

*Finding a Voice: Music and Identity for Nineteenth Century American Moravians*

Not long after the founding of Herrnhut, the Moravians embraced a call to missionary work, which eventually led to the establishment of settlements in North America, including Bethlehem (1741) and Salem (1766). Initially, Moravians living in North America were discouraged from developing local ties. Instead, Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700–1760) called on them to be citizens of the world—at home wherever they settled. This dictate, however, did not last. By the nineteenth century, Moravians in the United States were increasingly embracing the identities and cultural practices of their neighbors. This process reached a critical juncture in 1857, when a General Synod convened in Herrnhut resulted in the restructuring of the church. This move allowed for the American Moravians to have more administrative authority over their local churches, while moving away from the centralized European control that had been in place for over a century. This was the beginning of a new era for the North American church that further eroded the idea of a global community free from the influences of national identities and politics. One illustrative example of the changes that accompanied this shift is music, which occupied a central position in the spiritual, cultural, and communal life of the church. In the nineteenth century, there was a gradual movement away from the deeply Germanic tradition of the eighteenth century towards something more “American.” Perhaps because of the transitional nature of this period, music of this era has been underexplored in comparison to the “Golden Age” of the late eighteenth century. The ramifications of this transition, though, are consequential. The music—ranging from parlor songs to hymns—bears witness to this transformation, which increasingly reflected the struggle of Moravians grappling with conflicting identities of faith and nation and the question of what it meant to be both “Moravian” and “American.”