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Exploring God's Acre: The Moravian Church Mission Graveyard at Hebron, Labrador.

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Editor's Note. Mr. Jarvis was guest speaker at our May 27th meeting.

The Moravian Church, also known as the Church of the Brethren, or the Unitas Fratrum, is one of two pre-Reformation Protestant churches. It takes as its spiritual founder the Czech religious reformer Jan Hus, who was ordained as a Catholic priest, but was excommunicated in 1412 for speaking out against the practices of the Church (Schattschneider 18-20). Hus was burned at the stake on 6 July 1415, and his death sparked the Hussite War, which would last for over sixteen years (Schattschneider 22-26). The fortunes of the Church rose and fell, experiencing periods of calm, followed by periods of intense persecution. In the 1620's, intense counter reformation Catholicism forced the Church underground, with most adherents fleeing to Poland to escape the persecution in Moravia and Bohemia (Hiller 2). The Moravians, as they became known, eventually found shelter in Germany in the early eighteenth century, under the patronage of Nicholas Ludwig, Count and Lord of Zinzendorf and Pottendorf (Hiller 3). Sandra Gillis writes,

It was Zinzendorf, the "ordinary" or head, of the Church after 1737 until his death in 1760, who imparted to the Brethren a "global view of Christianity". "The World is my parish", he asserted, and under his leadership the Brethren began aggressive missionary activity throughout the globe (Gillis 457).

The Moravian Church in Labrador grew out of missionary work in Greenland, where

missionaries were first sent in 1733 (Schattschneider 71). Through their work in Greenland, the Moravian missionaries learned to speak and write Inuktitut, and started the work of translating the gospels. With a knowledge of the language with them, it was decided in 1752 to attempt missionary work in Labrador, and the first successful mission station was established in Nain in 1771. Many of the first missionaries at Nain were carpenters, blacksmiths, and builders. The mission house, brought from England on the ship the Jersey Packet (Hiller 84) was erected in 1771. The mission house was "extended and improved", and a saw mill was constructed in 1772 (Hiller 90). This saw mill would be of great importance in later construction efforts along the coast.

Using Nain as a base, other mission stations were soon opened. Mission work started at Hebron in 1818 (Peacock 1976, 12), although at that point it was known by its Inuit name of KangerdluksoaK (Peacock 1983, 25). The Moravians' first task, "was to gather the people in one place, so KangerdluksoaK became the permanent village, renamed Hebron. It was important to keep the Inuit close to the mission, which made it easier to preach the gospel and promote Christianity among the Inuit" ("Relocation"). In the winter of 1831, a "temporary building was prefabricated at the OKaK settlement and transported by dog team" to Hebron (Peacock 1983, 26). The large church building at Hebron was started at this time, but was not completed until 1838 (Peacock 1983, 26). The Hebron station remained open until 1959, when it was abandoned (Gillis 462).

Where the landscape didn't suit the needs of the missionaries, it was sometimes altered, reordered until it did so. Streams, such as the ones which flowed near OKaK, were redirected in stone channels to provide water to power sawmills or for drinking. Complex drainage and irrigation ditches were also dug, to provide water for various gardens.

One of the more impressive Labrador examples of landscape architecture is the missionary graveyard at Hebron. Located north of the community, the graveyard is an elevated plateau measuring roughly 45 meters by 30 meters, and is perfectly rectangular. The plateau is level, and accessible by a stone and earth ramp on its south-east corner. If one uses a conservative height estimate of 3 meters on average over the entire structure, the missionary families must have moved, by hand, approximately 4050 cubic meters of earth to create a suitable landscape for their dead. This graveyard, like the missionary graveyard at Hopedale, is aligned on a north-south axis.

The graveyard is one of two at Hebron. This graveyard was apparently reserved for the early missionaries and their families, the majority of them German. The second graveyard, not discussed here, is from a later period, and seems to contain mostly Inuit converts to Christianity. The missionary graveyard contains a total of twenty-seven markers. Twenty-six of these are stone marker. With one exception, these are arranged in three parallel lines running north-south towards the centre of the cemetery. One stone marker, apparently broken in half, lies off by itself in the north-east corner. The twenty-seventh marker is made of wood, and located in the extreme south-west corner. Unfortunately, it too has been damaged, and no visible text remains.

