

Herbst, Johannes ^[1]

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by George Bowling, 1988

23 July 1735–15 Jan. 1812

Johannes Herbst, Moravian ^[2] composer, was born at Kempten, Allgäu, Germany, to Lutheran ^[3] parents. He was educated at Hernhut, Germany, where he served an apprenticeship in clockmaking. From 1762 to 1766, Herbst worked in the Moravian children's schools in England. He then returned to Germany, was ordained deacon in 1774, and served the Moravians ^[2] in Gnadenfrey for six years. Subsequently, he was called to Lancaster, Pa., and emigrated to the United States with his wife, Rosine Louise Clemens. Their three children—Sophie Louise, Johann Ludwig, and Samuel Heinrich (who died young in 1786)—were left behind in Germany to be educated in Moravian schools.

In 1791 Herbst moved to Lititz, Pa., where, for almost twenty years, he served first as assistant pastor, then pastor. Among his many responsibilities he led the worship services, directed music, played the organ when necessary, and kept "the official Diaries, Minutes, and Financial Accounts of the Congregation." Herbst composed anthems for special days in the Moravian religious calendar and copied music that was used in the Moravian schools. A major accomplishment at Lititz was his music collection. In the catalogue of music he compiled in 1795, and afterwards updated regularly, he arranged pieces alphabetically according to the first words of the text, not according to the composer. Apparently this was a standard procedure for early catalogues of music in Pennsylvania Moravian settlements.



Image courtesy of the Moravian Church Archives, Bethlehem, PA.

^[4]Herbst is considered the most prolific composer among musicians who served the Moravian church in America. The present catalogue of Moravian compositions, derived from that compiled by Herbst in 1795, lists more than one hundred compositions by him. About fifty of them were probably written in America. According to one source, "A few of his European compositions are expressive and even audacious, but most of them are rather dull and uninteresting." When Herbst arrived in this country, his style of composition underwent a change. He "attempted larger forms, wrote more florid and independent parts for the strings, and added wind instruments to his orchestra." In the Moravian settlements, Herbst's anthems were popular, apparently because of their plain, obvious style.

In 1811 Herbst was called to Salem ^[5], N.C. Two days prior to leaving Lititz, he was made Bishop of the Moravian Church. However, he served as pastor of the Salem congregation only a few months before his final illness. Despite ill health, he remained interested in church music and continued to contribute manuscripts of performing parts to the congregation's library. His death in Salem was noted both within and outside the Moravian community. Afterwards the Elders' Conference took the unusual action of instructing one of its members to contact a Raleigh printer and ask that "the home-going of our departed Brother, Johannes Herbst, shall be announced in a suitable manner in the public papers."

References:

Hans T. David, *Musical Life in the Pennsylvania Settlements of the Unitas Fratrum* (1959).

Hans T. David and Albert G. Rau, *A Catalogue of Music by American Moravians, 1742–1842* (1938).

Marilyn Gombosi, *Catalog of the Johannes Herbst Collection* ^[6] (1970).

Additional Resources:

The Life and Music of Johannes Herbst. Program Book for Symposium Celebrating the Life and Music of Johannes Herbst. Old Salem: <http://issuu.com/oldsalem/docs/herbst-symposium> [7]

Johannes Herbst (1735-1812), Moravian Minister and Musician. This Month in Moravian History: http://www.moravianchurcharchives.org/thismonth/12_02%20Johannes%20Herbst.pdf [8]

Image Credits:

The Museum of Joannes Herbst. Published on Apr 30, 2012. Old Salem Museums and Gardens along with the Moravian Music Foundation present A Concert Celebrating The Music of Johannes Herbst (1735-1812). Friday April 20, 2012. See [moravianmusic.org](http://www.moravianmusic.org) for more information. Available from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EcFuSQqVaAw> [9] (accessed July 24, 2013).

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