

The Records of a 'Sober, Quiet, and Industrious People': The Archives of the Moravian Church in America, Southern Province, in Winston-Salem

by Joseph Thomas

The site of the North Carolina Library Association's 56th Biennial Conference, Winston-Salem, holds many treasures within its city limits. One of those treasures is the Archives of the Moravian Church, Southern Province. The Archives provide a historical record dating back to 1753, documenting the rise of the modern Piedmont from what was the North Carolina frontier. It was in 1753 that the Moravians, a denomination small in numbers but great in importance came to settle this area. The Moravian Records available in these archives offer the "only consecutive historical account" for this part of the State for some of the crucial years in its development.¹



The Archie K. Davis Center, home to the Moravian Archives and the Moravian Music Foundation. All images courtesy of the staff of the Moravian Archives.

Winston-Salem, North Carolina, is the seat of the Southern Province of the Moravian Church in America. The Northern Province's headquarters are in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Total membership for all Moravian congregations in the United States was about 50,000 in 2000; the Southern Province had 19,764 adherents reporting that year. Of that number, 18,180 lived in North Carolina, and 13,631 of them lived in Forsyth County.² With such a large percentage of adherents in the Winston-Salem area, Moravians, in addition to historians of North Carolina, look to the Archives on Church Street in downtown Winston-Salem.

Background of the Moravian Church

A liturgical Protestant Christian church, the Moravians are also known commonly as the Brethren, and officially as the Unitas Fratrum. The denomination traces its origins to 1457, when a leader known as Brother Gregory organized a community in Moravia, gathered together to live according to principles of the Sermon on the Mount and the example of the Apostles.³ Brother Gregory and this group, known collectively as the Unitas Fratrum (Unity of the Brethren), had been heavily influenced by the teachings of John Hus, a Czech reformer who was

burned at the stake in 1415 at the Council of Constance.⁴ Persecution kept the numbers of the church small, and in 1722, the group moved to the Saxon estate owned by Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf. There, the Brethren, by now beginning to be known as Moravians, built the town of Herrnhut, which became a model for later mission settlements. Zinzendorf's patronage revived the church and energized its first missions, which were to St. Thomas in 1732, Greenland in 1733, South Africa in 1736, and around that same time, to America.⁵



Archives staff: Richard Starbuck, C. Daniel Crews, and Nicole Blum.

A group of Moravians immigrated to Georgia, settling in Savannah in 1735, and began soon to make a name for themselves as desirable settlers because of their notion of "the common labor for the common good."⁶ Five years later, in 1740, this group left Savannah to settle in Pennsylvania. From Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, Bishop August Gottlieb Spangenberg traveled to North Carolina to oversee the purchase of nearly 100,000 acres of land from Lord Carteret, Earl Granville. The settlers named this land the Wachovia Tract, in memory of Count Zinzendorf's ancestral estate in Austria. In November 1753, the Brethren arrived in Wachovia, with a selected group of settlers building a settlement they named Bethabara, designed to realize the ideals of Moravian Christian living.⁷ Twelve years later, church leaders instructed the settlers to build Salem—this was the beginning of today's city of Winston-Salem, a city which lies almost entirely within the boundaries of the original Wachovia tract.⁸

The Moravian Archives

The Moravian Archives grew organically from the records kept by the ministers of each congregation, together with proceedings, letters, and other records sent to the Provincial Administration.⁹ Over time, these records were assembled, and the first mention of the archives as a collection of records to be housed in the Gemein Haus (the congregational meeting house) appears in a letter of 1772.¹⁰ This collection of records continued to grow and shifted homes several times within Salem, including the Bishop's House, the congregation's offices in the

Vorsteher's House, and other buildings.¹¹

The first caretaker for the archives was a Brother SchAAF, assigned by the Aeltesten Conferenz in 1830.¹² It wasn't until 1911, though, that the first archivist was appointed.¹³ In that year the Provincial Elders Conference (PEC) appointed Miss (later Dr.) Adelaide L. Fries archivist of a collection which was then housed with the collections of the Wachovia Historical Society in the old Boys School on Salem Square.¹⁴ Dr. Fries was active and successful in her efforts to encourage congregations to deposit their records in the Archives and to encourage the development and use of the Archives. In 1935, the Synod resolved that the PEC "take steps to have all congregations place their...records in the archives for safe keeping."¹⁵ Dr. Fries served the Archives until her death in 1949, and was followed by five other archivists before the PEC appointed Thomas J. Hauptert the first full-time archivist in 1985.¹⁶ Succeeding Hauptert in 1991 was the current archivist, C. Daniel Crews. Crews has led the Archives into a new cycle of publications, to continue the legacy began by Dr. Fries.¹⁷



Archivist Daniel Crews giving a tour of the vault.

