

# NOTES FROM THE ARCHIVES



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Canadian Moravian Historical Society, Edmonton Chapter  
2304-38 Street, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada T6L 4K9

## What Have We Been Up To?

The Canadian Moravian Historical Society held its 35th Annual General Meeting on April 22, 2017 at the Millwoods Community Church. A new Board was elected (listed at the end of the column.) The Presidents, Membership and Financial reports passed without objection. The change to the by-laws, allowing the Board to include individuals that are not current members of a Canadian Moravian Church, was presented and passed. A Board position was subsequently filled by Joel Henkelman who is a lifelong Alaska Moravian, being elected a Board Member. The highlight of the meeting was the presentation by Dr. Paul Peucker, Archivist from the Moravian Archives in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. A summary is provided in this newsletter.

After many years of dedicated service Laurie Ward stepped down as Board President. She will be missed and her years of service are very much appreciated.

Based on guidance from Dr. Peucker, the digitizing of the church registers from the Canadian Moravian Churches has started. New Sarepta and Bruderfeld/Millwoods is nearing completion. The goal is to make them available on the internet, most likely through the database being created by the Moravian Archives in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

### Following is a listing of the Canadian Moravian Historical Society (Edmonton Chapter)

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## The Moravian Archives

The presentation at the Annual meeting was given by Dr. Paul Peucker, Archivist at the Moravian Archives in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. He covered the history, function, importance and future of Moravian archiving. Following are highlights from his presentation.

The Mission Statement of the Moravian Archives reads as follows:

- The Moravian Archives collects, preserves and makes available the historical records of the Moravian Church in America, Northern Province and its members.
- It is our task and our privilege to collect, preserve and to make available the inspiring history of our Church. Like the early Moravians we feel that we do not record ordinary history but that we preserve testimonies of experiences our fathers and mothers had with their faith. We want to pass this history on to future generations.

The Moravian Archives are located in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania and are a Provincial Agency. They are similar to organizations and boards like the Provincial Women's Board, Larger Life Foundation, Moravian Open Door, and the Society for Propagating the Gospel. This is in contrast to interprovincial agencies such as the Interprovincial Board of Communication, Board of World Mission, Moravian Ministries Foundation, and Moravian Music Foundation.

Moravians have a history as good record keepers. This goes back, in America, to the mid 1700s. Most churches keep meeting minutes, correspondence, financial records, church registers and papers regarding property. Frequently Moravians kept other materials such as communal diaries, memoirs and other 'Congregational Accounts'. These records and accounts end up in the archives.

Because of the records contained, the archives frequently get requests for important documents that were saved by the church. For instance, if someone wants to get married in another church, archive records will show that they were baptized in the Moravian Church. People that are doing family histories are very interested in and request information from the church registers, land records and diaries.

VIEW OF HERRNHUT, CA. 1800



This all goes back to our church's early history. We remember how immigrants came to Herrnhut and founded a community in 1722. By 1727 there were about 300 people living in the community. These people had left their homes and possessions behind and come to Herrnhut to live in this faith-based Christian Community. They were not the easiest or most congenial people. They were very outspoken and had strong opinions about what they believed and how someone else should or should not behave. We know the story that by 1727 people were fighting with each other and there was a lot of conflict and tension. In August of 1727, during a communion service, the Moravians experienced what they called an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. During this outpouring it became apparent to them that the theological differences were not important but it was important that they understand that they were one congregation. From that moment on they believed that God was acting in their community. They believed that God was working in mankind and that his work and presence needed to be documented. That was the year that the Herrnhut Community began maintaining a diary. They felt that, in some ways, what was happening was a continuation of the Biblical story and it was very important to document these events.

Moravians felt they were a worldwide fellowship. They went out to other areas of the world and reported on what they were doing. The Moravians had a centralized organization. All the decisions were made in Germany and people were reporting back and forth. Combine that with a feeling that they were doing the work of God and it became very important that the material documenting of the work of God needed to be preserved. So the archives in the Moravian Church became not just a closet where all these materials were stored but a repository of faith and experiences.

