

The Moravian Records

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One of the most promising sources for the study of the Indians of the Middle West and the Middle Atlantic States is the body of records left by early missionaries of the *Unitas Fratrum* or Moravian church, who worked among the retreating tribes before their culture was submerged by that of the white man. A few of these Moravian records have already been printed, notably the White River Diaries, translations of which were published by the Indiana Historical Bureau in 1938 under the editorship of Lawrence H. Gipson; but the great bulk of them remains in manuscript at the Moravian Archives in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

There are many other repositories of Moravian records in America, but the Bethlehem collection is by far the largest and the most important. Bishop Samuel H. Gapp, the archivist, explained it in this way: "Bethlehem was the headquarters for all the Moravian missions in the New World, from Greenland to Surinam, including the West Indies and the North American continent." From all stations throughout this huge area, reports in the form of diaries were sent to headquarters; and there, in Bethlehem, a specially trained *Schreiber Collegium* or corps of secretaries, who had no other business than to write, sent out such copies of these reports as might be of interest to other centers of this great missionary church: to their international headquarters at Herrnhut in Saxony; to the English headquarters in London; to Nazareth, Lititz, and other stations in Pennsylvania; to stations in Maryland, North Carolina, Ohio, Indiana, Upper Canada, and so on. But the central repository on this side of the ocean has always been Bethlehem, where the original reports are still to be found.

For the worker in the field of American ethnohistory, these records are an essential primary source. They contain untold riches for the discriminating student. But anyone who approaches them without understanding their character and

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the circumstances under which they were produced, may be disappointed. It is the purpose of the present paper to consider the scope of these Moravian records, and to suggest some ways in which they may most profitably be used.

It has been my privilege recently to spend some time among them, working in the beautiful archives building on the campus of Moravian College. Thanks to Bishop Kenneth G. Hamilton, chairman of the archives committee, and to the archivist, Bishop Samuel H. Gapp, I have been given the opportunity of going through all the famous "green boxes" of the Indian Department. My primary purpose was to search for journals and letters written by John Heckewelder, who in 1754, at the age of eleven, came from England to America, and who, between the year 1762 (when he had his introduction to missionary work by going out with Christian Frederick Post to the Muskingum) and his retirement some fifty years later, journeyed over twenty-six thousand miles through the woods of Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, and southwestern Ontario in the service of Indian missions.

While I was engaged in this search for Heckewelder materials, I kept my eyes open for other things; and, with Bishop Gapp's very generous and understanding assistance, I was able to get a pretty good view of the whole breath-taking collection. My own earlier studies of colonial and Indian figures had made me alert to the significance of many of the documents handled. I found in these pages intimate references to Indians with whom I had already some acquaintance, and clues to riddles that had bothered scholars for a long time past. I mention this personal experience because, in what follows, I want you to know that I am not reporting from hearsay, and also that I am not altogether talking through my hat.

To understand what kind of value the Moravian records have for the ethnohistorian, it is necessary to know first what went into their making, in other words to know something about the purpose and history of the mission under whose auspices these records were made. That is essential, not primarily because it explains the wide geographical area from which the records came, but rather because a study of the motives animating the missionaries will explain the kind of contact they had both with individual Indians inside the mission community, and with the Indian nations outside it, on whose territories the mission had found domicile.

It is an unusual story. If you want it in full, read DeCost Smith's *Martyrs of the Oblong and Little Nine*.¹ Here, I can give you only a glimpse of it, but perhaps enough to serve the present purpose.

In the year 1740, one of the Moravian Brethren, Christian Henry Rauch, established a mission among the Mahican at Shekomeko and Wechquadrach in the Province of New York on the borders of Connecticut. The first convert was "Tschoop" (Job), a wretched creature who was said to look more like a bear than a man, misshapen, wild, drunken, product of a time of frustration when his people found themselves made outcasts in their own country by white men who seized their land and gave them in return a contempt that beat on the Indian's brain until it seemed as if it would crush it.

Tschoop's conversion had something dramatic and a trifle strident about it. "I am a poor wild heathen," he confessed in a letter to Count Zinzendorf, renouncing the worship of his mother-in-law's idol, which he stated was "made of leather in the shape of a man and adorned with wampum."² But the conversion of Tschoop was genuine—complete and permanent. This success, and others like it, encouraged the Moravians to believe that their method of evangelism, which was aimed at changing the whole man, educating him, teaching him arts and crafts, restoring his self-respect, and so enabling him to make the transition from old ways to new without the disintegration of his personality—that this method gave the best promise for a solution of the whole displaced-persons problem which the white man's conquest of this continent was precipitating. The Moravians had hopes of the regeneration, by their method, not merely of a few individuals like Tschoop of Shekomeko and Joshua of Wechquadrach, but of whole communities, of nations, eventually of the whole Indian race. Count Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf, the originating genius of these Indian missions, dreamed at one time of a Christian Indian state—not alien to but under the aegis of the Province of Pennsylvania.

