



Moravian Church at Bethabara (Winston-Salem, N.C.)

STAYING AT PEACE IN WARTIME

The Moravians were, and are, a Protestant evangelical and pietist sect or denomination, that was formed in 15th century in Bohemia (or what is now Czechoslovakia), followers of John Hus and who predated even the Lutherans, and who held strict pacifism in the highest regard. Congregations of their followers came to the present day Winston-Salem area in North Carolina about the mid 18th century,¹ and founded three settlements there, specifically: Salem, Bethabara, and Bethania. These clean, well run and administered, and prosperous towns often acted as both supply and wayfaring points for both American and British forces during the Revolutionary War. And while both sides for the most part, respected the settlements' conscientious neutrality, the Moravians were hard pressed keeping the combatants housed and fed when occasion arose, most notably during the hot and heavy fighting in late 1780 and early 1781; while, simultaneously, attempting to remain above and apart from the fray.

The records of the congregations' minutes from those times provides an unusual and sometimes amusing picture of these Christian, and predominantly (but not exclusively) German, settlements striving, not without difficulty, to stay aloof from the partisanship of the conflict; while, simultaneously, endeavoring to care and provide for soldiers of opposing sides. The following, taken from *Records of the Moravians in North Carolina, Vol. IV: 1780-1783*, edited by Adelaide L. Fries (Edwards & Broughton Company, Raleigh: 1930) are some revealing, and at times comical, passages selected from those records.²

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*~ from minutes of the Salem Congregation*

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<sup>1</sup> There were also, at that time, significant concentrations of Moravians in Pennsylvania as well.

<sup>2</sup> On a related note, the Marquis de Chastellux writes at some length about the people and customs of the Moravians of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania; see his *Travels in North-America, in the Years 1780, 1781, and 1782* (1787), Part I, ch. II.

Aug. 22. [1780] Toward noon Colonel [John] Armstrong and his brother the Major arrived. They had been in the battle [i.e. the Battle of Camden, Aug. 16, 1780], and through them we heard that Brigadier [Griffith] Rutherford was taken prisoner. An attempt will be made to gather the scattered troops, and half the militia are to be called out. The people are in extreme fright because of the English...<sup>3</sup>

Aug. 26. This morning Col. Armstrong and Mr. Sheppard and Mr. Commans [Cummings] arrived, on their way to Hillsborough. The first-named told Br. [Brother] Bagge confidentially that men were speaking angrily against us as Tories, from whom an uprising might be expected from Virginia, who were known to deal sharply with such people. He promised to give the necessary orders for our protection, for he did not consider us Tories...<sup>4</sup>

Aug. 28. ...We hear that a company of light-horse, under Captain Caldwell, are on a Tory hunt in the neighborhood. They have beaten several men, and threatened Br. Steiner, claiming that he had spoken against *Liberty*. May the Lord mercifully turn this aside from us...<sup>5</sup>

Sept. 5. ...There is much distress in Bethabara, for 300 soldiers from Virginia are there, who have camped in the orchard, where they do as they please...<sup>6</sup>

Oct. 9. ...Andreas Volk's son came for the doctor for his brother-in-law Johann Krause, who was shot in the leg yesterday while standing guard at Richmond, which was again visited by a strong party of Tories under Gideon Wright. The bullet had remained in his limbs; Joseph Dixon was sent to bind up the wound. The Tories had expressed sympathy for the injured man, saying the ball had not been meant for him but for some one else, and so on. What consequences this may have remains to be seen...<sup>7</sup>

Oct. 19. ...A Proclamation of [Maj.] General [William] Smallwood had been published, in which he stated that any soldier caught robbing would be brought to the camp and hanged. This order will have a good effect, for barbarous and unjust treatment has driven many to the Tories who would gladly have remained peaceful.<sup>8</sup>

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~ *from minutes of the Bethabara Congregation*

Feb. 6. [1781] During last night [Brig.] General [Andrew] Pickens arrived with his men and something over twenty wagons. Corn, hay, bread, and brandy were given to him at

³ *Records of the Moravians in North Carolina, Vol. IV: 1780-1783*, p. 1560.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 1561.

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 1561.

⁶ *Ibid.* p. 1563.

⁷ *Ibid.* p. 1571.

⁸ *Ibid.* p. 1572.

his request. He kept good order among his men. His manner was fatherly and mild, and he voted his belief that we would take no part in anything that was partisan or low. In the afternoon Colonel [Elijah] Clark arrived with more than fifty horse-men, and another company passed by the mill, all hurrying after General Pickens. So it went all day, partly with the passing of militia, partly with people fleeing from the war.⁹

Feb. 9. We expected the return of our guests of yesterday, but instead about eleven o'clock, a company of English dragoons arrived, bringing an order from Lord Cornwallis, for brandy, meat, meal and bread, and instructions that our mill should grind all it could, and that in the afternoon our wagon should take it to Bethania, where there were more than seven thousand men. In the afternoon the Commissary came for 100 gallons of brandy, more than 300 lbs. Of bread, and all the meal that was ready...Then came a company of German Tories, with an order for cattle for the army, -- just now the question is not who are friends of the land but who are friends of the king. The last named company seized several travelers here, and took them to Bethania, to the main camp.¹⁰

Feb. 16. The company in the tavern was called out at three o'clock this morning. The guard hailed some one, who replied: *Good Friend*. To the question: *Whose friend?* Came the answer: *King George's*.

Then it was quiet until nearly four o'clock when the advance guard of General Pickens company arrived with orders for meat, corn and meal...The General and his officers were polite and courteous, and assured us that no damage should be done; and as it would be necessary for our wagon to take the meat and meal to the camp late in the evening they promised that it should not be pressed. Our supply of bread was all taken, largely without pay. The company that was here last night returned, and it was in all respects a much disturbed time.¹¹

March 10. The above-mentioned guests remained until noon. Last night they broke into the spring-house; and they took all the eggs, even from geese that were setting. We were glad that no more damage was done by these people, who have been robbing and plundering wherever they go. Several Brethren went from here to the election of new members of the Assembly. Colonel [William] Preston and Colonel [Walter] Crocket[t] arrived and spent the night. The fire from General Pickens' camp, between Rank's and the lower meadow, broke out, and before it could be extinguished a hundred rails were burned. The fence was probably set on fire, for it was discovered after they left.¹²

For information on both restored Old Salem and Bethabara respectively, see <http://www.oldsalem.org/> and <http://www.bethabarpark.org/>

⁹ *Ibid.* p. 1741.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 1742.

¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 1743.

¹² *Ibid.* p. 1747.

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