

# This Month in Moravian History

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commemorating events from Moravian History

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## Wedding in Tibet

In time for Valentine's Day the Moravian Archives has chosen to celebrate the unique Moravian love story of Wilhelm and Maria Heyde, two of the earliest Moravian missionaries to Western Tibet during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Known affectionately as "Papa and Mama Heyde" they served the Lord in Asia for 50 years, laying the groundwork for future mission work, revising a Tibetan-English language dictionary and preparing translations of the New Testament and other Christian literature.

Their happiness at first seemed unlikely. Although born to missionary parents in Suriname, Maria Elisabeth Hartmann was leading a satisfied life as a popular teacher in the Moravian community of Gnadenfrei when she was asked to consider an arranged marriage to Wilhelm Heyde, one of three missionaries serving in Western Tibet. Maria naturally hesitated at first. Besides having no practical experience as a pioneer, Heyde was unknown to her and twelve years her senior. In addition, he expected *another* woman to join him in Asia, one who had in the meantime married and accepted a call to Labrador.



After much indecision Maria finally used the Moravian practice of the lot to decide her fate. When the lot answered "yes" to joining Heyde, Maria accepted this decision as God's will. She departed from London in the spring of 1859 with four other Moravian "brides." After spending more than three months sailing around Africa and two months crossing India, the couple met on November 10<sup>th</sup> at opposite ends of a wooden bridge high in the Himalaya mountains outside the mission post of Kyelang. Lacking courage to pass over the rushing water, Maria faltered. Wilhelm crossed the bridge and carried Maria in his arms to the other side. Eight days later they married.

In *Hochzeit in Tibet* [Wedding in Tibet], a novel which recounts this fascinating story of her grandparents, Ruth Schiel describes her grandmother's feelings after crossing the bridge:

*"All the fear, the uncertainty, the endless months of anxiety which ate away at her, fell away like chains from a prisoner. She who once feared condemnation to a life of drudgery, had now been granted a lifetime of love."*

This moment of redemption, and the consequent love that followed, grew out of the couple's love and faith in God - not their own feelings and whims. Their love was born, and endured, because they loved God before they loved each other.

(Sources: *Hochzeit in Tibet* by Ruth Schiel. [Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1986]; Dienerblätter of Wilhelm and Maria Heyde; Obituary of Wilhelm Heyde in "Missions-Blatt der Brüdergemeine" 1907, pages 325-333.)

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