

## HOPE AND THE MORAVIANS

A talk given prior to

### The Unitas Chorale Concert

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By

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It's nice to be back in Hope helping to bring Moravian music to life, Moravians have had a long-term love affair with this place. They founded the town in 1769 and then left in 1808. Then they came back in 1946 to establish what is now the Hope Conference and Renewal Center.

This year the Moravian Church is celebrating the 550<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its beginning so it had a long history before some its members arrived in Hope. The denomination traces its origins to the work of the Czech Roman Catholic priest and educator, John Hus of Prague. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century (a hundred years before Martin Luther), Hus was calling for reforms in the church: a return to scriptural purity in church practice, a recognition of the church as consisting of all who possess the spirit of Christ and lead Christ-like lives, and a moral reform of the clergy. He also advocated serving both bread and wine to all believers in the Eucharist, preaching in the local language and encouraged congregational hymn singing. As is often the case with reformers, Hus' ideas encountered severe opposition and he ended up being burned at the stake as a heretic on July 6, 1415 by order of a church council in Constance, Germany.

Hus' ideas did not die but gave rise to a variety of groups, which wished to implement them. One such group, the Unity of Brethren, was organized in early March 1457 in the rural town of Kunwald (now in the Czech Republic). So, the Moravian Church was founded 550 years ago.

The church flourished in central Europe and fostered, among other things, a significant musical tradition through the composition of hymns and the publication of hymnbooks. But the good days were not to last.

It's a long and complicated story full of the political intrigue, general mayhem, and warfare of the time but the Unity found itself engulfed in the Thirty-Years War ravaging Europe from 1618 to 1648 and was nearly destroyed.

Yet the spirit and traditions of the Unity survived repression and secret members of the church arrived as refugees in eastern Germany in the 1720s. There they came under the protection and patronage of a Lutheran pietist nobleman, Count Nicholas Ludwig von

Zinzendorf, who would devote his life until his death in 1760 to the development of the modern Moravian Church.

Moravians then began to spread around the world. They perceived that they had a special calling as a Christian church: to proclaim the Christian gospel to people who had never heard it and to whom no one else was ministering. This calling took them to African slaves on the island of St. Thomas in the Caribbean in 1732. And it brought them to Pennsylvania in 1740 where they set about establishing all those biblically named towns in the Lehigh Valley: Nazareth, Bethlehem, and Emmaus. The Moravians had sought the religious toleration of William Penn's territory for two reasons: as a new home should they be banished from Saxony, Germany and to establish a base from which they might evangelize Native Americans.

So it was that by the mid 1740s the Moravians were sending missionaries to several tribal groups including Mohicans in the Berkshire region of the Hudson River valley. As missionaries Joseph Powel, Joseph Shaw, and others traveled to and from Bethlehem and the Mohican territory, they frequently enjoyed the hospitality offered by Samuel and Abigail Green, early settlers in this area (which was known variously as Green's Ridge, Greenwich, and Greenland).

The Greens must have liked their visitors. In 1749 the Green family went to Bethlehem where they were all baptized, they sent their children to Moravian schools there, they took temporary refuge there during the French and Indian War. The Greens must have had good experiences among the Moravians. In 1768 Samuel went to Bethlehem and made an offer. He would give his land to the Moravians if they would establish a settlement like Bethlehem on it.

Moravian towns of that era were unique communities. They were frequently located in remote frontier areas. As such they were expected to be economically self-sufficient so agricultural activities and various crafts and trades were pursued. They were structured to encourage a vital spiritual life. Moravians believed that we experience the presence of Christ in our lives in various ways as we journey through life. So members were organized into groups, called choirs, according to age and status: children, young boys, young girls, single brothers, single sisters, married people, widows, and widowers. Members of each choir worshipped together in addition to worshipping with the whole community and often they worked together. Sometimes they lived together in their large stone 'choir houses,' especially the single brothers, single sisters, and widows. The structure of the exclusive communities (you had to be a church member to live in them) lasted for nearly a century. They have been described as 'Protestant married monastic communities' – all your needs, physical and spiritual were addressed and your primary focus was on the mission of the church.

Moravian officials believed that to accept the Green's land outright as a gift would deprive their two sons of their inheritance. So they worked out a deal involving a cash payment and the assurance that the Greens would be cared for by remaining in their house, maintaining their garden and receiving free firewood and hay for two cows as long as they lived.

The Peter Worbass family come from Bethlehem in the spring of 1769 and now the project was underway. A flourmill was built, a general store opened, the Rev. John Jacob

Schmick arrived as the first pastor in 1771. Surveying of the town site was finished by November 1774 and the town was officially named Hope. Soon there was a distillery and brewery, a blacksmith's shop, and bricks were being manufactured. Town regulations were drawn up and four men were selected to serve as the Town Council. In 1781 the large "Gemeinhaus" or "congregation house" which contained living quarters and a church sanctuary was built. This is now the bank building on the corner at the blinker light.

In August 1781 Dr. C.F. Kampman arrived to provide medical care for the 53 residents. The single sisters began to live together as a choir and established a school for girls. The boys got their school in 1786. A sawmill, a pottery, and an inn came next. In 1789 a set of trombones arrived from Europe. These would be played on festival occasions and to announce deaths in the community, according to the Moravian custom.

