L&A Treasures
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Colorful Find!

The most interesting things come across my desk! In my job, I often get the first glimpse of some of the most curious, fascinating and sometimes even colorful documents given to the historical society for the Library & Archives collections. A year ago, we received the papers and photographs of the Katherine Marion Miller Family, 1782-1933, that include materials related to several generations of Mrs. Miller’s ancestors.

Dean. The Deans’ son, Samuel Dean, a riverboat captain, settled near the shore of the Ohio River in Manchester before 1865, bringing this family to Western Pennsylvania.

Fraktur is one of the many forms of decorative arts and folk art traditions of the Pennsylvania Germans that was prevalent in America from the late 18th century to the middle of the 19th. Although the Elizabeth Duck document is not signed by the artist, it is illustrated with birds and flowers: a wonderful gem now held in our care. Below is an English translation of the German text of Elizabeth Duck’s Geburt und Taufschein:

In the year of Christ, 1782, at nine o’clock in the morning, a daughter was bestowed upon the honorable wife of Philip Duck. The sun was in the sign of Virgo, and the moon in Grehf. This daughter was named Elizabeth Duck.

God grant grace, power, and strength that this Bess Duck may grow up in the fear of the Lord, and to His praise and glory, that she may zealously seek after the pure milk of knowledge and the primitive salvation of souls, according to the declared profession of faith and confession of sins, through true repentance and penance. Before the Christian congregation, she has been assisted to spiritual second birth of holy baptism, and has been baptized and incorporated into the divine hand of God by William Williams, preacher and servant of the word.

The earliest document in the collection is a Geburts und Taufschein for Elizabeth Duck (also spelled Dock) of Lancaster County, Pa. Geburts und Taufschein are birth and baptismal certificates that are decorated and commonly referred to as Fraktur. Elizabeth, the great-great-great-grandmother of Katherine Miller, later married John Dean.
according to the command of Christ, Matthew 28, verse 19. This Elizabeth Duck was received and accepted as a member of the Communion of Saints the 19th day of May 1792, through baptism of a second birth and transformation of the Holy Ghost as taught by Saint Paul, and through faith in our Savior, Jesus Christ, whose dearly earned merits have made us heirs to heavenly joys and eternal bliss. Therefore, forget not how the apostle Paul lays down our duty, Colossians 1, verses 12-14. Return thanks to our Father who has made us capable of the inheritance of the Saints in Glory. This Elizabeth was born and baptized in America, state of Pennsylvania, Lancaster County, Earl Township.

When scarce we begin to live, From first walk to cool grave in the earth, Is but a short and steady step, Alas, in one moment Our strength declines And each and every year Finds us riper for the bier. Who knows in what hour, The last summons may wake us For God's voice To no man has disclosed it. Hence, he who has put his house in order Cheerfully leaves this world, But a false security May cause eternal death.