

## INTRODUCTION

### *"Pages of a Mystical Character": German Manuscripts in American History*

Between approximately 1750 and 1850, German-speaking settlers of southeastern Pennsylvania and their descendants cultivated a distinctive art form with many centuries of history in Europe: calligraphy and manuscript illumination, mostly of a religious nature. The manuscripts, commonly referred to as *Fraktur* by collectors and historians today, evoke connections to Christianity's ancient and medieval roots and frequently feature scriptural and devotional texts written in an ornate Gothic script, known in German as *Frakturschrift*, along with decorative illustrations depicting religious imagery or elements from the natural world. Most often created by members of Pennsylvania's separatist German religious communities, the documents survive in large number. Curious visitors can expect to encounter thousands of examples in the many historical and cultural institutions that populate southeastern Pennsylvania and the greater region.<sup>1</sup> Since serious study of the illuminated manuscripts began in the 1890s, scholars who specialize in the subject have observed the transatlantic significance of the Pennsylvania Germans' manuscript culture and the uniqueness of the art form in its early American context.<sup>2</sup> Despite these efforts, the manuscripts and, more important, the people who made and used them often remain absent from popular accounts of colonial and early national history.<sup>3</sup> In pursuit of the New England Puritans or Virginia Anglicans, historians of early American religion frequently pass over the libraries, museums, and archives in southeastern Pennsylvania that burst at the seams with primary sources of the Pennsylvania Germans' popular religious life.<sup>4</sup> The Germans were far fewer in number than English settlers, to be sure, but a brief glance at these artifacts reveals

the diversity—linguistic, theological, and cultural—that infused the early American religious experience.

Understanding the theology behind Pennsylvania German spiritual manuscripts means delving deep into continental Europe's religious history, into the devotional life of the late Middle Ages, into the upheavals of Martin Luther's Germany, and into the violence and bloodshed of Ulrich Zwingli's Switzerland. But before these topics can be explored, even more fundamental questions must first be answered, about why Pennsylvania German illuminated spiritual manuscripts should matter to us as relics of early American religious life and how the documents can be studied as historical evidence. The best place to begin to look for answers to those questions is not with the manuscript makers and users themselves but rather, one hundred years after their time, in the country library of an eccentric Gilded Age gentleman, where tables and bookshelves creaked and groaned under the weight of hundreds of cumbersome leather-bound volumes, as a bearded, bespectacled book collector feverishly translated a venerable old manuscript of a decidedly mystical character. A visit there can set the stage for developing new approaches to the manuscripts in question.

### Samuel Pennypacker: Country Collector and Pennsylvania Historian

Samuel Whitaker Pennypacker (1843–1916) was an unusually accomplished man. Like other well-born, well-to-do gentlemen in the late 1800s and early 1900s, the southeastern Pennsylvania lawyer, politician, and author cultivated a panoply of hobbies and scholarly interests. Unlike many others, he distinguished himself in almost all of them and left an indelible imprint on the civic and cultural life of his native Pennsylvania in the process. Pennypacker fought in the Civil War, attended the University of Pennsylvania, practiced law in Philadelphia, served as a judge on the Pennsylvania Court of Common Pleas, and was elected governor of the commonwealth in 1902.<sup>5</sup> If this résumé secured his status as a civic leader, it was the governor's "picturesque personality," historical research, and literary talents that garnered him "more than State-wide fame" and secured him a singular role in American culture.<sup>6</sup>

Samuel Pennypacker's great passion was history, especially the history of the commonwealth he governed. From the library in the mansion on his 170-acre ancestral estate in rural Montgomery County named Pennypacker Mills, he composed seminal works of history and served as the Historical Society of Pennsylvania's president.<sup>7</sup> A book collector of considerable renown,

Pennypacker was also president of Philadelphia's Philobiblon Club, one of the nation's oldest bibliophilic societies.<sup>8</sup> Pennypacker was a product of the ethnic and religious diversity of the southeastern corner of the state he called home, including the region's German-speaking sectarian settlers. As a collector and scholar, he relentlessly pursued books and manuscripts his own ancestors and other Germans had used to nourish their spiritual lives. Deciphering these texts did not come naturally for Pennypacker, who had to teach himself German to transcribe and read them.<sup>9</sup> Spiritual books and documents that for his parents' and grandparents' generation had been tools of active spiritual faith had, for Pennypacker's generation, entered a different stage of their life cycle, having transformed into artifacts ripe for historical analysis. Though the artworks had cycled out of active use by the time Pennypacker collected them, they all pointed to southeastern Pennsylvania's spiritually rich early heritage. And they found an apt interpreter in the governor.

