochester, N. Y.

Whatever its exact nature, the association with Koster probably solidified these Keithians' belief in the rites of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Not surprisingly then, sometime in 1697 Davis and several unnamed followers applied for admission to the Particular Baptist congregation at Pennepek. Although their request was first denied, Davis pursued it insistently and the congregation sought advice from its former minister Elias Keach, then in London. Keach returned an answer after consulting with other Baptist ministers that demonstrated how widely the Keithian reputation for contention had spread overseas. "It is all our Judgments," Keach wrote, "that you by no means Baptize them, much less Admitt them to your Communion: seeing we are assured of the Ill Consequences of such an Act, Especially they holding against the authority of the Civil Magistrate." This warning probably referred to a 1693 complaint by George Keith that the Quakers had misused the authority of the civil government to silence him. Yet despite it the Pennepek Baptists admitted Davis and some followers to the congregation.  

Davis' membership there proved brief. By January 1698 he took up a familiar Keithian obsession to begin a theological dispute centering on the person of Christ. According to the church minutes, Davis told the congregation that it was impossible to separate human and divine natures in Christ. Christ was "godman, and not humane and Divine; but human[-]divine, or divine-human." Christ "was Inferious to his father . . . and in no other ways Equal with God the father, than Joseph was to Pharaoh, or as a man's son can be to his father." Indeed, according to Davis, there were "two gods in heaven, A greater, and an Inferious god, and that the greater sent the Inferious or Lesser god to die, and the Inferious god did.” After making unsuccessful efforts to secure his recantation, the Pennepek Baptists excommunicated Davis.  

Davis then turned his attention south to a Keithian congregation in Chester County, and it is at this point that we need to examine Keithian activity there. Fortunately, some records from this congregation have survived; they reveal a congregation also edging toward Baptist principles. The congregation met at the house of Thomas Powell in Providence and originally formed part of the Keithian

24 Minutes, Pennepek Baptist Church, 10.
25 Ibid., 12–16.
group led by John Hart. Two marriage certificates of 1694 bear signatures of persons associated with all three Keithian congregations in Pennsylvania—at Philadelphia, Pennepek, and Chester County—and testify to the close connections which first prevailed among them. They also confirm their status as reformed or "Christian Quaker" congregations, since the marriage ceremony described in them virtually duplicated that used by orthodox Friends and carried the salutation, "Dear Friends."

By 1697, however, these Keithians too had altered their beliefs. In a three-page narrative one of the members described how, after coming from England and Wales "under [the] denomination of Quakers," they joined in the Keithian schism. Then, sometime in 1696 "it pleased the lord to incline our hearts to be moore like those of Bethelehem [sic] or them of Thesolonica to Search the Scripture" further for true Christian principles. As a result, by 1697 another new religious configuration had appeared in Chester County, part Quaker, part Keithian, part Baptist. Retaining the strict standards for admission to membership Keith had demanded for Quakers, the congregation decided that as "belief in the heart is the door unto the Church in the Sight of God[,] So the Belief in the heart and Confession with mouth and Being Baptized is the door unto the Church in the Sight of men." The congregation also rejected oaths, reaffirmed the Quaker refusal to bear arms, and agreed to follow Quaker customs "of good repast ... as modest Apparel, proper Language, the days of the Week and names of the months as first Second So forth According as it is used in the Scripture."

In addition to paralleling the spiritual migration of Davis, Rutter, and their associates (Davis himself a sometime Chester County landowner), the alterations in Chester County probably gained impetus from changes apparently being made among Philadelphia Keithians. It is in the Pennsylvania capital that Keithian affairs are most difficult to follow. But an ambiguous reference in the Chester

26 These documents, one dated Mar. 28, 1694, the other dated June 25, 1694, are in the records of the Brandywine Baptist Church, Chadds Ford, Pa. (microfilm copy from the Southern Baptist Historical Society, Nashville, Tenn.).

County narrative suggests that the adoption of adult baptism there followed the acceptance of infant baptism among Philadelphia Keithians; and certainly some changes were occurring there since two persons connected with the latter group in 1692–1693, Richard Dungworth and Thomas Budd, were baptized in the Chester County congregation after its reorganization in 1697.

The concern about the problem of baptism, whether infant or adult, in fact hung over Chester County Keithians for some time but without deleterious results. The man who first administered baptism among them in 1697, Abel Noble, had in fact been baptized by Thomas Killingsworth, a Baptist minister in Cohansey, New Jersey, as early as 1694 or 1695. Yet Noble worshipped with the Chester County Keithians for at least three years before they adopted the rite themselves, at which time his presence proved fortuitous. When the Chester County Keithians did decide to adopt baptism they asked for help from Philadelphia’s Particular Baptists, a branch of the Pennepek congregation. “But they no way being Assistant to us only left us to our Liberty to Chuse an Administrater,” so the Chester County Keithians selected Noble to perform the rite because “he was Baptised and Kept Among us all along.”

