

MORAVIAN MUSIC FOUNDATION

Finding aid for

Bethlehem Congregation Collection

Date range: 1750-1885

Bulk dates: 1770-1830

Finding Aid created by Nola Reed Knouse, April 10, 2019

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Creator: Bethlehem Area Moravians (formerly Bethlehem Congregation), Moravian Church in America, Northern Province, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania

Extent: 81 boxes, 115 linear feet

Abstract: The Bethlehem Congregation Collection consists of some 1740 sacred vocal compositions used in worship services in the Moravian community of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. The majority of the pieces are by Moravian composers, but the collection also contains a significant number of works by other composers, including *contrafacta*.

Call number: B – Moravian Archives, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania

Language: Over 2/3 of the material is in German, with the remainder in English and a number of works without linguistic content.

Access and Use:

Acquisition Information: These materials are in the custody of the Moravian Music Foundation from the Moravian Archives, Bethlehem, PA.

Access Restrictions: The record group is open to research.

Copyright: Copyright is with the Moravian Music Foundation

Cite as: [item], Bethlehem Congregation Collection [number], Moravian Music Foundation.

History: Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, was founded in 1741 by Moravian settlers, including the remnants of a failed settlement in Georgia (begun 1735), and served as a home base for missionaries and traveling preachers whose duties carried them to native Americans and European settlers in New York, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, New Jersey, the Caribbean, and South America.

Worship services structured life in Bethlehem, as in all other Moravian settlement congregations in the eighteenth century. Devotional meetings for small groups or the whole community occurred several times daily. In smaller assemblies hymns might be sung without accompaniment. Three services involved music in special ways. Sunday morning preaching services included liturgies according to the Lutheran liturgical year, usually along with one or two anthems and congregational hymns.

The *Singstunde* was the most characteristically-Moravian order of worship, instituted by their patron Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf within the congregation at Herrnhut, Germany; the worship leader chose from various hymns individual stanzas that combined to craft a unified message. Since the liturgist began singing each stanza without announcement or printed order of worship, the congregation's ability to participate relied upon their familiarity with hundreds of stanzas. The Moravians sang hymns daily and read and memorized hymn texts as a spiritual exercise, using printed hymnals at home for devotion but not during worship. The organist was also expected to identify the tune, and also to play in the same key in which the leader was singing, using his memory and ear. The *Singstunden* were held weekly as well as on special occasions, and could include a choir anthem. A sermon and the reading of the *Gemein Nachrichten* (congregational news from other settlements) might also be a part of the *Singstunde*.

The third type of service using music extensively was the Lovefeast (*Liebesmahl*). Modeled after the early Christian practice of expressing *agape* through sharing a simple meal, the Lovefeast includes the sharing of a beverage and bread during the worship service. Lovefeasts were held (and continue in many Moravian congregations today) to celebrate Christian feast days, Moravian festival anniversaries, and many kinds of special occasions, which could include birthdays, weddings, the arrival or departure of guests and members, funerals, anniversaries, and so on. The musical portion of the Lovefeast often took place at the end of a longer service which included preaching. Most of the sacred vocal music written by Moravian composers was written for a Lovefeast or other special celebration.

Texts and musical selections for a Lovefeast were compiled into an order of worship known variously as a *psalm*, *cantata*, or *ode*, or in German, *Dankesang* or *Lobgesang*. These odes included biblical texts, often fragments from many different locations in scripture, quoted literally or in paraphrase; hymn texts, often newly-written or adapted for the specific occasion; and solos, duets, or anthems to be sung by the choir. The well-crafted ode develops a unified theme, marked by harmony of language and thought; the music was intended to help carry the meaning of the text, not to stand on its own as an artistic creation.

The anthems, solos and duets were accompanied not only by organ, but by an instrumental ensemble consisting primarily of strings, augmented by some wind instruments (most often flute and horns).

Scope and Content: The collection consists of approximately 1741 pieces of sacred vocal music in manuscript form, the majority accompanied by chamber orchestra in addition to organ. More than 125 composers are represented, with the majority of works composed by Moravian composers. The Moravian composers most represented are Christian Gregor (1723-1801), who visited Bethlehem 1770-1772; Johann Christian Geisler (1729-1815), who did not visit America; Johannes Herbst (1735-1812), who lived in America from 1786 until his death; Johann Friedrich Peter (1746-1813), who lived in America from 1770 until his death; and Johann Christian Bechler (1784-1857), who lived in America 1806-1836. Non-Moravian composers most represented include Johann Heinrich Rolle (1716-1785), Johann Rudolf Zumsteeg (1760-1802), Johann Friedrich Reichardt (1752-1814), and Karl Heinrich Graun (1794-1759). The composer is identified on the score for most of the pieces in the collection, and researchers have been able to identify the composer for many through other sources. However, a significant number remain without composer attribution.

Very few pieces are in full score format. Rather, these are performance parts, and their condition indicates that they were used, with some having performance notations written in. By far the majority of pieces include accompaniment by instruments other than organ, primarily string orchestra with some parts for winds, notably flute(s) and horns. Most contain organ parts either as *continuo* or as a form of reduced score, indicating that the music director (or composer) was most often at the keyboard.

Title:

- Bethlehem Congregation Collection

Corporate Names:

- Bethlehem Area Moravians (Bethlehem, PA)
- Moravian Music Foundation

Subjects:

- Anniversaries
- Advent music
- Cantatas, Sacred
- Chorales
- Choruses, Sacred (Mixed voices) with orchestra (or chamber orchestra)
- Christmas music
- Communion service music
- Duets (of various kinds)

- Good Friday music
- Holy Saturday music
- Holy Week music
- Moravian Daily Text: April 2, 1763 (for example)
- Opera—Excerpts
- Oratorios
- Passion music
- Pentecost Festival music
- Psalms (Music)
- Watch night—Songs and music
- Sacred dramatic music
- Sacred songs (High voice) with chamber orchestra (or orchestra)
- Sacred songs (Low voice) with chamber orchestra
- Sacred vocal duets
- Te Deum laudamus (Music)
- August 13th Festival (Moravian Church) —Anniversaries, etc.
- Children’s Festival (Moravian Church) —Anniversaries, etc.
- Little Boys Covenant Day (Moravian Church)—Anniversaries, etc.
- Single Brothers Covenant Day (Moravian Church)—Anniversaries, etc.
- Single Sisters Covenant Day (Moravian Church)--Anniversaries, etc.
- Married Choir Covenant Day (Moravian Church) —Anniversaries, etc.

Related Materials:

Researchers interested in this archive may also wish to consult the following resources:

GemeinKat, online catalog of the Moravian Music Foundation.

<https://moravianmusic.on.worldcat.org/discovery>

Search for the collection by title: ti=Bethlehem congregation collection

The Music of the Moravian Church in America, edited by Nola Reed Knouse. Rochester, New York, The University of Rochester Press, © 2008.

Catalog of the Lititz Congregation Collection, edited by Robert Steelman. Chapel Hill, North Carolina, The University of North Carolina Press, ©1981.

Catalog of the Salem Congregation Collection, edited by Frances Cumnock. Chapel Hill, North Carolina, The University of North Carolina Press, ©1980.

Finding aids, Salem Congregation Collection; Lititz Congregation Collection.

Other materials in the Archives and Foundation holdings may relate to the topics in this archive. See the archivist for further research assistance.