

This Month in Moravian History

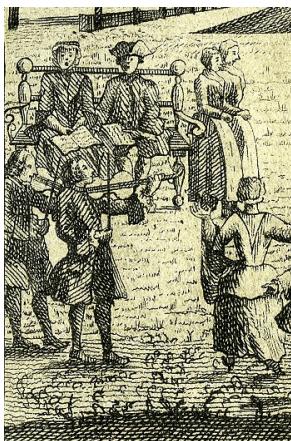
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Tobias Friedrich, First Musician of the renewed Moravian Church

On November 25 it will be 300 years ago that Tobias Friedrich was born. Tobias Friedrich was the first music director of the renewed Moravian Church who shaped the first fifteen years of church music in Herrnhut. Unfortunately, Friedrich died a few months before his 30th birthday.



Friedrich's biography is characterized by unexpected turns. He was born on November 25, 1706 in Kleinlangheim, a small village in Franconia, a region that is now part of the German state of Bavaria. According to Friedrich's memoir his parents owned a farm. When his father tried to instruct young Tobias in typical farmer's activities, he realized the boy had neither talent nor inclination. Tobias' gifts were much more evident

in the field of music. It speaks for his father that when Tobias was twelve years old he was sent to train with the cantor in the nearby town of Castell. Tobias learned to play various instruments, but he was especially talented in playing the organ and the violin.

In 1720 Tobias Friedrich met Count Zinzendorf, who was visiting his relatives in Castell. Zinzendorf's secretary, Heimburger, noticed the young Tobias in a tavern, playing a large double bass. Heimburger took Tobias with him and introduced him to Zinzendorf, who took an instant liking to the boy and asked him if he wanted to come with him. The way the story is told in Friedrich's memoir is reminiscent of the biblical accounts of Jesus calling his disciples. Yes, Friedrich replied, the count might lead him where he wanted; he was prepared to follow.

From then on Tobias Friedrich served the count as a servant and lived in Zinzendorf's households in Dresden, Berthelsdorf and Herrnhut. In 1728 Friedrich was promoted to chamberlain. In the same year he married Catharina Elisabeth Heintschel.

With the founding of Herrnhut on Zinzendorf's estate, Tobias Friedrich became active in this new

religious community. At one point he traveled home to tell his family about his new life in the Herrnhut congregation. His mother and his sister, along with her husband and children, eventually followed him and joined the Moravians.

In 1731 Tobias Friedrich was sent to Denmark and Sweden. In Copenhagen Friedrich had a chance to deliver a copy of the Herrnhut hymnal to Princess Charlotte Amelie, sister to the Danish King. He stayed in Stockholm for three months, visiting awakened people and laying the ground work for the Moravian movement in Sweden. Upon his return, Tobias Friedrich became Zinzendorf's secretary and a member of the board of overseers of the Herrnhut congregation.

Friedrich's main merit however lies in the field of music. Tobias Friedrich was the organist of the Herrnhut congregation and he was also one of the founders of the *collegium musicum* (1731). As a gifted musician Friedrich was influential in laying the foundations of the musical traditions of the renewed Moravian Church. Zinzendorf wrote about Friedrich's musical talents:

According to his true talents he was an able director of the congregational music which he led close to its actual purpose, namely to be a heavenly harmony in singing and to be an imitation of the angelic choirs.

Unfortunately, Tobias Friedrich did not live a long life. After a short illness of only four days he died in Herrnhut on June 8, 1736.

Image: Moravians making music, detail (MAB). Sources: Lebenslauf in Nachrichten aus der Brüdergemeine (1839): 910-919. Zeitschrift für Brüdergeschichte 7 (1913): 183-184.

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