The Chester County records also make clear how after 1693 the Keithian movement remained one of common and poor persons. The 1694 marriage certificates and the register of baptisms performed between 1697 and 1700 yield a list of about sixty adherents who probably lived in the county during the decade, excluding those like Thomas Budd or Richard Dungworth who likely journeyed there for special occasions. When these sixty names are checked with the principal sources of information on wealth in the county in these years, the 1689 Blackwell rent roll and the 1693 Chester County tax list, Keithians on either list emerge as plain or poor persons. Of the ten males on the 1693 tax list, eight paid less than that year’s average of 4.20 shillings in taxes, and only two paid more, while only two of the sixty appear on the 1689 rent roll at all, Thomas Powell, who held 300 acres, and John Palmer who

28 “Things transacted by a Congregation usually met at Powell’s house in upper Providence”; “Some Names of them that are baptized” [1697–1700], in Records, Brandywine Baptist Church. This baptismal list has been printed in George Smith, *History of Delaware County, Pennsylvania . . .* (Philadelphia, 1862), 544, but with some errors.
owned 100. The rest were either landless or new residents who had settled there after 1689, an important fact we will look at shortly. Similarly, a check of colony officeholders reveals that not a single person associated with the congregation held any elected or appointed post in either county or provincial government between 1690 and 1720. In short, available records indicate that common and poor persons still were the persons most likely to attach themselves to a Keithian congregation in the later 1690s.

The congregation's membership also was extraordinarily fluid. Of thirty-six persons connected with it in 1694, only twelve continued their association after 1697. Conversely, some thirty-one persons not associated with the congregation before 1697 were baptized there between 1697 and 1700. In short, only a fifth of the total number of persons associated with the congregation at any point in its history remained with it steadily between 1694 and 1700, and nearly half of the total membership joined after 1697. This information helps make sense of the large number of adherents who appear on neither the 1689 Blackwell rent roll or the 1693 Chester County tax list. They could, of course, have been landless or extremely poor. But given the alterations of congregational membership it seems likely that most probably were new arrivals in the county and part of the immigration that rapidly expanded Pennsylvania's population in the 1690s.

This information gives us an expanded view of the people we term "Keith's followers." Rather than comprising a dwindling number of his earliest supporters, they were instead a shifting body of individuals whose changes in congregational membership matched alterations in congregational belief. Certainly the movement did not quietly die out after 1693. Instead, it moved beyond its old base,

29 Lemon and Nash, "Distribution of Wealth in Eighteenth-Century America," 1-24; 1693 Chester County Tax List, Chester County Miscellaneous Papers, 1684-1847, HSP.

30 These results were achieved by comparing names on the 1694 Keithian marriage certificates cited above in note 26 with the names in the baptismal register of 1697-1700 cited in note 28. Since the congregation used the rite of adult baptism as the principal sign of membership after 1697, those who continued their association with it after 1697 should have had their names listed in the new register. At the same time it is possible that not everyone active in the congregation in both periods would have signed the two certificates of 1694, although their numbers should have been small since the number of persons attending the ceremonies from Philadelphia suggests that most local members were present.
losing some early adherents, holding others, but most importantly winning new members whose connection with the original schism among Quakers was nonexistent, remote, or even distinguished by opposition to it. Thus the same Jacob Chandler who was attacked for his “abominable doctrine” by one of Keith’s early supporters in 1692 left the orthodox Quaker meeting in Chester County as late as 1696 to join what Friends called the “Separatists,” while William Beckingham left the Particular Baptist congregation at Cohansey, New Jersey, in the same year to join the Keithian congregation in Chester County.\textsuperscript{31}

In the end all this mobility and the work of William Davis finally undid the Chester County Keithian congregation and what remained of the Keithian movement, although between 1697 and 1699 membership increased steadily in the reorganized congregation. This growth ended with William Davis’ appearance. Just ejected from Pennepek and accompanied by his old associate Thomas Rutter, he asked to join the Chester County congregation. Some members, including, apparently, the former Baptist William Beckingham, approved. But according to the clerk of the Baptist congregation at Pennepek, many others opposed Davis’ request, including one of the congregation’s administrators of baptism, Thomas Martin. During the ensuing argument Davis and Thomas Rutter apparently obtained the congregation’s record book and began recording baptisms in it themselves. Now not only did Davis replace Thomas Martin as administrator of baptism, but Rutter joined him in this role, and the two held services as far away as Pennepek. The turmoil shattered the group. After September 1700 no further baptisms were entered in its records and an unknown writer summarized the effect of the disputing: “our Congregational Estate was dissolved ... we could no longer Bear up our Church polity: Being dispersed [we] continued without the face of a Church for many years.”\textsuperscript{32}

