

*The Single Brothers Deal with the Death of Their “Never-to-be Forgotten Christel”*

From the 1720s through 1760 many Moravians formed deep personal ties with various members of the charismatic Zinzendorf family. Their birthdays might be celebrated by lovefeasts held by entire congregations, or by the choirs to which individual members of the family belonged. In their lebenslaufe, Moravians might mention times when they were closely associated with the family, such as caring for their children, or having a child baptized by one of them.

Christian Rhenus von Zinzendorf was the only son of the Count and Countess von Zinzendorf to survive into adulthood. During his lifetime he attracted significant attention as a spiritual leader within the Moravian Church. While a student at Jena, his household attracted many to the fledgling movement. He was at the center of the controversies of the Sifting Time. Christiansbrunn, Pennsylvania, the Single Brothers farming community created as the agricultural center for the Bethlehem congregation, was named for him.

The death of “Christel,” as he was affectionately known, sent shock waves through the Church. He was the heir apparent for the Zinzendorf family from a political and economic standpoint, at a time when the Zinzendorf family finances were intermingled with those of the Moravian Church. Despite his leading role in the Sifting Period, he was called to London, where he remained a revered spiritual leader, serving until his death on May 28, 1752. He would continue to be mourned and fondly remembered by Moravians like the Single Brothers at Bethabara, North Carolina (recently moved from Christiansbrunn), who celebrated the “anniversary of the ‘going home’ of our never-to-be forgotten Christel” several years after his death.

To deal specifically and in a timely manner with the leadership vacuum that Christel’s death created in the Single Brother’s Choir, a synod for the Single Brothers was held in London from December 19, 1752 through January 15, 1753. The diary from this Synod reveals the spiritual mood of the Single Brothers following this time of loss, and outlines the ways that worship and meetings allowed them to address matters they thought most important moving forward. The diary also holds important linguistic evidence that contradicts older historical arguments about the linguistic and theological underpinnings of the Sifting Period.