

A History of Hope Congregation, in North Carolina*

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One hundred and fifty years is a long time, but in a certain sense the story of Hope, North Carolina, is thirty years longer, for it was in 1750 that John Douthit and his family settled a short distance to the west of Muddy Creek, in what was then Rowan County, but is now Clemmonsville Township of Forsyth County. Douthit was born in Ireland,¹ came to America about 1724, and settled on the Manokasy, about fifteen miles north of Frederick, Maryland. There he married Mary Scott, a native of Pennsylvania; and from thence they came to North Carolina. They were followed the next year by Christopher Elrod² (or Ellroth), who settled in the same neighborhood. Both of these families had doubtless attended the services held by Moravian ministers at Manokasy during the preceding five years,³ so it was natural that friendship with the Moravians was resumed in 1753 when the village of Bethabara was begun on the Wachovia Tract. Mrs. Douthit died in 1794, and the minister of Hope then stated in a Memoir⁴ of her, that she and her husband were

friendly neighbors, and they aided the Brethren in the beginning of their settlement as far as they knew how and were able. When English services were begun in Bethabara they attended them frequently, and then invited the Brethren to come to their home for the same purpose. The Brn. Ettwein, Utley and others often had opportunity there to witness for the Saviour, and not without blessing.

A few miles south of Frederick, Maryland, the Moravians established another preaching place in 1760, popularly known as Carroll's Manor. This mission lasted only about ten years,

*The author of this article is Archivist of the Moravian Church of America (Southern Province). Her article is published because of its valuable content, but also because of the historical connection between the Hope Congregation of North Carolina and the town of Hope, Indiana. This place was founded by pioneers from North Carolina, several of whom were Moravians. The first Moravian Church established in Indiana, possibly the only independent church of this sect in the State, was composed of Moravians from North Carolina. The town which grew up about the church was first known as Goshen. The name was changed to Hope when a post office was established. The first pastor of the Moravian church, Martin Hauser, became also, the first post master of the town.—*Editor*.

¹ Death record in Hope Church Book.

² Death record in Hope Church Book.

³ *Records of Moravians in North Carolina*, I, 268.

⁴ Files in Salem, North Carolina, Archives.

when the minister was forced by ill health to return to Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, and a number of the families to whom he had preached moved to North Carolina, settling near Douthit and Elrod, both on the east and the west sides of Muddy Creek. Daniel Smith, Henry Slator, Nodley Masters, Mrs. Elizabeth Goslin, and their families came in 1772. The letters of introduction⁵ which they brought stated that the three men were skilled in raising tobacco, and that Smith, who was an expert fisherman, hoped for good fishing in the Yadkin River and Muddy Creek. Other early settlers in that neighborhood were James Abraham Wilson, Even Ellis, William Johnson, Robert Elrod, Adam Sells, Henry Hughes, Didwell, Jacob and Martin Hauser and Friedrich Fiscus,⁶ and to these were added the Padgets, Peddicoarts, and others, who followed the first comers from Carroll's Manor.⁷

The first English service held by the Moravians in the Muddy Creek Settlement was on April 4, 1763, in the home of John Douthit, Sr.,⁸ though he was then still a member of the Church of England.⁹ In 1767 a School-House was built in the South Fork Settlement (later Friedberg), and the Muddy Creek residents took part in the movement, partly that their children might attend the school which was begun for the children of members, and partly that they might share in the meetings for divine worship, though as the latter were held in the German language it proved to be a rather unsatisfactory arrangement. In 1768 and 1769, therefore, Rev. Richard Uteley held services in English about once a month at the home of Valentine Frey,¹⁰ who lived just south of John Douthit, Sr.

In July, 1774, Christopher Elrod was the leader in a movement to build a School-House on the Blanket Bottom Tract,¹¹ between Muddy Creek and the Yadkin River. Elrod had been raised a Lutheran, but had been much moved by a sermon preached in 1759 by Bishop Spangenberg to the people who had taken refuge at the Bethabara mill because of the Indian war.¹² In January, 1774, he became a communicant member of the congregation in Friedberg, but "promoted the building of an

⁵ *Moravians in N. C.*, II, 720-723.

⁶ Bethabara Diary, Jan. 17, 1763: *Moravians in N. C.*, I, 268.

⁷ *Moravians in N. C.*, II, 810, 819, 820, 854, 871; III, 1285, 1286.

⁸ *Idem.*, I, 270.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 274.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 376, 386.

¹¹ *Idem.*, II, 828.

¹² Death record in Hope Church Book.

