

This Month in Moravian History

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

No. 3

January 2006

John Andrew Buckley, the first Moravian minister from Antigua

Exactly 150 years ago this month the first man of African descent was ordained in the Moravian Church. On January 3, 1856 John Buckley was ordained a Deacon of the Unitas Fratrum. In preparation for the upcoming Black History Month, we want to commemorate his ordination in *This Month in Moravian History*.

John Andrew Buckley was born on October 20, 1818 in St. John's, Antigua, as the son of John and Hannah Buckley. On December 14, 1841 he married Charity Ann Martin; together they had eleven children. Buckley became a teacher and assistant preacher in Greenbay, Antigua. The missionaries were very content with Buckley's work. Moravian bishop G.W. Westerby reported to the Mission Board: "Our out-post, Greenbay, is for the most part under his charge, and during the past half-year the work has advanced rapidly." (letter Nov. 28, 1851) Buckley himself enjoyed his work. In 1852 he wrote: "As to myself, the longer I am engaged in the work, the more I feel the constraining power of the love of Christ, so that I desire to be spent in the service of Him who loved me, and gave Himself for me."

Br. Buckley was a popular preacher. The chapel at Greenbay soon became too small for the number of visitors attending his services. So in 1855 Buckley raised enough money within six months to add another wing to the Greenbay chapel.

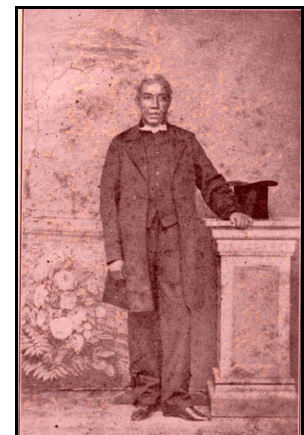
Around this time the missionaries began considering to ordain him. In those years the administration for the worldwide Moravian Church (Unity Elders' Conference) resided in Berthelsdorf near Herrnhut, Germany. Br. Westerby applied for permission from the Unity Elders in 1854 for Buckley's ordination. 18th and 19th century Moravians believed that Christ could indicate his approval of important decisions by means of the lot; for ordination and entrance into missionary service of the church approval by the lot was needed. In Buckley's case the lot responded negatively. When the Unity Elders attempted a year later, the lot once again said no. Finally, in September of 1855 an affirmative lot was drawn and Br. Westerby was given permission to ordain Buckley.

On January 3, 1856 Buckley was ordained. His wife, Charity Ann, was received as an acolyte the night before. He served the Moravian Church for many more years in Greenbay. In later years Buckley seems to have had higher expectations than the members of his congregation were able to meet. He wrote in 1866: "Concerning the spiritual state of the congregation, it is to be regretted that there is so little decided piety manifested, especially among the better-instructed, namely the young, who have received a religious education in our schools. (...) They are unwilling to join the Church, from fear of its discipline." Buckley not only cared about the spiritual state of his members, he also thought it was important for them to meet their financial obligations toward the mission, which was not always easy in times of drought or unemployment. When a severe hurricane hit the island in August of 1871 more than 100 people were given shelter in the schoolroom of the church for two weeks.

John Andrew Buckley died on December 31, 1884 in Greenbay, after retiring in 1879. Charity Ann lived until 1906, when she died on October 18th in St. John's.

Although Br. Buckley was the first male Antiguan to be ordained in the Moravian Church, two Caribbean women had this honor before him. In January of 1746 Rebecca and Maria, both from St. Thomas, were ordained as deaconesses of the Moravian Church in Marienborn, Germany.

(sources: *Periodical Accounts*; minutes of the Unity Elders Conference; register of missionaries on Antigua)



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