

HISTORY MAKER

DR. HANS MARTIN KALBERLAHN

Born: March 30, 1722, Trondheim, Norway

Died: July 28, 1759, Salem, N.C.

Known for: Wachovia's first physician. He cared for patients across the backcountry, often the only trained medical care for more than 100 miles, he was called "an angel of mercy," who also laid out and maintained one of the first medicinal gardens in the Colonies

When Hans Kalberlahn arrived at the Wachovia Tract with the first band of Moravian Single Brethren in October 1753, he was only the third professional medical provider known to practice in the North Carolina backcountry. Word that the Moravians had a doctor traveled quickly, and the first patient arrived just 10 days after the men settled into an abandoned cabin on the property church leaders bought the year before.

Life in the Colonial wilderness was precarious at best when the causes of infections and diseases were not yet understood and often proved fatal. Patients traveled from as far as 100 miles away or wrote letters asking for advice and medicines. He regularly traveled for days to care for those who could not make the journey. His diligent exploration of native plants and regional remedies, combined with his extensive training in Europe and the medicinal garden he established, resulted in a higher-than-usual survival rate. In five and a half years, no adult in Bethabara died in his care until the typhus epidemic that took his life.

Born in Trondheim, Norway, a center of trade and stronghold of the growing Lutheran church which prioritized comprehensive public education, Hans graduated at 15 and began a six-year stint training as a surgeon. At 21, he traveled Northern Europe to continue his studies.

He became involved with the Moravians in Copenhagen while working with their physician in Herrnhag near Frankfurt. He was particularly interested in the church's missionary work. When

they bought the Wachovia tract to reestablish relations with the Native Americans and others living in the Southern wilderness, the governing board appointed him as the physician.

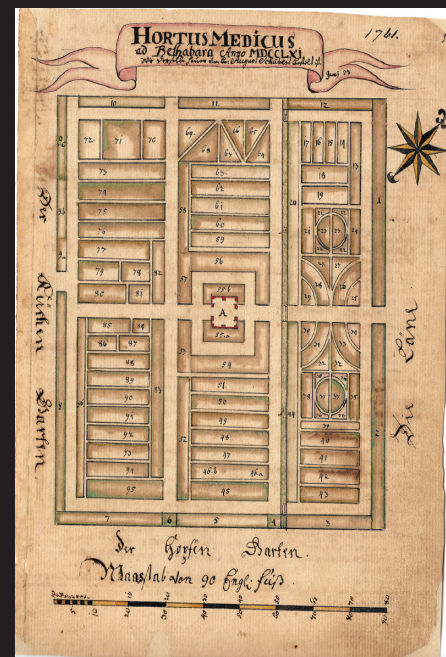
The Moravian Diaries, official accounts kept by the settlement leaders, record Kalberlahn's many patients and the treatments he administered, which included surgery, bloodletting and medicines he prepared of pine tar, minerals and herbs. He designed, cleared and fenced a medicinal garden in the Medieval abbey style that included more than 60 plants used to treat a wide variety of ailments. It is cited as one of the best documented such gardens from the colonial era.

In 1758, he set up a dedicated infirmary that some consider to be the oldest hospital in NC.

Cash was a rare commodity in rural areas. Patients paid in more practical ways – salt, livestock, bushels of corn and kegs of nails. One patient paid for his care of a dislocated hip with a bear he'd bagged on the trip from his home on the Uwharrie River. All were items the isolated outpost needed to survive.

His practice "was vital to the success of the entire endeavor," writes Christopher E. Hendricks, professor of history at Georgia Southern University. "He built a rapport with the neighboring community, provided an essential income for the support of the colony, and allowed the Moravians to fulfill their greater mission."

In 1759, many refugees sought shelter at the Bethabara mill for safety during the Cherokee War. Kalberlahn returned



MORAVIAN ARCHIVES

This 1761 diagram of the medicinal garden was designed and originally established by Kalberlahn.

from a trip to Pennsylvania to find crowded, unsanitary conditions and a shortage of food, the perfect breeding ground for sickness. Typhus raged across the backcountry of Virginia and North Carolina that year and hit Bethabara and the newly built Bethania. The doctor saw the first deaths in the settlement and was grieved by the suffering he seemed unable to ease. He was the fourth victim to fall.

Ultimately Kalberlahn's legacy was a standard of medical care that caused people to refer to him as "an angel of mercy" and the "sainted Kalberlahn."

— Kate Rauhauser-Smith