Oldest Building in Bethlehem Gets a Facelift
Historic Bethlehem Museums & Sites Completes Shutter Restoration Project

BETHLEHEM, PA, April 2021 – The oldest building in Bethlehem, the 1741 Gemeinhaus, has a new look and been beautified with the restoration of their exterior shutters which were handmade with handwrought hardware and reinstalled after extensive renovation to the façade of Moravian Museum located on 66 W. Church Street, Bethlehem, PA. The old shutters were removed in January to make way for the installation of the restored, historically accurate shutters on Earth Day, Thursday, April 22 at 10:00 am. This work is being done in preparation for Historic Moravian Bethlehem’s potential nomination to become a World Heritage Site.

A total of 88 shutters on the building have been refurbished and painted with the historically accurate paint color dating back to 1741. The Gemeinhaus, now maintained by Historic Bethlehem Museums & Sites (HBMS), has gone through a series of exterior appearance changes from oak log construction, to stucco over the logs, to the wood siding the building brandishes today. The oldest known photograph of the building from 1866 pictures the building with louvered shutters on the upper floors and paneled shutters on the lower floor and the shutters remain in that same configuration.

This restoration project, funded by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, became necessary as the weather elements took a toll on these wooden structures and deterioration had begun to rot the wood. R.J. Doerr Company, LLC, historical preservation contractor approved by the Commonwealth of PA handled the removal, restoration, and reinstallation of the 88 shutters using a high-lift truck and ladders to complete the installation. Repairs to the shutter dog or shutter catch, the device that keeps the shutters open against the walls, were made as necessary to safely hold the shutters in place during windy conditions. Shutters, once functional for security, lighting control, and air movement in the building, are now seen by many as just decorative. They are of increased importance for buildings with historical significance as they provide context and accurate appearance.

The 1741 Gemeinhaus, or community house, is believed to be the largest 18th-century log structure in continuous use in the United States. Moravian settlers lived, ate, slept, worshipped, conducted meetings, and welcomed visitors in this building in the early years while they built all the other buildings in what is now the first National Register Historic District in Pennsylvania.

The building was designated a National Historic Landmark in the 1970s, as birthplace and residence of Lewis David von Schweinitz, the Father of American Mycology. Since the 1960s, the Gemeinhaus has been a part of the Moravian Museum of Bethlehem. Through funds from the
Taking the World Stage Campaign, Historic Bethlehem Museums & Sites is able to restore this building which is treasured by our community, our state, our nation, and soon to be the world.

The Moravian Museum of Bethlehem is set to reopen to the public in June with a brand new exhibit, *The Moravian Legacy*. More information about the 1741 Gemeinhaus, the Moravian Museum of Bethlehem, and Historic Moravian Bethlehem’s World Heritage Site progress can be found on the Historic Bethlehem Museums & Sites [website](#).

*Historic Bethlehem Museums & Sites* is a not-for-profit institution that brings to life three centuries of American history. *Historic Bethlehem* tells the story of a small town of great influence, home to some of our nation’s early settlers, to the first pumped municipal water system in the American colonies, and to one of the world’s greatest industrial companies. *Historic Bethlehem* is located in eastern Pennsylvania, only an hour’s drive north from Philadelphia and 2 hours west of New York City. *Historic Bethlehem* is an Affiliate of the Smithsonian Institution, part of a National Historic Landmark District, and a designated site on the US Tentative List.

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