The first twenty-one years of the town (1769 –1790) were the most successful from the Moravian point of view. There were 36 buildings in the town and adjacent countryside. Many of these buildings remain today and are described in the excellent materials available about their history and the walking tours of Hope. The population was 147 in 1790 but it would decline steadily after that.

The Moravians of Hope survived the Revolutionary War mainly by maintaining a low profile. Several members of the Continental Congress passed through town and approved of what they saw. George Washington and his party visited on June 26, 1782 and also approved. The residents may have hauled flour from the mill to Washington's army during its winter in Morristown and perhaps also cannon balls.

The village population continued to shrink. By 1800 there were only 84 residents. In those days Hope was in a rural area and even other Moravians did not want to live in such a remote place, preferring the 'urban life' of the more prosperous Moravian settlements in eastern Pennsylvania.

As a consequence of events in Europe, the international Moravian Church found itself with a massive financial debt in the years after 1760. Payment of the debt became an obligation laid upon all Moravian congregations and only the strongest would survive. The future of marginal operations was questioned and Hope was becoming marginal.

Gradually the schools in Hope were closed. The Single Sisters choir was dissolved in 1806. Finally it was decided that the property would be sold and the residents resettled in other Moravian towns. On Easter Sunday, April 17, 1808, the 63 remaining residents gathered for their last service and the congregation followed their pastor to the cemetery, now next to St. John's United Methodist Church, where they offered a final prayer over the graves of 62 persons who had died during the days of Moravian Hope, which was now at an end.

But of course, the town did not really die. In 1824 Warren County was laid out and the first sessions of the county court were held in the old Moravian Church. This Episcopal congregation was organized in 1831 and the Methodist Church two years later. Over the years there have been many change and additions, including a wonderful re-discovery and appreciation of the unique heritage of this town.

The Moravian Church survived the loss of this marginal operation as well. It would continue its strong presence in eastern Pennsylvania and since the 1760s in another center of Moravian activity, which had grown up in Salem, North Carolina (now the city of Winston-Salem). The Church would abandon its exclusive communities in the mid nineteenth century as its own self-understanding evolved and as a result of a new understanding of denominational life in America. Yet many features of the old settlements continue to shape Moravian Church life: the musical tradition, its liturgically ordered worship, the observance of the Lovefeast, and special Christmas and Easter celebrations. The Church also expanded geographically through the establishment of new congregations. In North America Moravian congregations will be found in many eastern states as well as in the upper Midwest (the result of 19<sup>th</sup> century German and Scandinavian immigration) and the Canadian Province of Alberta.

The Moravian Church has also remained true to its early perception of itself as a missionary church. From that 1732 beginning on St. Thomas, Moravians have been constantly engaged in cross-cultural evangelization. The result is that today, in addition to Moravian congregations in Europe, England and North America, there are Moravians among native peoples in Alaska, Labrador, Central America, the eastern Caribbean, and Africa. As Moravians have organized all this, there are now 19 self-governing Provinces of the international Moravian Church, which comprise what we call the Moravian Unity. American Moravians are very consciously part of an international church and there are many cross-Provincial contacts. There are about 46,000 Moravians in North America today and a total of about 798,000 worldwide.

The Moravian Church has also been involved in ecumenical Christian activities from its beginning. American Moravians were founding members of both the National and World Councils of Churches and have recently entered into full communion with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and are involved in bilateral discussions with several other Protestant denominations.

And the Moravians came back to Hope, NJ. In 1945 a synod of the church declared that it was time to establish a “Moravian camp” as the site for summer youth activities. As is the usual procedure in such cases, a committee was appointed to find the place and given a small amount of “seed money” with which to work. They searched far and wide and finally were able to purchase the 86-acre Riedmann farm just outside of Hope. It was the best site available as far as the committee was concerned. Its closeness to old “Moravian Hope’ was only a coincidental connection. The first official event was a Junior Camp (9-12 year olds) in 1946. After some 60 years and some ups and downs, the Hope Conference and Renewal Center now plays a major role in the life of the Moravian Church and I’m sure is happy to now claim its connection with the Hope Moravians of yesteryear.

And now there are some more Moravians right here back in Hope for this concert. It has been said that ‘Moravians sing their faith’ and that is what we are here to do. Moravians began singing their faith in 1505 when the Church published its first hymnal containing some 400 hymns. Singing has always and continues to play a major role in Moravian worship. The esteemed Moravian Bishop John Amos Comenius taught that artistic abilities such as those reflected in the creation and performance of music are gifts from God and that in exercising those gifts, one is praising God.

The concert program contains a nice description of the Unitas Chorale and presents the credentials of our distinguished director. It should be noted that she and her husband, the Rev. Rick Bruckart, the Administrator of the Hope Center, actually live here so there really are live Moravians living in Hope again! The Unitas Chorale members are Moravians from congregations in PA and NJ and hold a variety of 'day jobs.' We are here because we enjoy singing and we enjoy this music. The music we will sing has been composed over time from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 21st centuries by Moravians and those influenced by them. There were Moravians singing in Hope 200 years ago and we're still at it. Enjoy the concert!

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