To this great end, the saving of the Indian people from the mass degradation to which the rum trader and other exploiters of human weakness seemed bent on consigning them,

¹ The title indicates the tracts of land on which stood the villages of Wechquadrach and Shekomeko, where the mission had its beginning.

² Moravian Archives, Bethlehem; Heckewelder microfilms, American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia.

the Moravians turned their energies. They not only preached to the Indians, but lived with them, working with them in the fields, accompanying them to the woods for "sugar boiling," and imparting to them their own crafts and skills—for these missionaries worked without salary, living, as the Indians did, by what they produced with their own hands. They taught their converts to read and write, to work at trades. Joshua of Wechquadrach became a cooper. Martha became a mantua maker. The missionaries did not regard the saving of souls as a mere matter of baptism, of correct answers to catechism, or even of confession of faith. It was a matter of Christian living—a thing which is caught, if at all, by contagion, from the people one lives with.

It was a noble experiment, but the times were against it. War with the French in Canada filled these border areas, during the mid-1740's, with the fears and suspicions too readily entertained at any time of people with a strange speech and a different color. Persecution of the missionaries and their flock soon brought an end to the New York mission. The Moravians would not, however, forsake the "little Congregation of Brown Hearts," as they called their Indian brethren. They brought them, accordingly, to Pennsylvania, hoping that the enlightened religious and racial policies of the Penns would there assure them freedom and protection.

A promising mission community was established on the Lehigh River at the mouth of Mahoning Creek. This was Gnadenhütten, "Tents of Grace," a name that recurs constantly in the story of the mission. But the life of this first Gnadenhütten was short. During the French and Indian War it was destroyed by enemy Indians, and a number of the missionaries there were killed. A new beginning was made a few years later, at the close of Pontiac's War, at a place called Wyalusing on the North Branch of the Susquehanna River. The Delaware chief, John Papunhank, was the first convert here. By this time the mission had grown considerably through the addition of many Delaware to the original Mahican band. At Wyalusing, Mahican and Delaware together built a good-sized town, the houses for the most part of squared logs, with gardens, fences, orchards, and streets swept every Saturday with housewives' brooms in preparation for the Sabbath. There Joshua, who had a house, garden, and stable, worked at his cooper's trade and played the spinet—one that he had made with his own hands, under instruction from his Moravian

teachers. In later years, out west, when the mission had acquired an organ, he became the organist and leader of the church choir. Meantime, travelers up the Susquehanna were amazed at the neatness of Friedenshütten and its air of happy industry.

Another mission was established a few miles north at the Indian town of Sheshequin. This place was close to the great Indian center of Tioga, where trails converged from all parts of the Six Nations country. The missionaries here, in consequence, found themselves in touch with the great world of Indian affairs. On occasion they received embassies, as did also Wyalusing, from Indian nations in the north and in the west.

But up out of the nearby Wyoming Valley, where Connecticut Yankees and Pennamites found it difficult to agree on which of them owned the land taken from the Indian, came sounds of strife. Soon the contestants themselves appeared, armed with liquor and driven by land fever.³ Just when the situation was becoming impossible for the mission, something occurred that changed the whole outlook and brought alive again the hope that these bands of mission Indians might, by their example, work the transformation of the whole Indian race.

It seems that out on the headwaters of the Muskingum, on what is now called the Tuscarawas River in Ohio, the Delaware Council at Gekelemukpechünk of whom the forward-looking Netawatwees was the head, had been keeping itself informed of the progress made by the Christian Indians at Wyalusing in adopting the white man's ways without losing their own identity. The Great Council now decided to invite these Moravian Indians to come west and show by example how the transition from old customs to new could safely be made. Netawatwees was convinced that these Christian Indians had found the best way to ride the "wave of the future."

The Council sent official invitations to Wyalusing and Sheshequin, first by the prophet Wangomen and afterward by Chief Killbuck⁴—both important men in the history of the West. Accompanying the invitation was an offer to set aside for the newcomers a large tract of good land on the Muskingum, where they could have better farms and build better towns than any they had hitherto known.

³ DeCost Smith, *Martyrs of the Oblong and Little Nine* (Caldwell, Idaho, 1948), 161.

⁴ "Sketch of a report to be laid before the President of the United States," 9-10, Moravian Archives; Heckewelder microfilms.