English school and meeting house in Hope with all his might."¹³ For a reason not stated in the records the site for the English School-House was changed, and on Nov. 8, 1774, the School-House land was laid out¹⁴ on the east side of Muddy Creek, just south of the mouth of a stream called Laer on the old maps of Wachovia, but later known as Little Creek. Pending the erection of the School-House (which was to contain a meeting-hall for divine worship), English services were held each month at Friedberg, and Utley preached at John Douthit's home.¹⁵

On Feb. 27, 1775, the first stake was driven at the north corner of the School-House¹⁶ and by Nov. 23, 1776, it was so far finished that the first service could be held in the meeting-hall. In spite of a heavy rain the Brn. Graff and Fritz went from Salem and met the company of friends who had been in the habit of gathering at John Douthit's. John Christian Fritz preached on the Old Testament text for the day:¹⁷ *Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.*¹⁸ Bishop Graff baptised a baby boy, William, son of William Douthit. It was arranged that Br. Fritz should hold services there twice a month, but that the consecration of the building should be postponed until it was possible for a pastor and his wife to move into the house.¹⁹

The disturbances incident to the Revolutionary War deferred further development much longer than had been anticipated. Officially and personally the Moravians of North Carolina were loyal to the new government of the United Colonies.²⁰ The Salem and Bethabara Moravians claimed the right to exemption from military service pledged to them by the Parliament of Great Britain when they sett'ed in America in which they were joined by some members of the other congregations, but it was not until early in 1779 that the Assembly of North Carolina admitted this claim, permitting those who chose to pay a three-fold state tax instead. For three years, therefore, all the men of Hope²¹ and of the other Mora-

¹³ Death record in Hope Church Book.

¹⁴ *Moravians in N. C.*, II, 821, 829.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 860, 863.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 867.

¹⁷ *Idem*, III, 1079.

¹⁸ Text Book for 1776, in Salem Archives.

¹⁹ *Moravians in N. C.*, III, 1042.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 1297, 1282.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 1063, 1151.

vian congregations were on the militia rolls and were liable to call. The Moravian church books and catalogues show there were at least thirty-nine older and younger men in the Hope group who were sixteen years of age and over during the Revolution, and of these at least seventeen furnished supplies, or did some individual service for the American cause outside of membership in the militia companies.

But children grow up in spite of war and, in November, 1779, three house-fathers from the English Settlement, Dan Smith, Henry Slator and John Padget, went to Br. Marshall at Salem and made an urgent plea for the sending of a Brother to keep school for their children, who were growing up in ignorance.²² On November 20th it was proposed to Br. (John Christian) and Sr. Fritz that they move to the English School-House and take charge of the souls there, which call they at once accepted.²³ On December 25th Rev. Frederic William Marshall went with Br. Fritz to the English School-House. After preaching there was a conference with the house-fathers and mothers. They were asked who and how many would undertake the expenses of the School-House and the support of the Brother and his wife? The families present, fourteen in number, pledged their co-operation.²⁴ John Padget and Dan Smith were elected stewards, or treasurers, of the group supporting the School-House, thereafter known as the Society.²⁵

The building having been completed, Br. and Sr. Fritz moved thither on March 13, 1780, and "were received with much love by their church-children."²⁶ On the 28th of the same month the meeting-hall was consecrated, Rev. and Mrs. Frederic William Marshall, Bishop and Mrs. Graff, and Br. Praetzel, coming from Salem for the day. The Text was most appropriate: *Except the Lord build the house they labor in vain that build it.* During the lovefeast, five unmarried men and nine unmarried women, one married negro and two married negresses were received into the Society. It was officially announced that the congregation would thereafter bear the name of *Hope*. The Salem Diary says of the services that the

²² *Ibid.*, 1318.

²³ *Ibid.*, 1319.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 1320.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 1321.

²⁶ *Extract der Diarii der Gemeiner in der Wachau*, March 13, 1780.

entire group was filled with joy and hope at this gracious visitation from the Saviour.²⁷

On August 26th of the same year (1780), the congregation of Hope was organized, during a visit from Bishop Reichel and Rev. and Mrs. Marshall. Membership in the Society was not limited to communicants—any person might belong who was willing to support the work. The congregation, on the other hand, was limited to communicant members, their children and those who were candidates for communicant membership. On this occasion, John Padget, his wife, Benjamin Chitty and his wife were received into the congregation of Hope.²⁸ To these were added on Nov. 18th, Henry Slator, his wife, Margaret Booner and Anne Padget, wife of Thomas Padget. The first Communion was celebrated on October 14th, with six members present; and the second on November 18th, with eight members.²⁹

