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## **Room(s) for More: A Communal Dwelling or Family Home at Ephrata**

*By Jeff Bach and Nick Siegert*

We would like to begin with an Ephrata Cloister trivia question:

The Ephrata Cloister as we know it today consists of nine original buildings (ten if you include the barn), two historic structures not original to the site, and a number of other administrative and reproduction buildings. Of the nine original buildings that are standing today, how many were built for celibate sisters?

Was it: a. One, b. Two, c. Three or More, or d. None of the above.

We bet that most of you answered “a.” And, you might be right. But on the other hand, you might be wrong. It is generally accepted that Saron, one of the most prominent buildings at the Ephrata Cloister, is the only remaining celibate women’s residence still standing here at Ephrata. According to the *Chronicon Ephratense*, the chronicle of Ephrata’s official history, edited and partially written by Peter Miller and published in 1786,<sup>1</sup> the celibate sisters lived in three different communal structures at Ephrata. The first was Kedar, built in 1735 and demolished at some unknown time. The second house for celibate sisters was an unnamed structure, built around 1739.<sup>2</sup> The location and fate of the second house are unknown. The third house was Saron, built originally in 1743 for married couples who separated to live in celibacy in the two sides of the large structure. Most of the couples resumed marital life at their private homes by 1745, when the monastic house was turned over to the celibate sisters. The house was renamed Saron, to accompany the new name of the reorganized sisterhood, the “Roses of Sharon.”<sup>3</sup> Saron was the home of the celibate women until the last original sisters died in 1814. The structure still stands.

One surviving building at Ephrata raises questions about the possibility of an additional structure for multiple monastic residents. The building interpreted currently as the Weaver’s House at Ephrata Cloister

has been viewed as a single-family house since the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission took ownership of the Ephrata Cloister. For about a hundred years before that it was known generically as the Parsonage, presumably for the minister of the German Seventh Day Baptist congregation at Ephrata. At the time when the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania took control of the property, the house was serving as a parsonage.

The house has certain features that suggest that it was built for more than one family during the communal period of the Ephrata community. Architectural evidence suggests a structure for more than a single family. Documentary evidence offers some possibilities for the purpose of such a large building during the communal period. Based on this combination of evidence, the authors propose that the Weaver's House is not a single family dwelling, and may have housed a group of celibates during part of the eighteenth century.

## **Introduction**

### ***The Ephrata Community***

The Ephrata Cloister, now a historic site and museum administered by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, began as a religious communal society founded by Georg Conrad Beissel on the banks of the Cocalico Creek in 1732. A baker born in 1691 Eberbach, Germany, Beissel immigrated in 1720 and worked a year as a weaver's apprentice with Peter Becker in Germantown. Becker was a minister of the Brethren, or Dunkers, a group founded in 1708 in Schwarzenau. They had not yet resumed worship together in America when Beissel arrived. After a year with Becker, Beissel moved into the area drained by the Conestoga River, seeking to live in a small fellowship of hermits. In 1724, Beissel was baptized by Peter Becker as the Brethren organized a new congregation in the area. Beissel was chosen as the leader of the congregation.

Beissel's emphasis on worship on the Sabbath and the superiority of celibacy led to a break from the rest of the Brethren in 1728. In 1732 Beissel abandoned his small break-away congregation and moved to the banks of the Cocalico Creek, joining Emmanuel Eckerlin to live a hermit's life. Soon three celibate men and two celibate women followed Beissel to his new location. The group built cabins and launched the nucleus of the Ephrata community, named by its members the "Camp of the Solitary" (*das Lager der Einsamen*). Soon more people followed, seeking celibate living

under Beissel's leadership. Married families, known as householders, also came, settling on farms around the monastic community. The community achieved a pinnacle of artistic achievement in its ornamented calligraphy (*Fraktur*) and original music compositions and hymn-text writing around 1750. This time also marked the peak membership, with about eighty celibates and approximately 220 people in householder families. By 1760 decline set in, accelerating after Beissel's death in 1768. The death of the last celibate sister in 1813 marked the end of Ephrata's monastic community.<sup>4</sup> The householder families reorganized the congregation into the German Seventh Day Baptists, and formed a bond with English Seventh Day Baptists in the nineteenth century. The German Seventh Day Baptists at Ephrata were never a large congregation, and by the twentieth century were in decline. They decided with some internal dissent to sell the property to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and its Pennsylvania Historic Commission in the 1930s. Objections were finally resolved and the state took over the site in 1941, embarking on a long restoration process that resulted in the museum of today.

### ***A Family Home ... or Not?***

One of the structures still standing is currently interpreted as the Weaver's House. After restoration work in the 1950s and 1960s, it stands as a two-story building of log construction with a large central chimney, situated alongside the cemetery known as God's Acre. Only the first floor is finished and open to the public.

For restoration purposes, architects G. Edwin Brumbaugh and John Heyl assumed that the structure was a single-family structure. This interpretation was likely the result of the building being identified as the parsonage of the minister of the German Seventh Day Baptist congregation. Rev. Samuel Zerfass lived there in the early twentieth century.<sup>5</sup> The structure's identity as the Parsonage dates back to at least 1844, according to a report by a visitor from a member of the English Seventh Day Baptists, whose account appeared in their journal, *The Sabbath Recorder*.<sup>6</sup> The structure also served as a residence for the schoolteacher of the Ephrata Academy in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup> In the past it has been suggested as a temporary residence for married householders who were waiting for permanent housing or the purchase of farms. It has also been suggested that it was constructed by Cloister members as a workshop, although no known documentation exists to support this.<sup>8</sup>

The one common thread of all of the interpretations since 1844 is the assumption that it was built for a single family. So far, specific references identifying the structure are known from eighteenth-century sources. The original purpose and even date of the large building is unknown. Certain features of the building suggest that there may have been room—and rooms—for more than just a single family when it was built in the eighteenth century. The evidence that follows allows for the possibility of alternative interpretations for this structure.