For Pennypacker, Pennsylvania's multiethnic, multilingual, religiously and spiritually pluralistic colonial society constituted the wellspring of the state's contribution to the American body politic. The governor's mid-Atlantic heritage provided for a more diverse genealogical inheritance, he explained. "Substantially all of my American ancestors were residents of Pennsylvania, save a few from New Jersey, and in almost all of my lines they came to the country among the earliest settlers. But among them were Dutch, English, Germans, Welsh, Swedes, Scotch-Irish and French Huguenots."<sup>10</sup> Pennypacker's collecting of early Pennsylvania spiritual books and manuscripts functioned as both a scholarly mission and a personal recovery effort of a piece of his family and cultural heritage that was receding into the past.<sup>11</sup> The bibliophile harvested the region's artifacts of early modern cultural life to understand his state's origins in the ethnically and linguistically porous early modern Atlantic world, as well as his own place in that narrative—not a difficult link to forge, given how many of his own family members had made and used spiritual manuscripts and other religious texts. An astute historian, Pennypacker noted the changes affecting the region. It fell to antiquaries and scholars like him to preserve and study the records of bygone days.

Rural southeastern Pennsylvania proved fertile soil for Pennypacker's ambitious book-collecting project in the last decades of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth. Descendants of the very settlers who used religious manuscripts and books offered them up for sale. As a well-known figure in the region, Pennypacker dressed in disguise during his visits to country auctions and sales, where he and an associate scoured lots for "out-of-the-way treasures" they hoped to secure at discount prices. "Often I went 'incog' [incognito] in an old suit and broken hat . . . to the sales of the

German farmers in the country and I have bought as many as a three-bushel-bag full of books at a sale," he noted. "The auctioneer would hold them up at a window, half a dozen at a time, and knock them down for a few pennies."<sup>12</sup>

Such collecting occasionally proved personal. One day in 1872, he traveled to the farmstead of a relative who had invited him to dine. The austere old farmer "entertained me at dinner sitting on a long bench before a table without cloth or napkins," Pennypacker reminisced. "He gave to me an old Bible which he said was of no use to him and which had been thrown with some other stuff into a worn-out clothes basket in the garret. It proved," Pennypacker soon learned, "to be the Bible which belonged to my great-great-great grandmother's grandfather, printed at Heidelberg in 1568, containing a family record and many interesting manuscript notes, which has now been in the family for ten generations and much antedating every other family possession."<sup>13</sup> Some of Pennypacker's own radical pietistic and sectarian German-speaking ancestors had carried this large folio Bible across the seas to Penn's Woods in 1685, and 187 years later Samuel Pennypacker pulled the book from the rubbish of an old man's attic.<sup>14</sup> The Bible was just one of many intriguing acquisitions made by Pennypacker. Another family piece was a lengthy bound manuscript bearing an inscription in Samuel Pennypacker's hand: "A book in MSS [manuscript]—of 876 pages of a mystical character. The cover is a gothic vellum MSS at least a thousand years old." The book belonged to Hendrick Pannebecker (1674–1754), surveyor for the Penns, Pennsylvania's proprietary family.<sup>15</sup> The governor also owned an intricate penmanship sample (or *Vorschrift*) made for twelve-year-old Simon Pannebecker by Pennsylvania German schoolteacher Herman M. Ache. Filled with colorful calligraphy and excerpts from religious texts, the document still hangs on a wall at Pennypacker Mills.<sup>16</sup> Across the region, Pennsylvania Germans discovered illuminated spiritual manuscripts folded and tipped into religious books, pasted onto the covers of painted chests, or stashed into the nooks and crannies of old farmhouses and then placed them onto the open market for collectors like Pennypacker to acquire.<sup>17</sup> In the mid-eighteenth century, illuminated devotional manuscripts and printed early modern spiritual tracts were vital to Pennsylvania German popular piety. A little more than a century later, it fell to the region's antiquaries to gather them up and preserve them as historical artifacts. What changed in the intervening years?

