

This Month in Moravian History

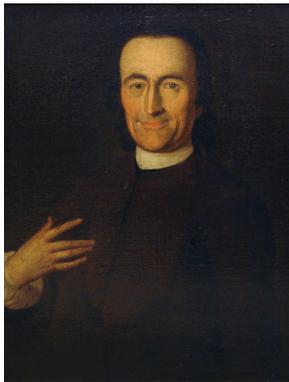
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Nathanael and Anna Johanna Piesch Seidel

This year, as we celebrate 550 years of the Unitas Fratrum, it is appropriate to remember two who were instrumental in the propagation of the gospel and the founding of many Moravian settlements in the Americas: Nathanael Seidel, and his wife, Anna Johanna Piesch. May 17 marks the 225th anniversary of Nathanael Seidel's death in Bethlehem after a lifetime devoted to the work of the church.



Nathanael's destiny seemed apparent from his birth on October 2, 1718 in Lauban, Silesia. Seidel wrote in his memoir: *Following my baptism the minister wrote a few lines to my mother noting that while anointing me in the name of the Trinity he observed I gave a smiling glance toward heaven, and therefore believed God had a special purpose for me.* Seidel took

this prophecy to heart, allowing it to shape his entire life. As a young man he trained as a cloth maker, but after joining the Moravians in 1739 quickly assumed positions of leadership within the church. In 1742 he became leader of the single brothers' choir in America and engaged wholeheartedly in the mission to the American Indians. In the following years he was involved in the early settlement of many Moravian communities in North and South America: Bethlehem (1742), Christiansbrunn (1749), Bethabara in North Carolina (1753), Berbice and Suriname (1755), Lititz (1757), West Indies (1758-59), and Hope, New Jersey (1768). In 1758 he was ordained a bishop.

Seidel married Anna Johanna Piesch in Herrnhut on October 30, 1760. Piesch had a successful career similar to Seidel's as General Eldress of the single sisters worldwide. Her decision to marry Seidel was not an easy one. She recorded in her memoir she felt orphaned by the deaths of Zinzendorf and her aunt, Anna Nitschmann. *"I was happy to go to America, but enter into marriage! That cost me dear..."* With their union they became a true "power couple" of the 18th-century Moravian church.

Nathanael took over the post of Provincial Helper from Spangenberg in 1761, and together with Anna Johanna assumed leadership of Moravian work in America, first tackling the complicated dissolution of the Bethlehem Economy.

The couple was married for 21 years until Nathanael died after a long period of failing

health on May 17, 1782. Anna Johanna, being eight years younger, subsequently entered the widow's choir in Bethlehem, and in 1784 became a helper in the widows' choir in Schoeneck and Nazareth. She died in Nazareth, age 63, on April 11, 1788. In her memoir Anna reflected on the couple's work and marriage: *Through all mistakes and shortcomings our hearts did remain faithful in intent. We had no other goal or purpose other than the Savior and His business. Through this we loved each other tenderly and shared joy and pain together.*

Let these words guide us as we anticipate the future of our church's ministry this year.

Sources: Dienerblätter and original memoirs for Nathanael Seidel and Anna Johanna Piesch Seidel; Katherine M. Faull, *Moravian Women's Memoirs*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997, 121-9. Images: portrait of Nathanael Seidel by Johann Valentin Haidt (Moravian Archives, Bethlehem), portrait of Anna Johanna Piesch attributed to J.V. Haidt (Unity Archives, Herrnhut, Germany).

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