### **The Weaver's House at the time of restoration**

Before looking at the evidence in the Weaver's House that supports the case this paper makes, a review of the condition of the structure at the time when the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania took over the property will be useful. Various oversights, discrepancies, and paucity of records related specifically to this structure complicate the process of determining its original purpose. As will become clear, an unusual convergence of inadequately recorded observations and the bad condition of the building at the time create problems unique to this building.

Known as the Parsonage well before 1941, the dwelling had been the home of Rev. Samuel Zerfass since the early 1900s. A postcard from the early twentieth century depicts the house, showing a one-story addition to the rear (north side) of the building and a roofed porch at the front.<sup>9</sup> Otherwise the building appeared to have the same dimensions as today, and had white clapboard siding.

Important potential documentation from a 1936 expedition to Ephrata by photographers and architects of the Historical American Buildings Survey (HABS) is lacking. For unknown reasons, the team did not document the Weaver's House (the Parsonage) when they recorded observations on the other deteriorating buildings.<sup>10</sup>

When the Pennsylvania Historical Commission (PHC, now the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, or PHMC) acquired the property in 1941, they began restoring the historic buildings. One stipulation of the purchase was that some of the surviving members of the Seventh Day German Baptist congregation, the sellers of the property, be permitted to remain living on the property for a period of time and that the buildings they inhabited be updated with indoor plumbing, sewage connections, and electric service. The Weaver's House was one of these buildings.<sup>11</sup> These changes further compromised existing evidence in the

building. The PHC hired G. Edwin Brumbaugh, a registered architect and local scholar, to do the restoration. He was the son of Martin Grove Brumbaugh, who was governor of Pennsylvania from 1915 to 1919, a member of the Church of the Brethren, and author of a history of the Brethren that included much information about the Ephrata Cloister.

Brumbaugh was typically very methodical and careful to take copious field notes and make numerous sketches before starting a restoration project. Upon his initial examination of the Parsonage in 1941 he described it as:

walls of framed timbers, covered with clapboards, in rather good condition. (All outside sheathing and finish relatively late). Roof slate, in good condition. The entire building leans some eight inches out of plumb to the west. It can probably be secured in this position. Fireplace, chimney, stairs, and most interior finish must be restored. The interior is little more than a shell.<sup>12</sup>

In 1948, Brumbaugh completed a set of “Survey Before Restoration” drawings prior to beginning restoration work. The Weaver’s House is among the buildings included in the drawing.<sup>13</sup> These drawings along with his other notes and sketches are the only documentary evidence of the pre-restoration condition of this building. Apparently no pictures were taken of the inside or outside of the building at the time.<sup>14</sup>

In 1953, presumably before beginning the restoration of the interior of the Parsonage, Brumbaugh prepared five field sketches for the entire building. For Brumbaugh this was an extremely low number. He prepared many more sketches for the other historic buildings at Ephrata and they were of much finer detail.<sup>15</sup> These sketches show less detail and quality in comparison to the 1948 drawing plans. Perhaps by 1953 Brumbaugh was under more pressure to complete the restoration, possibly explaining the lack of detail and fewer sketches. Unfortunately this lack of documentation makes it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to judge the authenticity of the restoration, especially on the interior. By 1955 the restoration of the exterior of the building was complete, but very little interior restoration work had been done, other than details deemed. In a letter dated December 31, 1956, Brumbaugh describes the limited interior work as “replacing the main entry door with a vertical board door. Removed, relocated, or replaced windows and window openings on all facades. Added stone sink in the center of the first floor, east wall.”<sup>16</sup>

By the end of 1956, fifteen years after initially coming to Ephrata,

Brumbaugh had done virtually no interior restoration work on this structure except to install a stone sink under a window on the first floor. By 1960, under pressure from the state to work faster and accomplish more, Brumbaugh left the Ephrata project. He had enjoyed incredible latitude to determine his procedures and pace. He was a perfectionist in his work. He spent months on historical research on materials and techniques, and made numerous drawings. In addition, Brumbaugh was working on restoration projects at other sites for the PHC. As the years passed and the costs of materials and salaries rose, the PHC (PHMC after 1945) pressed him to finish the job. At the same time, the site was regularly open to visitors, at first hundreds and eventually thousands. The constant traffic likely frustrated Brumbaugh, causing further delays, in turn generating more pressure from the PHMC to complete the job. The relationship between Brumbaugh and the PHMC deteriorated severely, and in 1960 Brumbaugh left as the restoration architect.<sup>17</sup>

At this time, almost twenty years after the restoration of Ephrata started, the PHMC decided to hire an architect who could finish the project as quickly as possible. John K. Heyl replaced Brumbaugh immediately in 1960. Heyl had a more limited budget and shorter deadlines for completing the restoration. Heyl made drawings of the Parsonage in 1962.

Heyl's drawings evidence some discrepancies related to the chimney and fenestration compared with the drawings that Brumbaugh made in 1955. In general, however the set of drawings are consistent with each another.<sup>18</sup> When compared with Brumbaugh's 1948 drawings, the 1962 Heyl drawings of the interior of the Parsonage reveal that a considerable amount of historic fabric had been lost. About a quarter of the floorboards on the first floor had been removed along with most of the partition walls. Parts of stairs were missing.<sup>19</sup> Conditions in the interior of the Parsonage had deteriorated considerably since 1948, leaving Heyl little historic fabric with which to work. Restoration of the interior of the Parsonage did not begin until 1963 and continued until 1965. The drawings prepared under the contract for this job called for limited exterior work and substantial interior reconstruction. It is unclear whether Heyl based his plans on Brumbaugh's earlier research or generated his own details based on physical evidence and site-typical models. Heyl left no known documentation of the historical sources he used to do the restoration of the Parsonage.<sup>20</sup> All of these factors lead to the conclusion that determining the original

structural features of this building and its original function from original architectural material is extremely difficult, if not impossible.

