

***Moravians in NW Georgia***  
*Compiled by Craig Cooper*

Did you know that our area used to be a missions field? It's hard to believe but true. Spring Place in Murray County was a missions station! It was started by a group of people who we call the Moravians. This station was dedicated to training people in Christianity. It is easy to forget that our area at one time did not know about the gospel of Jesus Christ. We are used to sending out missionaries but the idea of missionaries coming to us seems strange.

This article is a brief history of a group of people and their story of bringing the gospel to our area. Their name was the Moravians. The Moravians had an influence on our area and this article has been written to honor our forefathers in this region.

### **Background and History of the Moravians<sup>1</sup>**

The Moravian Church is over 550 years old and is still in existence around the world today! Their origins can be traced to 50 years before Martin Luther's reformation and the starting of what we call the Protestant church. This time was known as the pre-reformation period and one of the main leaders of the pre-reformation era was John Hus from Prague, Czechoslovakia (called Bohemia at the time). While John Hus did not actually start the Moravian Church, his life and teaching had a major influence on those who did. The foundation stones of the Moravian church were started by a man called Gregory the Patriarch. The first organized church was started in a village named Kunwald, Bohemia in 1452 when a group of people organized under the name the 'Unity of the Brethren'. This is the official name of the movement. Their goal was to be "pure and follow the Master and Him alone."<sup>2</sup>

They were a major doctrinal influence on Martin Luther 50 years later who was used by God to start the Protestant Reformation. It is amazing to note that the teachings that Martin Luther used to free Christians were all widely practiced by the Moravians many decades earlier.

History has shown that they were a people that were spiritual forerunners way ahead of their time. Their beliefs were not widely adopted by Christians until many decades later. But there was a high price to pay for their then unorthodox beliefs. Through persecution and the backlash of the Roman Catholic Church against the Reformation the Moravians were reduced to a very small number of people and were almost entirely eliminated. After their start in Bohemia many in the Unity of the Brethren ended up in an area of Germany called Moravia. This is how they came to be known informally as the Moravians.

The church was revived from near extinction in 1722 – 270 years after their birth - when the Moravians banded together with a group called the Waldensians to form the United Brethren in Germany. They relocated on a German estate owned by Count Nicholas Ludwig Von Zinzendorf. Count Zinzendorf became the main force reigniting the Moravians and propelling them forward to their new destiny. Their place on this German estate was called Herrnhut (The Lord's Watch). 10 years later Herrnhut started what would become the center of a worldwide missionary movement. History has shown that Herrnhut was the beginning of the great modern missionary movement. Just as the original Moravians were forerunners in doctrine and practice of Christianity 180 years earlier, this group of Moravian descendents would continue to be forerunners in missionary evangelism and devotion to the Lord.

Between 1732 and 1760, 226 missionaries entered service in 10 foreign countries. This was no small feat. Within 20 years the United Brethren (Moravians) sent out more missionaries than the Anglicans and Protestants had sent out in the previous 200 years. Overtime, the Moravians had 3 members overseas in missions for every 1 member at home! All this was accomplished by men with little or no theological education. The first two missionaries to Greenland were gravediggers! The missionaries at Spring Place came from this heritage.

They were men and women of incredible zeal and apostolic fortitude. When these missionaries left their home church, they were provided with enough money to reach their destination. Once they got there though, they were expected to fend for themselves. So committed were these Moravian men to the mission field that they

even took their wives and little ones with them. They lived and died and were buried in the land they adopted for Christ. They rarely ever returned back to their sending church. Their missionary zeal was undergirded by 24 hour prayer watch that lasted for 100 years in Herrnhut!

They were also known for their radical evangelical preaching, songfests, love feasts, and private devotions. An unusual feature of the group was their emphasis on fellowship instead of doctrinal creeds. They did believe in the Apostle's creed, but even though their heritage was strong teaching of the bible doctrinal creeds were not their center of focus – a person was. The Moravians had the motto – *“In essentials unity; in non-essentials liberty; in all things charity.”* The Count himself declared, “I have one passion; it is He and He alone.” Note that Count Zinzendorf stressed one critical issue that should be echoed in our generation: the importance of experiencing God!

The Moravians had an enormous influence through all of their efforts in prayer, music, writings, and preaching. They wrote a massive amount of literature. But they differed from other churches because very little of their writing was about theological issues. They would not spend much time on doctrinal debates. In actuality, they were some of the most brilliant people in the church but they would almost always focus their efforts on a practical way of living instead of a theological view.

### **Work in NW Georgia<sup>3</sup>**

The Moravians planted a missions outreach to the Cherokee Indians at Spring Place in Murray County. In 1801 Reverend Abraham Steiner and Gottlieb Byhan began the Spring Place mission by building a small cabin with their own hands on land given by Chief Vann of the Cherokee Indians. The school was started in 1802 with two pupils. Talk about small beginnings!

