

A HISTORY  
OF  
BETHLEHEM, PENNSYLVANIA

1741—1892

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WITH  
SOME ACCOUNT OF ITS FOUNDERS  
AND  
THEIR EARLY ACTIVITY IN AMERICA

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vided with two masts to carry what was thought would be adequate sail. The rigging was constructed by Schoute and Brink, with the assistance of two other sailors of the *Irene*, Peter Drews and Lambert Garrison. The launch at the Bethlehem boat-yard, where the several ferry flats had been built, took place on September 27. The school boys were given a holiday, and they helped to haul it on rollers to the water. When it was floated, some of the officials of Bethlehem were taken a little way down the river on a trial trip. The record states that seven men and seven women, accompanied by seven boat-builders and sailors, were on board. Meanwhile, Father Nitschmann served a luncheon on shore to the boys who had helped to tug at the ropes. He and they all then boarded the boat—fifty-six boys and eleven men—and sailed up and down the stream, singing hymns. The record states that with the first load, the boat drew nine, and with the second load, eleven inches of water. At the suggestion of Bishop Spangenberg, the favorite name *Irene* was given this Delaware boat, and she was then referred to as the "*Little Irene*," in distinction from the larger Moravian ship that ploughed the Atlantic. This gala-day was closed with the harvest-home banquet held on the square between the Community House and the Sisters' House. Instrumental music was rendered from the balcony in front of the turreted building in which the boarding-school for girls was then domiciled, and the smaller girls gathered in the doorway and passage and sang hymns. The history of the *Little Irene* is brief. On November 6, she started down the Lehigh on her first trip to Philadelphia with a load of linseed oil, in command of Schoute, with several assistants. They reached the city and delivered their cargo, but on November 16, they returned to Bethlehem without the boat. It was too broad to be gotten up stream past the falls, and was left at the city to be sold. They reported officially and recommended the purchase of a Delaware flat that was for sale not far from Bethlehem. It was prudently decided first to hire one on trial, and consider the question of purchasing later.

Another enterprise that engaged the thought and skill of Bethlehem mechanics in 1754, more distinctly marked an epoch in the progress of the town. This was the successful experiment that gives the credit to Bethlehem of constructing the first water-works in Pennsylvania. The problem of finding an easier way to bring the water of the spring up the hill and distributing it where needed, than by means of a cart and buckets, had been officially discussed and had

engaged the thought of the ingenious Hans Christiansen, the new mill-wright of Bethlehem. There was the water-power that ran the oil and bark mill. That wheel might be made to do more work. A water tower above, and one or more tanks were easily constructed. The matter of pipes to convey the water to the tanks, especially the question of material, was important. Yet more serious a problem was the construction of the necessary pump. John Boehner, the West India missionary, one of the pioneers of Bethlehem, was on a visit at the place. He was an ingenious man, had some knowledge of such mechanism which he had seen successfully operated and was interested in the subject. He made a model of a pump and connections. He and Christiansen discussed it together and the latter set about the task. Carefully selected trunks of hemlock were rafted down the Lehigh from Gnadenuetten in March, 1754, from which water-pipes were to be made. While Christiansen worked at his pump, a building was erected near the oil-mill where the power was to be supplied for his first experiments, and already on the evening of June 21, he demonstrated the feasibility of his plan by forcing water as high as the houses around the square in the town above, to the astonishment and joy of all. Then the machinery was perfected, a separate water-wheel was built, the pipes were laid, the water tower was gotten ready, at the end of the outermost of the two log houses west of the Community House, a large tank was constructed in the square in front of the girls' school, between the Community House and the Sisters' House. On May 27, 1755, the water was successfully forced up the water tower and on June 27, the flow into the tank in the square began. The regular operation of the Bethlehem water-works was commenced and the occupation of the water carriers trudging up the hill from "the well of Bethlehem which is by the gate" was at an end. The value of the spring and the importance of properly guarding it were appreciated more highly than ever.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> In a board-meeting on September 2, following, it was observed that nobody who did not understand it should attempt to clean the spring, for in this country the springs had the peculiarity that they dried up if stirred in at the wrong time. Did this refer again to the folk-notion mentioned earlier, that the state of the moon must be heeded? On February 4, 1751, the singular record occurs that the spring which had ceased to flow about a year prior to that, was suddenly running again; as were also springs along the Monocacy on the way to Nazareth, that had been been dry more than a year.

Nothing about Bethlehem in those days excited the interest of visitors so much as the water-works. Even before the plan had been successfully tested, when they were yet in process of construction, the project was mentioned in descriptions of the place, as one of its notable features. The earliest such reference to it in print is probably that of the Swedish Lutheran Provost, the Rev. Israel Acrelius, in his history of the Swedish Churches of former New Sweden and descriptions of the adjacent regions, written in 1758. He visited Bethlehem "in company with the Rev. Pastor Peter Brunnholtz, Pastor Eric Unander and Mr. Sleydon," in June, 1754, just two days before the first successful experiment, when the water was forced "as high as the houses." He refers to this project at which "the Brethren were working very actively and industriously." This, he says, "will be a very useful work for the cloister,"<sup>35</sup> for hitherto it has kept a man busy from morning till night to carry the water up the hill to the houses."

Among the various industries mentioned in an interesting manner by Dr. Acrelius, was a particular one that reveals the disposition of that time at Bethlehem to experiment with every possible thing, in extending the range of activities and products. This was the culture of silk-worms carried on in the Brethren's House since 1752. He found two men in charge of the brood who were kept busy gathering and spreading mulberry leaves. It was explained to him that there

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<sup>35</sup> The description given of Bethlehem by the Rev. Provost, while highly interesting and in the main, not as objectionable in tone as the animadversions of Lutheran divines of that time usually were, nevertheless reveals a preconceived aversion to the Brethren. A quizzing manner, with bantering questions and derogatory comments by the party, made their escorts at Bethlehem reserved and ill at ease; for they were not sure that it was not all preparatory to a new contribution to the library of publications against "The Herrnhuters" that had accumulated. Spangenberg, to whom he had a letter of introduction, and who would have met him with ease and dignity, as his peer in all respects, and would, perhaps, have enlightened him on some points, was, unfortunately, not at home. That his acquaintance with the Moravian Church was very defective, and that he entirely misconceived the genesis of things at Bethlehem, as well as the nature of the settlement and its establishments, appears in the opening sentence of his description: "Bethlehem is a Protestant cloister belonging to the Herrnhut Brotherhood, established in the year 1743 by Count Zinzendorff, the founder of the Brotherhood, and instituted by David Nitschmann, Spangenberg, Anna Nitschmann and others, as the elders and officers of the society." It sounds like some articles in modern newspapers, by persons who, after reading such accounts, come and stroll about the town a few hours, pick up some stories at random and then proceed to write up "Bethlehem and the Moravians." The extracts given above are from the translation of *Acrelius* published by the Historical Society of Pennsylvania in 1876.