

Unruly Sisters:

Moravian Women, Dissent, and the 18th Century North Carolina Piedmont

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is about how Moravian women in the community of Salem, North Carolina, challenged the policies of the church in order to gain more autonomy in the late 18th century. Settling into the Piedmont, these women encountered excessive materialism and a widely accepted racial hierarchy, which challenged the simple life of the Moravian community. I argue that although historians of Moravians have explored the dissent in the Salem community, they have not considered the desires of Moravian women and how their environment shaped them. Moravian Elders struggled to keep their congregation in line and were greatly concerned with the conduct of women. Young women running away with outsider men reflected poorly on their patriarchal control. Married women who conducted their households in a way that contradicted the guidance of the Elders, seemed to threaten the future of their community by corrupting the youth. Despite the efforts of the Elders to contain dissent, they were sometimes pushed to adjust their policies.

Using the disciplinary records of the Elders, memoirs, the Single Sisters Diary, and various documents from the congregation, I examine the experiences and actions of Moravian women prior to their arrival in Salem and shortly after, the dissent and desires of Single Sisters, and how Married Sisters navigated the rules of the Brethren to run their own households. Despite the attempts of the Elders to curb disobedient behavior, many women were successful. Moreover,

the disobedience of Moravian women exemplifies how women were involved in changing the Moravian church and the development of the Piedmont culture by challenging the policies of the church and seeking opportunities for freedom.

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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

In the second half of the eighteenth century, a group of German Lutheran reformers or Pietists, called the Moravians, started a congregation and community in the Piedmont region of North Carolina. Largely surrounded by small communities that were embracing materialism and benefiting from enslaved labor, Moravian Elders struggled to keep their congregation in line. This thesis examines how single and married Moravian women disobeyed the policies of the community in order to gain control over their marriages, work, and homes. These women navigated the spaces around them, southern racial hierarchy, and opportunities for dissent to garner some control over their lives and push back against the rules of the Elders. In this thesis, I argue that white Moravian women used private and public spaces to bend or break the rules of the Elders and gain new freedoms and autonomy. Furthermore, Moravian women had to consider their identities as white Moravian women in a slave owning society, which implied that they were superior to enslaved Black individuals. Due to these influences, Moravian women were inspired to dissent and challenge the Elders, which in turn inspired changes in the policies of the Moravian church.

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Trying to do research during the second summer of the Covid-19 pandemic was not easy, but thanks to the help of Nicole Crabbe at the Moravian Archives and Johanna Brown at the Old Salem Museum and Gardens, I was able to access the sources that made this thesis possible. I would also like to thank Johanna Brown for pointing me towards primary sources that inspired me to continue my research on the Moravians, as there is no lack of incredible women in the Moravian community.

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Introduction

In the colonial community of Salem, North Carolina, a small group of young women were preparing to turn in for the night. Unlike a typical evening in their communal home, there was no chatter. Each woman remained silent. One sat at a desk, fulfilling her daily duty of recounting the events of the day in the Single Sisters' Diary. Quietly, she wrote of the chastisement they had received that evening from the Elders and reflected on the disobedience of her fellow housemates.

There was discussion especially about the importance of holding to the established rules in a Choir House. This gave occasion for a thorough discussion about the disorders that have already been creeping in for a long period of time. There was a complaint that in this point there was still a fundamental lack among us. Therefore, those in charge were urgently asked to hold to the regulations and to be an example to the others.¹

Even with the pious teachings and communal control, this Sister noted, many women were bending and breaking the policies of the congregation. As rumblings of a Revolution in the 1770s infiltrated the bustling economy and social exchange in the Piedmont, Moravian women from Salem were noticeably participating in widespread disobedience inside of Moravian-run communities. Throughout the last thirty years of the 18th century, Salem saw many cases of Single Sisters, who were women of marrying age, disobeying the rules to shape their work and home lives. These actions were not a rare instance of one woman being a deviant, but a trend that caused the congregation grief and challenged their long-held traditions. Despite the desire of the Unity to correct these behaviors, women in their community found opportunities to shape their work, relationships, and homesteads, undermining the Elders to pursue their own desires.

A German pietist group called the Moravians established themselves in both Continental Europe and North America in the early 18th century. Practitioners of this unique form of

¹ Single Sister's Diary, 1794, Pg. 47, Moravian Archives, Winston-Salem, NC.

Christianity, derived from the Lutheran tradition, prioritized community and devotion above all things. As their church grew, they sought out places to form new communities. Their central ruling body, called the Unity, resided in Herrnhut, Germany, led and popularized by Count Nicolaus Zinzendorf in the early 1700s.²

Zinzendorf wanted a community separate from secular society, with a unique residential and family structure dictated by leadership. One of the unique features of Moravian society was the Choir system, which separated the community by gender and marital status. Single Sisters and Single Brothers consisted of those of marrying age who lived in separate housing. The church leaders typically decided which two single members would make a good match and then sought God's guidance by pulling a Bible verse out of a bowl called the Lot, which determined whether the union would be allowed. Use of the Lot allowed the decision to be placed in the hands of God but was still interpreted by the Unity.³ Once married, Brothers and Sisters sometimes remained in separate housing or would move in together. Widows lived in their own separate Choir groups and could move into their designated Choir House. Each section had a Choir leader who advised them, especially for spiritual matters.⁴ This communal system prioritized the church family over the individual family unit but encouraged a deep spiritual relationship with God.

The Unity upheld a certain concept of community that they referred to as *gemeine*.⁵ This concept embodied the ideal Moravian congregation community, in which the individuals lived by

² "The Unity" refers to their former name of *Unitas Fratrum*, which is Latin for "the Unity of Brethren." S. Scott Rohrer, *Hope's Promise: Religion and Acculturation in the Southern Backcountry* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2013), Pg. xi

³ The Lot was also utilized to make decisions about individuals and the congregation as a whole. See chapter four in Elisabeth W Sommer, *Serving Two Masters: Moravian Unity in Germany and North America*, (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2000).

⁴ Katherine M. Faull, *Speaking to Body and Soul: Instructions for the Moravian Choir Helpers, 1785-1786* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2017), Pg. 2.

⁵ *Gemeine*, in old German, roughly translates to community or congregation.

the policies of the Unity and pursued a relationship with God. Whether living in a Choir House or maintaining their household by the guidance of the Elders in the community, each member was expected to conduct themselves accordingly. When one joined the Unity, they were expected to sign a contract in which they agreed to obey the church's code of conduct.⁶ Beyond a written contract, the Unity designed the layout of their towns to optimize their surveillance of congregants. The Choir Houses were often built in the center of the settlement, near the gemeine house (community house), and the church. By enforcing social control through policy and physical space, the Unity attempted to protect their way of life and preserve their community for future generations.

As the Moravian church expanded into North America, its members encountered a culture that often challenged their own traditions and church policies. By the mid-1700s, the Elders first established the town of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, in hopes of fostering income and mission. Despite their fairly lucrative congregation in Pennsylvania, the Unity still needed more funds to financially support the church and sought new opportunities to keep their communities alive. By the mid-1700s, Zinzendorf believed he had found the perfect area to establish another Moravian community that could be successful spiritually and financially. The Moravians set out for Rowan County, North Carolina, in the lands east of the Appalachian Mountains and west of the fall line, known as the Piedmont. Made up of German and Scots-Irish farmers, enslaved and free Black individuals, and a few tradesmen who created clothing, tools, and artisan goods, the Piedmont was a tumultuous country both in landscape and society.⁷ While other Christian groups such as the Quakers, Lutherans, Baptists, and Dunkers also established themselves in the

⁶ S. Scott Rohrer, *Hope's Promise: Religion and Acculturation in the Southern Backcountry* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2013), Pg. 44.

⁷ Johanna Miller Lewis, *Artisans in the North Carolina Backcountry* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1995), Pg. 1-2.

Piedmont, they sought to establish churches within already established communities.⁸ The Moravians worked to establish a congregation but did not foresee how the diverse communities of this land would influence their members. Opportunities for wealth, including excessive materialism and owning enslaved individuals that would benefit the individual rather than the community, were apparent to the new settlers. Nevertheless, the Moravians continued to work with outsiders to ensure the establishment and survival of their communities in the Piedmont.

Moravian survival and success relied on their ability to work with outsiders. Of the six Moravian settlements in Piedmont North Carolina, Salem served as the *gemeine Ort*, the central community that smaller communities of Moravians referred to for leadership.⁹ In the early years of their settlement, Moravians stayed in Bethabara while they built their ideal town. The Moravians moved from the Piedmont town of Bethabara into Salem once it was established in 1772. However, a few families decided to remain in Bethabara among the non-Moravians, but they did not reject their faith. Bethabara would remain a town where Moravians worked and established their own homesteads while directly interacting with outsiders. Conflict with the Cherokee Native Americans and the French drove other German immigrants in the Piedmont to the safety of the Moravian community in Wachovia.¹⁰ To accommodate the Germans who desired to live on their tract of land and the Moravians who wished to run farms, Moravian leader Joseph Spangenberg founded the town of Bethania.¹¹ More outsiders moved into town, and the Moravian youth quickly identified Bethania as a place to socialize away from the strict rules of Salem leadership. Over time, some members of their congregation were drawn away from Salem and sought freedom in the nearby towns where the Elders wielded less control. The long-term

⁸ Michael O. Hartley and Martha B. Hartley, "The Great Philadelphia Wagon Road," (*Tar Heel Junior Historian* 45:2, spring 2006), Pg. 3.

⁹ The towns included Salem, Bethania, Bethabara, Friedland, Friedburg, and Hope.

¹⁰ Daniel Crews, 1993. *Bethania: A Fresh Look at Its Birth*, Winston-Salem, N.C.: Moravian Archives, Pg. 4.

¹¹ Daniel Crews, 1993. *Bethania: A Fresh Look at Its Birth*, Pg. 10.

relationships between outsiders and Moravians would be the source of many troubles for the Brethren.

While they sought to remain separate from the surrounding communities, Moravians' need to garner income to support their separatist community motivated them to participate in a slave-based economy entrenched in the region. The reality of living in the Piedmont would have implications for the shaping of the Moravian congregation. The Moravians chose to purchase and utilize enslaved persons within their communities to mitigate the lack of laborers as well as the cost of hiring white labor.¹² Within the town of Salem, the central place of Moravian leadership, no individual owned a personal slave. To keep members from becoming reliant on slave labor, the Unity would lend them out to the artisans, farmers, and shops that required them. Conversely, in the mixed towns of Moravians and outsiders, Bethabara, Bethania, Friedberg, and Hope, some were allowed to rent enslaved laborers from neighbors, and only a handful were allowed to become slave owners themselves.¹³ During the years of the American Revolution and after, more farmers bought enslaved people to work their farms, mills, and shops. Count Zinzendorf articulated in a speech and some of his writings that Africans are marked by their darker skin tone as descendants of Ham, Noah's sinful son, by God. Moravians accepted slavery as an earthly punishment for Ham's offspring.¹⁴ The Unity struggled to navigate the accepting nature of their beliefs while also enforcing racial hierarchy. Until the turn of the century, white members of the church shared Sunday services, celebration feasts, foot washing, and even Choir Houses with Black members. However, as slavery became intertwined with the economy in the Piedmont, the

¹² Jon F. Sensbach, *A Separate Canaan: The Making of an Afro-Moravian World in North Carolina, 1763-1840* (University of North Carolina Press, 1998), Pg. 67.

¹³ Jon F. Sensbach, *A Separate Canaan: The Making of an Afro-Moravian World in North Carolina, 1763-1840*, Pg. 79.

¹⁴ Jon F. Sensbach, *A Separate Canaan: The Making of an Afro-Moravian World in North Carolina, 1763-1840*, Pg. 30.

Unity started to segregate their practices and living quarters. As the presence of Black individuals in their community grew, the Elders' concern for the propriety of their congregation increased.¹⁵ Disobedience, whether performed by a white or Black Moravian, threatened their lifestyle.

Slavery was just one feature of the Piedmont that influenced the lives of Moravian women. White Moravians, including women, explored what their whiteness meant in a developing religious community as they encountered new ideas from their Piedmont neighbors and national political rhetoric. The presence of slavery allowed white women to access status by taking on the hard labor needed for profitable farming and trades, letting these women practice skilled trades or enjoy leisure time. Further, new boundaries of social life were solidifying in Wachovia as culture disseminated from interactions with outsiders. These new ideas caused a breakdown of traditions that inspired some Moravians to seek a marriage for love and subvert the power of their leaders and the result of the Lot.¹⁶ Moravian principles regarding the prioritization of the community were also challenged by the need for farms outside of town which allowed the establishment of nuclear families that became self-sufficient rather than relying on Moravian leadership.¹⁷ These new notions and practices directly affected white Moravian women in Salem. Inspired by the racial and material lifestyle of outsiders, unmarried and younger white women individually began to disobey the traditional Moravian restrictions on their lifestyle by occupying new physical spaces, such as workplaces, homes, and the communities such as Bethania where the grip of Moravian rules was looser and different constructions of acceptable conduct could be taken up, in efforts to gain autonomy.

¹⁵ Jon F. Sensbach, *A Separate Canaan: The Making of an Afro-Moravian World in North Carolina, 1763-1840*, Pg. 88.

¹⁶ Elisabeth W Sommer, *Serving Two Masters: Moravian Unity in Germany and North America*, Pg. 70.

¹⁷ Elisabeth W Sommer, *Serving Two Masters: Moravian Unity in Germany and North America*, Pg. 68.

This thesis explores how white Moravian Sisters in the emerging gemeine of Salem related and adapted to the North Carolina environment through acts of disobedience.¹⁸ The influence of the Unity's economic decisions during and after the Revolution caused unmarried women to work in public spaces. Taverns in Wachovia were known to be full of outsiders, for example, often those just passing through town.¹⁹ As the Unity was always concerned about the propriety and piety of white women, they attempted to limit their contact with men from the surrounding communities as much as possible but found that they needed white women to work in the tavern. In the tavern, on farms, and elsewhere, Moravian men and women engaged with outside ideas about appropriate white womanhood, and many women began to seek success in non-Moravian places. New ideas about sexuality and marrying for love caused these women to seek marriages not approved by the community, with Single Brothers or outsiders, in these places. Once married, these women ended up in private home spaces that prioritized the nuclear family instead of the community, and many of these households began to own their own slaves, which went against the wishes of the Brethren. Some women who chose not to marry moved from their Single Sister home, the living space for all unmarried Moravian women, and into a household with other single women, which was typically not allowed. Occasionally, some Moravian women sought to escape the Unity and have a separate life in the Piedmont. These small and large acts of dissent were a result of merging Moravian distinctions of space and the

¹⁸ The disobedience of Moravians in the Piedmont has been discussed by many Moravian scholars. This thesis understands disobedience in the Moravian context as it is presented in Scott Rohrer's *Hope's Promise: Religion and Acculturation in the Southern Backcountry* (2013) and Elisabeth Sommer's *Serving Two Masters: Moravian Unity in Germany and North America* (2000). While both scholars understand the disobedience among Moravians in Salem as a phenomenon that was taking place among many Moravian communities at this time, neither deeply interrogate the disobedience of white Moravian women specifically. In order to do this, I explore what disobedience in public and private spaces means. Cynthia A. Kierner's *Beyond the Household: Women's Place in the Early South, 1700-1835* (1998) provides the framework for understanding women's navigation of public and private spaces for their own means in the Early Republic.

¹⁹ Daniel B. Thorp, "Taverns and Tavern Culture on the Southern Colonial Frontier: Rowan County, North Carolina, 1753-1776," *The Journal of Southern History* 62, no. 4 (1996): Pg. 662.

culture of the outsiders that valued individuality instead of community.

The disobedience of Single and Married Sisters was deeply disturbing for the Elders, and their disciplinary records reflect this sentiment. While the cases of Brothers who purchased horses without permission or took out unapproved loans troubled the Elders, the instances of Sisters breaking the policies of the gemeine were recalled with great concern.²⁰ The Unity abided by traditional gender roles of the 18th century, which dictated that women were not independent agents, but reliant on the guidance of men. Disobedience from women within their community was not just the downfall of an individual, but reflected poorly on the leadership of the Elders. Therefore, a Sister who snuck away to meet an outsider broke the rules and directly challenged the authority of their leadership. The disciplinary records of the Salem Elders reveal that the dissenting acts of Moravian women disturbed them and were swiftly addressed.²¹

Argument and Significance

In this thesis, I argue that white Moravian women utilized private and public spaces to bend or break the rules of the Unity and gain new freedoms that would allow them to have more control over their lives. Single Sisters often used both private and public spaces to practice disobedience, while Married Sisters were most often breaking rules within private spaces. Moravian women were influenced by the social interactions in the homes of married family members, the tavern, or at social gatherings. Moravian women also used these spaces to express personal desires to forge their own path among outsiders in the Piedmont. While not approved by the Brethren, it allowed them freedoms such as control over who they married, how their

²⁰ Elizabeth Sommer's *Serving Two Masters: Moravian Unity in Germany and North America* (2000), provides more information on the disobedience of Brethren.

²¹ The Elders recorded conflict within the community and their disciplinary actions in the Die Aeltesten Conferenz, which translates to the Elder's conference. This extensive record provides researchers a glimpse into the process of maintaining the gemeine.

children were raised, and what kind of labor they would have to perform. This American influence was largely shared by surrounding Piedmont artisans, farmers, and traders.

Additionally, Moravian women had to consider their identities as white Moravian women in a slave owning society, which implied that they were superior to enslaved Black individuals. As previous scholars have not analyzed the disobedience of Moravian Sisters through a racial lens, they miss how these new identities provided white Moravian women with power over others in public and private spaces that was not granted by the congregation, influencing their desire for autonomy. The presence of enslaved labor provided an elevated social status and an opportunity for economic gain, benefitting from their labor as well as the time to pursue other trades. As the ideologies of the new American society encouraged individuality and the nuclear family structure, overseeing servants and slaves became part of maintaining the household for women, alongside working with their husbands and making decisions for their own children. Furthermore, as the Elders sought to maintain their *Gemeine* in a slave owning society, disobedience became feared even more. The Elders tried to define racial boundaries and rules regarding interracial interactions, yet disobedience from their congregants could threaten these unstable institutions. The element of racial tension within the Piedmont increased the fear of rule-breakers, which caused the Unity to express great concern over the behavior of their community.

In order to pursue their own desires for marriages of love, parenting, labor, and economic gain, Moravian women had to develop their own tactics of disobedience inside of Moravian and non-Moravian places. According to the records left behind by Moravian leadership and the personal writings of these women, their methods took many forms. The acts of dissent that happened in public spaces certainly concerned Moravian leadership, but the disobedience that

was carried out privately, through networks of women, alarmed them the most. Some women relied on secrecy to conduct dissent, which was much more troublesome to the Unity. Moravian women who snuck away to meet in private with a lover or maintained relationships with outsiders endured larger ramifications, such as expulsion. Through dissent that was practiced in different spaces in the community, Moravian women negotiated their social limitations and redefined the Unity's boundaries on their conduct as the Moravian community sought to establish itself in a tumultuous landscape.