### **Documentary Evidence for an additional monastic house**

Ezechiel Sangmeister opened his autobiography by extracting quotations from a now-lost manuscript version of the *Chronicon Ephratense*. Several of the quotations match closely the edited final text printed in 1786. However, much additional information also appears in this portion of Sangmeister's book. He quoted that "in 1739, the brother's built the Sister's other house."<sup>21</sup> Supporting evidence for an additional sisters' house other than Kedar, the first sisters' house, appears in a letter from Stephan Koch (Brother Agabus) written to his Dunker friend in Germany, Johann Lobach. Writing in October 1739, Koch noted that "in two houses live 26 single sisters." They "eat at one table and each had a room alone." Kedar was large enough to house thirty sisters, according a letter written in 1743 by Anna Thoma (Thommen) to her former pastor, Hieronymus d'Annoni. She wrote that "about thirty of us solitary spiritual sisters" live in Kedar.<sup>22</sup> According to Koch, in 1739 some sisters were living in a house other than Kedar. The reason why some might have lived separately is unknown. Ephrata's chronicle offers a tantalizing comment in the context of events in 1736. Among the celibate sisters, a "special band of holy matrons and virgins" submitted to "no headship but that of Christ."<sup>23</sup> Perhaps these women did not want live in the same house (Kedar) where Beissel's apartment had been added.

### **Unusual physical feature of the Weaver's House**

The Weaver's House is a large 29' 9½" x 24'5½" two-story log structure. It features clapboard siding and a steep side-lapped wood shingled roof with a traditional Germanic "kick." The structure also has a single off center central-chimney. While these features suggest a single-family house following a traditional Germanic plan designed around an internal fireplace, the sheer size of the building raises questions about interpreting it as a single-family home.<sup>24</sup>

In comparison to four other residential structures surviving at Ephrata, the Weaver's House is huge. These four structures admittedly were designed for small groups of celibates, perhaps only two or three persons, living together. The dimensions of these four residential structures are as follows:

The Beissel House is 23' x 19'3" (built ca. 1753),<sup>25</sup> the Physician's House is 26' x 20' (date of construction uncertain),<sup>26</sup> the Carpenter's House is 25'5" x 17' (built in the mid-eighteenth century),<sup>27</sup> and the so-called House by the Stream (the name given to it by the German Seventh Day Baptists in the twentieth century), attached to the Print Shop is 18'5" x 14'1". The House by the Stream was probably built prior to 1750; the Print Shop was built around 1810.<sup>28</sup> All of these structures are considerably smaller than the Weaver's House and were admittedly built for only a few celibate individuals. However, they reflect the kind of plan typical for single-family dwellings among the Swiss-German settlers in Pennsylvania.

One of the most unusual structural features of the Weaver's House is its two summer beams. Typically a single-family home contained only one summer beam in the center of the house.<sup>29</sup> A summer beam is commonly defined as a major, and usually massive, horizontal timber that spans the plates of a structure from gable end to gable end. Its purpose is to carry the load of the joists above it.<sup>30</sup> The use of two summer beams does not appear in any other surviving historic structures at Ephrata, nor in comparable Germanic residential buildings of the same era. As a comparison, the Hans Herr House, a 1719 historic Germanic single family home, has only one summer beam.<sup>31</sup> There are a number of old homes that use two or more summer beams in their construction but they tend to be larger homes with more complicated structures. Many barns with three bays have two summer beams.<sup>32</sup> The Weaver's House offers no internal evidence today for why two summer beams were used. Could the sheer size of this building along with the use of two summer beams imply that it had another purpose? Determining exactly how the original summer beams functioned in this structure is also complicated by the fact they were replaced during the 1963 restoration.<sup>33</sup>

While the size of the structure and the use of two summer beams suggest a purpose other than home for a single family, the question of date of construction is crucial. While no documentary evidence specifically identifies the construction of the building of the Weaver's House, dendrochronology tests conducted in 2000 offer some possibility for dating the house.

Dating based on dendrochronology is the most accurate scientific method of determining the construction date of a historical building. Dendrochronology is the science of dating and analyzing wood samples drilled from timbers in buildings and analyzing the evidence of annual

growth rings that are visible in the specimens. While this scientific testing can be highly accurate, it is only as reliable as the quality of the samples. The ideal timber sample should have bark edges, which is necessary for establishing the cutting dates for the trees. Some of the samples taken from the various buildings at Ephrata in 2000 were in excellent condition.<sup>34</sup> However, some of the samples came from timber that had been exposed to long term degrading conditions. In some of the samples, some of the outer sapwood rings could not be preserved during the coring process. These circumstances reduce the accuracy of dating by dendrochronology.

Three core samples were taken from timbers in the Weaver's House in 2000. All three samples suffered from a paucity of rings. One sample had no more than seventy-nine measurable rings, and the remaining two samples merely sixty-nine and forty-seven rings. A minimum of one hundred rings is the ideal for statistically solid dendrochronological dating.<sup>35</sup> The two weakest samples from the Weaver's House yielded cutting dates of 1707 and 1720. These dates could imply that the wood was cut long before the building was constructed, or that the wood was repurposed from another structure or project. The sample from the Weaver's House with seventy-nine rings was the most substantial of the three and yielded a date around 1743. This would imply that the Weaver's House was built sometime after 1743. However, the limited quality of even this sample makes the test inconclusive.<sup>36</sup> The specialists who conducted the tests on the samples from the Weaver's House decided that no firm conclusions could be drawn from the evidence. Additionally, the margin of error for these samples was wide enough to date the Weaver's House to the time of the second sisters' house construction. The dendrochronological testing and analysis cannot eliminate the Weaver's House from possibly being the second sisters' house based on date of construction.

In addition to the features of size, the presence of two summer beams, and the possibility of dating, the Weaver's House also has vestiges of architectural evidence that is analogous to evidence of internal room divisions in Saron. More specifically, the Weaver's House has a little evidence that shows the removal of internal room divisions in a manner similar to the removal of internal divisions in Saron. In this case, documentation recorded by G. Edwin Brumbaugh, the first architect of restoration at Ephrata, provides important supplemental evidence, since some of the remaining original architectural fabric in the Weaver's House was removed or replaced during restoration.

Because so little of the original architectural fabric survived in the interior of the Weaver's House, and because the documentary evidence is so scant, an important means of testing for earlier spatial configurations in the house is making analogous comparisons to Saron, the existing sisters' house, where evidence for the removal of interior walls is clearly visible.