The invitation was accepted. Bishop John Ettwein led his band of over two hundred Delaware and Mahican, men, women, and children, with their cattle, household goods, and family pets, across the Susquehanna River and out over the Wyalusing Path to Muncy, then by the Great Shamokin Path to Kittanning on the Allegheny, and thence to Friedenstadt (City of Peace) on Beaver Creek, where they remained for a few months before going on to the Muskingum. There they found, as the Delaware Council had promised, a thirty-mile stretch of land along the river below Gekelemukpechünk made ready for them by the evacuation of Indian families and even of two small Indian towns.⁵

Hitherto the Moravian missionaries, whose faithfully-kept diaries form the bulk of the records here discussed, had had only incidental contact with Indians outside their mission—as, for instance, in 1753 when a Band of Nanticoke about to migrate to the Six Nations country, invited the Christian Indians to take their place as guardians of the Wyoming Valley, an invitation the converts Teedyuscung (later known as “King of the Delaware”) and the Mahican Abraham accepted, with considerable impact on colonial history. But from now on, that is to say, from the year 1772 when the mission built its first towns, Schönbrunn (near the present New Philadelphia) and a second Gnadenhütten, the Moravians found themselves in the very vortex of Indian politics. Not that they wished to take a direct part in these matters, but the winds of international diplomacy blew strongly through their settlement. The diaries contain frequent reports of embassies passing through their towns from north, west, and south. In reading these documents today, one becomes aware of “cold wars” and political cross currents almost as confusing in the woods of Ohio and Indiana as those one hears of today in Europe and Asia. Though this gave the missionaries unparalleled opportunities to observe the high world of Indian diplomacy and statecraft, it also entailed involvements which in the end wrecked the settlement. When war came, they found themselves actually straddling Indian warpaths.

At the outbreak of the Revolution, the Moravians of both races tried to preserve an official neutrality, though their sympathies were with the Americans. What influence they had at

⁵ “Sketch of a report to be laid before the President of the United States,” 14-15, Moravian Archives.

Indian council fires in the West was exerted for peace, a policy entirely in line with American tactics. Delaware councils at this time were divided. Netawatwees, a good friend of the Moravians, died in Pittsburgh, October, 31, 1776, urging, as his last will and testament, that the Christian Gospel be taught to his people. Captain White Eyes and Chief Killbuck, followers of Netawatwees and friends to the Americans, were for keeping the borders quiet. Captain Pipe, on the other hand, a Delaware War Chief who feared the Long Knives' land hunger, wanted to join the British and go to war. In the end, Captain Pipe and his followers painted their faces black, crossed the Muskingum, and headed east to attack the American settlements.

This was more than John Heckewelder, who was one of the founders of Gnadenhütten, could stand. In order to prevent the shedding of blood, he sent repeated warnings to the American commander at Pittsburgh, specifying the complexion and numbers of enemy war parties, and expressing the hope that they would "get what they deserved."⁶

On March 30, 1780, Heckewelder wrote to Colonel Daniel Brodhead: "We have heard nothing at all . . . this whole winter, what the enemy are about. The snows being so deep and the weather so continually cold has I suppose prevented this, but this day I am informed that three young fellows, two Delawares and one Wyandott, have turned back from a body of warriors consisting of twenty six men. They inform, that five or six companies of warriors have gone out, two parties of Wyandotts towards Beaver Creek and the others down this river. The Half-King it appears is at the head of one of the parties and Nees hawsh (a Mohicon) heads a party of Muncies and Delawares.

"It is also reported here this day, that the Shawanese and others are gone to fight with the army at the *Big Bone Lick*, likewise that the Wabash Indians are all gone to war."⁷

The authorities in Pittsburgh knew that Heckewelder was an American patriot. If there should be any question about this, read the letters certifying Heckewelder's services to his country written by General Edward Hand, Colonel Daniel Brodhead, and others. Here are two samples:

⁶ Heckewelder to Colonel Brodhead, February 26, 1781, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

⁷ Houghton Library, Harvard University.

"In justice to the character of the Moravian Brethren resident with the Delaware Indians, I think it my duty to declare, that during my command at Fort Pitt in the years 1777 & 1778 I was regularly furnished with early and authentic intelligence of the intended movements of such of the hostile Tribes of Indians as were in their vicinity, which frequently enabled me to counteract them by open force and almost always to give the settlers such timely notice of a blow meditated against them as put it in their power to make effectual arrangements for their own security. In 1778 the United States were indebted to the active and patriotic zeal of Mr. John Heckewelder, who I firmly believe prevented the immediate commencement of hostilities between the United States and the collective forces of the Shawanese & Delaware Nations. . . .

Given under my hand at Philadelphia
the 11th day of Feby. 1800
(signed) Edwd Hand"⁸

"Philadelphia Jany 14th 1799

I do certify that I have been acquainted with the Reverend John Hackenwelder since the year 1778. That he resided on or near Muskingum River as Missionary from the United Brethren to the Delaware & other tribes of Indians during my command in the Western Department and discovered a decided and firm attachment to the cause of the United States giving me every possible information or intelligence of the enemies parties approaching our Settlements or posts, by which many of them were defeated & destroyed. That he and his colleague the Reverend David Zeisberger used every possible means to dissuade the Indians from War with the people of America and that in consequence of their attachment to us they and their followers were taken prisoners by the Enemy their property destroyed & themselves maltreated. I further certify that the Missionaries aforesaid furnished my Expedition against the hostile Indians on the Muskingum with a comfortable supply of Provisions and Forage and that their Letters of intelligence are still in my possession & may be perused if necessary.

