

MARIA AGNES ROTH

Prior to June of 2009, the furthest east of the Mississippi I had ever been was going to Florida. So when my husband was offered a job for a company in Towanda, PA, I was intrigued. It sounded incredibly different from our life in New Mexico and I thought it would make a fun adventure. Shortly after arriving, however, I realized Bradford County was not the idyllic place I had imagined. I longed for the endless sunny days of New Mexico, but instead all's I got was day after day of clouds. I was used to modern homes, immaculate sidewalks and big back yards, but here seemed nothing but crumbling sidewalks along streets packed with old, ramshackle houses. Everyone seemed to have lived in the area for generations leaving me to feel out of place, missing my family and friends. My husband, on the other hand, loved his job and I knew that for the foreseeable future, Bradford County was to be my home.

The next summer my mother and I were talking about our ancestry and she made an off-handed remark about my Roth ancestors being Moravian. After I returned home, not knowing much about Moravians, I began to do a little research. After reading about its founder, John Hus, its tenets, I wanted to learn more about my actual ancestors and if they were, in fact, Moravian. I knew from a family tree my mother had that our first ancestors in this country were Johann and Maria Agnes Roth. However, I had always heard they were Lutheran missionaries. A quick search on the internet proved that my not only was my mother correct about our Moravian past, but my forefather, Johann, was actually a rather famous Moravian missionary. The biggest surprise, though, was still to come. While searching, I came upon a genealogy that listed their children. It went on to say that the two had their first child

04 Aug 1771 "Tschechsheqanun" "Tscheschequanick" (Sheshequin) on the Susquehanna River per mother's Lebenslauf, Native American village later known as Ulster, Ulster Twp., Bradford Co., PA."

As I read, I sat there stunned. Ulster, PA in Bradford County!!! I practically lived in Ulster! My husband drove through Ulster every day to get to work. I was utterly shocked. Here I had been lonely and depressed, feeling out of place in this tiny little place no one ever seemed to have heard of, and yet all this time I was actually home - my ancestral home! This place, so far from where I grew up, was actually where my ancestors were originally from, this was where they began their married life together - Bradford County, PA was in my blood!

I quickly began to find everything I could about Johann and Maria Agnes. As I read more about them I began to feel increasingly close to my great-great-great-great-great grandmother. I began to find numerous parallels between our two lives. Like Maria, I, too, had move around the country for my husband's job, Both of us gave birth to our first son just days before our one year anniversaries and then went on to have three more boys after that. Finally, and most importantly, both of us had lived in the same little spot in Pennsylvania. We had woken up and stared at the same mountains, we had traveled along the same roads, we had

watched the same trees bloom in the spring and turn gold and red in the fall and, we had likely sat in the same spot and watched our children play in the Susquehanna River. I became fascinated with this woman. I thought I had it rough, but her life would have been much harder. I thought how lonely and out of place I felt, but what must it have been like for her? Other than the occasional letter, she would have had next to no communication with her loved ones back home. She was probably one of only a handful of white women (if not the only one) at these mission sites and so all alone she would have been forced to learn the language, customs and culture of the Native Americans she lived amongst. I tried to imagine what it must have been like to give birth for the first time out in the wilderness and then shortly after that birth be forced to pack up and move. I can only guess at the fear she must have experienced when time and again she was confronted by hostile Indian tribes, wondering if she and her children would make it out alive. I wondered how it was that she was able to do all this and realized that the only explanation was her faith. She must have had a deep and abiding faith that allowed her to persevere in the face of hardship, a faith that gave her the strength to follow her husband when he was once again called upon to move the family to a new site. She must have truly believed that it was her calling to be at her husband's side, giving witness, through her presence and example, to the gospel message which he preached.

So while I am sure there are numerous motivational Moravian women it is my great-grandmother, Maria-Agnes Roth, who inspires me. It is her faith, her tenacity, her endurance that inspires me. It is her devotion to her family and her willingness to sacrifice in order to keep them together that leaves me awe struck. Her example has inspired me to look at my life in a new way, to see my new home not in what it lacks, but in what it can offer; to see this as a chance for new opportunities, new friends, and new experiences. Yet mostly I am inspired by my great-grandmother's ability, even two hundred years after her death, to be a Moravian missionary in the truest sense of the word – to be one who brings light to an individual in darkness.

Submitted by:

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