

MORAVIAN ARCHIVES

**Inventory of
The Records of**

The Beneficial Society of the Borough of Bethlehem

1846-1906

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2007**

Papers of the Beneficial Society of the Borough of Bethlehem, 1846-1906. 5 boxes.

History: The Beneficial Society of the Borough of Bethlehem was established in 1846 in order to provide financial support to members who were unable to engage in their daily pursuits on account of disease or disability. Initial membership was contingent upon an application process that took into account age (no younger than 21 years and no older than 55 years), ability (and willingness) to pay monthly dues and additional contributions, and a clear bill of health. The constitution outlined the responsibilities of the elected officials who oversee each meeting as well as handle the financial matters which are the foundation of the organization—each elected officer was monetarily compensated for their efforts and is subject to fines if there is a dereliction of duty. The majority of the responsibilities fell upon the treasurer, the secretary, and the stewards. The treasurer ensured that the financial needs of members requiring benefits were met as well as the investments made in the interest of society were made by sound judgment. The secretary was responsible for recording detailed minutes and attendance of each meeting. The stewards, at least two at any given time, were charged with visiting the disabled members in order to ensure that monetary support was warranted. A member was not eligible to receive relief until they had been a member for at least one full year. In an 1896 revision of the bylaws of the organization, a member was entitled to the following benefits once he was deemed an appropriate recipient: three dollars weekly throughout the first six months, one dollar and fifty cents weekly after the second six months, and one dollar weekly for the remainder of the relief period. If a member should die, his heirs would receive forty dollars for funeral expenses and if a member's wife should pass away before her husband, the family would receive twenty dollars—upon such circumstances, members were required to pay fifty cents when a member died and twenty five cents when his spouse died.

According to the Beneficial Society minutes on November 4, 1905, the members unanimously agreed to dissolve the organization on account of “the rapid decrease of the membership...the finances have come to a state causing a continued drain upon the interested funds.” This was permissible according to Article XIII of the constitution that states that “this society shall not be dissolved while eleven members shall oppose its dissolution.” The remaining funds were used to pay off legal fees incurred by dissolution and then divided evenly among the surviving members. The last meeting of the Beneficial Society of Bethlehem was held on January 6, 1906.

Archival History (History of fonds): A motion was passed during the last meeting of the organization to place all materials pertaining to the Society in the custody of the Moravian Church Archives. The records were organized by Michelle Squiccimara, student at Moravian College, 2007.

Scope and Content: These records document the operations of the Beneficial Society of Bethlehem from its establishment in 1846 to its dissolution in 1906. The minutes include roll calls which provide membership lists and keep track of paid dues and society contributions. Several drafts of the constitution are included: one handwritten draft in German, one handwritten in English, one cloth bound edition with the signatures of all members from 1846 to 1906, and two typed pamphlets. The financial documents reveal the benefits to which each member is entitled and how the functions of the organizations are dependent upon member contributions and monthly dues.

System of Arrangement: The documents are arranged according to functions of the organization: Constitution and Bylaws, Minutes of General Meetings, Membership and Benefits, Financial Operations.

Conditions governing access: No restrictions

Language: Predominantly English; one draft of Society's constitution written in German

Physical characteristics: There are eleven cloth bound account ledgers, check books, and minute records. Loose papers regarding the constitution and membership benefits are kept together in folders. The overall condition of the collection is poor to fair on account of the toll that the aging process has taken on the paper –many pages are browning and brittle.

1. Constitution and Bylaws

This series details the drafting process of the Society's constitution and includes several versions of this document.

