

Susan Lena Kennedy, Independent researcher

*Paradise Garden: Jerusalem's Leper Home 1865 to the Present*

I am the co-author of a book on the Moravian-founded leper hospice in Jerusalem from the mid-19th century to the late 20th century. Since the publication of the book last year, I am completing a second book that focuses exclusively on the Moravian contribution to the care of the terminally ill in Jerusalem.

By the mid-19th century, when the Moravians made their humble entry onto the Jerusalem scene, a number of hospitals had already been set up in the city by the European powers, including the German Deaconess Hospital, the French St Louis Hospital, the British Hospital and St John's Eye Hospital. The leper hospice, "Jesus Hilfe", located relatively far from the city, is less well known.

My paper will focus on the vision of Augusta von Keffenbrink-Ascheraden, whose pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 1865 resulted in the establishment of the first leper hospices in the Holy Land. I will explain why the Moravians were chosen by Augusta to run her institution (their successful missionary work elsewhere), and how, where and with what values the Moravian-trained nurses (known as Diakonissen) were prepared for their roles. I will mention Nikolaus Ludwig Duke of Zinzendorf, the founder of the Herrnhut Brüdergemeine, who revived the deaconess function in the mid-eighteenth century and Hermann Plitt who founded the first Deaconess Institute in 1866 and a much larger institute in 1883, which he called Emmaus, in the small town of Niesky, close to the Brüdergemeine headquarters at Herrnhut.

Niesky provided nearly all of the staff of the leper hospices in Jerusalem.

I will describe the patients in the leper hospices, how they were treated and the Christian values that the staff tried, more or less successfully, to instill in them. I will talk about the religious instruction that the patients, whether Muslim, Christian or Jewish, received, and the Bibles in braille (Armenian, Arabic and Greek) that the Moravians provided. The grounds of the hospice, to this day, are among the most glorious in the city: gardens laid out by the patients, nurses, Gustav Dalman, house-fathers, doctors and visitors, and referred to as "Paradise".

In 1951, some years after the state of Israel was established, the leper home was signed over to the new state. The Moravians left. Some of the patients also chose to leave. One Moravian nurse, Joanna, upset to see her beloved patients left to their own fate, decided to return. She set up a new home, on a mountainside close to Ramallah, which continued to care for the last leprosy patients, providing them with the same loving environment they had known in Jesus Hilfe.

For almost a century the Moravians played a huge role in the care of those dying of leprosy in Jerusalem. Without them, the lepers would have been left to die alone, in the alleys of the city or in their overcrowded and insanitary villages, for no hospital would agree to treat them. Letters and diaries, of staff as well as patients, testify to the mutually rewarding and enriching relationship between patient, nurse and doctor.