

This Month in Moravian History

A monthly newsletter published by the Moravian Archives in Bethlehem, commemorating events from Moravian history.

Nr. 1

Nov. 2005

The Attack on Gnadenhütten, Nov. 24 1755



On November 24, 1755, one of the greatest tragedies in the history of the Moravian Church took place. In the evening of that day, a group of about a dozen American Indians came to the mission station in Gnadenhütten, Pennsylvania, attacking the sixteen missionaries living there, killing eleven of them, looting and setting fire to the buildings. Only a few missionaries were able to escape. David Zeisberger, who was on his way from Bethlehem to Gnadenhütten, heard the shooting from a distance, but did not think anything of it. The Indian members of the Gnadenhütten congregation, who had moved to the other side of the Lehigh during the previous year, all escaped the attack.

These were not the first and by no means the last casualties in a series of conflicts between the Indian inhabitants of America and the European settlers. Combined with hostilities between the English and the French, the conflicts of these years became known as the French and Indian War (1754-1763). Moravians, who tried to remain aloof, were looked upon with suspicion from both sides.

The Gnadenhütten mission station was established in 1746 on a tract of land north of the Blue Mountains where the Mahoning flows into the Lehigh River. It is the location of present-day Lehigh, PA (and not to be confused with a later mission station with the same name in Ohio). By 1748 over 500 American Indians were being ministered to by the Gnadenhütten mission.

Needless to say, the attack on Gnadenhütten had a devastating effect on the Moravians. How could something this bad happen to good people? Spangenberg addressed this question in a letter to the Elders of the Moravian communities in America, dated December 16, 1755. He writes:

'I say to my dear Lord: Did you not hear the words of those who blaspheme against you and us, saying, "Our Lord must have been away from home when this act of murder was carried out on the Mahoning? Should the heathen, whom we praised how good a Saviour you are, now devour your people, thinking that you were not able or not willing to help your people?" My hope is that, after the disaster that hit so many poor people, we may be the feet of the lame, the eye of the blind and the encouragement to the poor and the miserable.' (*original in Moravian Archives*)

This Month in Moravian History is compiled by Paul Peucker and Lanie Graf (Moravian Archives) in cooperation with Markus Gill (Moravian Church Utrecht, Netherlands). Picture (drawing by Nicholas Garrison, Oct. 1751) courtesy of the Unity Archives, Herrnhut. Moravian Archives, 41 W. Locust St., Bethlehem, PA 18018. Tel: (610) 866-3255. info@moravianchurcharchives.org. www.moravianchurcharchives.org