Historical analysis of the Moravian communities of the Piedmont in North Carolina has been particularly excluded in the current analysis of gender that has become popular in Moravian historiography.²² I want to bring this developing conversation of Moravian gender and space to the lagging analysis of North Carolina Moravians. This thesis illuminates the voices and experiences of these women and uncovers the influences and tactics they used to gain autonomy in a society that valued the harmony of the community rather than the fulfillment of the individual. Their experiences in the Piedmont during the formation of the New Republic reveal that white Moravian women were greatly involved in the process of changing Moravian traditions through their own actions and by influencing their peers.

In the larger picture of early American history, this project explores how gender roles were affected by the culture of the Piedmont and how these social ideals were influenced by the intersection of religion and whiteness, and the new ideology of the Revolution. In the

²² The discussion of gender has gained prominence in the field of colonial Moravian history but primarily focuses on the community of Bethlehem. Katherine Faull's newest publication on Moravian women, *Speaking to Body and Soul: Instructions for the Moravian Choir Helpers, 1785-1786* (2017), is essential to the analysis of Moravian sexuality, gender roles, and understanding of the body. Faull's previous works on Moravian women's memoirs are a staple in their history, and her newest piece is no different. In this work, Faull explores the utilization and meaning behind Choir Helpers' instructions in the Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, community. Using this specific document, she argues that through the one-on-one discussion between the Choir Helpers, Moravians were "provided with a regular opportunity to examine their bodies and souls and trace the connection between the two."[#] These teachings encouraged autonomy for women and men, both physically and spiritually.

introduction of *Women in the American Revolution*, Rosemarie Zaggarri states an essential question for all historians of colonial women's history, "did the Revolution benefit women or actually reinforce traditional gender roles?" She concludes that seeking a "comprehensive understanding of women's experiences actually changes the nature of the Revolutionary narrative itself."²³ This thesis project contributes the stories of white Moravian women to the larger narrative of women's experiences, which in turn reveals that they were shaping their own destinies, tied to the racial inequalities and networks of the Piedmont, alongside a developing nation.

Historiography

White Moravian women in the history of Salem and its adjacent communities have remained on the sidelines and hidden by the desires and work of Moravian men. As scholars focus on the economic and religious practices of the community, their source material puts forth the narratives of men while assigning women as the supporting actors. While these works acknowledge the gendered bias that is inherent in their sources, most do not attempt to center Moravian women in discussions of the Salem settlement. Resigning women's importance to the Single Sister's Choir House, many of these studies miss the dynamic and influential ways in which Moravian women created much of the turmoil and change within their own community and those beyond Salem. Despite the limited amount of sources created by Moravian women, the records left behind by the community reveal that these women were not only pious Moravians that obeyed the Unity's rules, but some were defiant and seeking to shape their circumstances. Exploring the complexities behind the experiences of Moravian women in Salem, this thesis looks at how the themes of disobedience, whiteness, and space shaped the desires and actions of

²³ Oberg, Barbara, ed. *Women in the American Revolution: Gender, Politics, and the Domestic World* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2019), Pg. 13.

Moravian women. Bringing these threads together reveals the complicated line Moravian women walked between freedom as defined by their religion and freedom as the outside world prescribed it.

Disobedience

Congregants' disobedience towards the restrictions of the Unity was a formative force in the development of the Moravian church. While the founders tried to maintain their utopian ideas that clashed with the cultural practices of outsiders through social control, they were often met with resistance within their community. Specifically, in the case of Salem, their connections with outsiders through business and social activities amplified dissent in their town. Looking at the role of Salem women in the larger trend of disobedience in the Moravian community provides a glimpse at their desires and experience in the Piedmont.

The practice of disobedience by the congregation greatly influenced the changing of Moravian church policies over time. Once in the Piedmont, some congregation members began to negotiate their place in Moravian and outsider society through acts of dissent. Scholars have explored this process at length, looking at the economic, spiritual, and cultural changes over time. Perhaps the most significant scholarship on this topic comes from Elisabeth Sommer's *Serving Two Masters: Moravian Unity in Germany and North Carolina, 1727-1801*, which is an essential piece in North Carolina Moravian history.²⁴ Sommer argues that the most pertinent influences on the community are rising consumerism, intellectual reason, and the valuing of

²⁴ Sommer's comparative framework was largely inspired by Gillian Gollin's *Moravians in Two Worlds: A Study of Changing Communities* (1967), which compares Moravian Herrnhut to their settlement of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Established before Salem, Bethlehem also went through an adjustment period that ultimately led to a distinct change in social boundaries, economic ventures, and separation from the secular world. However, Bethlehem quickly became an American city that was economically and socially secular, while still practicing Moravian religion. The purpose and makeup of Bethlehem and Salem were also very different. Salem was an economic venture and Bethlehem's purpose was to support missions throughout North America. While Sommer and Gollin's studies vary in subject matter and results, they both reveal that American Moravians developed their own identities that were different from Moravians in Herrnhut.

romantic love over a good match.²⁵ We see a rise in sexual misconduct and subsequent expulsions during this time. Sommer's work is one of the few monographs that briefly discuss the disobedience of young Moravian women in Salem. However, it lacks an analysis of how Moravian women were accessing non-Moravian ideologies and of the implications of slavery in the community.²⁶ By omitting other interpretations of the construction of gender in the Piedmont and just focusing on the broader trends in early American gender history, Sommer's conclusions miss the desires that inspired disobedience among Moravian women and the importance of their participation in changing Moravian policies.

We must also consider how owning enslaved people gave power and privilege to white women. Besides pushing hard labor off onto someone else, the status of slave ownership established one white woman over another through the ability to partake in skilled labor and leisure. Even though this social structure contradicted Moravian beliefs, Sisters found that they functioned within both in the Piedmont. If Sommer had considered how Moravian women accessed new social ideas such as the value of being a slave-owning mistress, she would see that they were heavily influenced by the slave-holding society they lived within. In turn, this created desires for autonomy, which led to family systems that went against the values of the Unity. Nevertheless, for Moravian women to dissent, they had to utilize the spaces in the Piedmont.

Space

²⁵ At the same time that Sommer was writing her book, Daniel Thorp was also writing another essential piece of North Carolina Moravian history, *The Moravian Community in Colonial North Carolina: Pluralism on the Southern Frontier* (1989). His research focused on the development of the Moravian community and their attempts to remain separated from the Backcountry communities. Thorp focuses on the methods the Moravians in Bethabara and Salem used to do business with outsiders while maintaining their social separation. While this thesis will interact more with Sommer's analysis of outside influences, it would be amiss not to include Thorp's work to construct the Salem community.

²⁶ Elisabeth W Sommer, *Serving Two Masters: Moravian Unity in Germany and North America*, Pg. 70.; There is debate about the accessibility of literature to communities in the backcountry (including Moravians) during the late 18th century. Patrick Valentine argues that there was practically no access to books during this period in North Carolina in his article, "Libraries and Print Culture in Early North Carolina." (2005); Richard Brown provides an interesting analysis on how early American women gained knowledge through social interactions in *Knowledge Is Power: The Diffusion of Information in Early America, 1700-1865* (1989).

A critical component of the lifestyle of Moravian women was space and place. Like other women in early America, they had to physically and culturally navigate the space around them. By occupying these different spaces, whether the privacy of the home and the public tavern or the controlled town of Salem and the unrestricted Bethania, Moravian women could access different opportunities. However, these spaces had social implications for the piousness of a Moravian woman, as she could corrupt her purity when not under surveillance. By understanding how Sisters moved in the gendered spaces of the Piedmont, their goals and tactics are revealed. To gain new freedoms, they carried out actions of dissent using the spaces they could access or control.

Sharing the similar concepts of space as culturally defined and reinforced, Stephanie Camp's *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* informs my understanding of space and how it can be used for disobedience. Camp utilizes studies of space as a way to understand how control is enforced and subsequently resisted. Further, by navigating the cultural meaning of different spaces, individuals could perform acts of dissent that could either push back against the rules, or completely break them.²⁷ However, Camp focuses on the lives of enslaved women, while I seek to apply this framework to white women. When looking at the field of white colonial women's history, many prominent and groundbreaking pieces help conceptualize what it meant to be a white woman and how they navigated space in this period.²⁸ Cynthia Kierner's *Beyond the Household: Women's Place in the Early South, 1700-1835*, explores how women sought roles in public places despite the strict

²⁷ Cynthia A. Kierner, *Beyond the Household: Women's Place in the Early South, 1700-1835* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), Pg. 3-4.

²⁸ These works that interact with this project stand on the backs of giants in the field. Some of the foundational work of colonial women's history includes Mary Beth Norton's *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800* (1990); Linda Kerber's *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (1980); Kathleen Brown's *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs* (1996); and Pauline E. Schloesser's *The Fair Sex: White Women and Racial Patriarchy in the Early American Republic* (2002).

patriarchal control of fathers, husbands, and the law. She argues that the American Revolution inspired sentiments of public duty in women. As they began to get involved in discussions and acts of a political nature, they sought public outlets for their activism. Kierner emphasizes women's public role during the Revolution and how religion facilitated these desires by getting women involved in works for the public good through their church; she misses other significant influences. By foregrounding religion, Kierner deemphasizes the importance of race and whiteness to the development of white women's role in the public sphere. However, to understand why Moravian women wanted to enter different spaces or influence their meaning, the racialized social structure of the Piedmont must be understood as part of outsiders' and dissent's appeal to Moravian women.

Whiteness

The study of Moravian women in Salem lacks an intersectional approach to gender and race, neglecting an important aspect of life in the Piedmont. Embracing a white Moravian identity allowed Sisters to access more freedoms regarding their labor and wealth. By acknowledging the development of racial identity among white Moravian women, I place them in the developing southern society that relied on enslaved individuals for economic gain and social status.

My study complements the centrality of race found in Jon Sensbach's work, *A Separate Canaan: The Making of an Afro-Moravian World in North Carolina, 1763-1840*, which focuses on the experiences of enslaved African Americans in the Moravian community of Salem. While he argues that white women navigated racialized slavery and racialized limitations on women, I will show how white women benefitted from this institution, how they were privileged to

navigate space in particular ways, and how it shaped their work and social status desires.²⁹ As Cecily Jones' study, *Engendering Whiteness: White Women and Colonialism in Barbados and North Carolina, 1627-1865* exemplifies, the definition of race was an evolving term that sought to separate and protect white women from the treatment that enslaved Black women endured in North Carolina.³⁰ As soon as they settled in the Piedmont, white Moravian women quickly developed a racial identity that benefitted them in both the Moravian and Piedmont spaces. While Jones considers how racial definitions evolved in societies of plantation farmers, the case of the Moravians complicates her analysis, as many of the enslaved individuals in the Moravian communities of the Piedmont were inducted into the community. In their theology, enslaved Blacks were not dehumanized but considered Brothers and Sisters in Christ. Nevertheless, the Moravian church did not support abolition and still partook in the institution of slavery. White Moravians and Black Moravians had a complicated relationship caused by the church's values, which complicates Jones' understanding of racial social structures in North Carolina. However, racial differences also inspired dissent among white Moravians, who used constructions of race for their own benefit.

Understanding how Moravian women navigated physical space, racial hierarchy, and trends of disobedience shows why and how Sisters influenced the Moravian church's policies. Further, placing Moravian women firmly into the context of the cultural, social, and racial practices of the Piedmont broadens our understanding of how these women fared during the tumultuous years of the Revolution. Indeed, expanding on the works of the aforementioned scholars continues the conversation about the role of religion and racial identity in the

²⁹ Jon F. Sensbach, *A Separate Canaan: The Making of an Afro-Moravian World in North Carolina, 1763-1840*, Pg. 60.

³⁰ Cecily Jones. *Engendering Whiteness: White Women and Colonialism in Barbados and North Carolina, 1627-1865* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), pg. 5

experiences of Moravian women.

This thesis project contains three chapters about the experiences of Moravian women broadly before and after their arrival in Rowan County, the desires and disobedience of Single Sisters, and the stakes of the dissent performed by Married Sisters. By tracing the development of Moravian women in the Piedmont and then through the different life stages prescribed by the Moravian church, their complicated relationship with their community and the outside world is revealed through the negotiation between Moravian women in the congregation and the Elders.

Chapter one provides an overview of the Moravian theology regarding women and how their traditions changed over time as they expanded their communities into North America in the mid-18th century. After reaching Rowan County in 1753, women encountered a different lifestyle that challenged the pious policies of their congregation, but also offered freedoms that were appealing. The Moravian church offered them opportunities to pursue spiritual and community leadership and provided a way for women to remain single without fearing shame. However, as they started to establish themselves in North Carolina, these values were often overshadowed by the social values of the surrounding Piedmont towns which were appealing to women and others in their community.

Chapter two picks up from the dissent discussed in the first chapter and focuses specifically on the Single Sisters of the Salem congregation during the late 18th century and up until the early 19th century. As these Sisters encountered the lifestyle of outsiders through social events and work, they were inspired to pursue fewer restrictions. The chapter explores how they bent and broke the traditions of the congregation to pursue the living spaces, types of work, and relationships that they desired. Through the exposure to and use of the spaces outside of Salem, young Moravian women participated in the larger patterns of disobedience. Instead of attempting

to establish themselves in the Salem community, like the Sisters described in chapter one, these Single Sisters began to break away entirely. By challenging the restrictive policies of the Elders, some of these women were able to access new opportunities, and in some cases the Unity adapted their policies. Through their example, this thesis reveals how the youth challenged and pushed changes in the Moravian church.

Chapter three looks at the ways in which Married Sisters in Salem were able to bend or break the policies of the Elders regarding conduct of the home even when restricted to the privacy of their homes and workspaces. During the late 18th century and into the early 19th century, these Sisters shaped their households to reflect those of prominent outsiders, benefiting from the ownership of enslaved individuals, raising their children according to their desires, and performing their preferred skilled labor for economic gain and materialism. Another focus of this chapter is the response of the Elders. They greatly feared the influence of these women on their children and the youth in Salem and responded to these cases with concern for the future of the congregation. The private nature of their disobedience troubled the leaders of the community, as it was harder to manage their actions. Married Sisters' behavior resulted in generational efforts to change the policies of the congregation.

Through these three chapters, this thesis will explore the contributions of Moravian women to the changing traditions of the Salem Moravians. Furthermore, it will show how both single and married women were able to practice control over their own lives and assist others as well. The beliefs fostered by gendered doctrine, the desire for public involvement, and the development of a white identity informed white Moravian women's desires for autonomy which they pursued with varying tactics. For better or worse, Moravian women could attempt to have control over their lives by navigating the cultures of the Moravians and the Piedmont.

A Note on Sources and Limitations

This thesis mainly relies on the sources left behind by the late 18th-century Moravian community. Official records such as the Single Sisters' Diary, the Memorabilia (yearly summary), disciplinary recordings, and Board Minutes of the Unity allow us to glimpse at those who were caught breaking the rules and how the Elders reacted to these instances in and around Salem. However, this proposes a few complications for this thesis. Like many women in the 18th century, many Moravian women only appear in the sources through the words of the men in their community.³¹ Further, in the cases of women who leave the Moravian community, they often disappear from the historical record. Nevertheless, by using the context of the Salem community and the Piedmont, this thesis reveals what these women were likely pursuing when they left the congregation. The majority of these sources can be found in the *Records of the Moravians in North Carolina*, a published collection of Moravian sources.

When available, this thesis also integrates the personal writings of the North Carolina Moravians. While some letters and family papers are available in the archives, perhaps the most insightful sources are the memoirs. Many Moravians have personal memoirs, as prescribed by their church, that outlined their lives, even from enslaved people who converted to Moravianism. These insightful sources, when available, will help the interpretation of how Moravians understood their place in the Moravian community's social order and their interactions with Piedmont residents. However, many women, especially those who left the congregation in Salem, did not leave behind a memoir. The majority of these sources are located in the Moravian Church Archives in Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

The most prevalent limitation to this study is lack of translations for many memoirs at the Moravian Archives. While some have been translated by scholars, family members, and

³¹ There are a few exceptions, as the Single Sister's Diary was written by other women.

archivists, many are still in old German. I do not speak the language and the archive has implemented strict rules on who can access works not yet translated. While limited in the number of memoirs I can utilize, many other written records have been translated and will be substantial enough to negate this issue. It should also be noted that the selection of what has been translated was likely chosen with biases. As Adelaide Fries translated the bulk of what we have access to, it is also important to acknowledge that she is a practicing Moravian and descendant of a family from Salem. It can be assumed that she would not have picked the most scandalous stories to share.

Chapter One

Moravian Women: Developing Theology and Changing Traditions

Standing in God's Acre, the Moravian community of Salem gathered to remember the life of a beloved Sister, Christina Biewighaus, who had just passed in the year 1835.³² Living to the age of 79, Christina lived through the evolution of the Salem community. Standing on the grass hillside, the congregation listened as the minister read aloud from her memoir as at all Moravian funerals. Tradition dictates that the memoir of the person who passed would be read at their funeral. This document was either written by the deceased before their passing or by someone who knew them quite well. With great grieving, the gathered reflected on the life of Christina.

Following the death of her mother, she served her aged father for 18 years there with exemplary faithfulness, which with his difficult nature called for indescribable patience. The last 8 years he could only move in a wheelchair, and at the same time she had to support them both with hard work. After she had lived here with her brother's family for 14 years, she was asked to take over the office of manager in the Sisters House here, which she did with industry and concern. She enjoyed the love of the [Sisters] Choir, and even though with her heated personality she often offended, she would soon regret it as best she could. She was surprised to be given oversight over young persons and tried not to demand too much of them in view of the many challenges of her own youth.³³

This excerpt from Christina's memoir reveals the life of an imperfect but successful Moravian woman in the town of Salem. Christina embodies many of the ideals for women in their congregation. Even at a young age, the care she gave her family was considered an essential duty for many Moravian women. Furthermore, she took on leadership roles in the Single Sister's House and the teaching of children. Even with a "heated personality," Christina was respected in the community and did not lose sight of her duties. Being a caretaker and spiritual leader in the

³² God's Acre is the cemetery in Salem where many generations of Moravians have been buried. It is split by men and women, just like their Choir system. Leland G. Ferguson's *God's Fields: Landscape, Religion, and Race in Moravian Wachovia* (2011), discusses the importance of God's Acre and who is buried there.

³³ Christina Biewighaus Memoir, Moravian Archives, Winston-Salem, NC.

household and within the larger community was considered a great honor. Indeed, Christina was revered for her life of hardship and service, and she was laid to rest with honor.

Contrary to the social restrictions for women present in other Protestant churches in the 18th century, the Moravian church offered some unique freedoms as it developed over time. However, while church policies were appealing to some women, they were invasive and restricting for others.³⁴ Like most denominations in this era, their practices and policies changed. As desires and values fluctuated as members spread into North America, adaptation became a necessary yet challenging task for the Elders of the church. This chapter will explore the development of the Moravian church in the late 18th century and varying degrees of autonomy afforded to women in the congregation over time. The Brethren's practices were often considered beneficial to young or single women as well as married women, providing a role in family and community no matter one's stage of life. Yet, the opportunities for women to serve in leadership roles became sparse as the church adapted in the 18th century. Understanding the ways in which the Moravian lifestyle was appealing to women is essential for understanding their choice to act disobediently. I argue that while some women sought to escape altogether the developing restrictive practices of the church, many chose to remain in the congregation and toe the line between Moravian and outsider lifestyles, forging their own path.