People were expected to write down the experiences of his or her life and the archives was where all this information was kept. Archiving became a very important Moravian tradition and we are thankful that our ancestors provided all this material. We carry this tradition forward to today.

In 1993, W.R. Ward stated in "The Renewed Unity of the Brethren: Ancient Church, New Sect or Transconfessional Movement", about the Moravians. "The characteristic expression of their belief was not the confession of faith, in the Reformation tradition, but the accumulation of archives, the evidence of the way God operated in history." Religious historians have compared the Moravian faith with the faith of other denominations and determined that statements of faith are not critically important but, what is more important is the evidence of how God has worked in our lives. This characteristic expression of their belief was not in the confession of faith in the reformation tradition but in the accumulation of archives, which demonstrates how God has operated in history.



Bethlehem in 1757

The first reference to archives in Bethlehem is in 1745. Bethlehem was founded in 1741 and by 1745 they already had an archives. The first archives were located in the attic of one of the early buildings in Bethlehem. By 1757 the room had become so full that it became necessary to organize and inventory everything there. The first items on the original inventory are the diaries from the founding of Bethlehem. Additionally, diaries are found from various communities and Moravian churches in the area.

By 1812 the archives had outgrown their original location and were moved to the Old Chapel in Bethlehem. The Chapel was a second place of worship in Bethlehem. Just before the archives were moved a

new sanctuary was completed and the use of the Old Chapel was diminished. This left it available to the archives. In 1836 the archives moved again, to the second floor of a new church building which is currently known as Central Church. It remained there for almost a century.



**Central Moravian Church  
Bethlehem, Pennsylvania**

In the 1890's, when interest in history began to take hold, the Pennsylvania History and Museum Commission complemented the Moravian church on their wonderful and valuable collection of records. However, they were concerned that it should be housed in a better facility. The current facility contained wood floors and walls and was susceptible to damage by fire. The Moravians immediately began raising money for an upgraded archival facility. It took until 1930 for the funds to be raised and facility to be built. The archives were then able to move into a new facility on the campus of Moravian college. It was a stone building and provided better protection for the archive materials.

By the mid 1970s the Moravian College decided that it needed the building. To provide space for a new facility, the college offered the archives board a piece of property on the College campus grounds. A complete new facility was built, specifically for the archives. That is where they reside today.

The new archives have secure vaults with fire proof doors and a fire suppression system. The vaults are climate controlled at 18°C and 55% humidity. In 2013 the Federal government recognized the importance of the archival work of the Moravian Church and provided a grant for upgraded shelving. The new shelving is mobile, on rollers and is a very efficient way to store materials.



**The current Moravian Archives Building  
Bethlehem, Pennsylvania**

Everything is stored in acid free folders and acid free boxes. This is called passive preservation. This would be in contrast to active preservation which would include sending a painting off to a conservator or a book to be a rebound or papers to be repair or similar activities. Active preservation is very expensive and we are not able to afford it all of the time. For this reason we use passive preservation to keep in good condition those items we already have.

We do a lot of cataloging. Everything is entered into a computer and then uploaded to our site on the web. People can then see what materials are contained in our archives. We do the same thing for our library which currently contains over 17,000 titles. We have a librarian that does this work for us. From our web site you can also access a catalog of thousands of libraries worldwide which may help you find a particular title that you're looking for.



**The archive vaults are temperature/climate controlled and have moveable shelving.**

We have a very active website. If you want to find out about activities at the archives it is a good source of information. From our web site you can also access finding aids to assist you in your research.