Saron's interior was reconfigured in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Completed in 1743, Saron was originally named Hebron.<sup>37</sup> Like the Weaver's House, it was built of log construction. It was built onto the free-standing meetinghouse built earlier in 1741 and named Peniel (now known as the Saal). Hebron was built for married couples who were separating to take up celibate lives. The four-story monastic dormitory measured 30' x 70' and was 68' tall at the gables. The building was constructed as two large log buildings conjoined with a central dividing wall and with two front entrances.<sup>38</sup> Men lived in one half of the structure and women in the other half. The couples decided to return to marital life on their family farms by 1745. In that year, Beissel assigned Hebron to the sisters, renamed their order as the Order of the Roses of Sharon, and renamed the dormitory as Saron.<sup>39</sup>

Saron was remodeled in 1745 to accommodate the new residents. Prior to this year, the sisters had lived in Kedar (the first monastic house) and in the second sisters' unnamed house that Sangmeister and Koch mentioned. Saron was probably an adaptation of a typical German floor plan with a central fireplace and two rooms on either side: a Kitchen or *Küche*, on one side, and Stube (work room) on the other. The unique feature in Hebron / Saron was a series of cells built around the work rooms, with an additional narrow hallway leading away from the work room. The cells were small and designed for single occupancy. Each cell had narrow benches built into the wall, a few shelves with pegs, and a small cupboard. Some, perhaps all, of the cells had an enclosure like a closet. Each cell had one window for light. None of the cells in any of the monastic buildings at Ephrata seem to have been windowless. Twelve to fourteen cells existed on each of the first three floors in Saron.

Remodeling through the centuries has obscured the original number of cells on each floor. When the sisters of the Roses of Sharon occupied Saron in 1745, the original interior dividing wall between the two halves of the structure was removed, possibly changing stair locations. One of

the front entrances was closed. At this time the sisters also took over Peniel, the communal meeting house, for their own house of worship. It was also remodeled and known afterward simply as the Saal (meeting hall).<sup>40</sup> Saron reached its fullest occupancy around 1750 with forty sisters, after which a long slow decline ensued. The last of the celibate sisters died in 1813.

Saron was further remodeled in the nineteenth century, a process that may have begun late in the eighteenth century. Some of the walls dividing the monastic cells on the first and second floors were removed to create larger rooms. Poor and sick members of the congregation and community were permitted to live here. Hearths were modified as iron stoves replaced five-plate and jam stoves. The building was occupied until the early twentieth century. Because very little alteration was carried out on the third floor of Saron, that floor became the model for restoration of the rest of the building after the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania acquired the property in 1941.<sup>41</sup>

Diagrams of the second and third floor of the Saron appear below as they would have appeared after the Sisters' took over the buildings and remodeled them.

For making analogous comparisons between Saron and the Weaver's House, the second floor of Saron is particularly significant. In several locations on Saron's second floor the walls of cells have been removed in order to create larger rooms for later occupants. In almost every case where a cell wall was removed, evidence remains either on the floor or in the ceiling, or both, indicating what was there before. For the purposes of comparison, we measured the dimensions of the cells on both the second and third floors of Saron. Dimensions of the cells on the first floor were not taken because very little evidence of the original configuration survived the restoration process.

The sizes of cells on the second and third floors of Saron vary widely. Although no two cells are exactly alike on these floors, strong similarities persist. In some cases, the width of the cells is very similar. Some of the cells on the east and west ends of the structure are parallel, sharing almost identical length dimensions. Below are diagrammatic reconstructions suggesting the original sizes of cells on the second and third floors of Saron (figures 1 and 2).

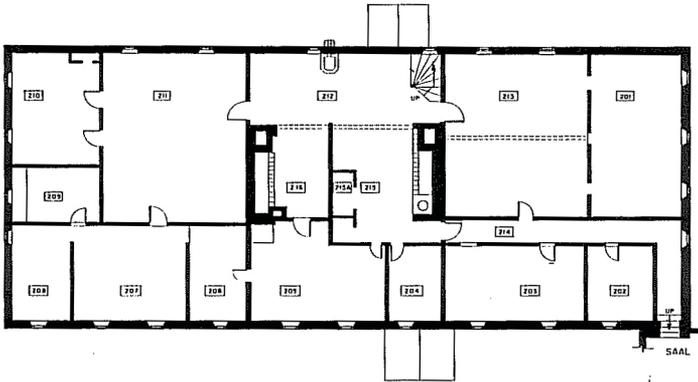


Figure 1. Second floor of Saron.<sup>42</sup>

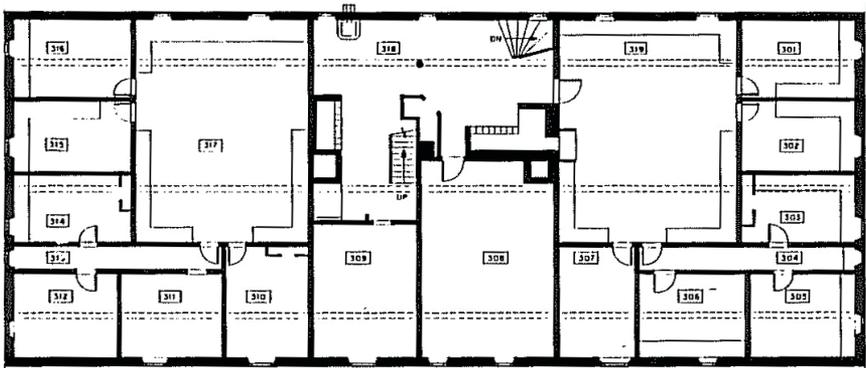


Figure 2. Third floor of Saron.<sup>43</sup>

It appears that the dividing walls of most of the cells consisted of vertical studs, mortised into a horizontal plate nailed and to the ceiling along the joist, and nailed or mortised into the same kind of horizontal plate that ran along the floor on top of the joist below it. That plate was also nailed into the floor. In Saron, at least three examples are visible on the second floor where dividing walls for cells have been torn out. In these instances, the removal of this horizontal floor plate also damaged or ripped up the floorboard below it. In these instances, the space where the original floorboard had lain, were filled with other boards or patches of a different age or color. These areas are distinctive and easy to see. The Weaver's House also has evidence of the removal of dividing walls. The evidence is very similar to that in Saron. The spaces created by these early

dividing walls are similar to the cells in Saron. In the Weaver's House these spaces created multiple rooms, supporting the hypothesis that the Weaver's House was subdivided at least on the second floor to create more than just a two-room plan that would have been typical for a Germanic single-family house. Indeed, the rooms might have created a communal dwelling for multiple monastic residents, possibly the second Sister's House.