The story of Samuel Pennypacker's early collecting illuminates two important points that can guide inquiries into the manuscripts as artifacts of popular piety and spiritual life that enjoyed changing resonance over time. First, the years of the Pennsylvania Germans' vibrant manuscript culture mirror the heyday and evanescence of German pietistic and sectarian traditions in

Europe and Pennsylvania between the late seventeenth and mid-nineteenth centuries. Pennsylvania Germans' religious traditions were shaped by late medieval and early modern spiritual controversies and faith practices, and those traditions survived deep into the "modernity" of nineteenth-century America, though they eventually faded among most of the population. Second, the vibrancy of Pennsylvania manuscript culture reflects the continued importance of manuscript text production for many centuries after the development of the printing press in Germany circa 1450. European and American manuscript culture declined only after 1850 or so, because of the emergence of industrial publishing around that time. In early America, handwritten text production could still function as a viable (and in some cases preferable) alternative to print, or simply as a method of text making complementary to more formal print publication.<sup>18</sup> Rather than accepting a tendency to interpret Pennsylvania German manuscripts primarily as rustic, folk artworks, scholars should read the texts as evidence of the coexistence in early America of centuries-old traditions and practices in popular piety and text making alongside cutting-edge innovations in the realms of religion, civil society, and printing technology. "Interpretation," wrote theologian Rudolf Bultmann, "always presupposes a living relationship to the subjects which are directly or indirectly expressed in the text."<sup>19</sup> We must strive to engage with the manuscript makers and users on their own terms, reconstructing the spiritual and communication networks that the artifacts once helped to constitute.<sup>20</sup> This effort requires a new paradigm for studying the history and meaning of manuscript making, one grounded in early modern theology, devotional practice, intellectual history, and history of the book.

### Manuscript Studies and Early American Religion: Toward a Pietist and Sectarian Paradigm

Regional scholars have produced a rich body of literature about Pennsylvania German decorative arts, largely interpreted through the lens of folk-art studies and the field of material culture, an approach to the study of artifacts of past human life familiar to most people through the work of museums that employ collections to interpret history and culture.<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately, academic historians have not been quick to fill interpretive gaps left by local histories as well as decorative-arts and collector-oriented publications. Perhaps because of language barriers, the Germans' small population compared to English-speaking settlers, or the sheer complexity of the continental European religious traditions that gained a foothold in the mid-Atlantic,

Pennsylvania Germans garner little attention from academic historians of early American religion, who focus instead on touchstone English traditions that shaped the American experience, including Puritanism in New England, Quakerism in the mid-Atlantic, Anglicanism in the South, and Methodism on the frontier. German Lutherans, Reformed, and sectarians, notes one Anglo-focused historian, seem to “pass fleetingly” through the historical record, compared to the more numerous, and presumably more influential, Anglophones.<sup>22</sup>

The English Puritans in particular have dominated academic historical scholarship. Perry Miller, the great patriarch of New England Puritan studies, claimed to have found a “working model for American history” in the religious culture of early New England.<sup>23</sup> Noting that Puritans saw “God’s fingerprints” across the New England landscape, Miller’s most famous student, Edmund Morgan, sought to unlock the “meaning of New England” through studies of the region’s spiritual life.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, a “Puritan paradigm” has long held sway over early American religious history, as if the entirety of early American spiritual life can be traced to the New England experience and as if a coherent ethos of American national life derived from Puritanism.<sup>25</sup> Overviews of early American religion often make only passing mention of Pennsylvania’s patchwork of German spiritual traditions.<sup>26</sup> Such peoples, and their manuscript texts, have never been placed near the center of the story of early American spirituality. Historians who emphasize the most influential early Anglo-American religious and intellectual movements risk smoothing over the cultural variety present in the colonies’ and early nation’s formative days and oversimplifying the spiritual forces active in the Americas. Considering nondominant stories of life in early America lends valuable context to the familiar Anglo-American narrative.<sup>27</sup>

In particular, study of Pennsylvania German popular piety offers a much-needed antidote to Anglocentric perspectives on American religious history. But how to go about that study? We need only look to Perry Miller for inspiration. One of Miller’s most famous writings, an essay titled “Errand into the Wilderness,” began life as a speech to accompany an exhibition of early New England books and manuscripts at the John Carter Brown Library in Providence, Rhode Island, on May 16, 1952.<sup>28</sup> Just as this exhibition, in the words of its catalog, “set forth, as far as might be done with such materials, the New England experience, body and spirit,” so too can the books, manuscripts, and calligraphic artworks of Pennsylvania illuminate connections between the material and spiritual worlds in another vitally important region of early America.<sup>29</sup> Pennsylvania Germans, through their books and manuscripts,

offer a way to nuance the tone and tenor of the intellectual history of religious and literary life in early America.

