Kramsch, Samuel Gottlieb [1]

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by William S. Powell [2], 1988

7 Sept. 1756–2 Feb. 1824

Samuel Gottlieb Kramsch, minister, educator, and botanist, was born in Rudelstadt, Silesia, the son of Lutheran pastor Johann Gottlob and Ursula Regina Kahl Kramsch. He was educated at the Moravian school at Gnadenberg. After working briefly in an apothecary shop, he accepted a temporary teaching position which he discovered to be to his liking. Already proficient in Latin, Greek, and French, he thought briefly of studying medicine, chemistry, or natural philosophy. Teaching, however, appealed to Kramsch, and in 1783 he was called to head a boys' school at Bethlehem, Pa. En route to America in the summer of that year, he saw the last English fleet returning to England after the American Revolution [3]. Reaching Bethlehem on 6 November, he soon was ordained a deacon of the Moravian church and in addition to teaching was the spiritual leader of the single brothers in the town.

In 1788 Kramsch was called to Salem [4], N.C., as a teacher and as spiritual leader of the single brothers there. He soon established a practice which he followed for sixteen years: preaching regularly in a thirty-mile-area around Salem, often to Lutheran and Methodist congregations as well as to Moravians [5]. On at least one occasion he was invited to preach to a Baptist congregation. He sometimes baptized, married, and buried people without regard to their denomination when no other clergyman was available. At a funeral in 1800, before the Episcopal church was established in the state, he used the "English Church burial liturgy" in compliance with the dying request of a man over ninety.

In addition, Kramsch taught in the boys' school and in February 1789 began English reading classes for men; in December he also began an evening school for older boys. Between 1790 and 1792 he was head of the boys' school, and in the spring of 1791 was one of those who dined with George Washington when he was in Salem. Kramsch conducted the president on a visit to the school, and Washington also observed one of Kramsch's reading classes. In 1792, he was called to take charge of an English-speaking congregation at Hope some distance from Salem. Because he was still single and Moravians expected their clergymen to be married, he went to Pennsylvania in August and was back by early December with his bride, the former Susanna Elisabeth Langaard, daughter of a professor at the Bethlehem Female Seminary and herself a gifted teacher and musician. They served the Hope congregation well until mid-January 1803, when the family, now including daughters Louise Charlotte [6] and Christiana Susanna, settled in Salem.

Kramsch in Salem became associate pastor and established a girls' boarding school. Under his direction plans were made, the cornerstone was laid on 6 Oct. 1803, and a teaching staff was engaged; on 15 May 1804 the first students arrived to enter what would become Salem College [7]. Other students arrived from various parts of the state and from as far away as Georgia to study under several good teachers, including the Reverend and Mrs. Kramsch. In mid-November 1805, however, it was discovered that "Br. Kramsch in his associations with the sisters and children of the Girls Boarding School has behaved in a most improper and objectionable manner." Exactly what he did is not recorded, but he was removed from his position at the school, excluded from the Communion, and removed from the Board of Elders.

For a time Kramsch became a shopkeeper, while his wife was named to look after the women visitors to Salem. In 1813 he was recalled to Hope where he served faithfully and well until 1819, when failing eyesight forced his retirement. He underwent operations on his eyes—in Raleigh, by Dr. Calvin Jones [8], in 1814 and in Salisbury in May 1823—with moderate success. His last years were spent in Salem where an apartment at the school was made available to the family, and he was buried in Salem.

Outside North Carolina Kramsch was known as a botanist. He studied, identified, recorded, and reported plants in both Pennsylvania and North Carolina and corresponded widely with other botanists. He also took his pupils on field trips. In North Carolina he was visited by such noted botanists as Henry Izard, August Gotthold Vemler, Ludwig David von Schweinitz, and John E. LeConte, and he sent plants and seeds to still others.

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