

Peter Vogt, Herrnhut Moravian Church

Corpse House and Burial Vaults: Unexpected Discoveries and Challenges of Heritage Preservation in Herrnhut

This case study will present the two recent discoveries related to the material heritage of Moravian burial practices that illustrate the complexities of Moravian heritage preservation within the context of the Moravian Church as a living religious community.

(1) In the context of the renovation of the Herrnhut Moravian sanctuary, construction workers discovered in 2021 the original 18th-century stone floor in the two chambers of the attached 1765 corpse house, which was located about 40 cm below the surface, complete with two descending steps. This discovery raised questions both about the practical and/or spiritual purpose of this arrangement and about its significance in the wider setting of Moravian Church architecture. It also posed the challenge of how the original floor could be preserved, as the continuing use of the Corpse House for modern burials needed to be ensured. Here, a compromise was found that balanced out the concerns of historic preservation and modern requirements of handicap accessibility.

(2) In 2022, the discovery of a hole in the ground next to Count Zinzendorf's gravestone revealed that Zinzendorf had been interred in a burial vault. A careful excavation showed that the original brick vault of Zinzendorf's crypt had collapsed. An examination of the other seven grave sites of the Zinzendorf family showed that all of them possessed vaults underneath, of which two were intact, two were damaged, and four had been filled up with a mixture of dirt and gravel. In conversation with church boards and historic preservation authorities, this discovery has raised a number of questions: How do we interpret the use of burial vaults in the larger context of Moravian burial practices? How can the unique features of the burial vaults be documented and preserved? What is the appropriate way to address visitor safety and preservation requirements in a manner respectful to the memory of the individuals buried there and considerate of the spiritual integrity of the burial sites and the tradition of Moravian funeral practice?

The material evidence for both discoveries will be presented, including a video of the exploration of the vaults. In conclusion, the findings from Herrnhut will be considered in relation to the larger network of Moravian settlements, and insights for the task of Moravian heritage preservation will be noted.

Biography

Rev. Dr. Peter Vogt is Director of Theological Education in the Moravian Church, European Continental Province, and co-pastor of the Herrnhut congregation in Germany. An alumnus of Moravian College and Theological Seminary, he received his Master of Divinity in 1995 from Harvard Divinity School and his Doctor of Theology in 2001 from Boston University. His academic interests include the theology of Zinzendorf, the history and practices of the Moravian Church, and 18th century Pietism. His list of publications includes more than 110 articles and dictionary entries and ten books, among them *Our Moravian Treasures*, a manual for theological education in the world-wide Moravian Church (2019). He is part of the transnational coordination group for the UNESCO World Heritage site "Moravian Church Settlements."