The experiences of this first year of Hope's existence as a Society and Congregation were not all joyous. On January 25th there was the first interment on the tract destined for the Hope graveyard. The youth, Henry Crampton, slipped on the ice while carrying a log of wood, fell and fractured his skull. Br. Fritz made an address and offered prayer at his funeral and so the graveyard was consecrated.³⁰

There were various acts of violence on the part of wandering militia during this year and that which followed. The experience told in most detail in the diaries is that which befell Br. and Sr. Fritz during the night of Sept. 13, 1780. About ten o'clock, when they were already asleep, Captain Holston and sixteen men arrived, forced the door, and with drawn swords compelled Br. and Sr. Fritz to open their chests. After blowing out the light several times the men took the clothing and linen from the chests. Br. Fritz found courage to speak seriously with the Captain, asking whether his men robbed and plundered like Tories, and that from people whom they should protect? The Captain and some of his men knew Br. Fritz well. They became ashamed of the disorderly conduct of their comrades, who had even torn off the shirt Br. Fritz was wearing. They promised that all should be returned to him, saying

²⁷ Salem Diary, March 28, 1780.

²⁸ Salem Diary, Aug. 26, 1780.

²⁹ Notes filed with Wachovia Memorabilia, 1780.

³⁰ *Extract der Diarii*, Jan. 25, 1780.

that the men who had robbed them were drunk. The Captain ordered that all the stolen articles should be brought back into the house and all were returned except one piece of linen. This the Captain found when his men were asleep at Markland's house and sent it back to Br. Fritz.³¹

Some time during the fall of 1780, the long-desired school for the children was opened.³² On Dec. 24th the children of Hope had their first Christmas lovefeast. Most of the members of the congregation and of the Society were present. They said afterwards that they had never before had so blessed a Christmas service.³³

On March 13, 1785, the "Brotherly Agreement about Rules and Orders for the Brethren's Congregation in and about Hope Settlement"³⁴ was adopted at Hope. This interesting document contains twenty-eight paragraphs, to the provisions of which the members of Hope bound themselves. The following very much condensed summary gives some idea of the scope of the Agreement:

Jesus Christ is the only ground of salvation, and the Bible shall be our only rule of doctrine and behavior (1,2).

Ministers are to be appointed by the directing boards of the Unity of Brethren (3).

We will faithfully attend the services of the church; will be loyal to duly appointed church officials; will give a decent support to the ministers; will keep houses and graveyards in good repair; will pay the church expenses; will contribute toward the general expenses of the Unity (4, 5, 6).

We will render due obedience to the civil authorities; will pay our taxes, and take care of the roads; we will support the Constitution of the State (7).

We Will live at peace with all men; will refrain from disputes with members of other denominations; will be loyal to the services of our own church (8, 9, 10).

We will not judge or criticise others; we will be just, honest and upright in our dealings with everybody (11).

Called by divine grace to be a living congregation of Jesus, members shall measure themselves by this standard. Only those shall be received into the congregation whose heart's desire is to surrender themselves to our dear Saviour (12, 13, 14).

We will show brotherly love one to another; bear reproof with meekness; arbitrate any differences that may arise (15, 16, 17).

³¹ Salem Diary, Sept. 14, 1780.

³² Notes filed with Wachovia *Memorabilia*, 1780.

³³ *Extract der Diarii*, Dec. 24, 1780. The numbers in parentheses indicate the paragraphs of the "Agreement" on which the summarizing statements are based.

³⁴ Filed in Salem Archives.

We will be careful in our social behaviour (18).

Parents shall bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; shall educate them; shall teach them to earn their own living (19, 20, 21, 22).

Marriage is honorable, and parents shall be consulted. No frivolous behaviour shall be permitted at wedding dinners (23, 24).

We will bear witness for the Saviour, and bring no reproach upon the Gospel (25).

We will avoid objectionable pastimes; will promote temperance; will spend Sunday as it becometh the children of God, and without giving offense (26).

Every one who shall seduce others by work or example, or resist the higher powers whom God hath ordained, or shall be given to idleness, or defraud his neighbor in dealing or trade, who shall practice lying, backbiting and slandering, who shall allow himself foolish talking and jesting, be a drunkard, run indolently into debt without endeavoring to satisfy his creditors, or live obstinately in any work of the flesh, excludes himself from our Society, as long as he does not show evident signs of repentance (27).

The Committee, house-fathers and mothers, and minister, are to see that these rules are observed. If needful the Rules may be amended by the congregation by unanimous action (28).

