CHAPTER 13

Pietism and the Archives

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In 1723 a book appeared with the title, “The Happiest Island in the Entire World or the Land of Contentment,” describing a utopian island located in the Pacific Ocean where Christians lived in perfect peace and harmony. The author was Philipp Balthasar Sinold von Schütz who had served in various German courts that were centers of Pietism. It has been suggested that Sinold von Schütz’s utopia may have influenced the Moravians when planning their communities in Herrnhut, Herrnhaag, and Bethlehem. It is remarkable that the islanders appeared to lack any interest in writing their history. They had no archives and no libraries; the only books the islanders possessed were the Christian Bible, a chronicle of their past, and a book of laws.

In this respect, the Pietists were very different from the pious inhabitants of the utopian island. They produced a great variety of documents and texts – letters, reports, autobiographies, and diaries – and carefully preserved them in libraries and archives. Today, some of these institutions are much-frequented research centers: the Francke Foundations in Halle, Germany; the Unity Archives of the Moravian Church in Herrnhut, Germany; the Moravian archives in London, England, in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, and in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania; the Brethren Historical Library and Archives in Elgin, Illinois;  

1 The word “Archives,” with an s and as a singular noun, is used in accordance with the practice of American archivists. See Richard Pearce-Moses, A Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology (Chicago, 2005), re “archives,” “archive.”
4 Other large Moravian archives exist in Paramaribo, Suriname, and in Genadendal, South Africa. In addition, certain state archives such as Utrecht, Netherlands, or university libraries, such as the John Rylands Library at Manchester, house important Moravian collections. Kenneth G. Hamilton, “The Moravian Archives at Bethlehem, Pennsylvania,” The American Archivist 24 (1961): 415–423; Kenneth G. Hamilton, “The Resources of the Moravian Church
the archives of the radical-Pietist Inspirationists at the Amana Heritage Society in Amana, Iowa; and the Young Center for Anabaptist and Pietist Studies at Elizabethtown College in Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania. While some of these institutions were organized quite recently, the library of the Francke Foundations and the Moravian collections date back to the beginnings of their movements in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In this chapter the focus will be on archival practice and tradition among the Halle Pietists and the Moravians. It shows that their reasons for collecting and documenting were integral to their Pietist ideals. In recent years, archivists have begun to study the symbolic significance of record keeping. Although not much has been written specifically about the motives for record keeping and archiving by Pietist groups, archivists have come to realize that the purpose of archives is not only to preserve documents for reasons of accountability and control; there are other important reasons for creating and preserving a record.5

August Herrmann Francke organized a library and archive as a part of his institutions in Halle in 1698.6 In his Pietas Hallensis Francke described how various people donated books to his institution: “Again, others who had obtained a parcel of books in a legacy, instead of selling the same, have made them over to the Hospital, which helped the Foundation in erecting a Library for the use of our poor students employ’d in the Hospital.”7 In 1708 the library