On the second floor of the Weaver's House, the lengths of the two floor patches are 103" and 103½" in length. These two floor patches are easily visible on the north end of the building. In the second floor of the Weaver's House on the floor of the north side of the building, the comparable floor patches where dividing walls were removed in Saron are 113½", 94½", and 100½" in length. The patches in the Weaver's House are pictured on a diagram (figure 3) drawn around 1948 by G. Edwin Brumbaugh, the first restoration architect, hired by the State of Pennsylvania to restore the Cloister buildings.<sup>44</sup>

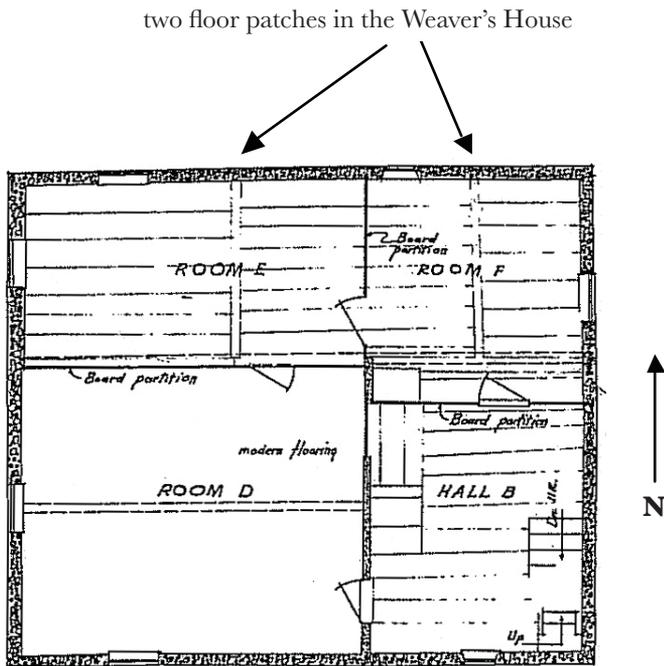
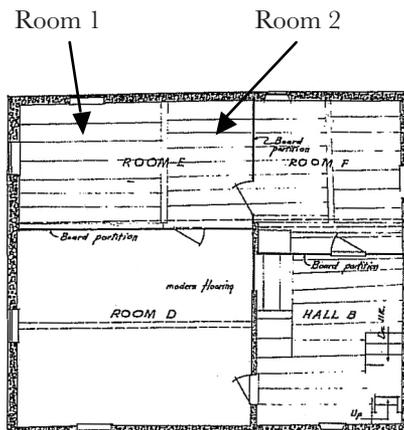


Figure 3. Brumbaugh plan of the second floor existing floor conditions in 1948.<sup>45</sup>



Visible on Brumbaugh's sketch in figure 4 are mortise marks along the northern summer beam that clearly indicate the location of studs and an insulated plaster wall. The board partition indicated in the diagram above is probably a later replacement.<sup>47</sup> Unfortunately these mortise marks no longer exist. The summer beams were replaced in 1964 by the architect that replaced Brumbaugh, John C Heyl, making it extremely difficult to assess the original appearance of this wall. The 1953 Brumbaugh drawings are the only evidence of the former plaster wall, but its location and basic configuration and stud spacing can be estimated from these drawings. The same kind of mortise marks also appear on the northern summer beam, from the first floor 1953 diagram by Brumbaugh. The first floor of the Weaver's House is even more compromised than the second floor because all of the floorboards on the first floor were replaced, and both summer beams also replaced by Heyl.<sup>48</sup> This simply leaves too little original material to make a comprehensive assessment for the first floor, making the second floor all the more important for this analysis.

Returning to the sketch in figure 3 (reduced below) one can plot possible room divisions in the second floor of the Weaver's House. If the two floor patches in this figure represent dividing walls for small rooms, we can determine the former size of these two rooms:



Room 1 would have been 128<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>" wide by 103<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>" deep. Room 2 would have been 128<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>" wide by 103" deep—nearly identical. (The scale of the drawing is not precise. Room 2 appears wider, but it is not.) This would indicate two fairly large rooms, much bigger than all the individual sleeping cells measured in the Saron. We don't allow for the possibility of a third room to the right of the right floor patch in this configuration because it would have been too narrow (only about 60").

However, there is also a possibility for three rooms on the second floor of the Weavers' House. See the diagram below.

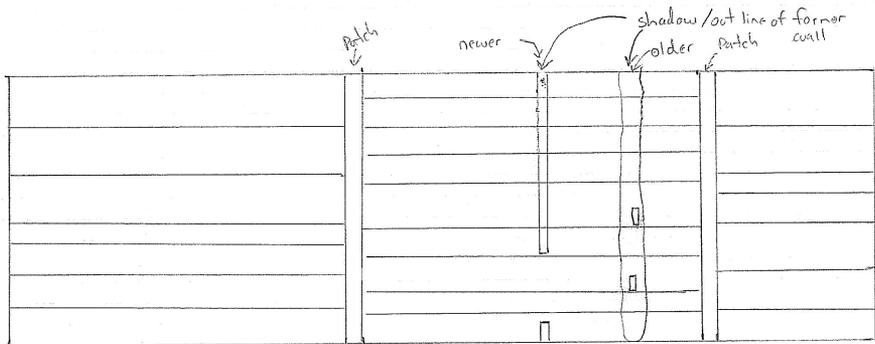


Figure 5. Diagram of north portion of second floor of Weaver's House.