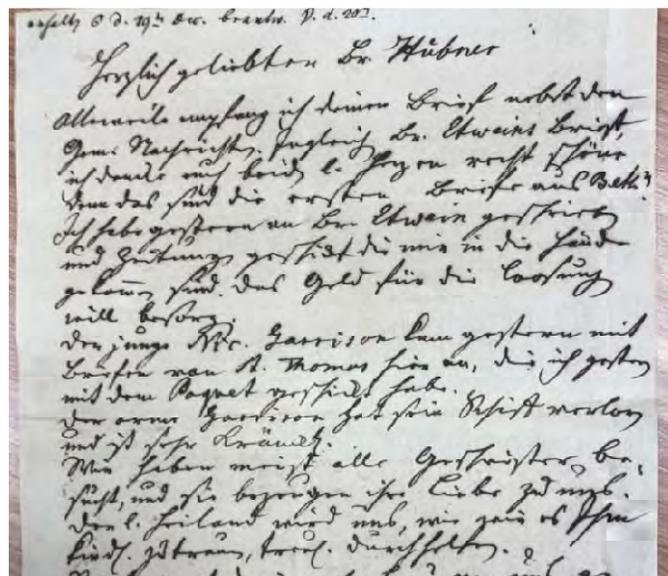
As archivists we maintain, preserve, process, catalog and appraise everything that comes in. We identify and remove duplicate materials and make sure that only the important items are preserved. We also spent time on acquisition. We go to online auctions and web sites to find books and materials that we do not already have in our archives. We also talk to people that are doing work or generating material that we may want to preserve.



The archives have a reading room which is a space that an individual can use for their research and studies. We bring out requested materials from the archives and help them by frequently making suggestions as to where they can find answers to their questions. We also get numerous requests for information by phone and e-mail.

We frequently sponsor programs and lectures on individuals and events of importance in the history of the Moravian Church. We also sponsor an English German singing service during advent. Many Moravians have a German background and like to celebrate the Christmas season with German Christmas carols. The service is set up to allow the singing of carols in English and German at the same time. We do this in conjunction with the Moravian Music Foundation and the Central Moravian Church.

Since 1971 we have sponsored a German script class. Older German writing, particularly before World War II, can be very difficult to read and is not easy to learn. Scholars from all over the country come to Bethlehem for the two week course. Because material from the archives is used in the training and a walking tour of Bethlehem is provided, many of the scholars and attendees have become very interested in Moravian history.



**Training classes in the reading and translation of old German Script are sponsored.**

We have an active outreach program and go to local schools or invite classes to come to the archives during which time we demonstrate the materials and documents the archives contain. We have exhibition space in the archives and try to provide a new display every year. This year Bethlehem is celebrating its 275th birthday and we have an exhibition called Building Bethlehem. The displays covered Bethlehem's earliest history.

For a number of years we sponsored a monthly newsletter which covered various events in the history of the Moravian Church. These newsletters are being gathered together and will be included in a book. Currently, we publish a semiannual newsletter for the Friends of the Archives. We produce the 'Journal of Moravian History' which is a scholarly publication. It is provided so that scholars from all over the world can publish their writings on Moravian history. This is a peer review journal and neither the authors nor the reviewers know who the other party is. The reviewers comment and make suggestions on the article and the author then provides an update before publication. We started this in-house in 2006 and a couple of years later, because of its historical importance, the Pennsylvania State University press came to us and said they were willing to take this over and publish it on our behalf. This has worked out very well and it allows the journal to be published twice a year both in hardcopy and online.



**We maintain a rotating display of our most important and interesting artifacts, documents and art work.**

We have a small core of employees but most of the work gets done by a large group of volunteers. They help in all aspects of the work. This includes sorting, indexing, cleaning, scanning and much more. Several of them have been working on a project called Moravian Roots. It is a database that includes information from all the churches. It will contain births, baptisms, confirmations, marriages and funerals all in one database. Currently, when someone comes to us looking for information on an individual they have to know what congregation the individual would be associated with. With this database all we will have to do is type in a name and all the information should be available. We have more than 250 church registers and are grateful to the volunteers that are willing to enter all this data. We posted ads in the newspaper soliciting help with this project and got numerous volunteers that have no ties to the Moravian Church but are very interested in this project. They have become very dedicated to it. As the project progresses we will make the database available online.

Financing for the archives comes from several different sources. 26% comes from the Northern Province. 15% comes from the Moravian churches in the Bethlehem area. An endowment has been set up for the archives and we get 24% of our funding from that endowment. 12% of our income comes from various programs sponsored by the archives. 22% of our funding comes from Friends of the Archives. This includes both one time and on-going donors who have chosen to sponsor

the work that we do. We need to expand this source of funding since we do not expect the contributions from the Moravian church to grow.