Some of Pennsylvania Germans' devotional ethos derived from German Pietism, an eighteenth-century renewal of Protestant faith practice that resulted in a flood of Christian devotional literature, as well as other sectarian and primitivist religious movements that offered alternatives to the mainstream Protestantism of the day. If a "Puritan paradigm" has undergirded Anglo-American studies of religious culture, spiritual books, and devotional art, then a "Pietist and sectarian paradigm" grounded in the cultural history and devotional practices of early German-speaking settlers of the mid-Atlantic could lend coherence to Pennsylvania German manuscript studies and shed new light on the religious foundations of early America. To understand the great variety inherent in early American religious history and devotional culture, one must understand Pietism and aligned movements that shaped spiritual culture in the German-speaking world.<sup>30</sup>

Arguably the most influential movement within Protestantism since the days of Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, and John Calvin, Pietism reshaped the practice of Christianity both within and beyond the German-speaking world.<sup>31</sup> With roots in the private devotional culture of seventeenth-century Germany, the movement emphasized inward experience of faith and personal engagement with scripture. Scholars have long acknowledged Pietism's influence over radical sectarian German Protestant peoples, including the Moravians and Anabaptists, but the movement possessed a decidedly diverse and ecumenical character.<sup>32</sup> Pietistic emphasis on personal engagement with scripture and the action of the Holy Spirit on the hearts of believers infused transatlantic religious literature of the period and shaped how Pennsylvania Germans interacted with religious manuscripts. Pietism is not a perfect model for the text practices of the Pennsylvania Germans, seeing as many prominent approaches to Christian spirituality (including mysticism and Anabaptism) predate Pietism by centuries, but the movement did figure centrally into the Protestant spirit of the age in both the German- and English-speaking worlds. A Pietist and sectarian paradigm reminds us that, despite the many differences separating the German Protestant denominations and sects, a common spiritual movement worked on all of them, one focused squarely on the centrality of the Word for nourishing the spirit. But what exactly does bringing a Pietist and sectarian paradigm to the study of early Pennsylvania and American history entail?

The Puritan paradigm explained the history of New England Puritanism by means of a narrative that explored how the Puritans' strict social values

and civic structure governed New England society for a short period but then managed to infuse American society with the idea of the country as God's chosen land.<sup>33</sup> The Puritan New Englanders' interpretation of Calvinism, which underscored human depravity and powerlessness before an angry God, infused their social lives and tinged their culture with a fear of secularism and religious plurality, not to mention strict controls on acceptable forms of Christian devotion.<sup>34</sup> The paradigmatic story of Pietists and sectarians including Anabaptists and mystics in Pennsylvania as proposed here is quite different. It is one of confident religious pioneers, of diverse backgrounds and sensibilities, who sought emotive, liberating, and at times even mystical spiritual experience in a colony premised on the idea of religious toleration and radical individualism. They lived in a colony in which Christian pluralism, rather than strict religious control, was the organizing spiritual principle.<sup>35</sup> They cultivated a freedom of knowing and loving God still reflected today in the manuscripts they created and used as part of their personal spiritual exploration. Where the theology of the New England Puritans was fearful, that of the Pennsylvania Pietists was hopeful. If the Puritans felt deprived of spiritual agency, the Pietists cultivated a radical level of agency over their own religious lives. The Pietist and sectarian paradigm encompasses a vast swath of transatlantic Protestant religious history—early modern mysticism, Anabaptism, continental European Pietism, evangelicalism, revivalism—as it came to rest in Pennsylvania, a colony-turned-state where the outlines of many later features of American life were most clearly drawn. While it would be easy to read chaos, confusion, and lack of cultural-historical coherence into the history of religious traditions practiced in early Pennsylvania, a Pietist and sectarian paradigm instead finds meaning in the theological diversity of the region—and the artifacts that diversity produced, including illuminated German-language manuscripts. “Whatever was poetical in the lives of the early New-Englanders had something shy, if not sombre, about it,” noted James Russell Lowell in an article in the *North American Review* in 1865. “If their natures flowered, it was out of sight, like the fern.”<sup>36</sup> It was quite different for the Pietists and sectarians of Pennsylvania, whose radical faith practices flowered figuratively and literally on the ornately decorated devotional manuscripts they produced and stowed away for future generations.