It is especially appropriate that the final denominational destina-
tions of some of the later Keithians are often best revealed through the *Journal* George Keith published to describe his final visit to Pennsylvania between 1702 and 1704. A former Scot Presbyterian turned Quaker, then schismatic, he now came as a missionary for the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, the Anglican body chartered by the Crown in 1701. His major goal was to convert orthodox Friends, though he accomplished little in this regard. They refused to hear him. When he demanded to speak at the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting in September 1703 they pushed him into the street.33

Sealed off from the main body of Quakers, Keith spent more time in Pennsylvania with the group that still bore his name but which he no longer led. In March 1703 he debated William Davis in the old Keithian meeting house in Philadelphia. Allies a decade earlier, Keith now rebuked Davis as a “Sect-Master,” a label Keith’s enemies must have viewed with some amusement, and ridiculed Davis’ newly published book, *Jesus the Crucified Man, the Eternal Son of God.*34 Certainly no volume better exemplified the centrifugal intellectual and ecclesiastical tendencies of the Keithian movement. It not only expanded on Davis’ ideas about there being two Gods in heaven, which he had espoused earlier at Pennepek, but backed them with a generously ecumenical collection of citations from a diverse range of authorities, from the classical Puritan, William Perkins, to Anglicans like Bishop Usher and the obscure Edward Leigh, and the Baptist Benjamin Keach, a major figure among London Dissenters and father of the first Particular Baptist minister at Pennepek, Elias Keach.35


34 Ibid., 37. One contemporary reported that Davis won the debate with Keith. See the letter from William Hudson to Jonathan and Mary Dickinson, Apr. 19, 1703, Maria Dickinson Logan Papers, HSP. Keith, however, claimed victory for himself in *Some of the Many False, Scandalous, Blasphemous and Selfcontradictory Assertions of William Davis ...* [Philadelphia, 1703], 7-12.

Indeed, between the publication of Davis' book and his debate with Keith, Davis had even made yet another change of allegiance and, of course, started a new dispute. Information about these developments comes from the minutes of the Mill Yard Church, a Seventh Day Baptist congregation in London founded in the Commonwealth period. In 1701 it received notice that Davis and Thomas Rutter had formed a Seventh Day Baptist congregation near Pennepek of eight families and two single adults. But the London minutes also noted that the congregation was already engaged in a dispute over what the Londoners termed "a Peculiar Notion they have of the Person of Christ and the blessed Trinity," a sure sign of Davis' presence, and later references in the London minutes reveal that by 1703 Davis and Rutter had fallen into a dispute themselves that ultimately led to Davis' expulsion from the congregation and his departure for Rhode Island.\footnote{Minutes, Mill Yard Church, London, 120, 146, 147, at the Seventh Day Baptist Historical Society, Plainfield, N. J. Davis' later career in this denomination can be traced through references in "The Seventh Day Baptist Church in Newport, R. I.," Seventh Day Baptist Memorial, I (1851-1852), 172-180; in an article, "William Davis," in ibid., II (1853), 101-116; and in Corliss F. Randolph, A History of Seventh Day Baptists in West Virginia (Plainfield, N. J., 1905), 1-8. Randolph argues that Davis attended Oxford but no evidence for this is found in Alumni Oxonienses, Being the Matriculation Register of the University, 1500-1714, J. Foster, ed. (Oxford, 1891-1892).}

Keith's mission also put him into contact with other Keithians who were changing denominations. In February 1703 he debated John Hart, one of the earliest leaders of the movement, whom he termed an "antinomian" on the ground that Hart allegedly believed that even persons who committed outrageous sins could not fall from grace. Whatever the truth of the charge, by the time Keith made it, Hart and his followers were about to unite with the Particular Baptist congregation at Pennepek. This occurred after Hart and John Swift, the most prominent remaining Keithians at Pennepek, sent "propositions" to the Particular Baptists there in the summer of 1702. Sometime within the next year the Baptists "agreed that we and they would Join in the publick worship of god and so make one meeting." The merger quickly proved momentous for everyone concerned in it because the Baptist minister at Pennepek, John Watts, died of smallpox shortly after it was accomplished. Watts had been enormously important to the congregation. In the
early 1690s he filled the vacancy created when its first minister, Elias Keach, left for London, and in 1697–1698 he defended the congregation from William Davis' onslaught. To replace him the congregation now turned in part to its newest members. John Hart was named to administer baptism and John Swift became one of three members authorized to “exercise their gifts in publick,” that is, to preach. Similarly, but much later, at least five of the original thirteen members of the Particular Baptist congregation organized in Chester County in 1715—John and Elizabeth Powell, Richard Buffington, Margery Martin and John Beckingham—had belonged to the Keithian congregation there between 1697 and 1700.37