The Moravian church was appealing to women as it allotted them opportunities to pursue different forms of leadership, valued their contributions to the congregation, and allowed women to remain single without shame. However, as they tried to establish themselves in North America, these values were sometimes overshadowed by the different social values of the surrounding Piedmont, which were appealing to some women in their community. As members

³⁴ Sommer provides an interesting analysis of both Salem and Herrnhut in her book *Serving Two Masters: Moravian Unity in Germany and North America, 1727-1801* (2000). The women in Herrnhut also desired change, and were a part of changing the policies of the larger Moravian organization.

of the Salem congregation, especially the youth, began to push back against the restrictive policies of the Elders in hope of gaining control over their own lives. The acts of disobedience carried out by new generations of Moravians inspired change. Single and Married Sisters were a part of a movement to change the community's policies, publicly defending their desires. Some women were empowered to negotiate through dissent by the agency given to them by the church to remain single or teach others. Others felt too restricted or guarded by the church and sought freedom. Falling in line with other colonial women, Married Sisters negotiated the rules that dictated their conduct.³⁵ As we will see, the developments made in the earlier stages of the Moravian church inspired the actions of Single and Married Sisters in Salem.

The Moravian Church and Gendered Policies

The evolution of the Moravian church was a tumultuous process that redefined their Christian practices as well as their concepts of gender and social norms. This tradition started in central Europe and spread to many colonies, including North America, encountering many different cultures. As the Moravian church grew in numbers, its policies evolved as it incorporated the cultures of its members and dealt with criticism. The practices of the Moravian community evolved in response to these influences. The liberation and restriction of Moravian women is revealed through the development of the church in the 18th century.

The old traditions along with more modern practices valued community and the individual connection to God, which was appealing for many individuals. The conception of the Moravian church started with the *Unitas Fratrum* which was founded by supporters of John Hus in the 15th century, established their pietist community in Lititz, Moravia. They were a part of a larger movement among Protestant groups that established themselves in this period. Rejecting

³⁵ Cynthia A. Kierner, *Beyond the Household: Women's Place in the Early South, 1700-1835* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), Pg. 3.

the pompous traditions of the Catholic Church, these new congregations sought pious and simple lives.³⁶ After gaining popularity they were targeted by the Catholic Church in the early 17th century. The members of the Unity scattered for survival. Consequently, a group of survivors sought refuge in Berthelsdorf.³⁷ The Moravian way of life was resurrected by a wealthy man who owned an estate in Herrnhut, a small Czech town. Count Zinzendorf was credited with the re-establishment of the Moravian church in the 1730s, after a long period of persecution from the Catholic Church.³⁸ The original congregation led directly by Zinzendorf was primarily made up of peasants, with some lower gentry often taking up leadership positions.³⁹ However, the congregation was not split up into rich and poor; instead, Zinzendorf introduced a different structure for their church. He established the Choir system, which separated the community by gender and marital status, in which individuals could find support for their spiritual growth and their worldly experiences. Zinzendorf explained that “the difference in class, temperament, life, age all makes an immediate difference to the way in which the individual serves the savior.”⁴⁰ Many members of the church found this organization liberating. Through this system, women were able to form a private community with their peers and serve God according to their stage of life through Moravian theology.

The structure and conduct of the Moravian community remained a pillar in their traditions and policies. Their theology evolved over time and space from practices considered mainly heretical by the outside world to more socially acceptable practices that reinforced gendered hierarchy. The Choir system reflected their long-lasting commitment to maintaining a

³⁶ Other Pietist churches founded during the 15th century include Lutherans and the German Baptist Brethren.

³⁷ S. Scott Rohrer, *Hope's Promise: Religion and Acculturation in the Southern Backcountry* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2013), Pg. xxii

³⁸ S. Scott Rohrer, *Hope's Promise: Religion and Acculturation in the Southern Backcountry*, Pg. xxi.

³⁹ Gillian Lindt Gollin, *Moravians in Two Worlds: A Study of Changing Communities* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), Pg. 34-35.

⁴⁰ Uttendorfer, Zinzendorfs Christliches Lebensidel 16, (Translated by Katherine Faul).

community that would allow their members to fully dedicate themselves to God and negate encounters with seductive secular influences. The maintenance of the congregation's piousness remained a concern for the congregation's leaders in Herrnhut. One of the fundamental values of the Moravian church, the value of hard work, was taught and reinforced in each Choir group. Zinzendorf wrote that "one does not only work in order to live, but one lives for the sake of one's work."⁴¹ By valuing hard work yet rebuking materialism, members could avoid the outside world's distractions and keep their thoughts with Christ. Even though the church itself sought to separate its community from the outside world, some of its fundamental values were influenced by the ethnic background of early Moravians.⁴² While these practices remained important to Moravian tradition, some of their early teachings, while empowering for many, became divisive and other denominations placed a target on the congregation.

Especially in the 1730s and 40s, gender performances began to allot women a significant role in the church. From the church's revival in the 18th century, Moravians were largely attuned to "blood and wound" theology, which emphasized the physical manifestations of Christ and a female Trinity.⁴³ Their worship often related the love of God and Christ with the physical body. Many Moravian hymns described sexual encounters with their Savior and compared Jesus' side wound from the Roman spear to a woman's womb.⁴⁴ While this practice was eventually stopped after much backlash and persecution, inklings of this language remain, especially in the writings by Moravian women. Celebrating the feminization of the Trinity and Christ's wounds, Moravians did not view femininity as lesser than masculinity but as an equally important characteristic. Zinzendorf encouraged sex between married couples beyond the means of

⁴¹ Zinzendorf's Eventual Testament, December 27, 1738, quoted in J.Pitt, *Denkwurdigkeiten*, Vol. 1 (unpaginated) Bethlehem, PA.

⁴² S. Scott Rohrer, *Hope's Promise: Religion and Acculturation in the Southern Backcountry*, Pg. 20.

⁴³ Aaron S. Fogleman. *Jesus Is Female: Moravians and the Challenge of Radical Religion in Early America*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), Pg. 79-80.

⁴⁴ Aaron S. Fogleman. *Jesus Is Female: Moravians and the Challenge of Radical Religion in Early America*, Pg. 80.

reproduction, calling it a sacred act that reflected the relationship between Christ and the church.⁴⁵ This practice allowed women to expect pleasure during relations with their husbands rather than simply performing a duty. Within the community, Zinzendorf deemed that women should not only lead within their Choirs but also be allowed to preach. He told his congregation that Sisters should be spiritual leaders and that “women should rejoice in their sex, and they should be honored, respected, and celebrated in song, as the Savior expected.”⁴⁶ Women were encouraged to celebrate their femininity and sexuality; they were also valued as spiritual leaders within the proper context. Zinzendorf's words directly challenge the popular belief of the time that women, direct descendants of Eve, were naturally sexual and needed to be restrained, lest they tempt men to sin. However, during the Sifting Period, these practices were “sifted” or removed from their religious practice. Although short lived, the values of the Moravian church before the Sifting Period were radical in their beliefs regarding women. Indeed, while these rules changed, more conservative ones were born out of “blood and wound theology.”

Adherents to these other, more conservative traditions understood the Moravian interpretation of scripture in the early 18th century as heretical.⁴⁷ As the persecution of Moravians continued in Europe and North America, and as the church dealt with the conflict of interpretation, their theology began to shift. The Unity chose to slowly remove “blood and wound theology” from their teachings. In response, more conservative practices were put into place, which placed gender into a strict category and removed many women from positions of spiritual leadership for the entire congregation.⁴⁸ The early Moravian practices of “blood and wound” theology were extremely polarizing to other Christian churches and were subsequently

⁴⁵ Aaron S. Fogleman. *Jesus Is Female: Moravians and the Challenge of Radical Religion in Early America*, Pg. 93.

⁴⁶ Nicolaus Ludwig Von Zinzendorf, “Reden vor Frauen-Personen gehalten in Philadelphia alle ab,” R.14.A.38.1a.3, Unity Archives,(Translated by Aaron Fogleman).

⁴⁷ Aaron S. Fogleman. *Jesus Is Female: Moravians and the Challenge of Radical Religion in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), Pg. 5.

⁴⁸ Aaron S. Fogleman. *Jesus Is Female: Moravians and the Challenge of Radical Religion in Early America*, Pg. 94.

removed from tradition by slowly removing references to these practices from their writings and enforcing socially acceptable gender restrictions. During the end of Zinzendorf's leadership and the establishment of Gottlieb Augustus Spangenburg as the leader of the Moravian church, the controversial practices of the church quickly disappeared. Both leaders began aligning their policies with more socially acceptable stances on interpreting scripture and gender roles. The Moravians curtailed the sexual language and tried to repair this reputation that followed them across the ocean in 1735 to Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. The desire to escape ridicule initiated their search for a peaceful, separate existence from other sects of Protestant Christianity, but it was difficult to establish.

Although women lost much of their freedoms, they were allocated during this "Sifting Period" some policies which allowed freedoms rare in other churches. Blood and wound theology created a unique way of life for Moravian women that lingered even after the practice was abandoned despite its short time in practice. The limited opportunities that remained continued to bring women to the congregation and provided community and comfort. Even though the roots of patriarchy still permeated the Moravian tradition, women still found empowerment in the church; some even felt enabled to negotiate for even more authority in their congregation.

From the time of revival, Moravian women were a valued part of the church. However, as the belief that women could lead men in the church vanished, Zinzendorf ascribed socially acceptable theology in the 18th century. He argued that "women cannot think as deeply, or broadly, or in such a sustained fashion as men."⁴⁹ Women were no longer allowed to lead men in spiritual matters, but some were selected to lead other women in segregated spaces. Even without the leadership opportunity, women still found opportunities for personal freedoms and support

⁴⁹ Speech in 19 April, 1756. Uttendorf, Zinzendorf und die Frauen. 14, (Translated by Katherine Faull).

through the Moravian church. The gender-segregated community arrangements afforded Moravian women a degree of agency and community with other women.

The unique Choir system provided autonomy for single women through education and guidance while simultaneously emphasizing the ethics of the Unity. Single Sisters were taught the importance of purity and hard work through Speakings, in which a Choir Helper or a Single Sister who chose to lead their Choir would discuss all matters spiritual and life experience.⁵⁰ Encouraged to view Christ as their spiritual husband while they either wait for marriage or choose to remain single, unmarried Sisters found comfort from their Choir. Choir Helpers, who served as guidance through spiritual and everyday experiences, also served as a support system. The private meetings between the helper and the Single or Married Sister, provided a space to speak in confidence about one's body and soul. Topics of discussion ranged from puberty and marriage to one's worthiness to partake in communion. The Choir Helpers Instructions for Single Sisters recommended that "she must make it her concern, through the Savior's grace, to become as closely and thoroughly acquainted as possible with each of her Sisters, according to the condition of their hearts."⁵¹ However, the Choir Helpers served the Elders first, and were meant to report any issues to leadership.⁵²

Although the Moravian church offered women many unique avenues towards leadership and meaningful sisterhood, it should not be conflated with an early form of feminist theology. Indeed, Moravian women's agency was restricted by the men in power, especially after the Sifting Period. Women in leadership positions were typically resigned to the mentoring of other women and children. Sisters who served as Choir Helpers also provided surveillance for the

⁵⁰ Katherine M Faull, ed. *Speaking to Body and Soul: Instructions for the Moravian Choir Helpers, 1785-1786*. Pietist, Moravian, and Anabaptist Studies. University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2017. Pg. 2.

⁵¹ Choir Instructions No.35, *Speaking to Body and Soul*. While this benefits the individual Sister with care for her wellbeing, it also allows the Elders to conduct surveillance on the Sister.

⁵² Choir Instructions No.35, *Speaking to Body and Soul*.

Elders. If Single Sisters under their care were disobedient, they would ban them from taking part in communion or bring them to the attention of the Elders if their behavior warranted a harsher punishment. Furthermore, as the congregation leaned into the nuclear family system, Single and Married Sisters often referred to the guidance of their fathers and husbands.⁵³ While other opportunities for autonomy were present, such as leadership, spiritual guidance, and teaching, Moravian women generally served as the helping hand for men in the congregation.

Nevertheless, the Moravian church was a unique form of Protestantism that allotted women more freedoms than the other denominations. As the church grew and began to take hold in colonial North America, women drawn to the Moravian lifestyle began to leave their old traditions to pursue a life in Moravian communities. A young woman who lived in Bethlehem, Margaretha Edmonds, recalled in her memoir,

I was awakened by Mr. Whitefield's [one of the founders of the Methodist tradition] sermons, and on a pleasure trip to Albany in which my mother's sister had taken me to visit a few relatives, the dear Savior led me to understand that the amusements that occurred there were nothing but vain things that brought the heart no true pleasure...I then applied all my strength in order to receive a believer's heart for my Savior until I became convinced in another way in the Brethren's sermons.⁵⁴

Margaretha participated in the revivals popularized during the First Great Awakening, which emphasized an emotional connection to God and spiritual experiences. However, she recognized the emotionalism of the Great Awakening as insincere, finding that the Moravians understood how one could indeed find a relationship with Christ without outbursts of emotion. The theology and support offered by the congregation were appealing to women looking for belonging in colonial America.⁵⁵ Women could grow in their faith and sense of community through Choir

⁵³ Katherine M. Faulk, *Moravian Women's Memoirs: Their Related Lives, 1750-1820* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1997), Pg. xxx and xxxi.

⁵⁴ Margaretha Edmonds Memoir, Moravian Archives, Winston-Salem, NC.

⁵⁵ Katherine M. Faulk, *Moravian Women's Memoirs: Their Related Lives, 1750-1820*. Pg. xxvii

meetings, Speakings, and Love Feasts.⁵⁶ Moreover, the Moravian congregation supported women through different stages of life with their separated Choir system, which fostered their spirituality.

The Single Sisters Choir provided individual freedoms for single women in early America. Besides communal living and individualized guidance, Sisters were allowed to choose between a marital partnership and remaining single. The opportunity to remain single while maintaining one's dignity allowed Moravian women to practice agency regarding their livelihoods and bodies. Escape from the dangerous ventures of childbirth and ability to work a simple trade was likely an appealing feature of belonging to the Single Sisters. Furthermore, Sisters could even find freedom of mobility through the Moravian congregation. Many women transferred from one Moravian town to another to fill specific positions or trades.⁵⁷ Through these options, Single Sisters could practice a limited form of agency and maintain their perceived purity in the eyes of society.

If a Single Sister decided to agree to a marriage proposal, there were other available freedoms to gain. Although entering a marriage would place women under the stewardship of their husbands, they were allocated certain freedoms regarding their bodies, homes, work, and mobility. As a Single Sister prepared to enter marriage, she was taught how to maintain a happy marriage and what to expect on her wedding night by a Choir Helper. Even after her wedding day, Sisters would continue to receive guidance on their relationships and bodies. Taking away the mystery and discussing marriage, pregnancy, and childbirth openly provided women

⁵⁶ Based upon the last supper, where Christ ate with his disciples before his crucifixion, the Love Feast was used to celebrate, mourn, and offer thanksgiving. The important practice of community fellowship blurred the lines of gender and race, as both white and enslaved African American Moravians would sit side by side to eat and worship.

⁵⁷ Katherine M. Faull, *Moravian Women's Memoirs: Their Related Lives, 1750-1820*, Pg. 29.

knowledge and support as they transitioned through these milestones.⁵⁸ Beyond the household, Married Sisters had the opportunity to dedicate themselves to mission work. In many Moravian congregations, married couples could leave their children in the care of the community and serve in different missions. Opportunities for mobility allowed these women to break away from a nuclear household as well as serve as spiritual teachers, as long as they served alongside their husbands.⁵⁹ These accessible freedoms and spiritual support brought many outsider women to the congregation.⁶⁰

Despite the restrictions placed on women after the Sifting Period, Moravian Sisters found unique opportunities to access agency through the church's policies. This appeal brought women from different religious traditions and backgrounds to the congregation, who found a supportive community to grow in their faith. While the Moravians still dictated much of a woman's life, she had the opportunity to decide whether to marry or remain single, exercise mobility, and have knowledge of her own body. While these practices remained integral to the church for an extended period, as smaller communities of Moravians spread across North America, growing sentiments of personal freedom and expanding community became enticing.

Moravian Women in American Colonies

In efforts to create multiple congregations, garner more income, and proselytize to those they deemed in need of spiritual help, the Moravians crossed the sea and came to North America in 1735.⁶¹ Six years later, after establishing a few missions with varying degrees of success, the

⁵⁸ Wilkening, Ann-Catherine, "I Didn't Know That I Was Starving 'Til I Tasted You: 18th Century Moravian Women's Ecstatic Experience of Bridal Mysticism in Communion and Marital Sexuality," (*Lumen Et Vita*, 2018), Pg. 47-48.

⁵⁹ Katherine M. Faull, *Moravian Women's Memoirs: Their Related Lives, 1750-1820*, Pg. 29-30

⁶⁰ Katherine M. Faull, *Moravian Women's Memoirs: Their Related Lives, 1750-1820*, Pg. xxiv

⁶¹ Moravians established missions throughout North America as well as Europe and the Caribbean. For more information on their mission work, read Jon Sensbach's *Rebecca's Revival* (2005), J.V. Gent's "*Side-wounds, Sex*

Moravians established a congregation town in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Focused on missions, mills, and creating material goods such as pottery, the community quickly became inhabited by many Moravians. Remaining in close contact with the leadership in Herrnhut, Bethlehem reflected the Moravian Choir structure and economy, proving to be quite lucrative. The Bethlehem congregation was also very successful when it came to their missions, with numerous conversions, especially among the Delaware Native Americans. The town itself was set up to support these missions, and those who joined the community were led to partake.

As labor and missions which served Native American communities became the priority for Moravians in Bethlehem, the structure of the community and even the family system adapted to these demands. The typical nuclear family system was disrupted by the need for adult Moravian couples to tend to the missions outside of Bethlehem. Instead of living with their mother and father, young Moravian children lived in the children's Choir House, under the watchful eyes of Single Sisters and some Married Sisters.⁶² Mothers were able to break away from the demands of motherhood and pursue a proselytizing role if deemed pious enough by leadership. Women who reflected on this opportunity in their memoirs recalled it fondly. In the mid-1760s, Married Sister Margarethe Jungmann wrote that she and her husband "received a call to Wihlusing on the Susquehanna. At our sending-out services, I was ordained a deaconess. We were there for a year and a half, then we came back to Bethlehem, where we made a brief visit to our children."⁶³ Margarethe practiced mobility by taking on a role in spiritual leadership in the Moravian church. She prioritized her role as a leader while maintaining her parental

and Savages: Moravian Masculinities and Early Modern Protestant Missions" (2011), and Jane T. Merritt's *"Dreaming of the Savior's Blood: Moravians and the Indian Great Awakening in Pennsylvania,"* (1997).

