

LOCAL HISTORIC LANDMARK PROGRAM

Forsyth County Historic Resources Commission

Bethabara Gemeinhaus

Local Historic Landmark #96

Historic Bethabara Park, Winston-Salem

Construction Date: 1788

Restoration Date: 1970

Landmark Designation Date: 12/18/1995

Bethabara's Gemeinhaus (congregation house) was constructed in 1788 and is the single most significant building remaining in what was the first Moravian settlement in North Carolina. The Gemeinhaus was not only a church, but also a meeting place, school, and minister's house for the Bethabara community. It is the only German colonial church with attached minister's living quarters remaining in the United States. This structure replaced an original log structure that housed the congregation, which was built in 1756 and located elsewhere on Bethabara's grounds.

In Bethabara, the "Lot" determined the exact location of the Gemeinhaus. The Lot was a method of decision-making employed by the early Moravians on many aspects of life: several possible solutions to a question were placed in a hat and the one selected was prayerfully respected as the Lord's decision. Indeed, following the Lot, the Moravian records stated that: "The Saviour approves that the Gemeinhaus in Bethabara should be built along the street in Stach's garden."



Bethabara, c. 1890

Courtesy of Old Salem Museums and Gardens via Digital Forsyth (<http://www.digitalforsyth.org>)



The architect for the Gemeinhaus was Frederic William Marshall, the administrator of the Moravian's "Wachovia Tract." Marshall submitted plans for the Gemeinhaus on January 4, 1788, and with the whole congregation in attendance, the foundation stone was laid April 8, 1788. Both Moravian and non-Moravian workers were hired to construct the building; Moravians were paid 9 shillings and non-Moravians 8 shillings, with room and board provided.

With only eighteen families in the Bethabara congregation, the minister, Jacob Ernst, requested financial help from the Moravian congregations in Pennsylvania to allow the church to be completed without going into debt; however, no help was received. Stone was quarried from a farm south of the settlement and the timbers were fashioned using broadaxe and adz. Yellow poplar shingles, leftover from the recent construction of a distillery across the street, were used on the roof. The gutters, also made of yellow poplar, were tarred on the inside and painted red on the outside. Consecration of the Bethabara Gemeinhaus took place on November 26, 1788, though there seems to be no reason for this date other than convenience of schedule.

The 1788 Gemeinhaus served the Bethabara Moravian congregation until 1953, fully two hundred years after the founding of the community. A new, replacement church was built at the intersection of Bethabara Road and Indiana Avenue.

Restoration of the Gemeinhaus took place in 1969-70 and the restored Gemeinhaus was dedicated on Sunday, April 25, 1971.

The 1788 Bethabara Gemeinhaus is exemplary of the sturdy construction, straightforward design, and simple refinement characteristic of 18th century Moravian buildings. It is composed of two different sections recognizable by height. The taller section was the Saal, or Moravian sanctuary, and the other section served as the parsonage. It is one of the finest examples of Moravian architecture remaining in America.

Today the Bethabara Gemeinhaus is an interpretative property for Historic Bethabara Park.



1788 Gemeinhaus at Bethabara, 1890-1900
Courtesy of Old Salem Museums and Gardens via Digital Forsyth (<http://www.digitalforsyth.org>)



Gemein Haus in Bethabara, date unknown
Courtesy of Old Salem Museums and Gardens via Digital Forsyth (<http://www.digitalforsyth.org>)

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Bethabara Historic District National Register Nomination
<http://www.hpo.ncdcr.gov/nr/FY0048.pdf>

<http://www.ci.winston-salem.nc.us/Home/Departments/RecreationAndParks/BethabaraPark/HistoricArea/Articles/Gemeinhaus>

<http://www.foodhistory.com/foodnotes/road/wsnc/bb/01/>

[http://images.lib.ncsu.edu/luna/servlet/view/all/what/Bethabara+Gemeinhaus+\(Winston-Salem,+N.C.\)](http://images.lib.ncsu.edu/luna/servlet/view/all/what/Bethabara+Gemeinhaus+(Winston-Salem,+N.C.))

http://www.facebook.com/note.php?note_id=155208167835355

<http://wakespace.lib.wfu.edu/xmlui/handle/10339/17237>



This information is also available
at the Forsyth County
Historic Resources Commission's web site:
<http://www.ForsythCountyHRC.org>