Figure 5 represents a scale drawing made from measurements taken during research for this paper. This drawing represents the northern portion of the second floor of the Weaver's House (the original flooring, as best as can be determined). The two floor patches noted earlier in figure 3 are apparent and noted in this drawing. However, in this drawing there is a shadow outline of a former dividing wall. Mortise holes also appear in this old outline. This feature does not appear on the Brumbaugh drawings of 1948 or 1953, but it appears to be very old. The mortise holes are 20<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>" apart, and represent a possible doorway, the same door opening size of most of the cell doorways in the Saron. If this dividing wall was the original, and the patch to its right represented a later addition, then this would allow for three possible rooms with the following dimensions:

Room 1 - 128<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>" wide by 103<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>" deep

Room 2 - 99" wide by 103" deep

Room 3 - 93" wide by 103" deep

If the outline of the joists above the floor and the northern summer beam mortise marks indicating the plaster wall, along with window openings, are imposed on top of figure 5 above, it results in figure 6 below:

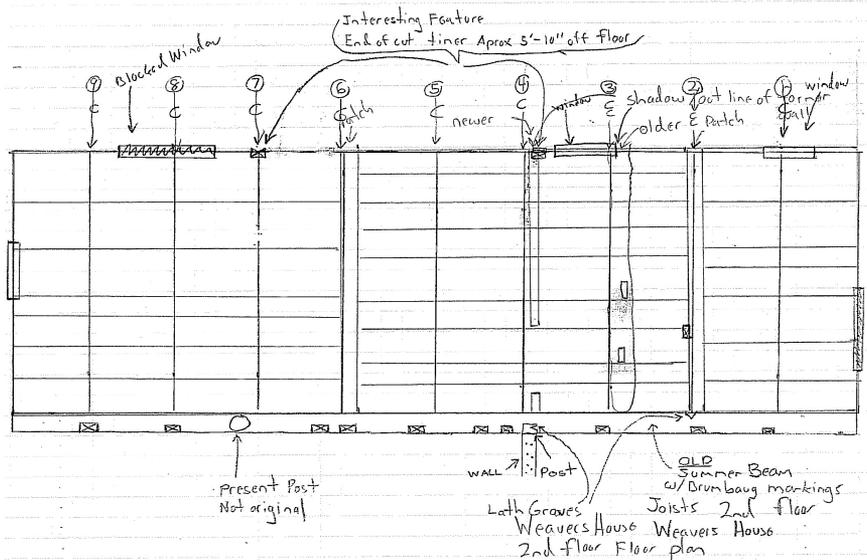


Figure 6. Diagram of north portion of second floor of Weaver's House with ceiling joists, window openings, and summer beam mortise marks imposed above.

The features numbered 1-9 represent the ceiling joists. This scale drawing shows that the joists above and below the three dividing walls would present solid fastening surfaces for the dividing walls. According to the fenestration in this scale drawing, each of the three rooms would have had a window. The dimensions of the rooms in this plan would be more similar to those in Saron. One of the rooms would have been considerably larger than the cells in the Saron, and the other two rooms slightly larger than most of those in Saron. However, it is not necessary for the dimensions of these small rooms to match more closely with those in the Saron for them to qualify as rooms for celibates.

Whether one concedes that divisions for two or three small rooms may have existed in the northern part of the second floor of the Weaver's House, the evidence suggests that multiple rooms existed in the second floor of the

Weaver's House. The second floor held more rooms than would have been the case in a traditional Germanic plan of Küche-Stube-Kammer, even if allowing for an additional small room or Kammerli. While the evidence is insufficient to prove that these rooms were cells like those created in Hebron / Saron (which was built later), it is likely that rooms for celibates were not uniform at Ephrata. If the Weavers' House was indeed the second Sisters' House, and this group of celibate sisters was distinct from the Order of Spiritual Virgins in Kedar, as hinted in the *Chronicon Ephratense*,<sup>49</sup> it is possible that rooms might have been configured differently. In the small hermit cabins that dotted the site prior to the building of Kedar in 1736, and even afterward, two or three monastic residents lived together in these buildings without the cells that later became characteristic of Ephrata's large monastic buildings.<sup>50</sup> Of the historic small residential structures that remain at Ephrata, especially the Carpenter's House, the Physician's House and the so-called House by the Stream, there is no indication that any of them had cells, although they were probably dwellings for celibates. It is highly unlikely that any of them were single-family residences.<sup>51</sup>

### **Location, Location, Location**

If the Weaver's House had been built for one family, it is highly unlikely that Conrad Beissel would have allowed it to be located so close the emerging complex of communal monastic dormitories. Most of the householders lived in dwellings on farms that they owned surrounding the monastic community. While Peniel (the Saal) and Hebron / Saron were likely constructed after the Weaver's House, Kedar and its worship house could not have been far from the Peniel's location. Additionally, the Weaver's House was constructed at the time that Beissel ordered the building of several monastic structures as he tried to bring the celibates together into communal housing and out of their hermit cabins. No other householder homes were constructed in the communal area of Ephrata. Allowing one single-family dwelling to be built so close to the monastic houses would be quite unusual.

Another factor weighing against the Weaver's House serving as a family structure was the decision to locate a cemetery so close to the building, virtually outside its front door. God's Acre cemetery probably had not been established at the time the Weaver's House was built, around or just before 1740. If the Weaver's House were a single-family dwelling, it seems improbably that a private dwelling would have been located close

to a cemetery. Germanic settlers typically located their cemeteries either close to a church or building, or if on a family farm, at some distance from the home. In addition to the proximity to the Weaver's House, God's Acre is close to Peniel, a worship house (built in 1741), and to Saron, a house dedicated for religious residents (built in 1743). The building now known as the Almonry stands between Peniel and God's Acre. However, architectural evidence, such as sawn rafters rather than hewn timbers, suggests that the Almonry was built later, and was not standing at the time when burials began in God's Acre. The close location of the cemetery to the Weaver's House makes more sense if it were considered a structure dedicated to religious residents.

While these two additional factors are admittedly small points, nevertheless they raise doubt as to whether the Weaver's House originally was a single family dwelling.