⁶² Katherine M. Faull, *Moravian Women's Memoirs: Their Related Lives, 1750-1820*, Pg. 53.

⁶³ Katherine M. Faull, *Moravian Women's Memoirs: Their Related Lives, 1750-1820*, Pg. 53.

responsibilities. Through the opportunities available in Bethlehem and its mission for mobility, Moravian women could inhabit different spaces while being supported by the community.

Towards the end of the 18th century, the focus of the community shifted to support industry, allowing for more nuclear family systems.⁶⁴ While the Elders, who oversaw the congregation in Bethlehem wished to maintain the separate Choir structure, the demands for farms meant families needed to break away from tradition. Although this community sought to change the nature of their practices, it remained under the close guidance of the leadership in Herrnhut, who oversaw the entire body of the church. Nevertheless, the Moravians still found that they needed further funding to continue their missions and strengthen their communities. Elders began to look for other opportunities to establish a lucrative congregation in colonial America.

In the 1760s, the Moravians sought to establish another community in America. They set their sights on a tract of land in the Piedmont region of North Carolina. The founders quickly realized they needed to establish families to begin the development of their congregation in the south. Moravian women in Herrnhut and Bethlehem had the opportunity to travel to this new community. Maria Miksch moved around quite a lot with the Moravian congregation. In 1751, she moved from London to Bethlehem. After serving as a Choir leader for the Single Sisters for 13 years, she married Mattaeus Miksch. In her memoir, it was recorded, likely by her husband or another close relative, that after their marriage, “she soon moved to Bethabara and was a faithful assistant to him in his business of operating the store.”⁶⁵ Moving from the established Moravian community of Bethlehem to the small town of Bethabara was likely an adjustment for Maria and the other Moravian women who migrated south. Most families had their own homesteads,

⁶⁴ Gillian Lindt Gollin, *Moravians in Two Worlds: A Study of Changing Communities*, Pg.178-180.

⁶⁵ Maria Christina Henrietta Miksch (Peterman) Memoir, Moravian Archives, Winston-Salem, NC.

instead of separate Choir Houses for married individuals. Due to necessity, nuclear family systems persisted in North Carolina as it had in Pennsylvania.⁶⁶ This structure not only interrupted the surveillance of the church members, but it also allowed disobedience to flourish. Conversely, before the establishment of a Single Sisters house, some Sisters resided in the gemeine house or community house, which was the meeting place of the Elders and therefore well supervised. While the Unity could no longer supervise married women, they still tried to keep an eye on the single women in their community.

Early Moravian settlers in the Piedmont foreswore the traditions of separation by age and marital status for the sake of survival. Moravian women encountered a different culture than their closely held traditions in Bethlehem and Herrnhut, which tempted some women away from their congregation. The Elders greatly feared losing members, as it threatened the longevity of their town. As the Moravian community developed in North Carolina, the Piedmont culture also evolved in the heat of Revolution and the establishment of a southern economy. Here, Moravian women would find new opportunities within the congregation, and in the outsider communities that surrounded them.

The Lifestyle of a Colonial Woman in the Piedmont

As Moravian Sisters arrived and established themselves in the new communities of the Piedmont, they encountered definitions of womanhood that contradicted some of the Unity's teachings. Women in the Piedmont came from many different ethnic backgrounds and participated in different social structures in the 18th century. German, English, and Scots-Irish immigrants permeated the landscape, seeking opportunities to hold their own homesteads.⁶⁷ The

⁶⁶ Elisabeth W. Sommer, *Serving Two Masters: Moravian Unity in Germany and North America, 1727-1801*, Pg. 65.

⁶⁷ S. Scott Rohrer, *Hope's Promise: Religion and Acculturation in the Southern Backcountry*. Pg. xx.

lifestyle for women in this stretch of land in North Carolina varied from yeoman wives, tradeswomen, and plantation mistresses.⁶⁸ While all functioning within nuclear households, their lifestyle varied depending on her family's economic status, indentured or enslaved labor, and their access to opportunities to learn a trade.⁶⁹ Further, as the Revolution raged and the Piedmont became more populated, their culture changed through the intermixing of newcomers, and the stratification of classes increased. These ideals of womanhood in the Piedmont challenged the simple lifestyles of Moravian women.

The arrival of the Moravians in Rowan County was not a necessarily unwelcomed change for locals; some, especially women, were drawn to the church. Many sought to join the congregation, whether women in the Piedmont were drawn to the Moravian church as an escape from rural society or because their hearts were moved spiritually. When the Moravians established themselves in Bethabara while building Salem, they became close with the locals. In the spring of 1768, one of the Elders recorded that a young woman begged to be admitted attending Sunday services. He wrote that

Sarah Frey did not know that our Amal [church service] is today. She again asks about it with many tears. We, therefore, asked (the Lot) again, using Yes and a blank, and drew: Yes. She thus participates here this time, of course, but in the future she will go to Bethania on foot every eight weeks, like the Valentin Freys and the Leinbach woman. She can go there five weeks from today, but will have participated here already.⁷⁰

Sarah was willing to trek to the neighboring town of Bethania in order to continue her involvement in the Moravian church, and she continued this dedication until she was finally accepted into the congregation. Although brought up in a Jewish family, Sarah converted and joined the community. When recording her baptism, an elder wrote that she had a "soft and tender heart."⁷¹ Sarah, now a Moravian woman, would be supported by the community spiritually

⁶⁸ Johanna Miller Lewis, *Artisans in the North Carolina Backcountry*, Pg.105

⁶⁹ Johanna Miller Lewis, *Artisans in the North Carolina Backcountry*, Pg.1-2.

⁷⁰ Die Aeltesten Conferenz, Salem, April 23rd, 1768, Moravian Archives, Winston-Salem, NC.

⁷¹ *Records of the Moravians 1768*, vol. 2, ed., Pg. 540.

and socially. Nevertheless, while the Elders allowed some outsiders to enter their congregation and adapt to their traditions, they were wary of outsider influence on their community.

During the second half of the 18th century, Moravians protected their community from surrounding influence they viewed as especially threatening to their traditions. A growing population of Scottish and German immigrants established homesteads and communities simultaneously as Moravians expanded settlements nearby. In the developing years leading up to the Revolution, Moravians avoided the conflict of the outside world. One member of the Unity recounted in 1766 that:

In spite of the critical and apparently dangerous unrest in this Province on account of the Stamp Act, the mighty arm of our Heavenly Father has been held over us, so that nothing has been demanded of us contrary to our conscience, but under His protection we have remained peaceful and undisturbed.⁷²

However, their good fortune would soon run out as the 1770s introduced a slew of issues for the congregation. While finishing the establishment of Salem as their ideal congregation town, the Elders were also managing the effects of outsiders on their people. The pacifist community not only navigated the drafting of young men, food shortages, and military occupation, they were also economically tied to nearby non-Moravian communities made up of passionate Revolutionaries.⁷³

As some material goods and economic growth began to spread throughout the Piedmont and challenge Moravian traditions, many individuals were inspired to break away from the community-focused rules of the Brethren. From the start, the congregation interacted with outsiders through business. Realization through financial gain appealed to the youth who lived

⁷² Records of the Moravians, 1766, vol. 1, ed. Pg. 322.

⁷³ Elisabeth W. Sommer, *Serving Two Masters: Moravian Unity in Germany and North America, 1727-1801*, Pg. 134.

and worked in storefronts or desired the finer clothes. The Elders' conferences struggled with the effects of this infatuation from when they arrived in Bethabara and established the towns of Salem and Bethania. They complained that the surrounding communities more embedded in the Piedmont economy, such as Bethania, were seducing Salem artisans to move with promises of "more freedom and other advantages."⁷⁴ For women, these advantages often included more money to secure the livelihood of the household and the ability to purchase goods that were becoming available in the Piedmont. Material goods like tools, fabrics, and furniture offered a comfortable life or signaled social status for white women. The opportunities that young Moravians encountered in the surrounding towns to socialize and form relationships with outsiders also encouraged them to explore the possibilities available to members of the Revolutionary, dynamic Piedmont.⁷⁵

While Piedmont planters became increasingly reliant on enslaved labor to support themselves, Moravian women had to consider their identities as white women in a slave-owning society, which redefined the labor they would carry out.⁷⁶ These new identities provided white Moravian women with options not typically proposed by the congregation, influencing their desire for autonomy. Seeking economic success, in the 1760s, the Moravians began to use enslaved labor in their shops and fields. For women specifically, having enslaved laborers allowed them to dedicate more time to their own skilled trades, rather than keeping house and performing more arduous labor. While adopting an economy that primarily benefited from enslaved labor was gradual, it greatly concerned Moravian leadership. Elders discouraged any communication with enslaved individuals that did not pertain to labor as "in general, there

⁷⁴ Die Aeltesten Conferenz, Salem, June 23rd, 1789, Moravian Archives, Winston-Salem, NC. (Translated by Elisabeth Sommer).

⁷⁵ S. Scott Rohrer, *Hope's Promise: Religion and Acculturation in the Southern Backcountry*, Pg. xxx and 104.

⁷⁶ Johanna Miller Lewis, *Artisans in the North Carolina Backcountry* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1995), Pg. 106.

should be less conversation with the negroes, as that naturally has no good result.”⁷⁷ These fears reflected the values of white individuals who believed the races needed to be separate. The Unity did not challenge the institution of slavery and accepted it as a necessity for success in the Piedmont. Concerned about the image of their congregation and the behavior of its members, the Unity enforced restrictions on interactions between the races.

Maintaining a Moravian Identity in the Piedmont

For the locals, the arrival of the Moravians in the Piedmont was not entirely unwelcome; however, the members of the congregation that arrived in Rowan county found a culture that largely conflicted with their own values. While local women were drawn to the religious community, some Moravian women were intrigued by the freedom allotted by the lifestyle of outsiders. As their congregation sought to establish the towns of Bethlehem, Salem, and Bethania, Moravian women began adapting to a new way of life. Many quickly gained their footing while others were drawn outside of their safe community. The presence of slavery served as a seductive force that brought along opportunities to embrace materialism and escape from the supervision of the Elders. Despite their troubles, the community celebrated the women in their congregation and supported their spirituality. While these efforts and opportunities were not enough to harbor all women from turning to the secular Piedmont, they fostered the dedication of many women. Indeed, some Single and Married Sisters found ways to grow spiritually and in the community.

The authority allotted to Moravian women in Bethlehem also transferred to their developing towns in North Carolina. The opportunities for spiritual leadership for other women and children became available as the community grew. Once missions were established, women

⁷⁷ Records of the Moravians, vol. 3, ed. Pg. 828.

had the same opportunities to proselytize to the area's indigenous communities.⁷⁸ In 1772, Single Sister Elisabeth Oberlin opened the first girls' school in the area, and remained much beloved in the community and a valued educator while maintaining her leadership role throughout the developing years of the town. Although the opportunities for women were not as prevalent as those for men, there were some available. Further, as a need for skilled work pressed the community, women took up many different trades. However, the Elders dictated which individual in their community learned and performed each skill, which took away the ability to change careers.⁷⁹ Whether a woman wanted to switch trades due to a fondness of the skill or because it was lucrative, leaders of the congregation restrained them to a set trade. Despite the issues of control, many women, like Elizabeth, participated in the establishment of their community.

The Moravian community continued to uplift women beyond employment and through their traditional celebrations. The Love Feast, a communal gathering where members ate a specially made bun and shared tea or wine, was held to celebrate different events in the congregation. Whether it was a holiday, a specific group or individual, or even to honor someone's memory, Love Feasts were a valued feature of Moravian practices and held during church holidays and for special occasions.⁸⁰ One Sister in the Moravian community of Salem, Elisabeth Schneider, fondly recalls the Love Feast held for the dedication of the Single Sisters and their new Choir Home in her memoir. She wrote that there "was a remarkable festival for me, it was the day when br. Johannes v. Watteville consecrated the Sisters' house, and I wished to live and to die in that house."⁸¹ Through these celebrations that purposefully honored women and

⁷⁸ Elisabeth W. Sommer, *Serving Two Masters: Moravian Unity in Germany and North America, 1727-1801*, Pg. 167.

⁷⁹ Johanna Miller Lewis, *Artisans in the North Carolina Backcountry*, Pg. 67

⁸⁰ Leland G. Ferguson, *God's Fields: Landscape, Religion, and Race in Moravian Wachovia*, Pg. 2.

⁸¹ Elisabeth Schneider (Dixon), 1759-1805, Moravian Archives, Winston-Salem, NC.

their spaces, the Moravian community supported and uplifted the Sisters in their congregation. Many Sisters found peace and security in their community, continuing to embody Moravian traditions by obeying the policies enforced by the Brethren.

Unlike the Sisters who found new opportunities, some Moravian women faced many difficulties in this new land that challenged their dedication to the congregation. While this was especially true for members born in the Piedmont, even women who were devout in Bethlehem struggled in the new Moravian settlements. These sentiments are often expressed in the memoirs of those who moved south. In the case of Christina Aust, another Sister, or possibly her husband, recorded that

Despite her quiet manner and way of life, she was not deeply enough grounded in the Savior and for that reason was exposed to many a temptation which disturbed her [Christian] walk, but through that she came to a more thorough recognition of her depraved soul and to a sincere confession of it which served to [bring] her to a deeper rooting and cure through Jesus' body and blood⁸²

Like other Moravian women, Christina struggled in this environment, which was starkly different from Bethlehem. In North Carolina, women's leadership roles were overall sparse compared to Bethlehem, and the nuclear family system quickly became prominent. During their early years, with no Choir Houses and only homesteads, a Married Sister's importance came from their ability to conduct a household by the Elders' rules. Leadership viewed the importance of pious behaviors, such as dedication to spiritual growth, work, and the community as vital to the continuation of their congregation. Because of their duties, the Elders enforced surveillance and judgment of their conduct.⁸³ However, as Choir Houses were established, mothers became concerned about the intervention of leadership and the possible removal of their children if their parenting was deemed lacking. As opportunities for Sisters dwindled or changed, restrictive

⁸² Christina Aust (Dixon), 1749-1795, Moravian Archives, Winston-Salem, NC.

⁸³ Elisabeth W. Sommer, *Serving Two Masters: Moravian Unity in Germany and North America, 1727-1801*, Pg. 65-66.

Moravian traditions such as the Lot continued. For Sisters in the congregation, it seemed that their lives were dictated mainly by the Elders. Not all Moravian women found their home in Piedmont.

Even though Christina was able to find peace and resist temptation through other spiritual dedication, other women continued to be tempted by the opportunities available in the Piedmont for control over their own lives and separations from the Elder's domineering policies. Further, Moravian values, which allotted women some freedoms, provided many with the ability to conduct dissent. By mixing their Moravian identity with the values of outsiders, Moravian women could both imagine and pursue their ideal life. Single Sisters and Married Sisters navigated connections between the various cultures around them to gain freedoms that allowed them to dictate their futures. To pursue their desires, Sisters had to bend or break the traditions of the church.

Conclusion

Understanding the development of the Moravian church provides insight into the changing roles for women in the congregation overtime and how race and space contributed to these changes. Some women who were encouraged to practice limited autonomy within the congregation then found new opportunities for authority over their lives. Moreover, as Moravian women sought to create communities, their adaptation to the Piedmont culture provided inspiration for disobedience. As disobedience became an issue in the Moravian congregation of Salem, the Elders feared for the future of their congregation. Over time, women's actions wore down the Brethren, and the congregation's policies changed. While Brothers' disobedience is recorded at length by the Elders, Moravian women also participated in these efforts. Some

sought opportunities to own enslaved labor, raise their children according to their values, practice their trade, and even assist other Moravians with their own dissent. Because Married Sisters influenced their children and the youth in town, the Elders feared their bad behavior. Through their disobedience, both big and small, Moravian women in Salem participated in changing Moravian traditions and policies by creating threats to the future stability of the congregation.

While some women benefited from Moravian practices, the evolving congregations were beginning to be troublesome for some women. Even after their theology adapted to be more socially acceptable, the culture of their new settlements introduced new ideas and concepts of womanhood that were increasingly appealing, significantly as the role of the Moravian woman in the congregations shrunk over time. Both Married and Single Sisters found an opportunity to negotiate their lifestyles as they grappled with being a white Moravian woman in the Piedmont. Through their attempts to change their own circumstances, women actively influenced Moravian policies and, therefore, shaped what it meant to be a Moravian woman in the Piedmont.

Chapter Two

Single Sisters and Acts of Dissent: How Single Moravian Women Navigated Colonial Piedmont Culture and Moravian Traditions

In the heat of June in Salem, North Carolina, a young Moravian woman sat at her desk and opened a small journal. She marked the date, June 29th, 1794, and wrote about the hardship that affected her fellow Sisters of God:

At her request Anna Steiner was released from here but to our great sorrow. At the time of her mother's illness in December she was wanted by her parents to help; we saw indeed that the Mill is no place for a single Sister but could not prevent it and so had to let her go. Then it happened that she came into a bad relationship with a bad stranger.⁸⁴

Between the beginning of the Revolutionary War and the day of her diary entry, this Single Sister witnessed quite a few women breaking the rules of their congregation. It was heartbreaking to watch the other women who lived with her in the Choir House, who shared meals, work, and the word of God, leave suddenly or reject their congregation outright. The Moravian Church prioritized community and devotion above all things. However, it seemed to the men who guided the church that the hearts of their young women had turned towards materialistic and lustful desires. Anna was not the first to move away or fall in love with an outsider. Some Single Sisters snuck away to meet with friends who did not belong to the church or even to the tavern with Single Brothers. The leadership met and discussed how to keep the young women from turning

⁸⁴ Single Sister's Diary, June 29th, 1794, Moravian Archives, Winston-Salem, NC.

away from their policies, often reinforcing restrictions on the movement of Sisters outside of Salem. Yet every year, women continued to bend or break the rules. Why would her Sisters break their long-kept traditions and seek the lifestyle of outsiders?

I argue that Single Sisters were influenced by the North Carolina Piedmont's race hierarchies and personal freedom and subsequently negotiated their role in Moravian society, and some were inspired to leave all together. As young Moravian women grew up in the North Carolina Piedmont, they encountered a way of living that allotted them more freedom than that of the Salem community. Sisters found opportunities to use their labor as leverage to negotiate how the policies of the congregation were enforced. Others resisted the strict marriage systems of the congregation in efforts to choose their marriage partners. Some Single Sisters even dissented by leaving the constraining space of the Choir as a first step towards transforming their social and economic status, gaining the opportunities of outsider women. By exercising this type of freedom, women could rid themselves of the simple communal lifestyle of the Moravians in exchange for opportunities to benefit from their own whiteness and run their own households. Responding to this dissent, the leadership realized that they must adapt to survive, taking such measures as ceasing use of the Lot to decide marriage matches in 1818. Through these cultural conflicts, Sisters influenced the development of Salem by disobeying or negotiating their freedoms. Preserving other Moravian traditions required acceding greater economic and social autonomy to the Single Sisters.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ This chapter will build on the work of gender historians such as Cynthia Kierner's *Beyond the Household: Women's Place in the Early South, 1700-1835* (1998) and Rosemarie Zagari's *Revolutionary Backlash: Women and Politics in the Early American Republic* (2007). These historians trace how women in colonial America made their way into the public sphere, despite the patriarchal control of fathers and husbands and discuss how women in this period advocated for changes in the gendered social structure. This chapter exemplifies how Single Moravian women were able to negotiate the gendered restrictions on their lives and gain some freedoms within the patriarchal social structure.

