

The Breweries and Distilleries of Bethabara

1756-1814

Jason Melius, 4/18/2018

On October 8, 1753, fifteen Moravian Brethren began their journey from Bethlehem, Pennsylvania to the Moravians' newly acquired Wachovia tract in North Carolina. The group traveled the Great Wagon Road and arrived at what would become Bethabara on November 17, 1753.

Brother (Br.) Henrich Feldhausen was one of the eleven specially selected Brethren who were to remain and lay the groundwork for the settlement of Wachovia. Born December 20, 1721 in Holstein, Feldhausen was a shoe-maker, carpenter, mill-wright, cooper, sieve-maker, turner, and farmer. He also did most of the hunting for the Brethren until livestock could be purchased.¹ He would eventually become Bethabara's first distiller and brewer.

From late 1754 until July, 1755, Feldhausen and Jacob Pfeil were in charge of Bethabara's tannery. On July 2, 1755, Feldhausen established Bethabara's first carpentry shop, where he built chests, storage boxes, the hoppers and mill stone cases for the mill, and even shaped the millstones. When the brewery/distillery was constructed in December, 1756, Feldhausen assumed the role as the community's distiller and brewer. He remained the brewer/distiller until he was expelled from Wachovia and sent back to Bethlehem on June 17, 1762.²

Christian Pfeiffer likely took over Feldhausen's duties. Pfeiffer arrived in Bethabara on October 11, 1755. He served as a vestryman from 1756 to 1759.³ Pfeiffer was listed as the brewer for Bethabara in the "Catalogue of the Inhabitants of Bethabara in Wachovia." In that same list, Nils Petersen (born April 3, 1717 in Holstein) was listed as the community's distiller, and Peter Mücke served as the apprentice to both men.⁴

Christian Pfeiffer died in Bethabara at two o'clock on the morning of November 22, 1772.⁵

While the majority of the trades had been moved to Salem by 1774, the brewery and distillery in Bethabara were still in operation.⁶

¹ Fries, Adelaide L. *Records of the Moravians in North Carolina. Vol I: 1752-1771*. Edwards & Broughton Printing Company, Raleigh. 1922. Page 73.

² Ibid. 103, 123, 133, 160-61, 247.

³ Ibid. 121, 209, 426.

⁴ Ibid. 343-5.

⁵ Fries, Adelaide L. *Records of the Moravians in North Carolina. Vol II: 1752-1775*. Edwards & Broughton Printing Company, Raleigh. 1925. Page 691.

⁶ Ibid. 831.

The brewery/distillery produced beer, brandy, and whiskey. The beer was principally consumed by the Moravians for refreshment and extra calories while working in the fields and doing hard labor. Whiskey primarily sold to non-Moravians through Bethabara's tavern and store. Brandy was made from blackberries, peaches, and apples, and primarily used for medicine. Like the beer and whiskey, the brandy was used by the Moravian doctors and sold to non-Moravians.

According to the monthly inventories for 1764, the Brethren were keeping an average of 270 gallons of brandy on hand and an average of 40 gallons of rye whiskey. Beer was only recorded for April, May, and June, with 90 gallons each month.⁷

The first brewery, constructed in 1756, was a log building with a brick chimney. It stood across the street from Bethabara's surviving 1788 Gemeinhaus. According to a building inventory taken in 1761, the brewery was valued at £50.⁸

In 1777, the Brethren decided to build a new distillery and brewery. This new structure was 66 feet long and 36 feet wide. The building had a cellar; the first floor made of stone and the second of brick. Plumbing, in the form of wooden pipes, supplied the building with water. Living quarters for Bethabara's brewer and stiller, Peter Mücke and his wife, were located on the building's second floor. The new brewery and distillery began operations on December 1, 1778.⁹

On December 2, 1802, the Bethabara brewery and distillery caught fire and was destroyed. Shortly after, the Brethren decided to rebuild. In order to conserve cost the new structure would be built on the foundation of the previous, using surviving construction materials. It measured 36 feet by 28 feet when it was completed in 1803.¹⁰ The third distillery and brewery stood adjacent to the rebuilt house. It is not known when this distillery was torn down, but it continued in operation until at least 1814, when Bethabara's last distiller, Johann Christian Fockel, moved away.¹¹

The house, named the 1803 Herman Buttner Distillery, still stands in Historic Bethabara Park today. It is the oldest distiller's house still standing in Forsyth County.

⁷ "Naturalien Tabelle den Monatlichen Bestand " [Monthly Table of Natural Produce], 1764/65. Moravian Archives, Southern Province, Winston-Salem, NC C122:3.

⁸ "Appendix to the Account from Bethabara. L.A. buildings valued, 1761." Moravian Archives, Southern Province, Winston-Salem, NC. C122:7.

⁹ Fries, Adelaide L. *Records of the Moravians in North Carolina, Vol III: 1776-1779.* Edwards & Broughton Printing Company, Raleigh. 1926. Pages 1267-8, 1270.

¹⁰ Fries, Adelaide L. *Records of the Moravians in North Carolina, Vol VI: 1793-1808.* The North Carolina Historical Commission, Raleigh. 1943. Pages 2716, 2751.

¹¹ Fries, Adelaide L. *Records of the Moravians in North Carolina, Vol VII: 1809-1822.* State Department of Archives and History, Raleigh. 1947. Page 3230.