## **Conclusion**

The large two-and-a-half-story building currently interpreted as the Weaver's House evidences some interior architectural features suggesting that it was not originally intended as a single family dwelling. Although remains of the original architectural fabric is scant, and the amount of documentary evidence for the restoration process is unusually thin considering Brumbaugh's frequently copious notes, the remaining evidence suggests that at least the second floor was subdivided in a more complex manner than was typical for a single family dwelling. A comparison between the Weaver's House second floor and the surviving evidence in the floors, ceilings, and walls in Saron where dividing walls were removed supports the theory that dividing walls existed in the Weaver's House. These dividing walls created several smaller rooms at some earlier time in the building's history. Additionally, the unusual feature of two summer beams in the Weaver's House suggests that the log structure was intended to bear significant weight on the second floor. The unlikelihood that a single-family home would be built so close to the emerging monastic communal center at precisely the time when Beissel was trying to move celibates into communal homes likewise speaks against identifying the building as a single family house. The decision to locate a cemetery so close to the building likewise casts doubt on its identity as a single-family home.

The evidence from contemporary historic documents is even thinner than the restoration notes that Brumbaugh made. While no documents

indicate the location of a second sisters' house, two solid references confirm that a second sisters' house was built in or by 1739. The scant architectural evidence from the original part of the Weaver's House and some of Brumbaugh's notes suggest that this building very well could have served to house celibate residents at Ephrata.

The current interpretation of this building as a single-family structure has a long history, dating back at least to 1844 when an English Seventh Day Baptist identified it as the parsonage for the minister of the congregation. Brumbaugh worked from the received interpretation that he encountered when he began his work. Indeed, the building was serving as a residence for the congregation's minister when the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania took over the site. The subsequent interpretations of the building as a householder's home and now as the Weaver's House simply followed the building's long-standing reputation after the communal era. While there remains the possibility that the Weaver's House was a single-family dwelling, the evidence presented here, when taken as a whole, raises sufficient questions about whether the structure was originally constructed for a single family. Although admittedly somewhat circumstantial, the combined evidence regarding the Weaver's House confirms that it admits of more interpretive possibilities than the single-family dwelling that it has long been considered. Indeed, at one time, there were rooms for more in this structure that may well have served a communal purpose.

We feel we have presented enough evidence to suggest an alternative interpretation for this structure. Architectural and historical evidence, along with conjectures based on documentary evidence suggest that in the Weavers' House, there were rooms for more in eighteenth-century Ephrata.

## Notes

1. Lamech and Agrippa, *Chronicon Ephratense* (Ephrata: [Typis Societatis], 1786). The English translation will be cited here: Lamech and Agrippa, *Chronicon Ephratense: A History of the Community of the Seventh-Day Baptists at Ephrata, Lancaster County, Penn'a*, trans. J. Max Hark (Lancaster: S. H. Zahm, 1889). Hark's translation is generally reliable and all quotations here are checked against the German original.
2. Ezechiel Sangmeister, *Das Leben und Wandel des in Gottruhenden und seligen Bruders Ezechiel Sangmeister*, vols. 1-4 (Ephrata: Joseph Bauman, 1825-1827). See the very reliable translation by Barbara Schindler published serially in *Journal*

of the Historical Society of the Cocalico Valley, 1979-1985. See also Stephan Koch, Letter to Johann Lobach, Oct. 20, 1739, quoted in Goebel, *Geschichte des Christlichen Lebens*, 3:264. Goebel cited as his source a collection of correspondence, *Sammlungerbaulicher Briefe*, 2:6-12, 108-13, without providing further description. See also Jeff Bach, *Voices of the Turtledoves: The Sacred World of Ephrata* (University Park: Penn State Press, 2003), 122.

3. Lamech and Agrippa, *Chronicon*, 157-59.
4. Bach, *Voices of the Turtledoves*, 16-24.
5. Undated historic postcard in the Ephrata Cloister collection.
6. "Visit to Ephrata," *Sabbath Recorder*, December 1844, p. 1.
7. Nobel and Splain, Historic Structures Report, 2001:10: 4.
8. Nobel and Splain, Historic Structures Report, 2001:10: 1-2.
9. Nobel and Splain, Historic Structures Report, 2001:10:5.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Side note: The Brumbaugh preliminary report came out in 1941. The "Survey Before Restoration" drawings came out in 1948. What was going on in between that time? Restoration must have been going on in the Saal or somewhere else on the site.
14. There is one photograph that is in the collection at the Ephrata Cloister that appears to show the inside of the Parsonage in the 1900s, but it is difficult to determine many of the details of the interior of the structure.
15. I have personally seen approximately one hundred sketches for the Saal and many of these featured fine details, much finer than the 1953 sketches of the Parsonage.
16. Nobel and Splain, Historic Structures Report, 2001:10:6.
17. This deteriorating relationship between Brumbaugh and the PHMC can be charted by reading the letters back and forth between them, especially after 1954. These letters can be seen and researched at The Winterthur Library, Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera. Many copies of these letters can also be seen in the Ephrata Cloister and the Heyl, Treby & Associates papers in the Pennsylvania Archives in Harrisburg.
18. Nobel and Splain, Historic Structures Report, 2001:10:7.
19. Ibid.
20. Nobel and Splain, Historic Structures Report, 2001:10:8.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
24. Nobel and Splain, Historic Structures Report, 2001:10:13.
25. Nobel and Splain, Historic Structures Report, 2001:6:14.
26. Nobel and Splain, Historic Structures Report, 2001:7:14.