Single Sisters encountered ideas that contradicted the teachings of the Moravian Church and led them to dissent from the moment they set foot in the Piedmont.⁸⁶ In the 1750s, young Moravians began to observe their Piedmont neighbors' values and cultures.⁸⁷ Farmers' dependence on slavery steadily grew in the Piedmont towards the end of the 18th century, in 1790, there were 1,742 enslaved individuals in Rowan county. Of about 2,400 households, around 420 owned enslaved labor.⁸⁸ Larger plantations, although not common, started to be established around their separate town of Salem, exemplifying wealth, and less labor for whites. Nevertheless, in Salem, only a few families owned enslaved individuals, while others had the opportunity to rent them from neighbors.⁸⁹

The Moravian youth were exposed to ideas of wealth, prestige, and leisure, and were intrigued.⁹⁰ Young Moravian women had to consider their identities as white women in a slave owning society, which redefined the labor they would carry out. The congregation saw themselves as a separate community in the Piedmont, however, members interacted with outsiders often for business, which the Unity expected, often in their own shops in the town of Salem. These exchanges took place in the middle of the congregation town of Salem, where their social expectations were enforced. But outside of Salem, the Elder's could not survey members as easily. Young people, seeking some freedom from the strict rules, attended social gatherings in neighboring communities with a reputation for improper conduct between men and women. Opportunities to interact with outsiders as well as one another without the restrictions of the

⁸⁶ While Elisabeth Sommer suggests that Moravian women were largely influenced by the popular literature of the time in her book, "*Serving Two Masters: Moravian Unity in Germany and North America*," (2000) Pg. 70, there is debate about the accessibility of literature to communities in the backcountry (including Moravians) during the late 18th century. Patrick Valentine argues that there was practically no access to books during this period in North Carolina in his article, "Libraries and Print Culture in Early North Carolina" (2005).

⁸⁷ S. Scott Rohrer, *Hope's Promise: Religion and Acculturation in the Southern Backcountry*, Pg. XXXI.

⁸⁸ Rowan County, North Carolina, 1790 Census.

⁸⁹ S. Scott Rohrer, *Hope's Promise: Religion and Acculturation in the Southern Backcountry*, Pg. 62.

⁹⁰ Elisabeth W. Sommer, *Serving Two Masters: Moravian Unity in Germany and North America, 1727-1801*, Pg. 70.

congregation were intriguing to young men and women seeking to break away from the rules of the Elders.

The control of the Elders extended into their personal lives and marriage. Occasionally, a Single Brother could suggest a potential partner to the Brethren, but Single Sisters could not.⁹¹ When a Moravian man proposed a marriage, Elders would pull an answer from the Lot, which communicated God's will to the community. The Unity would interpret the answers, typically Bible verses, allowing them ultimate control over the decision. They would then approach the single individuals and ask for their consent if the Elders interpreted a positive answer from the Lot. Marriage practices in the Piedmont contradicted those in the Moravian Church. Outsiders, young Moravians noticed, could marry for a variety of reasons: economic positioning, bargaining between families, and even love.⁹² This freedom of choice troubled Moravian Elders. Allowing the youth to fraternize and court one another invited sinful behavior.

While they risked social discord and estrangement, the timing was right for single Moravian women who struck out of their Choir Home and sought freedoms not allowed by leadership. Beyond influencing their marriage practices, the Unity were wary of the social influence of outsiders. However, the Moravians' Piedmont neighbors valued personal liberty and a developing economy centered on race-based plantation slavery, consequently, and white Moravians encountered a lifestyle with appealing freedoms in the late 18th century. Craftsmen and stores permeated the area and cultivated consumerism even among poor yeoman farmers.⁹³

⁹¹ Elisabeth W. Sommer, *Serving Two Masters: Moravian Unity in Germany and North America, 1727-1801*, Pg. 71.

⁹² Cynthia A. Kierner, "Women, Gender, Families, and Households in the Southern Colonies," *The Journal of Southern History* 73, no. 3 (2007): Pg. 642.

⁹³ The Piedmont became a center for material goods and craftsmen as Ann Smart Martin's *Buying into the World of Goods: Early Consumers in Backcountry Virginia* (2008) illustrates. Moravians in Piedmont immediately participated in this culture, even Single Sisters as Johanna Miller Lewis explains in her work, *Artisans in the North Carolina Backcountry* (1995).

While the Moravians had their own stores and craftsmen, the Elders only allowed for specific people to own shops and controlled how much they could charge for goods and services. Their practices restricted members of the congregation from fully partaking in economic opportunities and materialism. With outsiders' economic freedoms in mind, Piedmont-raised Moravian sons and daughters negotiated foundational traditions and rules of their congregation.⁹⁴ They sought out new workplaces, residences, and spouses instead of letting the Unity decide for them. For Single Sisters, this meant moving into different houses, working in different occupations, and courting a marriage partner on their own terms without the direct guidance of leadership.

Negotiating Living Spaces and Social Restrictions

As the Salem community attempted to establish stability, the separation of living spaces within the Choir system became a contested rule among Single Sisters.⁹⁵ The Choir Houses sat in the middle of town, with the Single Sister's house located right next to the church. Through the location of the Choir House, the Elders and other congregation members could keep surveillance of the Single Sisters. Most Sisters were encouraged to live in the Choir House until they were married, but some preferred living with family or friends. While a seemingly innocent preference, breaking away from surveillance was concerning to the Elders. In these home spaces,

⁹⁴ Moravian historians have looked at the period of 1770-1800 as a time of change and negotiation for the Moravian community in the Piedmont. Elisabeth Sommer's *Serving Two Masters: Moravian Unity in Germany and North Carolina, 1727-1801* (2000) is one of the first works on Moravian history in Salem that addresses the misbehavior of the youth. She masterfully addresses the influence of the American Revolution, booming economy, and the culture of the backcountry. The cultural makeup of the Moravian congregation also propagated contrary values as Scott S. Rohrer's study, *Hope's Promise: Religion and Acculturation in the Southern Backcountry* (2005) exemplifies.

Contrary to Sommer's argument of external influence, he proposes that the actions of Moravian youth were not simply inspired by the discovery of non-Moravian ideas. Due to the varying cultural influences, some Moravian men and women were more susceptible to the American ideology spread around the time of the Revolution. Allyson Atwood Wooten's article "Hauben, Waistcoats, and Gowns: The Invention of Moravian Identity through Dress in Salem, North Carolina, 1780-1830," *Journal of Moravian History* 21, no. 1 (2021), argues that Moravian men and women used their clothing to create new Moravian identities. She proposes that the material culture of the Piedmont not only encouraged disobedience but even served as a tactic. This chapter builds off of these concepts of dissent and specifically looks at how Single Sisters used dissent at this time.

⁹⁵ Elisabeth W. Sommer, *Serving Two Masters: Moravian Unity in Germany and North America, 1727-1801*, Pg. 63.

young women were risking exposure to impurity, through interactions with male relatives and visitors. This breach of their communal rules could be considered the first step towards the more concerning types of disobedience, such as secret relationships. While living in the Choir House was encouraged, Single Sisters found opportunities to dictate what spaces they inhabited.

Even though the members of the church were encouraged to value the community over personal desires, familial bonds were not buried.⁹⁶ Even before the establishment of the Single Sisters' Choir House, The Unity wanted single men and women to live separately and not interact in one another's homes so that they might focus on their devotion to God and maintain propriety. Before the construction of the Single Sisters' Choir House, many resided in the community house, which allowed the Sisters to be supervised.⁹⁷ However, some young women chose their homes without the guidance of the Elders. Single Sister Barbara Christmann secretly moved in 1779. The Elders found that she was residing with her sister and brother-in-law, not with her parents. Despite the rules, Barbara refused to return to her original home, which was likely in the community house. The Elders conceded and allowed her to remain with her sister, but demanded that Barbara avoided unsupervised interactions with her nephew.⁹⁸ While it is unclear whether the nephew was a blood relation or not, the case represents the Elders' concern for the separation of the sexes. Only a year later, the Elders found that there were multiple gatherings hosted for Single Brothers in the household, breaking more policies of the church and exposing Barbara to unsupervised contact with the opposite gender as the Elders feared this private space would allow.⁹⁹ Despite the qualms of leadership, these women still desired to live

⁹⁶ Old Salem Wachovia Residents Database, ID Peter Yarrell, 4260.

⁹⁷ *Records of Moravians in NC, 1772*, Vol 2, Pg. 671

⁹⁸ Old Salem Wachovia Residents Database- ID Johann Stockburger (brother-in-law) 3938, Jan, 20th, 1779.

⁹⁹ Old Salem Wachovia Residents Database- ID Johann Stockburger (brother-in-law) 3938, Oct 10th, 1780.

with family or friends exactly because of the different range of social interactions offered at home.

In other cases of women leaving their Single Sister's Choir House, some were escaping from Salem entirely. By leaving the town of Salem, Sisters removed themselves from the watchful eyes of not just the Elders, but the entire Moravian community. Opportunities to break out of their restrictions were more accessible in the surrounding towns. Assisted by a widow living in the town, Friedland, in 1785, Elisabeth Schneider ran away from her Choir Home to work for an older woman living in the small community outside of Salem. Living with and working for a widowed woman was socially acceptable, but she did not ask for permission, and simply left the Single Sisters' house.¹⁰⁰ By doing this, she rejected the Brethren's control over her home and work, pushing out of the spatial boundaries of where Single Sisters were expected to live yet remaining in acceptable boundaries in the eyes of the outside world.

While against the policies of the Elders, these Single Sisters sought out living spaces that were typically restricted. Often influenced by their own desires or perhaps a sense of duty to family, these young women redefined their own spatial boundaries and values. The Sisters' actions were greatly concerning, as these spaces allowed them to interact with Brothers or outsiders, which could lead to other forms of disobedience that could endanger their piety and purity in the eyes of their community. However, these young women were aligning themselves with the social norms of the Piedmont, which were much more flexible than the Moravian congregations.

Single Moravians increasingly sought independent opportunities to connect with one another and outsiders through work and commerce. The Elders consistently tried to curb these

¹⁰⁰ *Records of Moravians in NC, 1785*, vol 5. Pg. 2073.

interactions, fearful that their traditions would die in the hearts of their youth turned towards secular values. In 1782 the Elders Conference of the Unity lamented that “we must earnestly contend with the attitude of mind of our young people when they leave their trades because they can earn higher wages and not be ‘bound out.’”¹⁰¹ By “binding” themselves to outsiders through labor contracts, the youth took their labor away from the community. The Elders were concerned that young Moravians might become too invested in earning money, subsequently risking their relationship with their artisanal masters, and potentially depriving the Unity of their training and useful skills which served the community. Further, focusing on money threatened their dedication to God and therefore the rest of the congregation. The youth’s desire for commercial goods, despite the warnings of the Elders, is reflected in the complaints of debt among the young gemeine members. In the spring of 1787, the Elders recorded in their disciplinary records that “Much regret was expressed that the giving of credit has crept in among us. Some of the Brethren and Sisters have thereby become so loaded with debt that they could not pay in a long time,” a practice which continued.¹⁰² As the younger generations of Moravians were seduced by higher wages and the benefits of buying nicer items, like fashionable clothes, on credit, they began to break the tradition of living simply.¹⁰³

The towns outside of Salem where many of these exchanges occurred, and where slavery thrived and supported these exchanges, continued to be troublesome for the Brethren. In particular, Bethabara and Bethania developed a special reputation for unruliness and were a dangerous influence on Moravian youth. Bethania, established before Salem in 1759, proved to be a source of frustration. The town’s distance from the leadership in Salem allowed the

¹⁰¹ Die Aeltesten Conferenz, Salem, December 28th, 1782, Moravian Archives, Winston-Salem, NC.

¹⁰² *Records of the Moravians*, May, 1787, vol. 5, Pg. 248.

¹⁰³ Allyson Atwood Wooten, “Hauben, Waistcoats, and Gowns: The Invention of Moravian Identity through Dress in Salem, North Carolina, 1780-1830.” *Journal of Moravian History* 21, no. 1 (2021): Pg. 13.

townsmen to bend the rules. Farmers in Bethania were not restricted in the buying and selling of enslaved people, eventually owning a total of 36 enslaved workers by 1806, which allowed them to make more money and establish themselves as landed yeomen in the Piedmont social structure and economy.¹⁰⁴ The presence of slavery contributed to the changing Moravian values and conceptions of race and gender from 1750 to 1800.¹⁰⁵ Through interactions in Salem and in the outside towns, white Single Sisters grappled with a racial identity that placed them higher up in the social hierarchy of the Piedmont, socially and economically benefiting from the labor of enslaved Black individuals by avoiding the work they were supposed to perform.¹⁰⁶ Moravian women began to understand their role in the larger social hierarchy of the Piedmont in spaces beyond the Moravian settlement.

Many young Moravian men and women from Salem traveled to Bethania to participate in social gatherings with outsiders during and after the Revolutionary period. Here, they could not only interact with non-Moravians without surveillance, but they could also socialize with the opposite sex. Taverns were a relaxed hot spot for interaction, especially in Bethania. Out of sight of the Elders, young Moravians gathered and socialized in spaces like this which brought together travelers and residents for all kinds of exchanges. In 1794, one of the Elders lamented that social interactions “always draw so many single Brothers and Sisters into the Tavern...much to their great harm.”¹⁰⁷ In the tavern, young Moravians could interact with other Moravians of a

¹⁰⁴ S. N. D. North, director, Bureau of the Census. *Heads of Families at the First Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1790: North Carolina*, (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1908).

¹⁰⁵ Jon F. Sensbach, *A Separate Canaan: The Making of an Afro-Moravian World in North Carolina, 1763-1840*, Pg. xvii-xviii.

¹⁰⁶ Jon F. Sensbach, *A Separate Canaan: The Making of an Afro-Moravian World in North Carolina, 1763-1840*, (1998), Pg. 79, 95; Elizabeth Sommer and Scott Rohrer only consider race briefly in their studies. By overlooking this, they miss the impact of racial identity on the Moravian society. Jon F. Sensbach's *A Separate Canaan* reveals how Salem's interactions with enslaved individuals changed over time due to the development of a slave-based economy in the Piedmont. Sensbach's analysis only briefly discusses the effects of racial identity on white Moravian women. This chapter will seek to understand how a white identity influenced the types of work Single Sisters sought.

¹⁰⁷ “Meyer Family Papers, 1794,” the Old Salem Museums and Gardens library.

different gender, but also outsiders who shared stories, ideas and politics, and bits of their culture in this social space.¹⁰⁸

In these and other mixed spaces, women in the area around Salem shared gossip in their social circles, exchange that Moravian leaders tied to a growing trend in disobedience.¹⁰⁹ The youth congregated in Bethania to participate in corn husking and shooting contests. These social gatherings for young people were likely derived from the “spinning bee” that was popular in Germany, allowing women to gather with one another.¹¹⁰ At these Piedmont social and seasonal events, young Moravian women interacted with outsiders. Here, they could learn more about the lifestyle of women in the Piedmont or even socialize with outsider men. This behavior contributed to the growing concerns for the future of the congregation. Noticing that the acts of dissent were not decreasing, Moravian leadership decided to act. The Unity saw these gatherings as a cause of disobedience and prohibited them in the 1770s. As Single Sisters engaged with the Piedmont youth, they were able to learn information about non-Moravian traditions and social expectations.¹¹¹

Although the Unity attempted to crack down on the youth’s interactions with the outside world, they eventually conceded that young Moravians must be able to interact with outsiders to conduct their work. However, the Elders knew that the future relied on the dedication of their youth, and therefore were wary of worldly seductions.¹¹² An Elder reported in the fall of 1782, that a whole group of Salem Moravian youth “who rode last Sunday in company on horseback to

¹⁰⁸ Daniel B. Thorp, “Taverns and Tavern Culture on the Southern Colonial Frontier: Rowan County, North Carolina, 1753-1776,” *The Journal of Southern History* 62, no. 4 (1996): 661–88.

¹⁰⁹ Richard D. Brown, *Knowledge Is Power: The Diffusion of Information in Early America, 1700-1865* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), Pg. 174 and 182.

¹¹⁰ Elisabeth W. Sommer, *Serving Two Masters: Moravian Unity in Germany and North America, 1727-1801*, Pg. 80.

¹¹¹ Richard D. Brown, *Knowledge Is Power: The Diffusion of Information in Early America, 1700-1865*, Pg. 194.

¹¹² Allyson Atwood Wooten, “Hauben, Waistcoats, and Gowns: The Invention of Moravian Identity through Dress in Salem, North Carolina, 1780-1830,” Pg. 13.

Bethania, have been disciplined and excluded from Communion.”¹¹³ The young Moravians sought to socialize without the restrictions of their congregation. Unfortunately for them, an elder had spotted their group and reported their disobedience. They received the common punishment of exclusion from communion for their transgression.

As young Moravians socialized with outsiders, they also encountered different work practices and the benefits of an unrestricted lifestyle. The ability to choose a trade based on their desire for the art or capital, contrasting the Moravian policy of the Elders assigning apprentices to masters, dictating what craft they could learn. Furthermore, Single Sisters witnessed the unrestricted social interactions in spaces like taverns, allowing for work opportunities as well as possibilities for new relationships. Over time, some Sisters chose to bend the policies and traditions of the Moravian community that controlled their labor.

Challenging Restrictions on Moravian Women’s Labor

Many Moravian women were determined to take control of their labor, for a multitude of reasons, whether it was economical, dedication, or escape the prying eyes of the Brethren. It is through breaking traditions that Single Sisters could negotiate some workplace freedoms while remaining within the acceptable bounds of behavior. In the period of 1770-1800, Single Sisters began to seek new jobs in Salem and the surrounding towns instead of remaining in the positions selected by the Brethren. Individuals could express their preference for work, and some Sisters wanted to work in a specific trade or expand their services to men as well as women. In the Moravian community and the Piedmont more broadly, many women worked a trade such as weaving and tailoring, or assisted their husbands with work. However, the final decision

¹¹³ Die Aeltesten Conferenz, October 16th, 1782, Moravian Archives, Winston-Salem, NC.

belonged to the Brethren. In Salem, most of their jobs were defined by the gendered segregation of the Moravian community which kept women from working directly with men.

