

# This Month in Moravian History

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## Supplying a New Moravian Settlement: Bethabara 1753

While trumpets were sounding from the roof of the Single Brothers' House in Bethlehem on October 8, 1753, a group of fifteen single men set out on foot for North Carolina. Their goal was to start a new Moravian settlement on the Wachovia tract that had been purchased earlier that year for the Moravian Church. The Wachovia tract measured almost 100,000 acres and covered the area of the contemporary city of Winston-Salem. After almost six weeks of travel, the settlers reached their destination on November 17. They took refuge in an unused hunting cabin and immediately began to clear the land and construct necessary buildings. Their settlement was soon named Bethabara. It was the beginning of a Moravian presence in North Carolina. This year the Bethabara Moravian congregation celebrates its 260th anniversary.

The travel diary of the group of first settlers is well known and gives interesting details about their 500-mile journey from Bethlehem to Bethabara and about their first attempts to survive in the woods of North Carolina. Another, lesser known source provides additional details. The Moravian Archives in Bethlehem holds an account book in which all expenses relating to the new colony during the years between 1753 and 1756 are listed. On the first six pages of the account book we find an exhaustive overview of items the men took with them on their journey to Bethabara. Obviously, personal items are not listed.

From the account book we learn that the men were traveling with seven horses and a wagon that could be covered with a large canvas. Their luggage included a tent that could be used along the way as well as at



their final destination. The men brought five straw mattresses plus pillows, as well as a lantern and several candle sticks. The rest of the luggage can be roughly divided into three categories: tools, clothing, and food. Tools were needed to clear the land and to process the wood: various saws, axes and hatchets (including six axes they brought as gifts for the land surveyor), drills, wood rasps, files, crowbars, iron chains, hammers, and seven pounds of nails. In order to work the land they brought plowshares, a harrow, scythes, sickles, a pitchfork, grubbers, etc. They brought several rifles and shotguns with powder and lead bullets. Since one of the men was a physician, surgeon's equipment and medicine was brought to North Carolina. The list also included items such as distillery equipment, six traps, a compass for surveying, a gold balance, and a steelyard balance.

Many articles were clothing items: fabric, cloth, yarn, shirts, shoe buckles, handkerchiefs, scarves, wooly hats, 26 pairs of stockings, leather trousers, a large number of brass and tin buttons, and 13 pairs of new shoes (likely to replace shoes worn out during the long journey). The Bethlehem congregation also gave them nine combs and shaving tools.

During the journey the men were able to

purchase food at inns and houses along the way. The church gave them 39 pounds in cash so they could buy food for themselves and their horses. Once they arrived on the Wachovia tract, they were expected to prepare their own food. Therefore, their luggage included many tools for cooking and food preparation: knives, a skimmer, wooden bowls, 13 tin cups, teaspoons, a brass bucket, a caldron, and a teapot. They brought along large amounts of bacon, butter, and oats, as well as one pound of pepper, one pound of allspice, ginger, sugar (with a sugar box) and 13½ quarts of Madeira wine.

Besides tools, clothing and food, the men carried supplies of leather, iron, wax, sulfur, and pitch on their expedition. Because the group was expected to keep a diary and send reports to Bethlehem, the luggage included four ink wells. But these last items raise additional questions: why include ink wells but no paper? As detailed as the list may be, other things are missing as well. For example, what good are two dozen tobacco pipes without tobacco? Possibly, some items were donated and did not need to be entered in the books. Nevertheless, the account book allows us a rare peek into the luggage of the first European settlers in Wachovia.

### Sources

Image: the Bethabara Gemeinhaus in 1903. C. Daniel Crews, *Villages of the Lord: The Moravians Come to North Carolina* (Winston-Salem, NC, 1995); account book of the North Carolina Society, 1753-1756, MAB.