

The Moravians: From Europe to North America ^[1]

In 1733, a group of Moravians — a Protestant Christian denomination originating in fourteenth-century Bohemia (now in the Czech Republic) — moved from Europe to North America seeking freedom from religious persecution. By 1741, they had settled in Pennsylvania, north of Philadelphia. There, they organized a tight-knit religious community called Bethlehem.

The Moravians had brought with them a strong social organization based on communal living groups called “choirs,” which were organized according to age, gender, and marital status. This use of the word “choir” had nothing to do with singing in church, and instead was used to describe groups of people who ate, studied, and attended religious services together. Children moved away from their parents at a young age and became part of either the Little Boys’ Choir or Little Girls’ Choir. At age 12, they moved to the Older Boys’ or Older Girls’ Choir. At 19, girls moved to the Single Sisters’ Choir, and boys moved to the Single Brethren Choir. When Moravians married, they moved to the Married People’s Choir.

In 1753, a group of twelve single brothers left Bethlehem to establish a settlement in North Carolina. The brothers traveled south on the Great Wagon Road, a colonial thoroughfare that provided the main travel route for northerners who were settling the “backcountry” of Virginia and North Carolina. One of the brothers kept a diary, providing a written account of the journey and the establishment of their new home on a vast tract of North Carolina land they called Wachovia.

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