

# This Month in Moravian History

A monthly newsletter published by the Moravian Archives in Bethlehem,  
commemorating events from Moravian History

No. 2

December 2005

## Moravian Businessman, Abraham Dürninger

Does commercialism at Christmas get you down? Do you feel overwhelmed by retail strategies encouraging us to buy more and more? During the Christmas season one can easily get the feeling that retail greed is driving the holiday, and that the true Christmas story gets buried under a pile of shiny packages and bows.

One retailer who never lost sight of Christian ideals was the 18<sup>th</sup> century Moravian businessman, Abraham Dürninger. Guided by honesty and a strict sense of fairness, Dürninger perpetuated the practices of fixed prices and fair trade, considered innovative business practices during the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

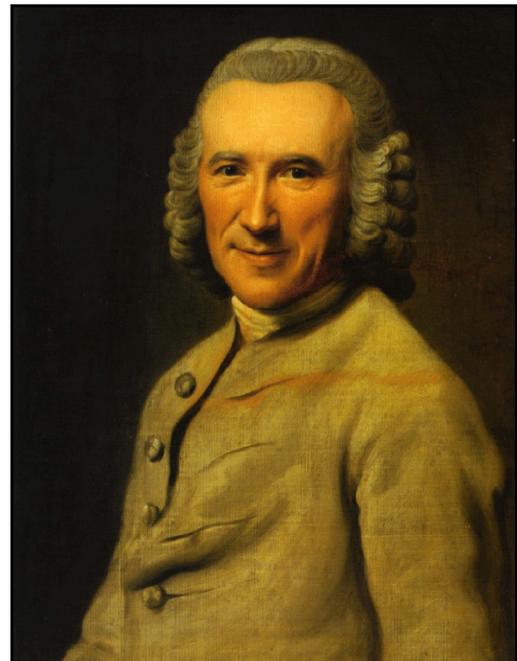
Dürninger was well-prepared to run business enterprises in the fledgling Moravian community of Herrnhut, Germany. Born December 22, 1706 into a prosperous merchant family in Strasburg, Dürninger gained practical experience at home as well as through apprenticeships in many different firms across Europe. In spiritual terms, Dürninger was raised as a Lutheran. He credited his parents as a positive influence, who strove to model Christianity through their behavior in the marketplace.

Dürninger became acquainted with some Moravians in his native town of Strasburg in 1741 and traveled to the Moravian community of Herrnhag, Germany in 1743. After this first visit Dürninger felt

inclined to join the Moravians, which he did after one year, returning to Herrnhag on December 5, 1744. In 1747 Dürninger received instructions to take over the struggling community store in Herrnhut. Under Dürninger business prospered. Over the next twenty years his firm grew to include factories for textiles, tobacco and sealing wax. In fact, the Dürninger firm continues today, more than 250 years after its inception.

Dürninger wanted to be a Christian businessman. He considered every material success a blessing from the Savior. The shops in Herrnhut were the first in the world to offer goods at fixed prices. Haggling was not allowed, but also not necessary, because Dürninger tried to set the fairest price possible. This philosophy spread and before long the term "Herrnhuter" became associated with fair trade and high-quality goods throughout Europe and America.

What a contrast Dürninger's practices pose to today's retail philosophy, where cheap goods produced in often poor conditions are sold at great profit. In a time when a company's success is measured solely by its profit margin, we can be cheered by the memory of Abraham Dürninger and his genuine attempt to incorporate Christianity into business.



*This Month in Moravian History* is compiled by Paul Peucker and Lanie Graf (Moravian Archives) in cooperation with Markus Gill (Moravian Church Utrecht, Netherlands). Portrait (oil painting by J. G. Ziesenis) courtesy of the Unity Archives, Herrnhut. Moravian Archives, 41 W. Locust St., Bethlehem, PA 18018. [www.moravianchurcharchives.org](http://www.moravianchurcharchives.org)