Placing the textual artifacts of Pietism and radical sectarian traditions in the foreground of a study of Pennsylvania German devotional practices offers an opportunity to view early American history from a different geographic, theological, and cultural lens than that usually brought to the topic, to uncover common threads uniting movements, and to trace cultural transfer across linguistic, imperial, denominational, and sectarian boundaries. New

Englanders and Pennsylvanians shared many theological connections, as coming chapters show, but the divergent manifestations of Protestant Christian practices in the two regions merit comparison. Diarmaid MacCulloch, a prominent historian of Christianity, has come as close as anyone to unearthing the essential meaning of Pennsylvania in its American spiritual and cultural context by bringing a long transatlantic view to the colony's early denominations and sects. "No one religious group could automatically claim exclusive status, unlike nearly all the other colonies," he wrote. "This was the first colony to evolve the characteristic pattern of religion of the modern United States of America: a pattern of religious denominations, none claiming the exclusive status of Church."<sup>37</sup> In MacCulloch's narrative, Pennsylvania emerges as just as important in the American context as Puritan New England. Scholars who work within narrower timeframes and geographic expanses should take note.<sup>38</sup>

"The Word" in Pennsylvania Popular Piety:  
A New Method for Manuscript Study

How can the Pennsylvania Germans' illuminated religious manuscripts enhance analyses like that put forward by MacCulloch? How can they help unlock the significance of German Pietism in its American context and form the foundation of the Pietist and sectarian paradigm? They can do so by revealing how everyday Pennsylvanians participated in a transnational Protestant community, imbued with centuries of continuity, rooted in an ages-old desire to know God. Although they are artifacts of a religious, linguistic, and cultural minority, the manuscripts demonstrate that early modern spirituality survived—even thrived—deep into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. When studied in relation to transatlantic German religious history, print culture, and manuscript traditions, the Pennsylvania manuscripts seem far more complex—and far more important—than their "primitive" illustrations may initially suggest. They reveal how a German Protestant literary canon, approach to spirituality, pedagogical method, and set of aesthetic norms infused community members' everyday lives. Pennsylvania German spiritual manuscripts equip historians with the sources they need to articulate a new theory of popular piety and the place of text in spiritual life. They are artifacts of a rich intellectual and aesthetic tradition informed by centuries of religious belief, time-tested methods of text production and use, and a system of visual aesthetics drawing on traditions of the late Middle Ages and German baroque. The documents reveal a coherent theological

and devotional foundation for why the artful presentation of letters and words figured in Pennsylvania German spiritual life, an insight that proves useful in making sense of the manuscripts' cultural resonance. For several generations the production, exchange, and use of spiritual texts exercised tremendous influence over Pennsylvania Germans' individual and collective spiritual experiences. "One basic fact must be underscored in studying these documents—the illumination was auxiliary to the text," wrote Pastor Frederick S. Weiser in 1973.<sup>39</sup> Illuminated manuscripts demonstrate the power of "the Word" in Pennsylvania German life—that is, how the scriptural and devotional texts presented on the manuscripts nourished the Pennsylvania German spirit.

