

Cherokees to the rescue

Two join together to save a long-time Archives project

Just as the economic decline has put the bite on everyone, the Moravian Archives has received pledges of two major grants for publication of our longest running project.

At the beginning of the 1800s the Moravians of Salem, North Carolina, saw opportunity to open a mission to the Cherokees. It was truly a major undertaking for such a small church, but despite start-up difficulties and some misunderstandings (see page 2), the Springplace mission to the Cherokee Nation began on July 13, 1801. It survived the Trail of Tears and the Civil War but could not survive government parceling tribal lands to individuals, omitting missions. The mission finally closed in May 1899.

During the mission's almost 100 years of existence its workers in true Moravian fashion compiled a remarkable body of records — diaries, correspondence, reports, committee minutes — truly a gold mine of material for historical, theological, socio-ethnological, linguistic research, or just plain fun reading and learning a large slice of American history that has been very little explored. As one scholar put it, these records are the “only account of daily life in the Cherokee Nation.” Period.

Trouble is, the first one-third of the records were in the language the mission workers knew best, German, and in the handwriting few German scholars know today, the “deutsche Schrift.” As late as 1989 the Archives had to turn away Cherokees who wanted to read of their ancestors, because the documents were still locked in the original German language.

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Archivist C. Daniel Crews receives the first grant of \$25,000 from Jack D. Baker, Treasurer of the Cherokee Nation.

Cherokees join in support of Archives project

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And so in 1992 Moravian Archives embarked on the "Springplace project" of translating the records, not only the mission diary but also the correspondence. Reports, meeting minutes, and travel diaries were also translated. While translating proceeded on the first 37 years of German records, transcribing was begun on the 60-odd years of English language records.

Our goal had become the complete (except for repetition) translation and transcription of the Cherokee mission records until transfer of mission supervision to the Northern Province in 1893. And when that was done, we would see to publishing what we had nicknamed *Records of the Moravians in the Cherokee Nation*.

But then last fall the bottom dropped out of America's economy. What seemed like sufficient income and assets dried up. Moravian Archives was facing the painful possibility of staff cutbacks. That meant shelving the Springplace project for we didn't know how long.

That is when the Cherokee Nation and the Eastern Band of Cherokees stepped in. The Cherokee Nation are those whose ancestors survived the Trail of Tears, the removal of the tribe in 1838 to the Indian Territory, which is now Oklahoma. The Eastern Band are those whose ancestors faded into the mountains rather than accept removal, becoming the largest band of original residents still occupying their ancestral land in North Carolina.

Shelve the Springplace project? Leave Cherokee history and heritage (even if it was written by Moravian mission workers) locked up for yet more decades? That will never do. And so the Cherokee Nation and the Eastern Band agreed on equal funding the Springplace project to publication, estimated by the Archives to cost \$50,000 a year over the next five years.

Declaration of this agreement was made at the Red Clay Council in Red Clay, Tennessee, on April 17. This was only the second united council held at Red Clay since the last council held in 1837 before removal.

With formal recognition that "both Tribes would benefit from the historical knowledge and information contained within these collections," and that "these documents will be prepared and presented for publication and use by the Cherokee people, historians, and interested parties to gain a better understanding of Cherokee history and culture," it was "finally resolved that the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians and the Cherokee Nation shall insure that this joint legislation is fulfilled."

For the Archives, this resolution of support and these grants are a salvation. If we had not received them, the alternative was cutting personnel and setting aside the Springplace project for yet another generation. We express our deep gratitude to the Cherokee Nation and the Eastern Band for this strong support of this most worthy project.

Now on to assembling diaries and documents, proofreading, editing, indexing of volume one of *Records of the Moravians among the Cherokees* (we are still working on the title).