1. Papers relating to the original draft of the Society's Constitution, (circa 1846).
Contents:
 - a. Handwritten draft of Society's constitution, circa 1846.
Language: German
 - b. Handwritten draft of Society's constitution, bound with pin, circa 1846.
Language: English
1 folder
2. Pamphlets, printed copies of the Society's Constitution, (1846, 1882).
Contents:
 - a. Printed edition of Constitution of Beneficial Society with several omissions and errors belonging to William Luckenbach, 1846.
 - b. Printed edition of Constitution of Beneficial Society, presumably owned by member who served as Steward, 1882.
1 folder
3. Papers pertaining to Constitutional Amendments (1870, 1896)
Contents:
 - a. Printed leaflets concerning a December 3, 1870 amendment to the Constitution which decreases the benefit amount after a certain period of time, (1870).
 - b. Printed leaflets concerning an 1896 revision to the Constitution that was mailed to member Edwin P. Bishop as notification, (1896)
1 folder
4. Book, handwritten edition of Society's Constitution, (1846-1900).
1 volume

2. Society Minutes

This series details the operational procedures of the Beneficial Society during meetings which were held monthly.

5. Book, minutes of general meetings, (1846-1859).
1 volume
6. Book, minutes of general meetings, (1880-1893).
1 volume
7. Books, minutes of general meetings, (1894-1903).
1 volume
8. Books, minutes of general meetings, (1903-1906).
This volume includes the details in the decision to file for dissolution in 1906. Secretary Orlando Desh pasted in correspondence with a lawyer for legal consultation
1 volume

3. Membership and Benefits

As the name of the Society suggests, each member is entitled to financial benefit if disease or injury prevents him from carrying out his livelihood.

3.1 Member Correspondence

9. Papers relating to the benefit recipients of the Society.
Contents:
 - a. Letter, record of accession of minute books and financial records (1848).
 - b. Letter, written by Oliver A. Clewell to the Moravian Church Congregation (1878).
 - c. Letters, concerning member Franz Koegler (1903).
 - d. Letter, written by Allentown Board of Health to Secretary Orlando Desh (1903).
1 folder

3.2 Benefits

10. Papers pertaining to the procedures of how members receive financial aid.
Contents:
 - a. Stewards' Reports (1892-1899)
1 folder
 - b. Stewards' Reports (1900-1905)
First included report is undated, but the names on the list correspond to members from this period of the institution.
1 folder
11. Checkbook, payments made for member benefits (1889-1906).
1 item

4. Financial Operations

In order to function efficiently, the Beneficial Society relied on membership dues and other monetary contributions. In addition to application fees and a graduated scale of member contributions according to age, the Society was able to pay out assistance to members who either could not work or had suffered the loss of a spouse. This became increasingly difficult to maintain once membership declined dramatically at the turn of the 20th century.

4.1 Bookkeeping

This series includes the financial records of the Society which details how it was able to function and how the collected funds were dispersed among eligible members.

12. Register of paid membership, record of monthly dues payments, (1846-1880).
This volume includes application and admissions fee payments from 1846 to 1848.
1 volume

13. Cashbook, record of the Receipts and Expenditures, (1846-1898).
1 volume
14. Cashbook, record of the Cash Paid and Cash Received, (1846-1903).
1 volume
15. Cashbook, record of the Receipts and Expenditures, annual summary of finances included, (1889-1906).
1 volume
16. Papers pertaining to the financial dealings of the Society, (1903).
Contents:
 - a. Report from Committee on Loans that recommended that the Society seek a loan to pay for one \$1000 Bethlehem bond dated November 7, 1903.1 folder.

4.2 Dissolution

17. Checkbook, written out from the South Side Banking Company, (1906).
Inside this book are several checks made out to the surviving members of the Society and those who were responsible for settling the Society's affairs throughout the dissolution process.
1 volume
18. Papers pertaining to the dissolution of the Beneficial Society, (1906).
Contents:
 - a. Receipt of payment from City of Bethlehem for final tax payments on Beneficial Society land holdings, May 16, 1906.
 - b. Bill from *The Bethlehem Times* for printing of public dissolution notice, May 31, 1906.
 - c. Bill from Secretary of Commonwealth of Pennsylvania certifying dissolution, July 10, 1906.1 folder