(Signed) Daniel Brodhead
late Col. commandg the Westn Departmt"⁹

⁸ Moravian Archives; Heckewelder microfilms.

⁹ Moravian Archives; Heckewelder microfilms.

Captain Pipe was no fool. He was soon aware that John Heckewelder, as a consequence of the information sent to Pittsburgh, was causing the death of his warriors. Communicating with the British in Detroit, he was authorized to seize the missionaries and bring them, with their flock, north to Lake Erie, where they would, as the British saw it, be in no position to do further mischief. John Heckewelder's narrative of his captivity and of the journey made in the fall of the year with his wife and baby daughter, Polly, to Upper Sandusky,¹⁰ gives a picture of "wild" Indians from a somewhat unusual angle—for example, the Ottawa warrior who dressed himself up in stolen missionary clothes, and rode about camp with a nightcap on his head. At Captives Town, as the new missionary settlement at Upper Sandusky came to be called, the Brethren built themselves houses and tried to keep alive during a winter of famine.

When the missionaries were summoned to Detroit, to be examined before Major Arent S. de Peyster, the British commandant, there occurred one of those odd reversals that make history stranger than fiction. Captain Pipe, who, with his warriors on their arrival at Detroit had marched up the street to the government house shouting the "death hallo," turned out to be a man of quixote magnanimity. He could be cruel, on provocation, but what he had recently seen of these Moravian teachers did not stir up that element in his nature. He knew as well as Netawatwees had known that, in the long run, the Moravian influence was good for his people. When the British Commandant called on Captain Pipe to present his charges against the prisoners, the chief declined to make any. "These are good men," he said. "I would be sorry to see them ill-treated." The major, accordingly, dropped the case and set the missionaries free—with a gentle admonition henceforth to leave war matters alone.

Meantime certain of the American borderers, unaware of the help the Moravians and their Indians had been giving to the American cause, were working up to the hysterical outburst which was to bring so much shame upon them. Early in the spring of 1782, a considerable part of the half-starved mission Indians at Captives Town returned to Gnadenhütten on

¹⁰ John Heckewelder, *Narrative of the Mission of the United Brethren among the Delaware and Mohegan Indians* (Philadelphia, 1820). Heckewelder's original manuscript, now in the Moravian Archives, contains much detail not found in the printed version.

the Muskingum to gather what they could find of last year's corn. There, in the fields, a band of militia under a certain Colonel David Williamson found them. Approaching them with professions of friendship, the militia took them prisoners, herded them into two houses (one of which was Joshua's cooper shop), and there hacked and clubbed these unarmed people—over a third of whom were children—to death, using as tools for this purpose axes, knives, and Joshua's cooper's mallet. Joshua himself was absent at the time (he was to die later at the hands of the Shawnee in Indiana), but his two daughters, fourteen and eighteen years old, were murdered.¹¹

"Often, very often," wrote Heckewelder afterward, "has he been seen shedding tears, on this account, though he was never heard to utter a revengeful sentiment against the murderers: he however could not conceal his astonishment, that a people, who called themselves Christians, and read the scriptures, which he supposed all white people did, could commit such acts of barbarity."¹²

Gnadenhütten is still there, a beautiful little modern town that has done what it can to wipe out the stain of the massacre. A tall stone shaft raised beside the grave of these martyrs is inscribed with the words: "Here triumphed in death ninety Christian Indians March 8 1782."

One is reminded of the inscription of an Indian burial mound at Cooperstown, New York: "White man, greeting! We near whose bones you stand were Iroquois. The wide land which now is yours was ours. Friendly hands have given back to us enough for a tomb."

The massacre at Gnadenhütten did not end the mission, though it caused the defection of a few of the Indians—more through revulsion than fear—and darkened the hopes of the missionaries. It became a *cause célèbre*, among Indians as well as among white men. General George Washington, hearing of what had happened at Gnadenhütten, instructed commanders in the West to warn their men not to allow themselves to fall alive into Indian hands, since now they could expect no mercy.¹³ When Williamson, this time under the command of

¹¹ For a full and discriminating account of the massacre at Gnadenhütten, Ohio, see Rose M. Davis, "'The Tents of Grace' in Longfellow's *Evangeline: Their History and Fate*," *Pennsylvania History* (Philadelphia, 1934-), XVIII (1951), 269-92.

¹² Heckewelder, *Narrative of the Mission of the United Brethren*, 415.