The stone markers are all laid flat on the ground in typical Moravian fashion. As in most Moravian graveyards, the markers are simple rectangles, free from any carved patterns or designs, and usually free of any text other than the name of the interred and the dates of birth and death. Where other text exists, it is usually brief. Examples include information on the place of birth, or short references to Biblical scripture. Many of the markers are those of children, a reminder of the difficult conditions that must have faced the early missionaries.

All the markers recorded here were transcribed by Dale Gilbert Jarvis on August 07, 1995.

01 In Loving Remembrance of Francis Whitchurch EVERARD of Nottingham England Aged 21 Years. Erected by his parents.

02 August GUNTHER Geb. 15 Feb. 1838 In Kurtzig bei Meseritz Prov. Posen Heimgegangen den 4 Feb. 1876

03 Herman Adolph ZIOK geb d 9. Juli, 1839 in Emaus auf St. Jan Westindien heimgegangen de 20 Oktober, 1868.

04 Marie Friederike KÄSTNER. Geb: Hultsh Geb: D. 27 Aug: 1849 In Gross Hennersdorf bei Hernhut. Heimgegangen D. 26 Mai 1873.

05 Luise August HLARATSCHEK Geb: Dechenhardt Geb: 26 Sept. 1845 [-?-] bei Potsdam Heimgegangen de. 5 Juni 1876.

06 Beata BOHLMAN Geb und Gest. 5 Okt 1909 HIOB.1.21.

07 Friederich Joachim BOHLMAN Geb 20 Mai 1905 Ging Heim 12 Octbr 1906. Mark 10.14

08 Walter Werner GERICKE Geb 2. Octbr. 1904 in Rama Ging Heim 4 Mai 1906. OFF.21.4.

09 Beatus WALDMANN 8 Mai 1904

10 Beatus WALDMANN 14 Januar 1903

11 Beatus KÄSTNER Geb: U. Heimgegangen D. 19.Mai 1873.

12 Carl Otto HIRT geboren in Okak. den 8ten April, 1867. Heimgegangen den 8ten April, 1868.

13 Beatus SCHOETT geboren und

entschlafen den 2 Deci 1857

14 Friederich Jonathan BUBSER geboren
den 13ten October 1852 entschlafen den 14ten
Merz 1853

15 Gertrud BOURQUIN geb den 26 April,
1864, in Nain. entschlafen den 16 October
1867. PS 23 1

16 Sophie Kjerstine DAM Geb. D. 20 Juni
1870 Entschlafen d. 19 Mai, 1872. Petri 1.3.

17 Maria Bertha HLAVATSCHEK Geb
11ten August 1883 Heimgegangen 3ten
November 1883.

18 Hedwig Magdalene HAUGE geboren
den 1sten October 1883 gestorben
den 30ten October 1884.

19 Paul Albert HAUGK Geb: den 13ten Juli
1877 in Hoffenthal Heimgegangen den: 4ten Jan:
1880 2 Cor: 1.V 3.4.

20 Rudolph George SCHNEIDER geboren
allheir de. 10. Juli 1865. G heim
d. 28 Januar 1867.

21 Johannes TAPPE geboren und
entschlafen den 24ten July 1861 Offenbg 14.13.

22 August Hermann FREITAG. Geb den 1
July 1841, entschlafen den 2 August 1841.

23 Beata SCHNEIDER Geboren und
Heimgegangen den 11 May 1836

24 Lilly ASBOE born May 31 in Hopdale
1891 Fell asleep in Jesus Febr 15th 1893.
Suffer little children and forbid them not to
come unto me for of such is the
kingdom of heaven. Matt. 19.14.

25 Beata SCHMIDT geboren und
entschlafen den 14 Mai 1899.

26 Julius SIMON Heb [Stone appears
broken in half. Heb=Hebron?]

27 [Wooden, half circle-shaped fragment of
marker. No text visible]

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