27. Nobel and Splain, *Historic Structures Report*, 2001:4:15.
28. Nobel and Splain, *Historic Structures Report*, 2001:5:7.
29. Nobel and Splain, *Historic Structures Report*, 2001:10:48.
30. <http://www.vermonttimberworks.com/blog/summer-beams>
31. Hans Herr note – Jeff Bach contacted the Hans Herr House and obtained this architectural information from administrators there.
32. [http://www.easternbarns.com/barn\\_terms.html](http://www.easternbarns.com/barn_terms.html)
33. Nobel and Splain, *Historic Structures Report*, 2001:10:48. (There is also some doubt if this restoration actually took place in 1963. So far, no actually documentary evidence supports a 1963 date.)
34. Edward R. Cook and William J. Callahan, “Tree-Ring Dating of the Ephrata Cloister in Ephrata, Pennsylvania,” unpublished manuscript (Palisades, NY: Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory, Sept. 10, 2000), 3. Quotes in Nobel and Splain, *Historic Structures Report*, 2001:10: Appendix E, *Dendrochronology Report*
35. *Ibid.*, 11.
36. *Ibid.*, 11.
37. The construction date of 1743 is supported by the fact that it is carved into one of the lintels over a former doorway. Dendrochronological tests also confirm this date. See Cook and Callahan, “Tree-Ring Dating,” 4, 12-13. Also see O’ Bannon et al., “Ephrata Cloister,” 2:43.
38. Bach, *Voice of the Turtledoves*, 2002, 130.
39. *Ibid.*, 130-31.
40. *Ibid.*, 133.
41. Ephrata Cloister Guide’s Manual, 2001, 2010, 2013.
42. O’ Bannon, *Historic Structures Report of Saron and Sal*, 1988.
43. *Ibid.*
44. Nobel and Splain, *Historic Structures Report*, 2001:10:71. (The diagram appears here, but there is no documentation that confirms a date for this diagram. Someone was living in this building until 1951.)
45. Nobel and Splain, *Historic Structures Report*, 2001:10:71.
46. Nobel and Splain, *Historic Structures Report*, 2001:10:70.
47. Nobel and Splain, *Historic Structures Report*, 2001:10:64.
48. Nobel and Splain, *Historic Structures Report*, 2001:10:45.
49. Bach, *Voice of the Turtledoves*, 2002, 122 .
50. *Ibid.*, 115.
51. Brumbaugh’s field sketches of these buidlings are in *The Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera*.

## Appendix

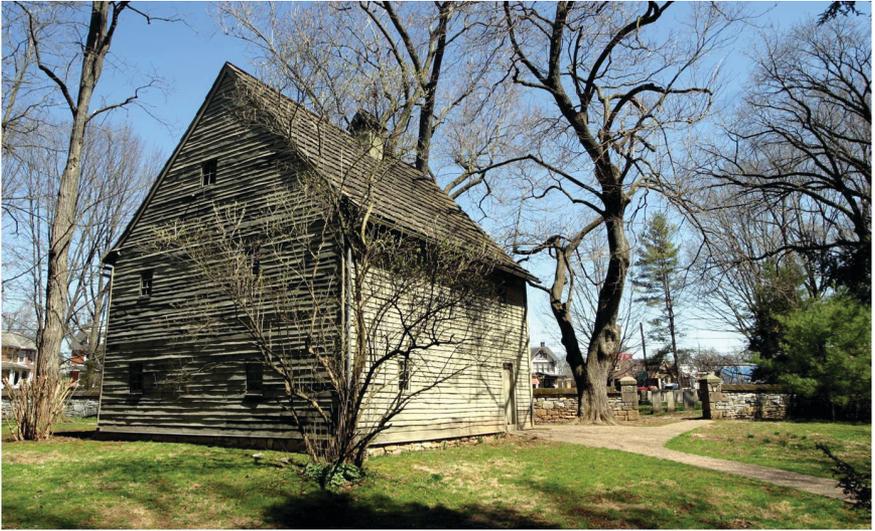


Figure 7. Weaver's House.



Figure 8. Ephrata Cloister: Saron & Saal.



Figure 9. Ephrata Cloister: Saron & Saal.



Figure 10. First floor of Weaver's House looking north showing both summer beams.



Figure 11. Third floor of Saron showing original cell, bench, and wall construction.



Figure 12. Second floor of Weaver's House showing both summer beams.



Figure 13. Second floor of Saron showing area where cell wall was removed forming larger room. Notice patch on floor where wall used to stand.



Figure 14. Second floor of Saron with ceiling joist and mortise holes where wall studs used to be. Also notice back wall with joist and stud locations.



Figure 15. Second floor of Saron. Former hallway and wall have been removed. Notice where joist running along ceiling has been removed. Notice vertical groove running up vertical stud to hold lath.



Figure 16. Second floor of Weaver's House showing floor patches where cell walls used to stand.

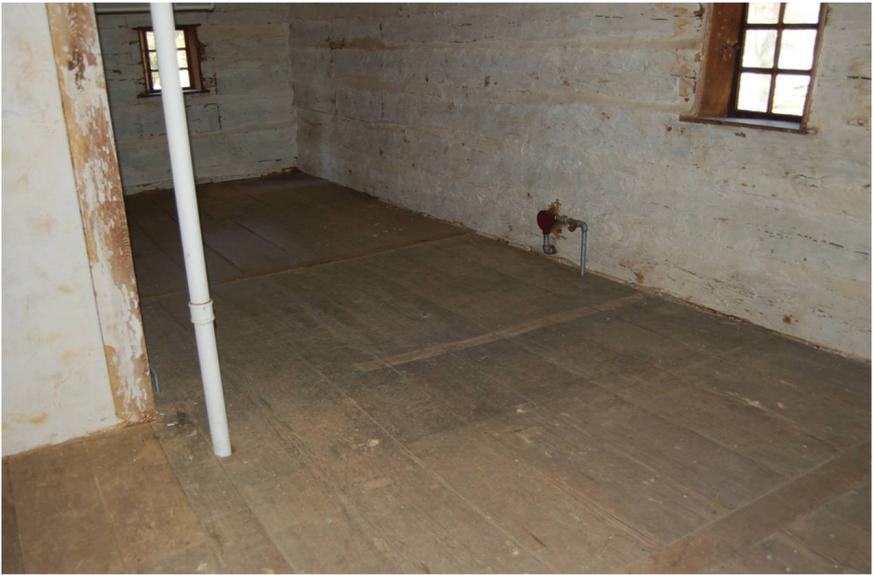


Figure 17. Second floor of the Weaver's House from the opposite angle showing floor patches denoting possible location of cell walls.