¹³ Davis, "'The Tents of Grace' in Longfellow's *Evangeline: Their History and Fate*," *Pennsylvania History*, XVIII, 288.

Colonel William Crawford, came out with a force of five hundred men against Upper Sandusky, he found Captives Town deserted. But in the neighborhood were Captain Pipe and his warriors, prepared to take, not prisoners this time, but scalps. Williamson fled and escaped, leaving Crawford, who could not keep up with him, to his fate. Crawford was taken prisoner and tortured on orders from Captain Pipe, not for anything he had done himself but because he had been out with Williamson.

For many years after that, the Moravian mission, now often described in the diaries as the "wandering congregation," was buffeted about by the winds of politics and war. Under the Shawnee, Tecumseh, and his brother, the Prophet, a fierce nativist movement sprang up which reversed Netawat-wees' policy of conciliation and compromise, and put the Moravians high on the list of those who must be liquidated. In 1806, Joshua the cooper, organist, and choirmaster, formerly of Gnadenhütten and now a "chapel interpreter" in the White River mission, was burned at the stake. Horizons narrowed for the Moravians. Their former high hopes were lost in a struggle for bare survival. David Zeisberger died believing the mission to have failed. During the twenty-six years he had lived since the massacre at Gnadenhütten on the Muskingum, he had seen his flock driven from one place to another: from Captives Town to New Gnadenhütten in Michigan, Pilgerruh (Pilgrim's Rest) on the Cuyahoga, New Salem on the Pett-quotting, *die Warte* (the Watch Tower) on the Detroit River, and finally to Fairfield (more popularly known as Moraviantown) near the country of the Chippewa in Upper Canada. In this last place, a few miles east of Detroit, it remained for some time in quiet. But, during the War of 1812, the congregation again found itself in the path of armies. Always the flaming sword between them and the City of Peace! Before the Battle of Moraviantown, British forces occupied the town. After the battle, General William H. Harrison's victorious soldiers sacked and burned it.

But this time the congregation did not wander. A quarter of a mile away, across the Thomas River, they built a new Fairfield. And there you may see to this day what remains of the Shekomeko mission: some two hundred Delaware—they have almost forgotten their Mahican blood, though some of the old Mahican baptismal names still run in their families—a good-living, industrious people, commuters who work in neighboring towns but who, under Chief Omer Peters (as delightful

a gentleman as you will find to talk with in a day's drive) have preserved their own identity as Indians. Though they are members of the United Church of Canada, they honor the memory of the Moravian Brethren who led their ancestors here nearly one hundred sixty years ago. Visit them, if you wish to see a living monument to one of the noblest experiments ever made in the furtherance of race understanding.

It will be seen from this brief sketch of the mission what opportunities the Moravians had for observing the Indian world before its collapse. What use they made of these opportunities we have now to consider.

The Moravians had an educated ministry, and their church leaders pursued an enlightened evangelical policy. Theirs was not the "baptize and run" type of evangelism—count souls saved and call it a day. On the contrary, the evangelistic work was only part of a sound educational policy aimed at the good life, the all-around development of their converts. Such a policy required that the Moravian teachers should live and work with their people, and understand their personal problems.

The missionaries who made the records we are surveying were an intelligent, well-balanced, well-informed group. Their eyes were not exclusively turned inward. They were interested in all that went on around them. Not infrequently they were employed by the government to serve as advisers at Indian treaties, or, as in the case of Christian Frederick Post, to undertake dangerous ambassadorial assignments. Post, in the Ohio country in 1758, was sold by Daniel, a Delaware, to the French for value received. Daniel failed to deliver the goods only because Post had sat at Pisquetomen's fire, and the laws of hospitality (as this brother of King Beaver understood them) could not be broken to surrender him. Missionaries such as this were not overburdened by the *minutiae* of doctrine and discipline. When they met Indians, it was not the nonessential things about them that they observed. They were not looking for oddities to tickle the fancy of metropolitan audiences. Their appraisal of the Indians had regard to their essential humanity.

We find in the reports from the missionaries, and in the other records at Bethlehem, a wide range of material. In attempting any analysis of these Archives, we must note to begin with that the core of the collection is the Bethlehem Diary, the record kept by the authorities at headquarters. Its forty-four

fat manuscript volumes contain not only the local news of Bethlehem and its vicinity, but also news of all the other activities in which these wide-awake people were interested. There is news here of government doings in Philadelphia and other capitals, news of the frontier—church news and Indian news. Extracts are given from travelers' letters. David Zeisberger's journey from Bethlehem to Goschgoschink on the Allegheny can be almost as clearly followed in the Bethlehem Diary as in his own journals. The Bethlehem Diary depicts, not only the new missions of a very old church (one which had originated among the followers of John Huss in the fifteenth century), but also the expansion of a very young nation into the as-yet-unwelcoming West.