The Word in its many forms served five main purposes in Pennsylvania German faith communities, which must be appreciated when studying their religious manuscripts (see a visual summary in fig. 5). First, Protestants viewed the words of scripture not primarily as *descriptive* of the reality of their religion but as *creative* of its truths here on earth. The essence of Christian faith resided in the text, which was the revealed wisdom of God. This elevated the status of the Word and infused Protestant devotional life. Second, grounded in this approach to scripture and the theology of the Protestant Reformation, the principle of personal engagement with holy texts was a fundamental tenet of Pennsylvania German religious life. To be a Christian was to know and engage with holy scripture and other devotional texts. Third, the Word remained a language-based sign system that required careful study and interpretation to understand. As an informational medium, written text could obscure as easily as it could enlighten. Careful training was required to equip individual Christians to use the Word effectively. Fourth, through neo-Gothic calligraphy, manuscript illumination, and Fraktur typography, the Word became a form of visual artwork capable of deep spiritual expression and the subject of intense veneration.<sup>40</sup> (Print and manuscript enjoyed a fluid and often symbiotic relationship in early German Pennsylvania, and printed texts could certainly exude their own evocative artistry.) Fifth, religious texts in print and manuscript form were artifacts of social exchange and community relationship building—that is, material commodities that figured in a regional pietistic and sectarian spiritual economy.

Pennsylvania Germans viewed their illuminated manuscripts as suited to bringing about spiritual experiences rooted in both personal introspection and community fellowship. While few of the texts included on manuscripts were "original" compositions, as their makers pulled their text excerpts from other sources, the scribes' visual presentation of various interlocked scriptural and literary excerpts were truly authorial and artistic compositions

*The Word in Pennsylvania German Devotional Life*

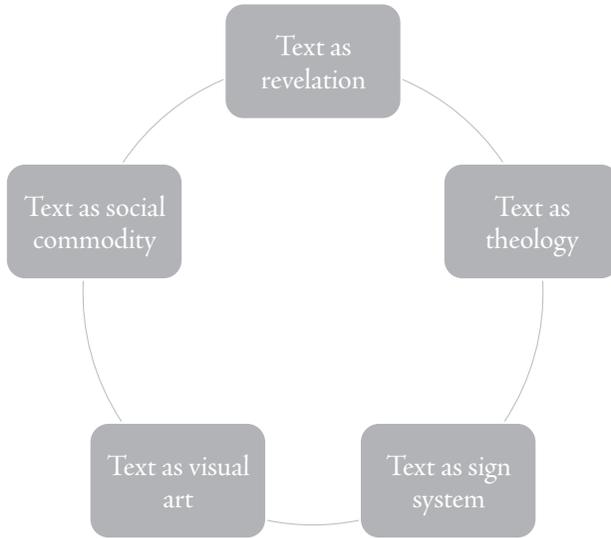


Fig. 5 A visual representation of the five-part understanding of the Word adopted in this book.

imbued with a level of talent, creativity, and spiritual agency unique in early America.<sup>41</sup> Studied for their importance as objects as well as texts, religious manuscripts underscore the material dimension of spiritual experience among certain German-speaking communities in early Pennsylvania, experiences bound up with rendering, transmitting, engaging with, and sharing the Word.<sup>42</sup> In Christianity, “invisible grace is rendered in visible signs.” Text artifacts offer tangible evidence of conceptions of grace.<sup>43</sup> The Pennsylvania documents comprised an “art system” that allowed for creativity and agency on the part of makers and users but relied on a socially conditioned set of aesthetic standards for their communicative ability.<sup>44</sup>

Artifacts still found at Governor Pennypacker’s country estate tell us much of what we need to know about the place of the Word in Pennsylvania German life. On young Simon Pannebecker’s writing sample, schoolteacher Herman Ache wrote a poem that describes the place of religious text in his pupil’s education: “This writing shows me [Simon Samuel], correctly, / Which way I should go, / Which is good for me and eternally sound, / Through your spirit, Lord, teach me, / That I may know you genuinely / At all times in the way I go, / To that this writing guides me.” The scribe intended

the verses found on Pannebecker's writing sample to guide the youngster on his spiritual journey. Ache's text was both visually engaging and instructionally rich.<sup>45</sup> This combination of text as pragmatic communication tool and as artistic embodiment of faith characterized Pennsylvania German manuscript culture. Readers could venerate the grandeur of holy words while they internalized valuable, and often very practical, spiritual lessons. Calligraphy and manuscript illumination were essential activities to Pennsylvania German spiritual culture. Studying Pennsylvania German manuscripts and printed texts for their spiritual qualities reveals the documents' significance within a long line of Christian traditions that sought to balance the evocative power of images with the revelatory function of words, in the hope of creating a transporting religious experience, yet one grounded in the spirit of the letter. That quest is as old as Christianity itself.

