

Bethlehem Moment: Henrietta Benigna opens a girl's seminary, 1742

The Bethlehem Gadfly Bethlehem Moments, Fun Stuff September 18, 2019

(Latest in a series of posts on Bethlehem Moments)

Bethlehem Moment 12

City Council

September 17, 2019

Jim Petrucci

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Read by Joseph Petrucci

[video](#)

Bethlehem Moment: May 4, 1742

On May 4th, 1742, 16-year old Countess Henrietta Benigna, daughter of Count Zinzendorf, opened a girl's seminary school in Germantown, Pennsylvania. Initially, the school taught 25 pupils and focused on reading, writing, religion, and the household arts. Seven weeks after the school was founded, it was moved to Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Three years later, it was moved to Nazareth and then returned permanently to Bethlehem in 1749.

In 1785, the school expanded its charter, began accepting girls from outside the Moravian Church, and changed its name to Moravian Female Seminary. The school itself built a tremendous reputation. In fact, as president, George Washington personally petitioned for the admission of his great-nieces. Eventually, in 1945, the Seminary was merged with a local boy's school to form the coeducational institution we now know today as Moravian College.

As the first all-girls boarding school in the New World, the Moravian Female Seminary holds a special place in the history of education in America. Not only was it a school founded by women and for the benefit of women, but it was also one of the first schools in the New World to open itself to Native American children. This is the legacy of Henrietta Benigna. Henrietta founded the school on the basis that all deserve a quality education, and she did it in a time when that wasn't a popular opinion. As various stakeholders in the City of Bethlehem today, we should feel proud of this moment in history and look to replicate the principles that Henrietta Benigna displayed back in 1742.

The [J. G. Petrucci Company](#) has been working in Bethlehem since the early 90's, completing such projects as the Perkins on the Southside, the Moravian Health and Science Center, and ten projects in LVIPVII – including Curtiss Wright, Cigars International, and Synchronoss.

Resources

<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.32044089399828&view=1up&seq=38>

<https://books.google.com/books?id=Ogc1AAAAIAAJ&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q=Countess%20Benigna&f=false>

<https://www.mcall.com/news/local/bethlehem/mc-pictures-timeline-bethlehem-pa-history-20160610-photogallery.html>

<https://www.bapl.org/local-history/local-history-timeline/bellhouseschool/>

<https://www.moravianacademy.org/Our-Story/Our-History>

<https://www.geni.com/people/Countess-Benigna-von-Zinzendorf/6000000038018709862>