But the section of the Moravian records which is of chief concern to us here is the one known as the Indian Department, which has been just recently taken out of the old green boxes, reorganized, and rearranged for greater convenience to the student. It is here that the ethnohistorian finds his Golconda. Some time ago I stumbled on the original pages (scattered through three separate boxes) of Christian Frederick Post's 1758 journal to Venango, describing the journey that cost France her Indian allies on the Ohio and so cleared the way for General John Forbes at Fort Duquesne. These fragments were without title page or signature, but they were unmistakably Post's to anyone familiar with his handwriting, incredible spelling, and style. Since I was at the time making a study of Indian trails, this, the first version of his badly printed diary, was to me the Great Mogul. It explained discrepancies in the printed journal and cleared up the uncertainty with regard to his route. Further assistance from Bishop Gapp, whose profound knowledge of church history is matched by an acute understanding of a wide range of subjects pertinent to this inquiry, including the peculiarities of German idiom and the habits of cows on the march, cleared up what remained of the Forbidden Path mystery. Everywhere in these papers are traces of Indian personages who, after a brief appearance on the pages of state records, had disappeared from official view. Jo Peepy, for instance, a Delaware stalwart among David Brainerd's Presbyterians in eastern Pennsylvania, turns up in the Moravian records as an aged interpreter who accompanied the Moravians when they journeyed to the Muskingum in 1772, and, a year later, as the *Fremden Diener* or official receptionist at Gnadenhütten who got a meal ready for a certain

Mahican with his wife and daughter when they came on a visit from Eckpalawehunt's Town.¹⁴ Jo Peepy's wife, Hannah, was one of those murdered at Gnadenhütten.¹⁵

If you are interested in Indian biographies, after having exhausted the government records, try the Moravian Archives. Go first, if the man you are interested in was a Christian, to the list of 721 Indians baptized up to the year 1772, a list that notes, wherever possible, the man's or woman's name (Indian name and baptismal name), family relationships, tribe, place and time of baptism and who performed the ceremony, place and time of death. Then look him up in the Moravian obituaries, which are preserved in a section by themselves. Look for him also in the lists of communicants, and the separate records of baptisms, births, marriages, and deaths. Finally, look for him in the diaries of those missions where he may have lived, or, if he was not a Christian, where he is most likely to have paid a visit or in some way to have made his influence felt. Strings of wampum were being constantly delivered at one or another of the mission stations, and the messages that accompanied them from this or that chief are carefully recorded. Netawatwees and Packandgihille; Captain Pipe and Captain White Eyes; King Beaver; Joseph Brant; Pamoacan, the Wyandot Half King; Tobias, the Indian boy who slipped into the cellar and so escaped the carnage at Gnadenhütten, though the blood of his kin leaked between boards in the floor above his head and splashed on his face and hands; Head Chief Tete-pachsit, who invited the Moravians to come to the White River; Chief Little Turtle of the Miami; the Shawnee prophet, —they are all here and many more, men who played a part in the history of the West, only waiting to be brought alive again out of the pages of these Moravian records.

There are some interesting unpublished linguistic materials at Bethlehem; scraps of early Mahican vocabularies; a few letters, such as that signed by Abraham, January 2, 1752, with a German translation appended. The greatest of Moravian linguists, of course, was Zeisberger. The manuscript of his Indian dictionary is here; others of his manuscripts are in the Harvard College Library. John Heckewelder's linguistic work is for the most part in the Library of the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia. But the odds and ends

¹⁴ September 22, 1773, Gnadenhütten Diary, Moravian Archives.

¹⁵ Moravian Archives; Moravian Manuscripts (microfilms), Roll 3, frame 2067, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.

of language materials in Bethlehem are not without interest to specialists. There are seven pages of Indian verses with an interlinear translation in German. There is a note concerning the *johah*—the Iroquois cry of approbation which so much interested Conrad Weiser and Henry Melchior Muhlenberg—giving its equivalent in the Shawnee, Delaware, and Mahican languages.

The mission diaries, already mentioned as a source for biographical information, have much else besides for the ethnohistorian. Along with the routine news contained in them, are what we might call “angling shots” of the Indians at their daily chores: “sugar boiling,” farming, even hunting (for only the fruits of the chase could be exchanged for the traders’ goods the Indian stood in need of), the reception of embassies from the Six Nations country, the Wabash, the White River, the Miami, or the Mississippi.

A diary from Shamokin at the Forks of the Susquehanna (the present Sunbury) pictures some canoe loads of Iroquois warriors stopping off for the night, and, in return for the hospitality received, putting on a war dance for their hosts. The sound of the drum, the flashing of drawn swords in their hands, and the movement of their bodies—not the naked torsos of magazine illustrations, but all clad in brown coats trimmed with gold lace¹⁶—these make a colorful and surprisingly modern scene in which the Indians appear more like “gentlemen adventurers” than like the savages of conventional fiction.

