Treasures from the Moravian Archives

The Languages of Flowers in Moravian Wachovia

In 1753 a small group of members of the Moravian Church left their American headquarters in Pennsylvania to take possession of a nearly 100,000-acre tract of land the Church had purchased at the frontier of European colonization in present-day Forsyth County, North Carolina. They called their settlement Wachovia, after the former family homeland of the leader of the Church, Count Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf. In Moravian Wachovia, settlers brought their own cultural appreciation and appropriation of the natural landscape. This exhibit shows five ways or “languages” by which flowers spoke to the Moravians, as documented in the holdings of the Moravian Archives in Winston-Salem, keepers there of over 265 years of community records.

“The Moravian Archives contained two detailed plans for the gardens at Bethabara, with complete plant lists for the beds... We believe these to be the earliest drawn garden plans with plant lists in America.” - Flora Ann Bynum (1924-2006), horticulturist and Moravian historical landscape scholar

Utility
Flowers for Subsistence and Healing in Maps and Record Books
Survival on the Carolina frontier depended on knowing what natural resources you had available, and then supplementing those resources with items brought to and created from the natural landscape. Moravians had no better mind for this task than that of Philip Christian Gottlieb Reuter (1728-1777), who was the group’s chief surveyor. Not simply adept at finding boundaries in the landscape, Reuter created maps and record books now found in the Archives that document both Wachovia’s plant resources and the new settlers’ planted choices.

Study
Flowers in Natural History and Botany in Maps and Letters
Moravian Wachovia was founded in 1753, the same year that Linnaeus published Species Plantarum, the first catalog of plants using binomial nomenclature. A new passion for discovering, naming, and placing in relationship the wide variety of flora and fauna in the world soon reached into the educated of Wachovia as well. A first generation of settlers needed to make use of their environment. A next generation took time to catalog, study, and appreciate the diversity of creation. Lists and letters in the Archives document their efforts, especially that of renowned natural historian and mycologist Lewis David de Schweinitz (1780-1834).