



This Month in Moravian History

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“Labrador Kate,” the Life of Kate Hettasch (1905-1987)

One Bible text that guided Kate Hettasch her entire life was “With God all things are possible” (Matt. 19:26). Twenty-five years after her death her legacy remains a testament to this verse as she served almost fifty years in Labrador as teacher and missionary, starting a boarding school and mastering the Inuktitut language during her tenure.

Kate Ellen Margarete Hettasch was born in 1905 in Hopedale, Labrador, where her parents served as missionaries for 49½ years. As a young girl she was sent for schooling with her sister to the Moravian community of Zeist in the Netherlands, where she learned Dutch. In her memoir she described herself during her school years as an “impetuous tomboy” who benefitted much throughout her lifetime from her confirmation text, “Rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing instant in prayer” (KJV Romans 12:12).

When Kate finished high school, she began training as a kindergarten teacher in Germany. In 1923 she attended a youth rally in Herrnhut, which changed her life. She recorded, “Uncle Willy Miller awakened the inward desire to go into the mission field. When he asked is there no one amongst you who feels the call of the Lord to go, I started to stand up. My cousin and sister Elsie tried to pull me down, but I had to say, ‘I want to go!’”

After passing her teacher’s exams in 1925, Kate received several offers, including one to teach in Labrador, and one to instruct the children of a wealthy baroness on the Rhine. An older mentor who had been helping to pay for her schooling encouraged Kate to take the offer from the baroness, however Kate insisted on accepting the

Labrador offer. When her mentor saw that she was serious, she said, “Child, go with God and forget ever to pay me back.”



Kate arrived in the small Labrador village of Makkovik in 1925, where she was assigned to teach at an English-speaking boarding school. Upon her arrival she thought, “Oh my did I make a mistake! This wee village, few small houses, few boats, few people,” but quickly changed her mind and settled in after being greeted by a child that recognized her from a picture at her parents’ house. Kate stated in her memoir, “Here was a child that needed me, knew me, and all hesitating feelings left me and never came back. It was here God wanted me to be.” Kate worked at Makkovik until 1928 when she returned to Europe to accompany another missionary’s child to school and also to receive medical training at Pancras Hospital in London. While pre-

paring to return to Labrador she received word that she was to go to Nain to serve as a teacher (the only teacher!) in a new boarding school. Kate served at Nain until 1952, when she moved to Bethlehem to care for her mother. In Bethlehem Kate taught at the Moravian Preparatory School. She returned to Labrador in 1955 after her mother died and served as missionary and teacher in the villages of Hebron, Makkovik, Hopedale, and Nain until her retirement to Bethlehem in 1973.

Kate died in Bethlehem thirteen years later in 1987. At her funeral Bishop Edwin Kortz described her as a “child of God, missionary-teacher, artist, lover of all God’s creation, and a caring friend...a true Moravian.” He described her greatest God-given gift as “her ability to deal with children everywhere.” In her memoir Kate recorded, “How graciously God led me all these years. I was permitted to serve Him amongst children.” She loved the children with whom she worked and depicted them often in her prolific artwork. She considered a heartfelt good-bye from one of her students, Ado Barbour, as the most beautiful thank-you she ever received. Just prior to her death she wrote these words, “To all my boys and girls I was permitted to teach, I say forgive where unknowingly I may have hurt you. Do find Jesus, the Friend of all. This little light of mine, let it shine, let it shine.”



Sources

Memoir of Kate Hettasch and eulogy by Bishop Edwin Kortz (MemBeth 1537, MAB); Obituary in *The Moravian*, Feb. 1987, p. 27.