One curious journal, kept during the period of wanderings in the West, is headed, “Diary of the Indian Congregation in Night’s-Lodging on the Cayahoga.” The dates are October, 1786, to February, 1787—surely a long night for this latitude. But “night’s-lodging” is a familiar Indian metaphor, meaning a visit of a year—or, it may be, of indefinite duration. The Seneca of New York State, on whose lands at Lewiston the Tuscarora have settled permanently, crack this joke about their guests: “The Tuscaroras asked if they might stop over-night; and now they remain to itch us like fleas.” The Cayuga on the Six Nations Reserve in Canada, among whom the descendants of Teedyuscung’s Delaware from the Wyoming Valley have found asylum, put it this way: “The Delawares asked if they might stay overnight; but morning never came.”

The diary entries startle one less often with instances of

¹⁶ Shamokin Diary, April 4, 1748, Moravian Archives.

violence or of primitive absurdities (like the use of emetics to clean out sin), than with the unexpected appositeness of their conditions to ours. From the Goshen Diary of December 1, 1799, for instance, one learns of an early attempt to stop inflation by means of price fixing in the meat industry: "The price as fixed by Br. Heckewelder before his departure for Bethlehem is 1 penny a lb. for the best joints, or a dollar for a whole deer, without the skin. In summer, when the deer were lean, they were sold for 3/9 each. Bear's meat is 3 pence per lb. or 6 pence for the fat only." If the price of fat in this list seems excessive, we must remember that bear's fat was used for cosmetics. And if that seems outlandish, may I remind you *we* use skunk as a base for perfumes.

It is from the Goshen Diary also that we learn of the prevalence of bad colds among Indian children in February, for the reason that, during what the diarist calls "thaw weather," it was impossible for them to go out of doors without "getting wet feet through their porous moccasins." Besides, these youngsters had a habit of breaking through the soft ice on the river, which they *would* try to cross, too late in the season.

The Moravian diaries are buzzing with movement. In their pages, one finds the primeval American forest, which it is now conventional to think of as an all-but-unbroken solitude, teeming with life like a ripe cheese. We are made to realize that the Indians were great travelers. Their woods were honeycombed with trails over which they sped on all manner of businesses: hunters combing the valleys by day in search of game, and, in the evening, still full of high spirits, peeling the bark off trees and on the bare spot thus exposed painting their exploits; runners giving the alarm yell as they approached each town to assemble the people; warriors uttering their triumphant scalp cry as they returned from an expedition; chiefs with their retinue bearing peace pipes and wampum for distant council fires; or, as happened each year among the Chippewa, whole communities traveling north to escape the September fever.

The travel journals, of which there are many, are among the best things in the whole collection; for these missionary travelers, freed while on the trail from the routine of conventional duties, had time to look around them. Fresh scenes and new contacts put life and dash into their style. Nowhere will you find *vivider* or more honest sketches of our westward-

moving frontier, during the transition period when the lands of Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Indiana were occupied jointly by white men and brown. In these pages you will see the white man and the Indian at his best and at his worst.

In John Heckewelder's journals you may read of Indians killing one another in drunken brawls, and of white men in the taverns tearing at one another until the skin of their hands hung down in tatters. From Heckewelder, however, you will learn more of the pleasures than of the discomforts of pioneer travel. He, like most of the Moravians, who had a strong vein of the artistic, had a taste for wild scenery, whether among the mountains or on the plains, long before the romantic poets had made such landscapes fashionable. He was entranced by the extent of hills spread out below him as he looked down from the summit of the Allegheny Mountains west of Bedford. He was equally delighted with the "majesty" of Indiana's Lombardy poplars, "under whose shadow," as he wrote, "the buffaloes hide from the summer sun." He wrote with enthusiasm about the "beautiful Wabash river," where it "proudly empties into the Ohio."

In 1792 Heckewelder accompanied General Rufus Putnam, as an adviser to the Indian conference at Vincennes,¹⁷ where, he said, "articles of peace were formally signed by thirty-one chiefs of the Seven Nations represented at this meeting." Traveling by boat down the Ohio, he was amazed to see the "almost continuous" herds of buffalo along the bank. His description of the Indians at the conference, though vivid, is disappointingly scrappy; but he makes up for this by an excited description of the country around, which he declared to be the best he had ever seen. "It may be said of the meadows of this country," he wrote, "that some of them are several days journey in length." They served then chiefly for the grazing of buffalo herds.

