

# This Month in Moravian History

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commemorating events from Moravian History

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## 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Town of Emmaus in Pennsylvania

*The founding of Emmaus is a typical story of Moravians successfully reaching out to the unchurched. Although the town of Emmaus marks its anniversary as 1759, the Moravian work in that area began seventeen years earlier in 1742.*

Due to the scarcity and poor quality of ministers available in Pennsylvania at that time, many German immigrants felt their spiritual welfare suffering in the remote wilderness. The gratitude for Moravian outreach to the under-served in the region previously known as "Maguntsche" is evident in the memoir of Jacob Ehrenhardt, one of the founders of Emmaus: *He felt his way around like a blind man...going now to hear this preacher, now to that one...but nothing quieted the unrest of his soul. He even began to be doubtful about the preachers. He cast himself at the feet of God and prayed that He might lead him to His people, who might show him the way. In 1742 he got to hear about the Brethren whom he visited in Bethlehem and soon became convinced in his heart that they were truly of God's people.*



Ehrenhardt, together with Sebastian Knauss, John Adam Schaus and others in the region, welcomed visits by Zinzendorf and itinerant evangelists, Gottlieb Pezold and Leonhard Schnell from Bethlehem. They soon built a small log church, and in 1743 the Bethlehem diarist recorded: *The Savior is busy within that little congregation.* Besides a church, the community also wanted a school for their children. In 1746 a school was

built, and in 1747 the school opened for day and boarding students, including a couple of Native American children. The increased spiritual energy surrounding the school and itinerant ministry led to the official organization of a congregation comprised of 43 members on July 20, 1747. To Moravian leaders in Bethlehem it seemed *that the time had come to gather up the ripe grain into a sheaf.* Anton Wagner was the first minister of the newly formed congregation.

In 1749 the first church was moved closer to the schoolhouse and enlarged. That same year the new congregation reached out to the fledgling Moravian society in the "back part of Maguntsche" known as Allemängel, celebrating a joint communion with them. They served as a point of refuge during the Indian raids of the French and Indian War, and boldly hosted a church synod in 1756 amidst the conflict. Now known as the "Salisbury" congregation, their zeal and importance within the Moravian network grew steadily.

On September 14, 1757, the Bethlehem leaders noted that *Jacob Ehrenhardt and the other Brethren in Salisbury have a longing in their hearts to grow together and form a little village with each other.* This led to the survey and establishment in 1758 of a Moravian *Gemeinort*, or closed congregational village regulated by the church in which residents of "kindred spiritual needs" agreed to live and work together. In the summer of 1759 the first house was built in the new village, and on October 16 Andreas Giering and his wife, Maria, became the first residents. The village did not receive its name until two years later, on April 2, 1761. A hymn composed for the occasion encapsulates this early zeal: *Now here we build a village small; Toward its completion we give all. Here, too, our hearts within shall flame - Emmaus, then shall be its name!*

Image: Salisburghaus, by N. Garrison. Sources: Bethlehem Diary; Minutes of the Bethlehem *Jüngerkonferenz*; P. Barba, *They Came to Emmaus*, (1960 and 1984); Moravian Church N. Prov. "Record of Congregations, 1742-1955."