Currently holding more than 1,000,000 pages of handwritten documents and a research library of 1,600 volumes, the Archives are housed in the Archie K. Davis Center, near the campus of Salem College in downtown Winston-Salem. The Davis Center also houses the headquarters of the Moravian Music Foundation, and the offices of the Southern Province are headquartered next door. As the repository for the province, the mission of the Archives is "to serve the Church in the collecting, cataloging, and safekeeping of its records."¹⁸

The Moravian Archives, Southern Province, has published a score or so of books, manuscripts, and musical pieces, the most recent being archivist C. Daniel Crews's *This We Most Certainly Believe: Thoughts on Moravian Theology* (2005). The Archives has also published a journal since 1985, *Annotations from the Moravian Archives, Winston-Salem, N.C.* Perhaps the best-known publication, though, is the one that most opens the Archives to the public: the twelve-volume (soon to be thirteen) *Records of the Moravians in North Carolina*. Edited at first by then-

archivist Adelaide Fries, the *Records* provide translations of the materials held in the Archives dating from 1753 until 1876. These records are divided into various kinds: the Daily Diaries; the Memorabilia; Minutes of the Church Boards and Congregation Councils; Account Books; Church Registers of births, baptisms, marriages, deaths and burials; and Memoirs. Kept by each congregation's minister, the Daily Diaries provide an outline of all church services along with notes of daily local and regional news.¹⁹ The Memorabilia are truly wonderful time capsules, composed in remembrance of congregational, local, national, and even international events on a yearly basis, in order to be read at the New Year's Eve service. *The Memorabilia of Fifty Years, 1877-1927* continues the historical record, built on the accounts kept by the Bishop Edward Rondthaler, who served the Salem area from 1877 until 1908. And the *Memorabilia of Salem Congregation, 1931-1961*, continues the record closer to the current day. Taken together, all volumes present a nearly complete account of the Moravian presence in the city into the mid-twentieth century.



Volunteer Victoria Starbuck holding the Fry-Jefferson map of Virginia, on its way to being conserved.

Another publication extremely useful in opening the Archives to the public is the *Guide to the Manuscripts in the Archives of the Moravian Church of America, Southern Province*, which was prepared by the North Carolina Historical Records Survey, Division of Community Service Programs, an outgrowth of the Work Projects Administration. Published in 1942, this guide provides detailed lists of items with brief descriptions. Varied entries range in genre from letters, sketches, diaries, and business records to lists of congregants and students, and range in topic from descriptions of women's education and the relationships between the Moravian churches in the US and Germany, to the first permanent mission to the Cherokees. Items related to missions and to music are significant holdings. Alongside other holdings are those belonging to the Moravian Music Foundation, Inc.²⁰ Treasures are sprinkled throughout the collections, including this one: greetings to President George Washington on the occasion of his visit to Salem on June 1, 1791. While this item is in English, many of the original texts are in German.

The wealth of continuous historical material, particularly of a personal nature, makes the Moravian Archives a destination for genealogical researchers. In fact, more than 20% of the nearly 500 visitors each year submit genealogical inquiries, many requiring substantial research. The Archives provides a research service for a fee; the staff researchers do not photocopy the documents, but do provide a report of their findings. For further information, contact the Moravian Archives by US postal mail or by email.²¹

The Moravian Archives, Southern Province, maintains a working relationship with Old Salem, Inc., with its sister archive for the Northern Province in Bethlehem, and with the denomination's two educational institutions: Salem College, in Winston-Salem, and Moravian College and Theological Seminary, in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. In fact, the Archives was involved in the preparations for Old Salem since its inception in 1950, providing church records for microfilming and translating under the supervision of the archivist, while retaining ownership and disposition of the records.²²



Assistant Archivist Nicole Blum in the Isolation Room prior to processing.

As the repository for a denomination very much alive, the Moravian Archives continues to engage in new projects and to publish new work. Among other projects, archivist C. Daniel Crews is engaged in gathering the earliest translations and records of the earliest conferences, and filling in any gaps. Assistant archivist Nicole Blum initiated a project to inventory and make available maps, and assistant archivist Richard W. Starbuck is busily scanning memoirs (there are about 12,000 total!) to make digital copies available.²³ Be sure to visit, and discover treasures of this collection!

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- ² American Religion Data Archive, "Maps and Reports," American Religion Data Archive, <<http://www.thearda.com>>(December 30, 2005).
- ³ Frank S. Mead and Samuel S. Hill, *Handbook of Denominations in the United States*. 11th ed. Rev. by Craig D. Atwood (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 78.
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ E. A. Livingstone, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford Univ P, 1997), 1112; Mead and Hill, 78-79.

⁶ Fries, 14.

⁷ Fries, 14-15.

⁸ Moravian Archives, "Wachovia Tract Map," Moravian Archives, Southern Province, <<http://www.moravianarchives.org/mapview.htm>> (January 5, 2006).

⁹ Fries, *Guide to the Manuscripts in the Archives of the Moravian Church, Southern Province* (Raleigh: The North Carolina Historical Records Survey, 1942): 2.

¹⁰ Crews, C. Daniel and Richard W. Starbuck, *With Courage for the Future: The Story of the Moravian Church, Southern Province*. (Winston-Salem, NC: Moravian Church in America, Southern Province, 2002): 83.

¹¹ Ibid., 421.

¹² Ibid., 251-52.

¹³ Fries, 2.

¹⁴ Crews, 481-82.

¹⁵ Ibid., 544.

¹⁶ Ibid., 850.

¹⁷ Ibid., 743.

¹⁸ Moravian Archives, "Moravian Archives, Winston-Salem, North Carolina," Moravian Archives, Southern Province, <<http://www.moravianarchives.org>> (January 5, 2006).

¹⁹ Fries, 20.

²⁰ Crews, 666.

²¹ Moravian Archives, "Genealogical Research," Moravian Archives, Southern Province, <<http://www.moravianarchives.org/genealogy.htm>> (January 6, 2006).

²² Ibid., 627-28.

²³ Moravian Archives, "These Projects Will Keep Us Busy For a While," Moravian Archives, Southern Province, <<http://www.moravianarchives.org/articles/maps.htm>> (January 5, 2006).

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