

## Strangers' God's Acre (1759-1847)

During the French and Indian War (1754-1763), refugees frequently flocked to Bethabara for protection. Moravians settled displaced families in cabins near their gristmill, about a mile downstream Monarcas Creek from town. As threats continued, fear mounted that the nearby Cherokee would join French forces, and Moravians built a protective stockade for their fearful guests. Indians never attacked, but in 1759 a typhus epidemic raged across the backcountry. In early October, a refugee child, Michael Woerly, died, but there was no place to bury him.

Moravians quickly laid out a new God's Acre for outsiders (strangers) on a hillside near their mill. Surveyor Christian Gottlieb Reuter planned and staked the boundaries for the graveyard, and Michael Woerly's grieving family buried his little body in the children's section on Oct. 5, 1759.

Following Moravian custom, Reuter designed the graveyard in four sections, segregating males from females and adults from children. Graves were oriented west to east, facing the rising sun.

## Dobbs Parish God's Acre

Although Moravians were a separate denomination, colonial law required Wachovia also become a parish of the Church of England. Thus, in 1755 the Colonial Assembly established Dobbs Parish and, officially, the Strangers' God's Acre became Dobbs Parish God's Acre. During the Revolutionary War, North Carolina abolished the parish system. For the graveyard, nothing changed but the name.

## The 19<sup>th</sup> Century

Local families continued the graveyard until at least 1847. Records show they buried 98 bodies, many of which were placed outside the original boundary. Survivors memorialized some graves with Moravian-style gravestones. Fieldstones or wooden stakes marked others, and spreading periwinkle covers most of the graves.

Archaeologists have examined and mapped Reuter's original plot and the surrounding area. A list of people interred in the Strangers' God's acre is available at the Historic Bethabara Park Visitor Center.

# The Strangers' God's Acre

at

Bethabara Mill Site  
1759-1847

Historic  
Bethabara  
Park 1753

Site of the First Moravian Settlement in North Carolina