Despite the traditions held by the church, Single Sisters sought to break out of the gendered restrictions of their work. At the turn of the century, a young Single Sister, Maria Magdalena Schmidt worked in the corpse house and prepared the bodies of Moravian women who had passed and were to be buried in God's Acre.¹¹⁴ Despite being a troubled girl in her youth, Maria was assigned to this role by the Unity in the 1790s. She held a position not typically given to single women, but she was revered by the rest of the community as she performed her job well. While the circumstances are unknown, Maria prepared the body of a deceased man in the community. Her actions caused a stir, as preparing the body of the opposite gender contradicted the Moravian practice of keeping men and women separated. But due to the community's admiration of her skill, the Unity concluded that

The proper care of corpses in the room appointed for it has been given with great care and faithfulness by Sister. Mar. Schmidt. After this matter has been considered she will be asked in future only for Sisters who have passed away, and not for members of other Choirs, unless she is specifically asked to do so by relatives.¹¹⁵

While the Unity did not throw the gendered restrictions out, they agreed to let her prepare the bodies of men if it was requested by the family. Maria Schmidt's actions exemplify the negotiating tactics of Single Sisters. By leveraging her skills, Maria was able to gain freedoms within her position.

As a growing need for labor in the community pressured the Unity in the 1770s, Single Sisters were increasingly allowed to work in public spaces such as taverns, stores, and

¹¹⁴ Leland G. Ferguson, *God's Fields: Landscape, Religion, and Race in Moravian Wachovia* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011). Ferguson discusses the importance of gendered burial practices for the Moravian community.

¹¹⁵ "Maria Magdalena Schmidt," Resident cards from the Old Salem Museums and Gardens Library.

workshops.¹¹⁶ At this point, young women and men began to consistently interact with outsiders. Even as they acknowledged the need for women's labor in spaces of co-mingling, Moravian leaders feared Piedmont locals could tempt women to violate the policies of the church through private interactions or promises of better wages.¹¹⁷ The fears of the Unity were sometimes realized as Single Sisters began to negotiate their way into these spaces and use them to their own advantage. The Single Sister Anna Steiner, who ran away with an outsider in Bethania, met him and interacted with him in the gristmill where she worked. In 1794, the Unity noted in their records that "We believed she merits sympathy. But we also deemed it necessary for a certain man at the mill, by whom her heart was smitten, to be promptly dismissed" by the mill owners.¹¹⁸ But despite their efforts, Anna would not remain apart from the man, meeting him in the houses of other Moravians who conspired with her. Anna Steiner negotiated and directly challenged the Brethren's rules. This continuing battle between the Elders and the appeal of work outside of the community continued throughout the end of the 18th century. Yet, some would not only challenge the social standards of the Moravians, but of the Piedmont as well.

Secret Relationships and Escaping the Gemeine

Interracial relationships were taboo for the Piedmont Moravians, making the instance of Single Sister Mary Schor, rare but significant. Racial and gendered anxieties commingled on the part of Moravian leadership as Sisters found opportunities to work outside of Salem, they also found opportunities to interact with and benefit from enslaved laborers. Even as the majority of

¹¹⁶ Jon F. Sensbach, *A Separate Canaan: The Making of an Afro-Moravian World in North Carolina, 1763-1840*, Pg. 59-62.

¹¹⁷ Johanna Miller Lewis, *Artisans in the North Carolina Backcountry*, Pg. 109.

¹¹⁸ Die Aeltesten Conferenz, June 29th, 1794, Moravian Archives, Winston-Salem, NC.

Moravian women did not have slaves to rule over, they were still white women who embodied Revolutionary ideas of virtue and piety, reenforced by contrast to the sinful enslaved Black women.¹¹⁹ Contrarily, some Single Sisters worked alongside enslaved and free Blacks, creating spaces that allowed for friendly conversation and possible friendship with them, much to the dismay of the Brethren, who sought to physically separate the congregation by race as they had by gender and age. Nevertheless, even when working alongside Black individuals, white Moravian women benefited from their presence in the workplace through less hard labor and social status. While their identities as white women came with specific social rules for them to follow, individual white women were participating in the shaping of slavery in the Moravian communities and the Piedmont.

Many Single Sisters sought jobs in the nearby town of Bethabara, which allowed them a bit of freedom from the strict rules of the congregation. Margaret Schor went to work in the Bethabara Mill in 1782. In the mill, she worked with other Moravians as well as the enslaved Moravian man Johann Samuel. During the summer, an incident occurred that garnered harsh reactions from church leadership. The Unity recorded that a “wretched incident regarding the Negro Johann Samuel in Bethabara and Margaret Schor in the mill there...Uncouth offenses easily could have arisen as a result.”¹²⁰ Reflecting the language and punishment for similar acts of secret relations, it seems that Margaret and Johann may have been romantically involved. Both individuals were barred from communion and Johann was required to admit to his sins and show a change of heart. Margaret used the freedom provided by her work and distance from Salem to participate in a relationship of some sort with a Black man, which defied the racial social order embraced by the Piedmont and the church. This event also shows that some white

¹¹⁹ Kirsten Fischer, *Suspect Relations: Sex, Race, and Resistance in Colonial North Carolina* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), Pg. 133

¹²⁰ Die Aeltesten Conferenz, June 19, 1782, Moravian Archives, Winston-Salem, NC.

Moravian women were exploring racial boundaries when given the physical work and social spaces, and freedom from surveillance to do so. Single Sisters who worked with outsiders brought about another form of disobedience that concerned the congregation's leaders.

Clandestine meetings were not uncommon as Single Sisters began to look for relationships on their own terms.

White Single Sisters sought out work on farms or in mills, which served them by putting distance between them and the Brethren, increasing their control over their own time and labor, and affording romantic opportunities with non-Moravian men.¹²¹ While concerned with their propriety and keeping Sisters separate from Brothers, the Elders feared that Single Sisters may become involved with outsider men, who through economic and social opportunities provided by their work and connections could draw them away from the community. Despite these fears, some young women found opportunities to pursue partners they desired, no matter how taboo their relationship appeared to their community.

While Single Sisters had participated in secret romantic relationships since they first arrived in Bethabara, there was a distinct surge of these relationships in the 1770s, likely a side effect of entertaining outsiders and expanding work spaces. According to the records of the Elders, there was at least one case a year.¹²² The Unity were especially concerned with these acts and punished them swiftly. These relationships were threatening to the community, as they challenged the strict separation of the genders and the power of the Unity to match couples. It was especially concerning when Single Sisters ran away with outsiders as they would no longer reside in a Moravian space, which supported their spirituality. Even though leadership would attempt to correct these behaviors, they were not typically successful. In the case of Anna

¹²¹ Jon F. Sensbach, *A Separate Canaan: The Making of an Afro-Moravian World in North Carolina, 1763-1840*, Pg. 73.

¹²² Die Aeltesten Conferenz, 1794, Moravian Archives, Winston-Salem, NC.

Steiner, even though the Unity demanded that the outsider man should be removed from the mill and brought Anna back to the Choir House, her desire could not be curbed. The Single Sisters recorded that:

She had promised with hand and mouth to be faithful, but it lasted only four weeks, then we noticed that advice and warning were in vain. Her heart was clinging to the dissolute fellow and on the above-mentioned day she went after him. May the Savior in mercy preserve us from more such trickeries.¹²³

Despite promising to end her relationship with the stranger, Anna deceived the Unity and the other Single Sisters. This time, however, she left them and followed him. Anna Steiner never returned to Salem and subsequently disappeared from their records.

Contrarily, some women leaving the Moravian community in Salem did not go far and maintained meaningful connections to family and friends. In 1801, it was revealed that Single Sister Christine Holder and Single Brother Charles Bagge had a “secret understanding.” Having secret meetings in private created opportunities for premarital sexual relations, threatening the purity and reputation of the Single Sister. Christine snuck away from the Choir House and married the young man, shocking the Brethren. For some women, this was a chance to escape the rigid religious community to run a household according to their own wishes. Some Single Sisters, like Margaretha Hauser, suddenly left Wachovia altogether to marry an outsider.¹²⁴ However, the Unity noted that the young, now excommunicated couple “has settled in the Friedberg neighborhood, and has there opened a store, nine miles from us.”¹²⁵ Margaretha, in breaking away from the restrictive traditions of the community and marrying a man of her choice, could pursue a different form of labor that was more lucrative, such as sewing fashionable clothes. Further, the Elders removed the couple from Salem, still attempting to cut

¹²³ Single Sister's Diary, 1794, Pg. 47. Moravian Archives, Winston-Salem, NC.

¹²⁴ *Records of the Moravians*, vol. 4, ed, Pg. 1618.

¹²⁵ *Records of the Moravians*, vol. 6, ed, Pg. 2675.

off unsanctioned marriages. Despite their efforts, Margaretha's story shows that Moravians could find a new life without completely abandoning their relationships in these outside towns surrounding Salem. Even though the young couple broke the rules, their family and friends did not shun them. Through marriage, Single Sisters found a way to escape Salem without endangering themselves and with hopes of escaping the restrictions of Moravian policies, but without fully leaving Moravian networks behind.

Single Sisters negotiated or rejected the restrictions over their relationships and pursued inmate connections for their own desires of love, economic gain, or agency over their labor despite the governing body of Moravians. Breaking away from the restrictions of Salem to marry into a Piedmont family provided opportunities for women to run their own households and escape the extensive labor that they may have been expected to perform through the ownership of enslaved individuals. Contrarily, some women may have sought to escape the racial restrictions of socialization and pursue relationships with Black men. Moving outside of Salem also allowed these women to escape the surveillance and restraints of the congregation. Indeed, there were many new possibilities for Single Sisters who were willing to leave their known Moravian life for that of the outsiders.¹²⁶

The Elder's Reaction

The Unity were quick to reject women and men who secretly began relationships with men from the Piedmont in hopes of mitigating the influence of their transgressions. It signaled to the rest of the community that such actions would be met with severe consequences.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1980), Pg. 5; Allyson Atwood Wooten, "Hauben, Waistcoats, and Gowns: The Invention of Moravian Identity through Dress in Salem, North Carolina, 1780-1830," Pg. 15.

¹²⁷ Elisabeth W. Sommer, *Serving Two Masters: Moravian Unity in Germany and North America, 1727-1801*, Pg. 70.

Perceiving the women's disobedience as a threat to concord inside of the settlements, the Moravian leadership sought to stop these relationships and used harsh punishments to discourage others. While the punishments for breaking rules about work and living spaces brought about chastisement and correction, the Elders found it necessary to deal out punishments as harsh as excommunication for serious offenses. After discussion and punishment, however, disobedience continued to challenge the policies and traditions of the church.

When the Unity came to a consensus that an individual was harmful to the congregation, they resorted to excommunication, which removed unruly Sisters and their influence from the community completely. Excommunication was used when the Unity did not see any possibility of redemption. In the case of Anna Mary Stotz, who caused trouble repeatedly in 1792, the community could no longer accept her behavior. Her fellow Single Sisters lamented her behavior in their diary:

She had already been excluded completely for some time because of her offensive manner of life and conduct and after many warnings. We had hoped that she would recognize it herself and allow herself to be changed by the Savior, which she always promised to do, but it was always put off so that one could have no hope.¹²⁸

The Elders were worried about the effects on the other Single Sisters. Excommunication was a rare punishment, with social, spiritual, and emotional implications for other Single Sisters and the larger community. Yet, these individuals could also harm the faith and dedication of congregation members. Young women who left not only lowered the number of Moravians living and working in Salem, but also represented the waning of spirituality in their community. The disobedience of these women threatened the longevity of the Salem congregation, which the Elders aspired to protect.

¹²⁸ Single Sister's Diary, 1792. Pg. 27. Moravian Archives, Winston-Salem, NC.

The Unity did value the spiritual life of their church members and would sometimes express forgiveness towards Sisters who wanted to return to Salem. The Unity valued one's ability to connect with God and a faith-based community greatly. If an individual could convince the Unity that their hearts had turned towards God, they may have been allowed back into the community. Maria Salome Schaub and Dorthea Boner, who ran away to marry Single Brothers, eventually returned to Salem. Dorthea and Issac Meyer went on to run the tavern in Salem.¹²⁹ These women and their families were not only accepted back into the church, but also given jobs that required a good deal of trust from the Unity and continued interaction with Piedmont residents. While the reacceptance of those who left does not seem to be a common event, it happened a few times during the first thirty years of Salem's development, demonstrating that the social and spiritual consequences of disobedience need not be permanent for Moravian women.

After years of dealing with dissent, Moravian leadership decided to share with families the responsibility of matching couples for marriage. In 1780, the Elders in the gemeine of Salem deemed that they could no longer manage the matter of marriage in the surrounding towns. Instead, they advised, "If a marriage seems advantageous, they may with full confidence discuss it with the minister and his wife, who will help them with advice. House-fathers shall be plainly told that they should observe a tendency toward marriage on the part of their children."¹³⁰ This decision placed the responsibility on the parents and local ministers rather than the Brethren. Additionally, leadership recognized that the use of the Lot to pick couples was not sustainable, and declared that only those who sought the opinion of the Lot would have to submit to its

¹²⁹ Single Sisters Diary, 1794, Moravian Archives, Winston-Salem, NC.; Meyer Family Papers 1794, Old Salem Museums and Gardens library.

¹³⁰ *Records of the Moravians*, vol. 4, ed. Adelaide Fries (Raleigh: North Carolina State Department of Archives and History, 1930), Pg. 1606

influence.¹³¹ It would be many years later, in 1818 that the Elders stopped using the Lot for marriages in Salem despite their efforts to maintain tradition.¹³² The strict control over marriage in the surrounding towns began to loosen and allow women some liberty in who they could court. Despite the patriarchal control of their fathers who were interested in the economic advantages of marriage rather than the continuation of the congregation, the control over Moravian women's lives eased slightly. However, this only increased the appeal of escaping Salem and the cases of Sisters running away with outsiders continued to challenge their policies and traditions. The separation of the races and the use of enslaved labor increased in surrounding Moravian settlements, mirroring its development in the Piedmont.¹³³ Although managed within Salem, slave labor in Bethania and Bethabara were largely unregulated. Indeed, the opportunities outside of town were enticing to Moravian women, and they continued to challenge church policies.

Conclusion

Moravian women succeeded in gaining autonomy through breaking the rules of the Brethren, up to and including leaving their communities. The actions of Moravian Single Sisters influenced the larger adaptation within the larger Moravian community during their development in the late 18th century through the early 19th century by threatening the future of their congregation.¹³⁴ During the Revolution and into the Early Republican period, Moravian leadership adapted the strict rules of the Moravian community in response to the desires of the

¹³¹ Die Aeltesten Conferenz, March 28th, 1781, Moravian Archives, Winston-Salem, NC.

¹³² Elisabeth W. Sommer, *Serving Two Masters: Moravian Unity in Germany and North America, 1727-1801*, Pg. 109

¹³³ Jon F. Sensbach, *A Separate Canaan: The Making of an Afro-Moravian World in North Carolina, 1763-1840*. Pg. 62-63

¹³⁴ S. Scott Rohrer, *Hope's Promise: Religion and Acculturation in the Southern Backcountry*, Pg. xxx-xxxi.

members who looked to the lifestyle of the surrounding Piedmont and sought their place within both social structures. Younger generations raised in Salem sought economic gain while Moravian leadership relaxed restrictions in interactions between men and women in response.¹³⁵ The tactics of the Single Sisters were often more secretive than those of Moravian men due to the spatial restrictions placed upon them. Nevertheless, they still negotiated the restraints around their lives by using the spaces and social networks available to them. These women also shaped their labor through the establishment of slavery in the Piedmont, establishing themselves as white Moravian women. Throughout the end of the 18th century in Salem, Single Sisters were able to influence the established policies of the Unity to shape their work and social networks while also contributing to the networks within the Piedmont.

¹³⁵ Allyson Atwood Wooten, "Hauben, Waistcoats, and Gowns: The Invention of Moravian Identity through Dress in Salem, North Carolina, 1780-1830," Pg. 15.

Chapter Three

Misbehaving Married Sisters: Using Private Spaces to Shape the Moravian Community

As the American Revolution raged on in the colonies in 1778, the Elders conference in the developing town of Salem, North Carolina were struggling to manage their congregation members, including their Married Sisters. One family in particular continued to be troublesome, as they often broke the rules of the community. The Meyers, who came to Salem to run the Tavern, subverted the rules in many ways. But perhaps the most distressing to the Elders was the disobedience of Married Sister Dorothea Meyer, mother of the Meyer children. The Elders recorded that “besides having problems with the running of the tavern, Dorothea also had problems with the raising of her children. The tavern was a place of many bad influences.”¹³⁶ The congregation was concerned for the future of the gemeine and often looked at mothers of misbehaving children as a source of poor parenting and bad behavior among the youth. Dorothea’s children had a reputation for getting into liquor and becoming drunk, which certainly undermined Moravian values regarding children. As a result, the Elders suggested the removal of her children from the household. The Elders maintained this strict attitude within Salem, but in the 1780s, the Moravian community started to adjust its rules and policies regarding how a Married Sister should run her household as part of a larger move to allow more freedoms in the surrounding towns.¹³⁷

As Married Sisters in Salem sought to navigate both their duties as Moravian women and the Piedmont’s demanding realities and perception of womanhood during the American Revolution, some used the sanctuary of their private homes to subvert the congregation's

¹³⁶ Die Aeltesten Conferenz, 1772, Moravian Archives, Winston-Salem, NC.

¹³⁷ Die Aeltesten Conferenz, 1780, Moravian Archives, Winston-Salem, NC

policies. Unlike the methods of Single Sisters, Married Sisters used different forms of disobedience to assert their autonomy behind closed doors and used their position in the community to assist others. Even when confined to a household through marriage, Moravian women were able to use the privacy of home spaces to pursue their desired lifestyles and assist others in obtaining their own agency. However, the Unity saw the home and family unit as the space where young individuals were taught Moravian values. If the congregation's rules were not reinforced in the home, then surely misbehavior of the youth was the fault of poor parenting. The private spaces where Married Sisters had the most control- the home- were highly contested as they sought to balance the demands of the Unity with their own wishes. At the same time, plenty of wives and mothers sought to maintain their households in the standards of the congregation, some created spaces with enslaved labor, material goods, and unrestrictive households reflective of those of Piedmont outsiders. Certain Married Sisters used their private spaces to shape their own households and futures.

Married Sisters used the privacy of their homes, which shielded them from prying eyes, to undermine the policies of the Unity and instead pursued a lifestyle that reflected backcountry white womanhood. These Sisters dissented by asserting authority over their households and shaping work and social life to reflect their own wishes, not necessarily those of the Moravian Church. Through their disobedience from the beginning of the American Revolution to the turn of the century, these women were able to access greater social and economic status for themselves and their families within Piedmont communities. Married Sisters were on the front lines of the conflict between the traditions of the Church and the trends of Piedmont society towards an economy that thrived on enslaved labor, bringing that conflict into the home. Alongside Single Sisters, these Moravian women sought ways to negotiate the restrictions on

their autonomy. However, the actions of Married Sisters were even more threatening to the leadership of Salem, as they could influence their husbands and children towards disorder.