Br. Fritz ended his pastorate in 1788, returned to Salem and three years later went as a missionary to the West Indies. John Jacob Welfare and his bride moved to Hope on Aug. 26, 1788, but ministers from Salem helped until Welfare was ordained on Oct. 26 of that year³⁵. Welfare was followed by Samuel Gottlieb Kramsch, who arrived from Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, on November 19, 1792, and was installed at Hope on December 2, at a lovefeast for Hope Society.³⁶ Abraham Steiner took charge of Hope on December 5, 1802, serving until October 20, 1806, when he was called to Salem as the second Principal of Salem Academy. He followed Kramsch there as he had followed him at Hope.³⁷

Hope was now served from Salem for a few months. There on January 11, 1807, Jacob Welfare was installed for the second time, the service being led by Br. Verbeek, who was on an official visitation from Moravian headquarters in Europe. Welfare lived only a little more than six months, but his widow remained in the School-House until late in

³⁵ *Aeltesten Conferenz*, June 25, July 24, 30, Aug. 27, 1788.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, Nov. 14, 21, 1792.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, Nov. 17, 1802; Sept. 6, Oct. 23, 1806.

the year, services being held by the Brethren coming from Salem.³⁸

During the interim between Steiner and Welfare, there was a discussion concerning the dropping of the Society at Hope. This course received consideration because at some places in Pennsylvania the Society members had come to outnumber the members of the Congregation, with detriment to the work. It was found that nothing of this sort existed at Hope, where the Society consisted largely of the children of the communicants. When adult years were reached these children married and either joined the congregation there or separated themselves entirely from the Society.³⁹ Since the children of members became eligible for the Society at the age of twelve, it was decided that it was unnecessary to begin their reception into the Choirs of Older Boys and Older Girls.⁴⁰

John Lewis Strohle served Hope from November 29, 1807, to November 7, 1813. He and his wife were living in Hope, New Jersey, when called to Hope, North Carolina. He was transferred to Bethabara in November, 1812, but continued to preach at Hope for another year.⁴¹ He was followed by Samuel Gottlieb Kramsch, filling a second term extending from November, 1813, to November, 1819, when serious trouble with his eyes forced his retirement to Salem.⁴² Until his successor came, Hope was served from Salem by Abraham Steiner.

Christian Denke had served many years among the northern Indians, but he now accepted the call to Hope and was installed on May 28, 1820.⁴³ In the fall of the following year, it was noted that he and his wife had a persistent fever and that most of the former pastors had suffered in the same way. The parsonage was in need of repairs, and it was suggested that a new house be built, but the Hope Committee did not see how that could be done as money was scarce just then. It was suggested further that Hope might rent a house and garden in Clemmonstown, where Denke preached at intervals. It was finally decided that Denke and his wife

³⁸ *Helfer Conferenz*, Jan. 19, Aug. 7, 1807.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, Jan. 5, 1807.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, Dec. 29, 1806.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, Nov. 2, 24, 1807; Nov. 1, Dec. 24, 1812.

⁴² *Ibid.*, Aug. 2, 1813; April 13, 16, Nov. 2, 1819; Jan. 4, 1820.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, March 14, June 12, 1820; Sept. 23, 1837.

should move to Salem and, as soon as he should recuperate, he was to serve Hope from there. On March 5, 1822, Denke took charge of Friedberg, but continued to serve Hope also until the end of 1832, when he retired from both pastorates.⁴⁴

During Denke's pastorate the migration from Wachovia to Indiana began. About 1825, a number of families moved to the newly organized Bartholomew County, Indiana. There they began a settlement which first received the name of Goshen, but was later called Hope,⁴⁵ in remembrance of the Hope in North Carolina from which some of them had come. This migration continued for a decade and more⁴⁶ and seriously reduced the membership at Hope, North Carolina. The loss should have been regained gradually by the enrollment of children of members who remained in Wachovia, but many of them married non-Moravians and did not join Hope congregation. Some entire Moravian families went over to the Methodists, who were very active in the neighborhood.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, the Hope congregation did not give up. It still lives, and is at present served by Br. Leon Luckenbach.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, Sept. 25, Nov. 14, 1821; March 5, 1822; Sept. 14, 1832.

⁴⁵ *A Home Mission History of the Moravian Church in the United States and Canada*, 41.

⁴⁶ Friedberg and Hope Diary, May 1, 1836; *Helfer Conferenz*, July 9, 1838, Jan. 17, 1839; Church catalogs of various dates.

⁴⁷ Friedberg and Hope Diary, Oct. 1, 17, 1836; Hope catalogs.