

Far Heel Spotlight

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL RESOURCES
Grace J. Rohrer, Secretary

EARLY MORAVIAN CHRISTMASSES
Christmas Eve, 1755, had come to Wachovia and, as usual, a careful record was kept of the Moravian congregation's activities of the day. At 10 that night, a watch-meeting was held, and the pastor and the people sang "from the large Hymnbook hymns written in all centuries concerning the night of Christ's nativity, drawing special attention to one written by Count Zinzendorf thirteen years ago. The service closed with a Lovefeast, and evening prayers. A deep snow fell during the night."

This record of Christmas, 1755, is among hundreds of other events recorded by Moravians who settled in North Carolina in the mid-eighteenth century.

The chronicle continues: The next day, Thursday, was Christmas day. Trumpets awakened the people, and at 10 A.M. they gathered to hear "an earnest sermon" by Brother Christian Henrich. That afternoon a Christmas sermon of Count Zinzendorf was read

and in the evening service Br. Henrich again addressed the people, "and so this day of great grace and blessing was happily and thankfully ended."

The diary of Bethabara for 1760 records a slightly more lively Christmas. "On Christmas Day the English children from the mill came to see our Christmas decoration, they were so poorly clad that it would have moved a stone to pity. We told them why we rejoiced like children and gave to each a piece of cake. In Bethania Br. Eitwein held a Lovefeast for the 24 children there, at the close of the service each received a pretty Christmas verse and a ginger cake, the first they had ever seen."

Two years later an entry for Christmas Eve reported that a Lovefeast was held in Bethania for the children, "who at its close received lighted wax tapers, and then a Lovefeast for the Congregation." At Bethabara there was also a Lovefeast for the children, who "rejoiced over the birth of the little Jesus, and at its close they received as in Bethania for the first time lighted wax tapers." Later there was a Lovefeast for the congregation, and old German and English hymns were read and sung. On Christmas morning the congregations in both Bethania and Bethabara were awakened with music, and services were again held.

Little honey cakes and verses were distributed during the Christmas Eve service held by the "Little Company on the Ens or South P.O." in 1770. Hymns were sung, the Christmas story was told to the children, and during the Lovefeast more hymns were sung with violin accompaniment provided by Br. Volk. The service closed with prayer, and the "children were full of wonder and joy, it being the first time they had attended such a service."

In the following century, the Moravians were still keeping records; and entries speak of Christmas. The diary of the Bethania congregation for 1855 tells of the rain on Dec. 24. "It was remarkable how many people came through the deep mud to the Christmas vigil service. The children urge them on and almost all were here. The service was held at 5, and later an English sermon on the spiritual text, attended mostly by young people. The choir music went fairly well, though in part it was too slow, as usual."

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