While many historians of Moravians in North Carolina have analyzed the dissenting actions of the youth, white Married Sisters' dissent is usually only described in the context of their husbands or children. As only husbands often interacted directly with the Elders Conference and children were discussed frequently among the congregation, Married Sisters often appear in the periphery of these sources.¹³⁸ However, by taking a closer look at the different ways that these women sought control over their own lives and households, it reveals a more complicated story of Moravian women during the late 18th century. Utilizing their private home spaces, married women could explore their identities as Moravian women and white women in the Piedmont. These women deserve to be studied, as they are another example of how white mothers, wives, and widows navigated their early American spaces in order to, I argue, participate in freedoms allotted by a changing southern society. Like Single Sisters, Married Sisters were a part of a more extensive trend of women in the New Republic seeking new freedoms.¹³⁹

The Moravian Church set standards for how a good married Moravian woman would conduct herself and her household, and these expectations were brought to the town of Salem. Married women were supposed to submit to their husband's jurisdiction in their household. They were also expected to serve as role models of spiritual strength and pious behavior.¹⁴⁰ The Elders

¹³⁸ Elisabeth W. Sommer, *Serving Two Masters: Moravian Unity in Germany and North America, 1727-1801* (Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 2000), Pg. 65-67.

¹³⁹ This chapter looks to Cynthia Kierner and Rosemarie Zagari for context regarding married women in the Revolutionary period. It builds upon the work of these scholars by using their framework to show how Married Sisters were navigating their restricted lifestyles and participating in the changing culture of the Moravian community. These Married Sisters were also participating in the small politics of their town by practicing agency and working with other members of the congregation, adding to the story of colonial women wielding political power.

¹⁴⁰ This thesis uses Katherine M. Faull's *Moravian Women's Memoirs* (1997) to explain how Moravian doctrine taught about gender roles, which emphasized autonomy in Christ, but submission to the Moravian Church's rules.

of the Moravian community were not only worried about the behavior of the parents but also the conduct of their children. The role of motherhood was considered one of the most important jobs for a Married Sister. The Unity believed that the first line of defense against the shrinking of their congregation was to raise young Moravians in their traditions. The Elders expected women to dutifully respond to the challenges presented by the Piedmont, such as war and economic struggles. A Married Sister who silently suffered but remained faithful embodied the ideals of a Moravian woman. For example, Married Sister Catharina Steiner in Salem, who did not have the chance to write her own memoir, was recalled by the congregation fondly. A member of the congregation wrote of her faith in troubling times.

With many difficult experiences she had to endure, especially during the [Revolutionary] war and many painful incidents in her family, the Savior was and remained her only refuge, help, and counsel. And His grace and forgiveness when she had transgressed somewhat was a comfort and refreshment to her heart. In the year 1796, she moved with her husband here to Salem, caring for him especially in his last difficult illness with much faithfulness until his blessed end, which came on 8 July 1801 [actually 21 July 1801].¹⁴¹

Despite the hardship she faced in her house and beyond, Steiner remained faithful to God and her congregation. Being obedient to her husband and Church, she was viewed as a good Married Sister, wife, and mother. In contrast, Married Moravian women who did not embody these characteristics, whether due to debilitating circumstances or intentional neglect, were a threat to the Brethren.

Life in the Piedmont presented another concept of womanhood that contradicted the Moravian ideals. And for some women, the opportunities apparent in the Piedmont—to perform fewer household chores with the help of enslaved labor, have a little more money, and have final

Ann-Catherine Wilkening continued the discussion of Moravian gender roles in her article, “I Didn't Know That I Was Starving 'Til I Tasted You: 18th Century Moravian Women's Ecstatic Experience of Bridal Mysticism in Communion and Marital Sexuality,” (2018). She makes a significant contribution to historiography, furthering the discussion of women's autonomy through the Church's teachings. Both authors discuss acts of disobedience very little. When they mention it, the discourse focuses on the forgiving nature of the Brethren, which foregrounds the piety of Moravian men rather than the actions of Moravian women. This project aims to highlight the autonomous actions that Moravian women carried out to negotiate their place in society.

¹⁴¹ Catharina Steiner Memoir, Moravian Archives, Winston-Salem, NC.

say over their household—were extremely appealing.¹⁴² The Unity encountered cases of Moravian families desiring enslaved labor, often citing a Married Sister's want for assistance as the reason for their disobedience. While the Elders sought to control slavery in Salem, there was no stopping the enthusiasm for it among farmers outside of their mediated community. The presence of enslaved labor provided an elevated social status through the opportunity for economic gain. While the town of Salem limited the ownership of enslaved people to those who they deemed in need, typically a result of sickness or a need to increase production, the surrounding towns of Bethabara and Bethania were not restricted.¹⁴³ However, owning enslaved labor was not common due to the expense. Nevertheless, white Moravian women benefited from the institution, as their whiteness afforded them status that contrasted that of enslaved Black women.¹⁴⁴

Another feature of white womanhood in the Piedmont that appealed to Married Sisters was the control over their own children. The Unity was concerned about the upbringing of children in the gemeine and identified the home as the place where children could learn to be a good Moravian or be an unruly one. The Elders were nosy regarding how households were run and punished parents for not keeping their house in order.¹⁴⁵ Church policies put the wishes of the Elders above those of the parents. One Moravian minister and elder attending to a troubled boy in Friedland recorded in a diary that “I believe that were the parents more on fire with love for Jesus the children would gain some profit thereby and be won' to the Lord.”¹⁴⁶ The failings of Moravian parents threatened the future of the gemeine, and possibly their children's souls. The minister advised the parents to uphold the Church's practices to correct their son's behavior.

¹⁴² Jon F. Sensbach, *A Separate Canaan: The Making of an Afro-Moravian World in North Carolina, 1763-1840*, Pg. 64-65.

¹⁴³ S. Scott Rohrer, *Hope's Promise: Religion and Acculturation in the Southern Backcountry*, Pg. 139.

¹⁴⁴ S. Scott Rohrer, *Hope's Promise: Religion and Acculturation in the Southern Backcountry*, Pg. 165.

¹⁴⁵ Elisabeth W. Sommer, *Serving Two Masters: Moravian Unity in Germany and North America, 1727-1801*, Pg. 65.

¹⁴⁶ Soelle Diary, Pg. 75, Moravian Archives, Winston-Salem, NC.

Avoiding the control of Moravian leadership meant breaking the rules in the privacy of their homes or even moving outside of Salem and the Brethren's realm of control. A few women were able to gain freedoms by moving beyond the limits of the town of Salem, which took them out from under the immediate grip of the Elders in town. Not only did distance make it harder for disobedient acts to be punished, but it was also generally harder for individuals to be caught. Nevertheless, the Married Sisters located in the town of Salem relied on the privacy of their homes to hide their conduct. This type of secrecy was unique for these women, as their husbands often worked in more public places such as shops and trades performed outside of the house.¹⁴⁷ Worried about their community's resilience and traditions, Elders discovered and were quick to punish these actions. They sought to maintain access to the private sphere, arguing that they had a right to know what happened within the household.¹⁴⁸ Nevertheless, the Piedmont's culture of individualism seduced Married Sisters to resist this intrusion.

Married Sisters inside of Salem sought opportunities to form an identity as both Moravians and as members of the Piedmont. In the secrecy of their homes, they could explore their place as white women in Piedmont culture, direct the labor of enslaved people, and shape their households and children to reflect their identities without the judgment of their congregation. They subverted the rules of the congregation secretly. From allowing their children freedom to play and interact with outsiders, to asking their husbands to purchase enslaved labor to help them with their work, Married Sisters quietly dissented and sought a place for themselves and their families in the Revolutionary world.

Homesteads as Epicenters of Dissen

¹⁴⁷ Johanna Miller Lewis, *Artisans in the North Carolina Backcountry*, Pg. 102.

¹⁴⁸ Elisabeth W. Sommer, *Serving Two Masters: Moravian Unity in Germany and North America, 1727-1801*, Pg. 66.

As they traded and talked more frequently with their Piedmont neighbors in the Moravian towns, Married Sisters created homesteads that reflected those of outsiders. Women's ideas about marriage, trade, vocation, wealth, and the day-to-day comings and goings in their homes sometimes deviated from the Elders' expectations, and encouraged women to take control of their households.¹⁴⁹ In acting on their own visions, they supported other Sisters in doing the same, activating close relationships between Sisters to resist the lot and pursue a trade."

While an enslaved labor economy flourished outside of Salem, it slowly permeated the town over the late 18th century. Slavery underscored the contrast between outsider society, which focused on independence and economic mobility, and the restricted lifestyle of the congregation. All Moravians in the congregation were expected to work hard yet not seek a materialistic lifestyle. The Unity was wary of allowing households and businesses to buy enslaved laborers in Salem, as they were afraid it would inspire laziness and greed.¹⁵⁰ If members of their congregation valued economic gain over their spirituality and connection with the community, the congregation as a whole would suffer.

The Meyers, who came to Salem to run the tavern, were constantly reprimanded by the Elders for how they conducted their home and workplace, illuminating the central role of slavery and outsider influence in women's conflict with Moravian leadership. When the young Meyer family moved to Salem from Bethania, they brought two enslaved women along with them. The Elders recorded in the winter of 1772 that "Br. and Sr. Meyer moved to the Tavern in Salem, taking their two children, the widow Dixon, the negress and her daughter, the hostler Friedrich, and so much of their baggage."¹⁵¹ The Meyer family would prove to be a source of stress for the

¹⁴⁹ Cynthia A. Kierner, *Beyond the Household: Women's Place in the Early South, 1700-1835*, Pg. 46.

¹⁵⁰ Jon F. Sensbach, *A Separate Canaan: The Making of an Afro-Moravian World in North Carolina, 1763-1840*, Pg. 79.

¹⁵¹ Die Aeltesten Conferenz, February 17th, 1772, Moravian Archives, Winston-Salem, NC.

Elders, as the family and their slaves' behavior was often ridiculed by the community. Working in the tavern brought them into constant contact with outsiders, allowing them to participate directly with the Piedmont economy and encounter their culture. These interactions seem to have influenced the family. Married Sister Dorthea Meyer actively disobeyed the wishes of the Unity by making fashionable clothes that were popular in the surrounding towns of the Piedmont. The Elders recounted in their records that "Sister Meyer was reprimanded for 'doing too much spinning, dying, etc. Things which hinder them very much in their real job, and which they could buy in the ordinary way much cheaper."¹⁵² Although rare, the Elders were wary about the influence of these new fashions and spent too much time worrying about one's appearance, as it was a distraction from daily chores and dedication to God.¹⁵³ Dorthea likely garnered the time to pursue this trade due to the enslaved laborers working at the Tavern, allowing her to choose what labor she performed, elevating her status from the other women around her. Despite the scolding from the Brethren, Dorthea's use of slave labor was only part of the larger story of Dorthea's claim of control over her household.

Even if a Married Sister did not live on a plantation, they could still benefit from enslaved labor in their homes and businesses. However, the Unity disapproved of families relying on the assistance of others. In 1780, worried about the laziness of the youth, the Unity advised young married couples "who are healthy and able also should take care of their households and not help themselves to mere comforts. The Rudolph Christs (another young Moravian couple), for example, could indeed bear their housekeeping very well without any help."¹⁵⁴ Even as materialism grew around them, continuing to be industrious and live simply

¹⁵² Die Aeltesten Conferenz, 1772, Moravian Archives, Winston-Salem, NC.

¹⁵³ Allyson Atwood Wooten, "Hauben, Waistcoats, and Gowns: The Invention of Moravian Identity through Dress in Salem, North Carolina, 1780-1830," Pg. 15.

¹⁵⁴ Die Aeltesten Conferenz, 1780, Moravian Archives, Winston-Salem, NC.

was expected of those who were a part of the Moravian congregation. Nevertheless, these Married Sisters still sought ways to lighten their burden, and in some cases, they turned to their husbands for assistance.

With the help of their husbands, a few Married Sisters were able to use enslaved help with their everyday tasks, including trades such as weaving and household chores. The use of unapproved enslaved labor not only served as a way to subvert the expectations of the Brethren, which focused on one's duty to work hard with what little free time they had to be set aside for spiritual development. As white women with enslaved help, they separated themselves from the Black laborers as well as poorer whites who could not afford such a luxury.¹⁵⁵ Maria Krause, the first wife of Johann Krause, benefited from her husband's willingness to disobey the Elders and buy her some assistance. The Elders reported that without permission, Krause, needing "help for his wife, he has taken the Negro girl from Spach's."¹⁵⁶ The Unity did not forcefully remove their enslaved help, but it remained on record as one of the Krauses' many wrongs. Moravian women such as Maria were able to resist the congregation's policies on labor through the use of an enslaved laborer.

A few years later, in 1790, Maria and Peter Yarrell committed a similar sin. Maria struggled to keep her house in order by Moravian standards. The Elders recorded in the spring that Peter "has taken a Negro girl into his house without reporting it, which is against the orders of the community."¹⁵⁷ After renting her from a farmer in Bethania, Peter wanted to buy the enslaved girl for their home in Salem. The Unity later recommended that he stop, as

The old resolution of not bringing more Negroes into the community should not be violated without serious reasons. Therefore, we shall advise Br. Yarrell not to buy her,

¹⁵⁵ Stephanie E. Jones-Rogers, *They Were Her Property: White Women As Slave Owners in the American South*, Pg. xvi.

¹⁵⁶ Die Aeltesten Conferenz, May 23rd, 1788, Moravian Archives, Winston-Salem, NC.

¹⁵⁷ Die Aeltesten Conferenz, May 11th, 1790, Moravian Archives, Winston-Salem, NC.

mainly since he can look after his household with the help of his children and apprentices.¹⁵⁸

After this meeting, the Yarrells and the enslaved girl's record goes quiet. It is not until 1800 when the widowed Maria Yarrell comes up in a conversation among the Brethren, revealing that Maria still owned the enslaved girl and benefited from her labor after her husband's death.¹⁵⁹ While the Unity disapproved of the use of enslaved individuals within the town of Salem, these women and their families continued to use and benefit from the work of enslaved individuals in a variety of ways.¹⁶⁰

Even though the Unity frowned upon families owning slaves, the congregation continued to rent and buy enslaved laborers secretly. Married Sisters participated and benefited from these acts of dissent. In most cases, husbands took the brunt of the chastisement, as they were the ones who made the transaction, allowing the wives to benefit from enslaved labor with few consequences from leadership. By limiting the risk of direct chastisement on their character, women benefited from the discrete nature of this disobedience.¹⁶¹ Through the privacy of their homes and their technical separation from the purchasing or renting of enslaved labor, Married Sisters could take part in a society defined by slavery while avoiding the repercussions which often included shaming from the Elders. Marriage and the privacy of their own homes allowed these women to commit acts of dissent that challenged the Elders' labor and slave ownership policies. In so doing, they aligned their actions and aspirations with those of the Piedmont's white women, and the values of autonomy and leisure.

The Problem of Parenting

¹⁵⁸ Die Aeltesten Conferenz, January 17th, 1792, Moravian Archives, Winston-Salem, NC.

¹⁵⁹ Die Aeltesten Conferenz, March 4th, 1800, Moravian Archives, Winston-Salem, NC.

¹⁶⁰ S. Scott Rohrer, *Hope's Promise: Religion and Acculturation in the Southern Backcountry*, Pg. 159-160.

¹⁶¹ Stephanie E. Jones-Rogers, *They Were Her Property: White Women As Slave Owners in the American South*, Pg. xi.

Despite the rules of the congregation, parents still had their own wishes for their children. Within the privacy of their homes, parents raised their children as they saw fit, which did not always align with the ideals of the church. Married Sisters, who most often inhabited this space, could have more control over their household, and the upbringing of their children. Fathers, who often worked outside the home or in separate spaces such as shops, stores, and the fields, relied on their wives to enforce the rules of their household in his absence.¹⁶² By raising their children according to their own values and desired lifestyles, some Moravian women challenged the rules of the community in private.

The Elders, concerned for the continuation of their community, were quick to seek the root of disobedience in town. When reflecting on the disappearance of Dorthea Meyer and Magdalena Schaub, who ran away to marry two Single Brothers, the Elders identified their parents as the root cause of this disobedience. They recorded that “We trace the sad incident to the parents who for several years did not heed the warning to be serious about the going in and out in their families.”¹⁶³ The home was understood as the place where children learned how to be good Moravians and internalize the Church's values. However, if the parents did not conduct themselves and their household by the Church's policies, children would be more likely to misbehave. With many cases of young adults, typically teenagers, leaving the Choir Houses to visit their families, the Meyers and Schaub's were not the only families who wanted their children to visit. Indeed, Married Sisters and Brothers seem to have been willing to assist their children in breaking the rules to see them and allow them to come home. Nevertheless, Moravian mothers had to be careful, as the Unity could intervene if their households were unorderly.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² Cynthia A. Kierner, *Beyond the Household: Women's Place in the Early South, 1700-1835*, Pg. 28.

¹⁶³ Meyer Family Papers 1778, Moravian Archives, Winston-Salem, NC.

¹⁶⁴ Elisabeth W. Sommer, *Serving Two Masters: Moravian Unity in Germany and North America, 1727-1801*, Pg. 67.

While undoubtedly concerned about the conduct of the congregation's young adults, the Elders were more suspicious over the upbringing of young children as a consequence of parents' moral failures. One of the Single Sisters that we met in the previous chapter, Maria Schmidt, who managed the corpse house, came from a troubled home. When concern for her and her brother's wellbeing became too great, the Unity spoke to her parents.

It was desired that someone talk to Schmidt about the 'bad education of Br. Schmidt's children' and the admonition that the parents be told 'to be stricter with them.' Schmidt was apparently unable to govern his children, particularly his daughter.¹⁶⁵

When the Schmidts did not improve their parenting, and the Elders found that they were much too wrapped up in sinful behavior such as drinking and laziness, they encouraged the Schmidts to allow Maria to join the Single Sisters and live in the Choir House.¹⁶⁶ While the Elders did not seem to wish to forcefully remove Maria from the Schmidt family, they suggested that it would be harmful to her to remain in this household. In the case of Maria, her parents conceded to the Brethren's demands, allowing their daughter to be strictly in the care of the Single Sisters.

Other Moravian parents chose to subvert the Elders' wishes when it came to the care of their children. Parents whose work required direct contact with outsiders also exposed their children to non-Moravians and their ideas. The Meyers' tavern allowed their children to have these interactions.¹⁶⁷ Living in this environment presented their children with temptations that greatly displeased the Brethren. Even though both parents worked in the tavern, Dorthea was identified as the reason their household was improper. The Elders wrote that,

On September 2, 1778, the Collegium 'asked that it should not happen again--as it did quite often already, that his children are making themselves drunk with wine and other strong drinks, because it has such a bad influence on their body as well as on their soul.' Magdalena was eleven and Jacob was seven at this time.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ Schmidt Family Papers, 1780, Moravian Archives, Winston-Salem, NC.

¹⁶⁶ Schmidt Family Papers, 1784, Moravian Archives, Winston-Salem, NC.