Anglicans also gained converts among Keithians. In his Journal Keith named the Quakers he and his fellow Anglican minister John Talbot claimed to have converted while on their mission in the Delaware Valley. But Keith failed to reveal that at least half of these converts had not been Friends since 1692 and were among the oldest Keithians in those parts. They included Thomas Bowels and John Read of Shrewsbury and Robert Wheeler and Thomas Budd of Burlington. Other Anglican converts included Keithians involved in the later stages of the movement. Thus, in Chester County John Hannum and Thomas Powell allowed Keith to preach in their homes, after which both men “became zealous members of the Church, with diverse others of their neighbours,” although Keith unfortunately did not name them.38

Finally, in eloquent testimony to the chaos produced by the later Keithian movement, one Chester County resident drew up his own doctrinal positions in hopes that perhaps some existing denomination might claim them, and him too. In the late 1690s Walter Martin executed a will providing that one acre of his estate be used as the site for a church building. Rather peculiarly, he did not specify which sect or denomination it should be. It was not to be used by “Quakers or reputed Quakers.” But it could be claimed by any other group that believed in several thoroughly orthodox points, among them baptism, the Lord's Supper, and "the resurrection of the

37 Keith, A Journal of Travels, 36; Keith to Thomas Bray, Feb. 24, 1703/4, in ibid., xxiv; Records, Pennepek Baptist Church, 38–39.
bodies of the dead." Although Martin's name does not appear on any list of Keithians (others with his surname do), the effect of the county's spiritual turmoil seems especially evident in the terms of his gift. Confused by the decade of religious upheaval, doctrine here literally waited for an ecclesiastical home. It soon found one, of course, since by 1702 a voracious Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts was already supporting an Anglican congregation there, one that it named simply St. Martin's Church.39

With Davis' turn to Sabbatarian principles, Hart's association with the Pennepek Baptists and Keith's conversion of old and new Keithians to Anglicanism, all the distinguishable Keithian movements had finally died out. Where then have they taken us? Their history suggests first that Pennsylvania is rich with sources revealing the activity of common men and women in religion. In this case, they stretch from the unusually detailed minutes of the Pennepek Baptist congregation to luckily surviving Chester County Keithian materials and Sabbatarian Baptist records from London. It also suggests that this remained a religious movement of common and poorer persons. If it is impossible to demonstrate that many of them came from the ranks of the abject poor, in part because tax collectors seldom list those who pay nothing, we should note that few Keithians who remained in the movement belonged to the emerging Pennsylvania aristocracy either. Moreover, their activity was no mask for more "real" economic or political concern. After 1693 they used the movement to reshape their inherited spiritual world. They transcended their original protests against Pennsylvania Quakerism and drew adherents from among people who never had been Friends and had not supported the movement in its early stages.

The story of the Keithians also helps show how in the broad flux of early Pennsylvania social development, with its quick growth in population, sudden mix of ethnic groups, and considerable economic instability, denominational and sectarian allegiances proved as fluid as did political alliances or residence. We should not, of course, be surprised by this. Historians now are well aware that considerable geographic mobility characterized seventeenth-century populations in both western Europe and America—one powerful demonstration

39 Quoted in Smith, History of Delaware County, 207–208.
of it coming in Chester County, where the geographic mobility now seems to have been reinforced by a striking mobility of spiritual commitment there too. Quakers became Keithians, Keithians became Baptists, Baptists became Keithians, Keithians of several stripes became Anglicans, and some waited for denominations to claim them. Indeed, if this denominational and sectarian mobility was even reasonably common in other times and places—the examples of mid-eighteenth-century Connecticut or New York's Burned Over District spring quickly to mind—perhaps the churning of America's nineteenth-century urban population, to take just one example, was but an industrial manifestation of broader and older processes of spiritual as well as physical movement which stemmed from many sources, including religious ones.40

Also important is the fact that the mobility manifested by the Keithians failed to destroy the colony's still infant mainstream Protestant denominations. Rather, here the evidence suggests that they all benefitted from what in the end might have been a "churching" process in the later Keithian movement, in which settlers moved to mainstream denominations by moving through others. True, Keithians sometimes destroyed congregations. Yet their activity slowly fed at least three denominations despite particular casualties along the way. Thus, the distance between sect and denomination—between Justus Falckner's "sects and hordes" and Pennsylvania's better-known Protestant groups—proved slight here, as movements that "went nowhere" played vital roles in the complex process that created Pennsylvania's colonial religious heritage.