



## The Word in the Wilderness

Popular Piety and the Manuscript Arts in Early Pennsylvania

Alexander Lawrence Ames

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“Ames breaks new ground in the study of Pennsylvania German manuscript art by synthesizing the significance of the religious context with the artistic achievements of creating the pieces. This is also the first book to integrate research based on several collections of Pennsylvania German Fraktur across many regions. *The Word in the Wilderness* is a remarkable achievement reflecting years of study and an amazing breadth of research.”

—Jeff Bach, author of *Voices of the Turtledoves: The Sacred World of Ephrata*

Once a vibrant part of religious life for many Pennsylvania Germans in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Fraktur manuscripts today are primarily studied for their decorative qualities. *The Word in the Wilderness* takes a different view, probing these documents for what they tell us about the lived religious experiences of the Protestant communities that made and used them and opening avenues for reinterpretation of this well-known, if little understood, set of cultural artifacts.

The resplendent illuminated religious manuscripts commonly known as Fraktur have captivated collectors and scholars for generations. Yet fundamental questions about their cultural origins, purpose, and historical significance remain. Alexander Lawrence Ames addresses these by placing Fraktur manuscripts within a “Pietist paradigm,” grounded in an understanding of how their makers viewed “the Word,” or scripture. His analysis combines a sweeping overview of Protestant Christian religious movements in Europe and early America with close analysis of key Pennsylvania devotional manuscripts, revealing novel insights into the religious utility of calligraphy, manuscript illumination, and devotional reading as Protestant spiritual enterprises. Situating the manuscripts in the context of transatlantic religious history, early American spirituality, material culture studies, and the history of book and manuscript production, Ames challenges long-held approaches to Pennsylvania German studies and urges scholars to engage with these texts and with their makers and users on their own terms.

Featuring dozens of illustrations, this lively, engaging book will appeal to Fraktur scholars and enthusiasts, historians of early America, and anyone interested in the material culture and spiritual practices of the German-speaking residents of Pennsylvania.

**Alexander Lawrence Ames** is Collections Engagement Manager at The Rosenbach, a historic house museum and special collections library affiliated with the Free Library of Philadelphia.