¹⁶⁷ Thorp, Daniel B. "Taverns and Tavern Culture on the Southern Colonial Frontier: Rowan County, North Carolina, 1753-1776." Pg. 672.

¹⁶⁸ Meyer papers 1778, Moravian Archives, Winston-Salem, NC.

The Meyer household and business were a great concern to the Elders and continued to be for many years. Even though Dorthea did not embody a good Moravian wife and mother, she did practice some of the values of Piedmont women by seeking fashionable goods and running her household as she wished.¹⁶⁹ Although allowing children to get drunk was not a common aspect of a Piedmont household, limited supervision and freedom to roam was a standard feature of these homes.¹⁷⁰ Mothers were often expected to mold the moral character of their children, and to neglect this responsibility was a signifier of poor parenting.¹⁷¹ Two years later, when the conditions of their household were not improved and the family had been ravaged by smallpox, the Elders strongly suggested that the two children should be removed from the Meyer household. Confronted by the Elders, the family agreed in the end. The children, though allowed to visit with their family, stayed in the Choir Houses.¹⁷² Despite the social expectations of the Moravians and the consequences, Dorthea intentionally challenged Moravian church policies through the conduct of her household, allotting more freedoms for herself and her family.

Married Sisters used the secrecy provided by their homes to live according to their own opinions and desired lifestyles. As certain Married Sisters began to identify themselves as not just Moravians but white women in the Piedmont, they sought control over their households and control over the raising of their children without the guidance of the Elders, mitigated by the Unity. Despite these mothers' efforts, the community uncovered their secret disobedience through vigilance and gossip. However, even when the sins of their households were exposed, Married Sisters were able to maintain control in their homes and continue to disobey the rules by

¹⁶⁹ Martin, Ann Smart *Buying into the World of Goods: Early Consumers in Backcountry Virginia* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), Pg. 7.

¹⁷⁰ Myer Papers, Schmidt Family Papers, Moravian Archives, Winston-Salem, NC.

¹⁷¹ Elisabeth W. Sommer, *Serving Two Masters: Moravian Unity in Germany and North America, 1727-1801*, Pg. 67.

¹⁷² Die Aeltesten Conferenz, 1780, Moravian Archives, Winston-Salem, NC.

directing the labor of enslaved people and raising their children to their own accord. The Brethren, although discontented, did not take overt action to punish their behavior very often. However, the homes of Married Sisters became a site of other acts of dissent that were immensely troubling to the Elders and resulted in harsh punishments.

Assisting Others in their Dissenting Acts

Some Married Sisters did not uphold their role as pious exemplars of good Moravian behavior but instead encouraged continued disobedience, especially among the youth. Through the privacy of their households and their creative skills, some women who often interacted with the surrounding Piedmont also passively participated in subverting the policies of the Church. These women fostered the desires of young Moravians for love or consumer culture instead of correcting the behavior. The few instances of collaborating between the youth and a Married Sister brought about harsh punishments from the Brethren. Salem's Elders, who were already wary of the moral decline of their community, were affronted by the intergenerational actions of their congregation members, which drew on the networks of women created by the church's gendered residential structure.¹⁷³ If younger Moravians had assistance in their deception, the Elders would have had a more challenging time putting an end to their actions. This reveals that while acts of dissent were seemingly individualistic, some were interrelated and intergenerational. Not only were Moravian youths pushing back against the rules, but older generations of women were also doing so as well in their private spaces.

The privacy of a household allowed young couples to meet and socialize while avoiding the judgments of the congregation. Married Sisters who were in charge of their homes had the

¹⁷³ Elisabeth W. Sommer, *Serving Two Masters: Moravian Unity in Germany and North America, 1727-1801*, Pg. 66.

power to allow dissent to be carried out in their space. During the love affair between Anna Steiner and an outsider man, the Elders uncovered that she received assistance when meeting with the man after they forbade any further interactions. In 1794, Married Sister Elisabeth Reich assisted Anna's relationship, likely allowing them to meet in her house. The Elders recounted in the summer that,

We have clear proof that Matthias-Reich's wife participated so closely in the distressing connection between Anna Steiner and the aforementioned Rothhaas that she no longer can be regarded as a member of the Gemeine. The matter will be discussed with her husband.¹⁷⁴

The Elders considered Elisabeth's actions so severe that they warranted expulsion from the community. Leadership also concluded that Mrs. Reich was the only one participating in the deceit, as her husband was not asked to leave. When confronted about her sins against the rules of the Brethren, the Elders wrote that she, “could not deny her past in leading Anna Steiner astray, was told that she is excluded from the Gemeine.” Upon hearing her punishment, “She then tried to excuse herself by saying that still other persons had taken part in the situation.”¹⁷⁵ Elisabeth’s endeavor to distract the Elders from her disobedience did not work, as there is no record that they forgave her and allowed her back into the community. The Unity were eager to stamp out any acts of disobedience that may have continued to spread and devalue their church policies.¹⁷⁶ However, her accusations brought another household into question and revealed not just one woman, but a network of women were involved in supporting Steiner’s actions.

¹⁷⁴ Die Aeltesten Conferenz, 1794, Moravian Archives, Winston-Salem, NC.

¹⁷⁵ Die Aeltesten Conferenz, July, 1794, Moravian Archives, Winston-Salem, NC.

¹⁷⁶ Elisabeth W. Sommer, *Serving Two Masters: Moravian Unity in Germany and North America, 1727-1801*, (Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 2000), Pg. 59.

The Elders discovered that the Licks family was also involved in assisting Anna Steiner.¹⁷⁷ Both the husband and wife were alerted by the Elders that they were guilty of great disobedience. They recorded that,

It is to be brought home to Martin Lick that we have the clearest evidence that the most essential matter between Anna Steiner and Rothhas was agreed upon in his house. We generally wished that it might be possible to remove this doubtful household from the town.¹⁷⁸

The Elders would not tolerate this behavior. With this act of disobedience along with a lengthy list of debts and poor behavior, the Lick family left the congregation and moved to a nearby community right outside of Salem.¹⁷⁹ Despite the possibility of encountering the harsh judgment and consequences of the Brethren, some Married Sisters and sometimes their husbands assisted the younger generation with their desire for a choice in marriage partners, using private spaces to which younger Moravian women would not otherwise have access.

There were other ways in which a Married Sister could assist younger congregation members besides assisting them in their secret relationships. Single Brothers started to desire the fashions that became popular in the Piedmont as access to imported goods increased. The dress approved by the Unity was practical, without flashy buckles or expensive fabrics popular in the Piedmont. Specifically, the young men began to wear,

Big shaggy hats; the hats with drooping brims, down which hang cords...waistcoats with short or without sleeves...scarlet waistcoats, large stocks, from which a silk drape must hang; big buttons; and boots on which the tops are made to hang far down.¹⁸⁰

The Unity objected to these fashions and warned the youth not to seek them and the seamstresses in Salem to not sew fashionable clothing for the men. As their way of dress visually set the

¹⁷⁷ Die Aeltesten Conferenz, July, 1794, Moravian Archives, Winston-Salem, NC.

¹⁷⁸ Die Aeltesten Conferenz, July, 1794, Moravian Archives, Winston-Salem, NC.

¹⁷⁹ Die Aeltesten Conferenz, 1804, Moravian Archives, Winston-Salem, NC.

¹⁸⁰ *Records of the Moravians*, vol. 5, ed. Adelaide Fries (Raleigh: North Carolina State Department of Archives and History, 1930), Pg. 2177.

Moravians apart from the outsiders, the Elders ruled that “changing fashions in dress shall be avoided, especially among our young people...He who dwells in our town shall dress as a Brother. Other people may have their clothes made as they please.”¹⁸¹ This type of dissent concerned the Brethren, as they saw it as an outward projection of an individual's waning dedication to their faith.

One Widowed Sister used their trade to provide young men with fashionable clothing that directly went against the directions of the Brethren, assisting with the other's acts of dissent for their own opportunities for autonomy. Sarah Buttner returned to the Salem congregation as a widow with two children and served as a weaver and tailor in the 1780s. Working on her own and not alongside other Sisters, Sarah was able to use the privacy of her home to sew the clothing without being caught in the act. The Elders complained of the services she provided, recording that “the Widow Buttner often makes such waistcoats for those who cannot get them from the tailors in the Brothers' House.”¹⁸² Assisting the Single Brothers by making modern clothing, Buttner participated in their disobedience and made some extra money for her family. Like the Elders feared, the material gain appealed to both generations and inspired conspiracy to obtain it.

Married and Widowed Sisters participated in others' disobedience even if it was not always for their own benefit. Instead of serving as role models of piety, these women assisted the younger generation as they sought more freedoms than the Church allowed. Subverting the rule of the Brethren, these women used their skills and spaces to participate in the significant changes in Salem. Whether or not they benefited from these efforts, these women were behind the scenes

¹⁸¹ *Records of the Moravians*, vol. 4, ed. Adelaide Fries (Raleigh: North Carolina State Department of Archives and History, 1930), Pg. 1804.

¹⁸² *Records of the Moravians*, vol. 6, ed, Pg. 2593.

and participating in the expanding generational gap between the Elders who settled the town and the younger members who were born or grew up in the Piedmont.¹⁸³

Response of the Elders

By increments, the women's disobedience pushed the Unity to adjust their expectations. Married Sisters used the spaces in which they resided to participate in a larger trend of disobedience amongst the congregation in pursuit of their own aspirations. This battle lasted well into the 1800s, and though the Unity attempted to address childrearing and slave ownership issues, disobedience continued. While the Elders of the Salem gemeine never gave up outright, they slowly started to turn a blind eye to certain behaviors. The slow process of change seems to have started in the 1780s. Salem's Elders reflected on the towns surrounding Salem, recording that,

The most trouble-some matter is that the inhabitants have for the most part deviated from their goal than they had in the beginning. Accordingly, many have no understanding of gemeine [concept], seek after their own cause more than that of the Saviour, negligiren [neglect] the training of children, and therefore have not imported the fact that [the children] are growing up for the gemeine or are accepted into the care of the gemeine. Thus, a troubled Prospect emerges for the future and it looks very doubtful that gemeine understanding will again be found in Bethania.¹⁸⁴

The Unity realized that their "concept" of Moravian piety and values was not sustainable in Bethania among the youth. Misbehavior flourished in this town that was closely tied to the Piedmont through material goods, farming, and intermarriage; it could not be corrected in the eyes of the Salem Elders.¹⁸⁵ The family matters in Bethania were especially upsetting, as parents were blamed for the poor upbringing of their children. Indeed, Married Sisters in Bethania and their husbands were understood to be a source of the generational issues affecting the Moravian

¹⁸³ Allyson Atwood Wooten, "Hauben, Waistcoats, and Gowns: The Invention of Moravian Identity through Dress in Salem, North Carolina, 1780-1830," Pg. 13.

¹⁸⁴ Die Aeltesten Conferenz, 1780, Moravian Archives, Winston-Salem, NC.

¹⁸⁵ Elisabeth W. Sommer, *Serving Two Masters: Moravian Unity in Germany and North America, 1727-1801*, Pg. 58-60.

communities. Especially in an area that was not as heavily policed by the looming presence of the Unity and close quartered neighbors, parents were the only force in these surrounding towns that could surveil the conduct of children. Although the families in Bethania were not as restricted to private home spaces, the miles between the two towns created a space that was more private than the homes and shops in Salem. Bethania seems to be the first town to experience a loosening of the policies of the Moravian Church. Over the next 70 years, rules would continue to change in the other surrounding towns as well as in Salem itself.

Disobedient women's gravitation towards slavery and Piedmont culture, and illicit use of their private quarters away from Moravian ideals, encouraged a movement towards slavery that changed the society and economy in Salem. The gemeine slowly started to loosen its restrictions on policies such as marriages and slavery. As the Elders in Salem started to ease some restrictions on the white members of the town, they also started to restrict the freedoms of Black Moravians in their congregation, becoming more segregated. White Moravian families could enforce their racial superiority more openly.¹⁸⁶ The Unity started to encourage the harsh control of Black individuals, especially as stories of slave revolts permeated the Piedmont, to ensure that Salem would not experience such an event.¹⁸⁷

Conclusion

Despite their use of private spaces, Married Sisters participated in shaping the Moravian community through their disobedience. Whether they secretly used enslaved labor, raised their children by their own values instead of the policies of the Church, or assisted other community members with their acts of dissent, Married Sisters were often actors in the background who

¹⁸⁶ S. Scott Rohrer, *Hope's Promise: Religion and Acculturation in the Southern Backcountry*, Pg. 162-163.

¹⁸⁷ Jon F. Sensbach, *A Separate Canaan: The Making of an Afro-Moravian World in North Carolina, 1763-1840*, Pg. 184-185.

were influencing the progression of change in the Moravian gemeine of the Piedmont. Understanding how these women participated in the more significant trend of disobedience through the means of their private spaces and maternal roles, reveals a more complicated experience of white women in colonial America. Married Moravian women were being disobedient and secretive, sometimes even from their own husbands, in order to secure their ideal lifestyle. Through their actions, younger Moravians were also inspired to dissent. Whether raised in a disobedient household or assisted in their own efforts for autonomy. Indeed, the actions of Married Sisters correlated with the actions of the Moravian youth, creating change over time in their congregation. Married Sisters' ability to influence other members of the gemeine disturbed the Elders, as not only were they being disobedient, but they were also sharing their impious acts with others. This Choir of Sisters established their presence in the public culture of the Piedmont by being secretive in their private spaces. These women were able to affect their community and push back against rules of the gemeine that infringed on their autonomy.

Conclusion: Moravian Sisters as Women of the Piedmont and the Early Republic

As the Moravians settled into the Piedmont, the congregation members began to challenge the policies of their church. Exposed to the materialistic, racially mixed, and freer lifestyle of their non-Moravian neighbors, Brothers and Sisters challenged the Unity's concept of *gemeine* and embraced aspects of Piedmont culture. While Moravian men could challenge the restrictions on their conduct through disobedience, such as making unauthorized purchases and moving their families beyond the surveillance of the Elders, Moravian women had to develop tactics to push against the restrictions that dictated most aspects of their lives. Scholars have yet to answer the question, how and why did Sisters participate in changing the Moravian policies and traditions? Moreover, what were the stakes of their dissent?

While individual women carried out most acts of dissent, Sisters still used common tactics depending on their designation as Single or Married in the community. These titles dictated the social and spatial restrictions that the women had to navigate. Further, the desires of a Single Sister and a Married Sister differed and influenced their disobedience. The Single Sisters and Married Sisters typically used different tactics with different end goals. Single Sisters were concerned with the physical restrictions of the church, which dictated where they lived, whom they interacted with, whom they married, and what jobs they would perform. These Sisters negotiated these restrictions often by avoiding surveillance through private spaces or escaping to the less restrictive towns of Bethania and Bethabara. On the other hand, Married Sisters often used their private home spaces to defy the Elders' rules. While their tactics and

goals were different, both Choirs of Sisters were shaped by the cultural and spatial standards of Moravians and the Piedmont.

The influences that are often glossed over in the analysis of Moravian women's disobedience in Salem include the racial hierarchy slowly embraced by leadership, spatial restrictions, and freedoms of Salem and the surrounding towns. These features of life in the Piedmont were formative to the experiences of Moravian women. By looking at the stories of Salem's Sisters through the lens of disobedience, space, and constructions of whiteness, their role in the development of the Moravian church is revealed. White Moravian women tried to gain freedoms that reflected those of women in the Piedmont, which allowed them to practice mobility, choose their work, form relationships, and conduct their households without the oversight of the Elders. The stories of these Sisters clarify the early history of Moravians in the Piedmont region while also adding to the historical narrative of women in the Early Republic.

In the larger picture of Moravian history, Sisters were a part of a larger retaliation against the surveillance of the gemeine. Consequently, their stories also provide a glimpse into the Unity's struggle to preserve their control over the congregation members. Despite the efforts of the Elders to supervise the women in their community, the Sisters used different methods to escape scrutiny and pursue their own desires. However, the Sisters in Salem were not unique in their disobedience. The events in Salem were taking place alongside similar struggles in other Moravian communities. Notably, the communities of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania and Herrnhut, Germany were also experiencing conflict between congregants and leadership.¹⁸⁸ Even though all three communities included women who participated in dissent, the disobedient women in Salem

¹⁸⁸ For more information on the conflict in Herrnhut, read Elisabeth W. Sommer's, *Serving Two Masters: Moravian Unity in Germany and North America, 1727-1801* (2000) and for more on the conflict in Bethlehem, read Gillian Gollin's *Moravians in Two Worlds: A Study of Changing Communities* (1967).

were navigating a society that was increasingly relying on enslaved labor. The growing popularity of a slave-based economy in the Piedmont affected acts of dissent in Salem. Sister's dissent in the Salem community provides a different perspective on the conflict within the Unity and their adjustment to a changing society.

The Moravians of Salem merit consideration alongside the many colonial women in the Piedmont who renegotiated their social status on the eve of the Revolution. There has been little analysis of gender and race in the Piedmont during this period. However, the experience of Moravian Sisters illuminates how racial hierarchy affected the lives of white women. White women primarily sought ways to use their positions in the home and their larger communities to gain more power in the patriarchal society of the Early Republic. Through the stories of white Moravian Single Sisters, we see that women who belonged to devout traditions of Christianity were navigating their place in the developing American republic. While seeking freedom from the patriarchal control of the Moravians, some gained freedoms that were not typically allowed by the Brethren.

Recalling Rosemarie Zagari's question regarding the benefits of the American Revolution, we find one answer among the Moravians women. While Sisters rejected the patriarchal power of their church community, most of them then embraced the patriarchy of the Piedmont. Some women gained freedoms that empowered them to perform work or have relationships that would have also been rejected by Piedmont society, however, most dedicated themselves to a emerging patriarchal society based on racial hierarchy. These dissenting Moravian women traded the surveillance of the Brethren for the guidance of husbands and fathers. By understanding the experiences of Moravian women, we in turn better understand the Piedmont in the period of the Revolution as a place where women shared new social scripts and

embraced a culture that allotted them more autonomy. Regarding the broader American Revolution, even in controlled communities with little access to literature, sentiment for some form of personal independence was prevalent among these women. Even under a household patriarchy, women could exercise some limited freedoms in the early Republic. The ideas shared among individuals while working or socializing became desires that were sought after. Indeed, white Moravians, despite the desires of their leadership to abstain from participating in the Revolution, could not avoid it.

While the experiences of white Moravian women contribute to our understanding of Moravian and colonial history, there is another side to this analysis that has yet to be fully explored; the dissent of Black Moravian women. Free and enslaved Black individuals were accepted into the *Gemeine* in Salem, yet had different experiences from white members. The spaces they could navigate differed from those of white women, and their actions, especially in the late 18th century, were scrutinized by the Elders who feared an uprising. Black Moravian women struggled to find their place in a community that believed they were worthy of spiritual salvation, but not physical freedom. In order to fully understand the complexities of the Salem community, future scholars should look to the stories of Black Moravians, and further complicate the narrative of Moravian history.

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