This understanding of the place of the Word in Pennsylvania German spiritual life recasts the nature of illuminated manuscript study, and a few more interpretive concepts can help us in this effort. When interpreted first and foremost as devotional texts, the documents reemerge as a materialized quest toward *spiritual literacy*, which was a fundamental devotional skill for Pietist and other spiritualists of sectarian persuasion that emphasized effective engagement with spiritual texts through functional skills in decoding words as well as a set of interpretive tools to unlock holy texts' meanings. It was an essential skill for Pennsylvania German popular piety. Pennsylvania German literacy education undertook training in these competencies, which readers employed throughout their devotional lives.

A community organized around the acquisition and use of spiritual literacy skills was sustained by a culture of creating and exchanging texts based on *scribal authorship*. By combining scriptural and literary texts from various sources and linking them together on manuscripts through calligraphy, illumination, and creative design and layout, scribes in effect authored "new" texts designed to meet the needs of devotional readers for whom the texts were produced. Not unlike the Europeans and Americans who assembled selections of texts in the form of scrapbooks or commonplace books, this scribal method resulted in not only literary and visual artworks derived from a rich context of source material but also original and unique to their makers.<sup>46</sup> Describing the creation of the Hebrew Bible in ancient Israel, Karel van der Toorn observed that the "very notions of books and authorship were very different from what they are today. The writings of the ancient Near East were created in a world in which there were neither books nor authors in the modern sense of those terms. Instead of books," Van der Toorn explains, "there was the stream of tradition; instead of authors, there were scribes."<sup>47</sup>

While the textual world of early America was by no means as different from modern times as was the ancient Near East, concepts as foundational as books and authorship have evolved dramatically over time.

The key concepts of spiritual literacy and scribal authorship help explain how the five approaches to the Word outlined earlier exercised social influence over early Pennsylvania German culture. In an era when calligraphy and manuscripts still played a prominent role in the world of text making and use, Pennsylvania Germans laced their manuscripts with traces of their search for the divine. The purpose of the chapters that follow is to demonstrate how the five-point understanding of the Word in Pennsylvania German life, along with the concepts of spiritual literacy and scribal authorship, can lend a coherent foundation to study of the devotional calligraphy and manuscript tradition. Chapter 1, titled "Heaven Is My Fatherland," considers how Protestants embraced the Word as an abstract theology of religious life, situating Pennsylvania German devotional manuscript culture in a global context before tracing the movement of German-speaking Protestants across Europe and the world in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. Chapter 2, "The Spirit of the Letter," considers the Word as medium for spiritual experience, presenting a detailed analysis of early modern manuscript culture before doing a deep read of Pennsylvania German spiritual literature to uncover the theological and devotional basis for manuscript culture. The remainder of the book explores how calligraphy and manuscript illumination turned words into artworks, and artworks into social commodities. Each of the final three chapters combines formal analysis of individual manuscript artworks with contextual data about the documents' social and spiritual significance. Chapter 3, "Worship Always the Scripture," analyzes manuscripts produced in and for German community schools, demonstrating that a school tradition of wisdom acquisition through pious living characterized much Pennsylvania German curriculum. Chapter 4, "Incense Hill," reveals connections between hymns, manuscript culture, and spirituality. The fifth chapter, "Marching to 'Step and Time,'" explores the role of calligraphy and manuscript culture in how Pennsylvania Germans documented important life occasions (most notably birth and baptism), built a network of text production and exchange, and cultivated a vibrant text-based Protestant community. Finally, a conclusion places the manuscripts in broader perspective, considering the role of Pennsylvania's German speakers in the popular narrative of early American history.

"The texts must translate us before we can translate them," wrote the twentieth-century German theologian Ernst Fuchs.<sup>48</sup> Making sense of Pennsylvania German spiritual documents requires resurrecting a worldview that

shaped their makers' and users' earthly and spiritual lives. The pages that follow reveal the existence of an American spiritual culture of a decidedly mystical character, a culture of intense spiritual introspection and experience of the divine that many modern observers may be surprised to learn existed on these shores. They open a long-vanished spiritual world and yet stay close to home, in the rolling hills and valleys of rural southeastern Pennsylvania, a landscape rich with meaning for those who linger long enough to seek it.