We have many diaries in our archives. They include diaries from locations such as Nazareth, Lititz, Philadelphia and New York. They date back to the early 1740s and if you are interested in looking at what was going on during the American Revolution these diaries are a great place to catch a snapshot of history. You will frequently find historical information that is not recorded anywhere else. The diaries record not only the work of the Moravians but also the world in which they were living.



**Kralice Bible**

One of the most valuable pieces of our collection is a Kralice Bible. It is an early Czech translation of the Bible and was the Czech equivalent of the King James Version for the English. It was printed in the print shop of the Brethren in the late 1570s. Subsequently, it was outlawed and ordered that all copies be destroyed. This copy was used only in hiding and kept in a box buried in someone's backyard. Every time they wanted to read it and they had to dig it up, read it and then rebury it. The archives were able to purchase this Bible and its history in the 1950s. Some of the title pages have been replaced and other pages show water damage but it is still in fairly good condition.

There are numerous other documents and publications in the archives. One is a 1751 deed for 500 hundred acres on the Lehigh Valley River for the original Moravian settlement of Bethlehem. In 2016, in celebration of the 275th anniversary of the signing of

the deed, we put it on display in the archives for one day. We called it deed day and invited locals in to see the original document. We had over 850 people come to see the document. Most visitors were not aware that the archives existed and were impressed by the work done. Many people donate bibles to the archives. Some time ago I was going through a pile of Bibles in a corner of the vault and found one that looked most interesting. After some research we discovered that it was Zinzendorf's personal Bible from the 1740s. It had belonged to a pastor who was a descendant of Zinzendorf and was donated to the archives in the 1950s.

Also maintained in the archives is a collection of portraits and paintings. They were done by Moravian artists dating back to the 1700s. We also have a few artifacts such as an Indian doll from the 1780s. We have collected numerous examples of Moravian music which is maintained by the Moravian Music Foundation. They make the music available, upon request. We have a large collection of books and try to purchase any books on Moravians and their history, not already contained in our library. The oldest book in our collection dates back to 1472, approximately 20 years after movable type printing was invented. The book doesn't necessarily have anything to do with Moravian history but was owned by a Moravian minister and donated to the archives. We have 12 books, in our collection, that were printed before 1500.

The Archive attempts to maintain a full set of the old Moravian Daily Text books. The earliest one in the collection dates back to 1733 and was printed in German. The very first Moravian Daily Text book was printed in 1731. In 1732 they just printed a list of the daily texts from the previous year and used them, in a different order, than they had been 1731. In 1733 they printed a new collection of daily texts. The only other copy from 1731 is in Herrnhut. The first English daily text was printed in 1743.

As Moravian missionaries went out they frequently had to study and learn the language of the country or region in which they were working. As they studied and learned these languages they often provided the archives documents and writings in the languages of the location in which they work. They frequently translated the Bible into these languages. As a result the archives contain documents in numerous foreign languages. Many of the old languages have become or

are becoming obsolete. That makes many of these old documents rare and valuable.

The archives also contained a fairly extensive photo collection. They cover locations around the world and over periods of time that Moravian mission work was active. Many architectural drawings of buildings that the church built over the years are also available. We have records from over 100 Moravian congregations and it is a large task to organize and document where all the information is stored.

The archives contain an original Lot Box. This is based on the old custom of drawing lots. When major decisions had to be made and there were several options, after much prayer and consideration, a lot was drawn to get the approval



of Christ. The lots included yes, no and a blank lot. The official use of the Lot Box was stopped in 1868 but the box is preserved in the archives to this day.

To expand and enhance our collection we monitor EBay, auction sites and other locations where documents and items of Moravian historical importance may be found.

We are looking for ways to improve and expand the archives services. A great way is for you to stay informed and get involved in the archives. We would appreciate if you would 'like' us on Facebook. From our Archives website at <http://www.moravianchurcharchives.org> you can learn more about the Archives, find research aids, view a calendar of upcoming events, find lists of publications, get on the email list or join the Friends of the Archives and show your ongoing support of our efforts.