

History of the 1803 House

In 2003, The Friends of the 1803 House celebrated the passing of 200 years since Jacob Ehrenhardt, Jr. built this stone, Federal-style home for his wife Susanna and four daughters. He located it just south of the Moravian Church on a plot of land owned by his father; outside of the confines of the “congregational village” of Emmaus, but close to the heart of the settlement – the church. For us, the story of Jacob and his house begins with his father.

On land originally granted to William Penn and his father by King Charles II of England, German settlers began to settle into this area (known by the Lenni Lenape as “maguntsche,” or feeding place of the bears) in the early 1700s. Moravians had established the industrial settlement of Bethlehem in 1741, and local settlers Jacob Ehrenhardt and Sebastian Knauss found themselves drawn to the church. They wanted to have the Moravian church establish a congregation in this area, so they donated a large portion of their land warrants for the creation of a “gemein-ort;” this was a closed congregational village in which people of similar spiritual needs could live and work together in harmony. They also built a small log church in 1742 on what would become the settlement’s cemetery God’s Acre. In 1746 a schoolhouse was built, and in 1747 the local Moravian congregation was founded. Eleven years later the village was surveyed and a map drawn. In April 1761, the name Emmaus was given to the settlement by Bishop Spangenberg, from a hymn he’d written recalling Christ’s appearance to two of his disciples on the road to Emmaus (in part: “Now here we build a village small; toward its completion we give all. Here, too, our hearts within shall flame – Emmaus, then shall be its name!”).

The Moravian faith in which Jacob, Jr. was raised was one of strict adherence to the rules of the church. One couldn’t travel without permission of the “Warden,” no meetings could be held in the dark,

History of the 1803 House

marriages had to be approved by the church elders, and restrictions against noise and youthful playing were strictly enforced. The Moravians refused to bear arms, swear oaths or to take part in political discussions. When trouble arose between the English king and the colonies, young Jacob and his community were faced with a series of events which sorely tried their faith. They were asked to swear an oath which would break their allegiance to King George III, and they were required by the Continental Congress to join the Pennsylvania Militia. Fines, imprisonment and confiscation of property faced those who refused to participate. The church diaries kept by the Moravian ministers make no mention of who was imprisoned for his faith, or who broke with his faith and joined the militia. No mention was made of the fact 12 men from Emmaus did enlist in the Continental Army or that in 1782, 22 year-old Jacob Ehrenhardt, Jr. joined the Northampton County Militia. Jacob and the 11 other men would return from the war to live out their natural lives and each would find his last resting place in God’s Acre.

In addition to a modest gravestone in the church cemetery, Jacob leaves behind his handsome Federal-style home. In 1975, Robert Rodale donated the house and its surrounding property to the borough of Emmaus. He made a generous donation to help with repair and restoration costs, with the provision this amount be matched by the community and the house be operated as a museum. Today, the Ehrenhardt house is administered by the Friends of the 1803 House, Inc. It has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places and serves as a living classroom for the community at large. Through scheduled tours and various special events throughout the year, children and adults can obtain a glimpse into the lifestyle of the inhabitants of colonial Emmaus into the lives of Jacob and Susanna Ehrenhardt and their four daughters.