A very interesting fact is that the mission was started by people sent out from the Salem, North Carolina (Moravian Falls) mission. This is the area that is the prophetic headquarters of Morningstar Ministries. It seems God wants these ancient lands staked out by our forefathers reclaimed!

The main people ministered to by the Moravians in NW Georgia were the Indians but slaves were also routinely in their services. Some other things of note about the Moravian mission at Spring Place was:

One, their primary purpose was a school to train the local people. Everyone had to work in the fields to pay their way. To receive the full benefits of schooling the children roomed and boarded at the mission.

Two, they welcomed ministers and people of all faith as long as they loved the Savior and spoke English. Among the visitors they had a Jewish rabbi, Episcopal priest, Quaker elder, Presbyterians, Baptists, and Methodists. The Spring Place Mission became a model of ministering, education, unity, and European farming techniques to many other missionary enterprises. They were a known as a spiritual hub.

Three, music was a large part of their services and heritage. 250 years earlier during the great Reformation period the Moravians were the first Protestants in all of Europe to publish a hymn book. Out of all the protestant churches they were known to have the best developed music departments. Their people would sing the hymns day and night when other protestant churches barely even sung in the church service. Here is a quote by a leading church leader of the day from another church that describes the impact the Moravians had on the country of Germany through their music:

*Your churches surpass all others in singing. For where else are songs of praise, of thanksgiving, of prayer and instruction so often heard? Where is there better singing? The newest edition of the Bohemian Hymn-book, with its seven hundred and forth-three hymns, is an evidence of the multitude of your songs...In your churches the people can all sing and take part in the worship of God.” - Esrom Rudinger<sup>4</sup>*

Here in Spring Place, many times when an interpreter was not available they would simply play music and let the Spirit of God minister through that. It is thought that the first organ played in Georgia was at Spring Place! Musical forerunners!

The Spring Place Moravians reached out and founded a second mission called the Oothcaloga Mission in Calhoun, Georgia in 1822. It operated into the 1830's when it was turned over to Indian Assistants.

The Moravian mission in NW Georgia ended very badly. In the early 1830's the Cherokees were forced to leave the area by the State of Georgia in what is known as the Trail of Tears. The Moravians decided to leave with the Cherokees and never returned to the area. On January 1, 1833 the Moravians were ousted from the area. The Moravian missionaries labored in this area for more than 30 years.

## **The Moravian Mantle and Heritage**

I believe that a mantle was dropped in Northwest Georgia that was worn by the Moravians. Their work was not finished through no fault of their own. I honor their sacrifice, vision, and steadfastness to see the principles they believed in effect this area. It is my desire to see the spirit of their work completed.

I believe that God is looking for a people who will take up parts of this mantle and complete the work that He started. This is a big call and can only be given by God. Mantles are not a thing to be taken lightly. Here is a quote that I found but the source is unknown:

*"I believe that every great man of God has left a mantle behind, but few have accepted, and few have put to use. And few have been worthy to wear that mantle because it demands the same lifestyle, the same dedication, the same suffering, the same tears, the same prayer life, the same dangers, the same loneliness, the same deprivation, the same rejection, and being maligned as the one who first wore it. It is not easy to accept the mantle when so much pain is attached to it. It's not just a case of glamour, glory, and fame. There is a lot more involved with the mantle of our predecessors who leave us at the end of their ministry."*

Only God gives and takes away mantles. This is because a mantle is simply His presence to accomplish something. Here is a summary of just a few of the characteristics of the early Moravian church.

## **Moravian Emphasis**

1. Herrnhut Church – 100 years of Non-stop Prayer
2. Importance of Experiencing God and Knowing Jesus. Their symbol is a lamb and a cross.
3. Emphasis on Unity around Jesus and how to live as a Christian and not Doctrine
4. Primary Purpose at Spring Place was Training
5. Emphasis on Music

I have come to believe that any of these common areas that we see start to happen in NW Georgia is due to the fact that the 'Spirit' of these things were started in this area over 175 years ago. In any way that we participate in our churches in these things just means we are walking in the shoes of great men and women of faith – our forefathers – of over 8 generations ago! We honor these forerunners and may their memory live long and their work see its completion.

If anyone desires more reading on the Moravians the book, "A History of the Moravians" by J. E. Hutton covers their history up through 1909. The book can be found in PDF format at our website here:

<http://www.relationshipchurch.com/Home/Resources/Writings/tabid/65/Default.aspx>

<sup>1</sup> The source for this section came from *The Voice* magazine, "Count Nicholas Ludwig Von Zinzendorf" by Jonas Clark and "A History of the Moravians", by J.E. Hutton.

<sup>2</sup> "A History of the Moravians", by J.E. Hutton, Chapter 5.

<sup>3</sup> Parts of this section adopted from *Murray County's Indian Heritage*, @1987, Whitfield-Murray Historical Society

<sup>4</sup> "A History of the Moravians", by J.E. Hutton, Chapter 12.