On his way west, he had skirted Indiana by way of the Ohio and the Wabash; but on his return he crossed its territory, traveling from Vincennes overland to the Falls of the Ohio. He and his party, after leaving behind them the "beautiful White River," found themselves in a wilderness "where," as he said, "we could with difficulty pass through the grape

¹⁷ "Narrative of John Heckewelder's Journey to the Wabash in 1792," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* (Philadelphia, 1877-), XI and XII.

vines and bushes." At the Buffalo Salt Lick, he said, as many as five hundred buffalo sometimes could be seen all at once. "The salt spot," he continued, "several acres in size, is so much trodden down and grubbed up, that not a blade of grass can grow and the entire woods are for miles around quite bare. Many heads and skeletons of these animals are to be found which were either shot from time to time, or had died there. From here a great many buffalo trails lead out, and we had the misfortune to take such an one instead of the right one, our guides not being with us, but when they came back again, they led us in to the right path."

If one were looking for oddities in these Moravian journals, one would certainly not want to miss the glimpses there given of medical practice on the trail. The best way to treat a bruise, Heckewelder learned from a white woman who attended to him after his horse had stepped on his foot while he was groping in the dark for his hat which a low branch had knocked off his head, was to apply old wagon grease as it ran off the wheel hub. Not having any handy, she applied a tar plaster to his foot, which healed him in no time. For earache, he noted (apparently from the same medical authority) a good remedy was the vapor of red sumac boiled in water.¹⁸

Of a cure for spider bites, this is what he learned one day in October, 1786, on his way east from the Muskingum: "Early on the 13th," he wrote, one of the Indians "while driving in the horses was so badly poisoned by a spider that he gave us to understand he must die. In a very few minutes his eyes were swollen shut, and his whole body covered with large red spots. He pointed to his heart, which, as he told us afterward, felt as if it were under a heavy weight or in a press. John Cook [an Indian] who had gone through this same experience twice in his life before, made him drink a concoction of gunpowder, tobacco, and rotten leaves, the same being also rubbed over him. At once he began to vomit, and after an hour we could see he was recovering. . . . By ten o'clock he told us to break camp. We put him on a horse and set off."¹⁹

By this time we have seen enough of the Moravian missionaries, their opportunity to observe the Indian, and the use they made of it, to be ready for the main question, which is

¹⁸ Heckewelder, "Eine Reise von Pittsburg nach Le Boeuf," Moravian Archives; Heckewelder microfilms.

¹⁹ Heckewelder, "Reise Diarium . . . 1786," Moravian Archives.

this: Just wherein lies the value of these records, the value to those, that is, who are engaged in Indian studies? Granted the scraps of linguistic material, the picturesque travel journals, the reports of Indian conferences (some of which have not found their way into government records); granted the new light thrown on trails and on Indian biographies, the question still remains: how solid and impressive a contribution do these records make to the highly specialized and well-developed modern science of anthropology? How important, for instance, are the Moravian studies of Indian religion, of council ritual, of medicine societies?

The question, so narrowed, has only one honest answer. Of formal ethnological studies, the Moravian records at Bethlehem have little to offer. Zeisberger and Heckewelder did valuable linguistic work, but, when they attempted to enter the field of ethnology, their contribution is disappointing.

Heckewelder, it is true, in his retirement wrote and published an ambitious book entitled the *History, Manners and Customs of the Indian Nations Who Once Inhabited Pennsylvania and the Neighboring States*—but that is not the work for which we have chief reason to thank him. Indeed, it was that book which produced Fenimore Cooper's travesty on the "Mingoes." When Heckewelder wrote from mere hearsay (as he did about the Six Nations—Cooper's Mingoes—getting his information concerning them from that part of the Delaware nation which had broken away from the Iroquois political system),²⁰ he could be very wrong. But when he described what he saw with his own eyes, he was excellent.

That is true of the rest of the Moravians. It was not as interpreters of Indian life but as participants in it, and as reporters of casual contacts with individual Indians (not observed as types or cases), that they made their real contribution to science.

So, if there is little formal study of the Indians in the Moravian records, what does it matter? If you want first-hand data—not someone else's synthesis of customs, beliefs, and personality traits—for your own studies of the Indian as

²⁰ The so-called "Susquehanna Delawares" (followers of Teedyuscung), a blend of Munsee, Unami, and Mahican, remained in the Six Nations orbit. Their migration from Wyoming, Pennsylvania, to Ohsweken, Ontario, where they now form a considerable block of the population of the Six Nations Reserve, is traced by the late Frank G. Speck in "The Celestial Bear Comes down to Earth," Reading Museum and Art Gallery *Scientific Publications* No. 7 (Reading, Pennsylvania, 1945).

a going concern; if you want to know how the Indian looked after his family, what pleasure he took in music, how he responded to kindness—and to cruelty; if you want to know what pride he took in his nation, to what degree he loved his garden, his hunting territory, his village; or what was his solution of the old and universal problem (which still bedevils us)—how to reconcile freedom with one's duty to society; in a word, if you want to know where the Indian's heart lay, and what promise of a native American civilization the white man destroyed by his premature coming—go to the Moravian records. They contain the materials out of which you can shape for yourselves the answers.