

Scenes
from the
Life
of
David Zeisberger



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Mike Atnip



Primitive Christianity Publishers

www.primitivechristianity.org

Earnestly contending for the faith once delivered unto the saints

The cover picture is an 1862 oil painting by Christian Schussele of David Zeisberger preaching to the Indians, titled "The Power of the Gospel."

The inside title page is the only oil painting known of David Zeisberger.

This book is given to the public domain.

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Introduction

How does one squish eighty-seven years of a busy life into sixty pages?

He simply doesn't!

This short booklet focuses upon a few scenes in which David Zeisberger was faced with a decision. At times, the decision seemed small, but it had eternal consequences, to say the least. Being a truly “spiritual” person is more than experiencing an occasional emotional blessing. Being a man of God is choosing, day by day, the Spirit over the flesh.

The chapter titles state in brief the decisions that David (or his parents, as in Chapter 1) faced. By consistently choosing the good and right, David Zeisberger was enabled to “leap over a wall,” as David the Psalmist once proclaimed. This is not to say that David Zeisberger was a “perfect” man without a single fault. In spite of imperfections, we can learn from the good that others have accomplished.

The amazing story of David and his fellowlaborers is fast fading into oblivion. The accounts of these “mighty men” ought to inspire—not merely entertain—our children to sacrificial living.

I trust these scenes, and the choices that they represent, will be etched into your heart as you read. And may they motivate you to follow David's example, as he followed the Lamb.

—Mike Atnip
July 5, 2005

Chapter 1
Material or Eternal?

It was just another morning for little David Zeisberger as his mother gently awakened him. No doubt, she had repeated the same loving ritual to him many times in his short life. However, it was soon evident that this particular morning was going to be different. With hushed tones and a most serious face, his parents admonished David to eat his breakfast hurriedly. A couple of backpacks lay ready on the floor. Mother and father scurried quickly, but quietly, about. This particular July morning, a certain sense of alarm and excitement filled the otherwise peaceful Moravian household. The day had come!

Little David had no idea that this day was going to be a special day until it actually came upon him. Five years old, with a little sister Anna of less than one year, he would not understand its significance until many years later. All he knew at the moment was that as soon as breakfast was finished, the packs were hoisted onto their backs and down the road they went ... never to live in Moravia again.

The peaceful countryside around Zauchtenthal, in Kuhländl (land of cows) was just awaking when David Zeisberger Sr. and his wife Rosina with their two small children forsook the land they had grown up in, seeking a place where they could worship God as they thought they should without fear of repression from the government.

Such an upheaval might be called a “traumatic childhood experience” by modern psychologists: something a 5-year-old boy might never recover from. Just what was going through little David’s mind in the following days as they headed, walking, for Germany, over 200 miles away? Over the Carpathian Mountains they hurried on, into Silesia, using the lesser-known byways to avoid suspicions.¹

David and Rosina had been wealthy small landowners. Now they were forsaking it all except for what they could carry with

¹ I assume this was the route. The authorities in Silesia were a bit more lenient to “heretics,” thus it was safer to use this northern route.

them. To sell out would have aroused suspicions and questions, which might have landed them in the local dungeon for a spell. So they walked away from the land of their nativity, with all its comforts and fond memories, that early July morning of 1726: a “traumatic childhood experience” for little David, from which he might never recover.

And, thankfully, he never did! In fact, walking away from earthly comforts, trading material loss for eternal gain, actually became a way of life for him. During his long lifetime of 87 years, he would walk away from—either by force or by choice—houses and lands that he had helped to develop, almost as many times as he had fingers and toes.

Of German stock, on April 11, 1721, David had been born into a lineage of family that secretly had clung to the old teachings of the *Unitas Fratrum*, the Unity² of Brothers. For many decades, his forefathers had quietly held to what Peter Chelcicky, John Dubcansky, and John Kalenec had taught from the Bible. These men, leaders in the Czech Unity of Brothers, had been influenced from the older and better known group known as the Waldensians. But the religious wars of Bohemia and Moravia had eventually scattered and wiped out all the believers in Moravia, except for a handful who for almost a century secretly continued to meet and worship in homes, waiting for the day when they could openly confess their faith without fear of reprisal.



Fulneck Castle, Moravia, close to David’s home town.

2 Some linguists contend that the Czech word *Jednota* was used in the Unity’s writings in the same sense as “church,” as they referred to the Roman “Jednota” and the Lutheran “Jednota.” Therefore, they simply called themselves in their own tongue “The church of the Brethren” (not to be confused with the group that originated in Schwarzenau, Germany in the early 1700’s). In this book, I will use the more familiar, albeit incorrect perhaps, forms *Unity of the Brethren* or *United Brethren*.

Chapter 2
War or Love?

Rumors of war were afloat; not only rumors, but threats of being conscripted into the army. In times of war, non-resistant people often suddenly become suspected of traitordom. And so the little band of Moravian believers was confronted with a choice: Stay in Georgia, or leave for Pennsylvania where they would be free from military conscription. Finally the news arrived from London: England had declared war on Spain, with plans to attack the Spanish forts in Florida. All available men were being mustered to take up arms. In addition, the British government had forbidden the Brethren any further contact with the inland Indians. Why stay in Georgia then? Their contract with the British settlement flatly declared that “they neither could nor would bear arms under any conditions.”

They did use arms for hunting. David Zeisberger was now a teenager living at Savannah, Georgia, and one day took upon himself the duty of protecting their rice plantations³ from the many deer that roamed the neighborhood. Accordingly, he climbed up into a tree and waited for the first offender to show up. Sure enough, a deer soon wandered into gun range. David took careful aim and pulled the trigger ... and the resulting recoil knocked him out of the tree! After lying unconscious and bleeding for a couple of hours, he eventually found his way home. His recovery took several months.

But David would soon become proficient in backwoods living. He eventually became expert in hiking, canoeing, and horse-back riding—he would travel tens of thousands of miles through the pristine American wilderness. Many times he would even have to build his own canoe before he could begin his journey. He would face hoards of mosquitoes, hundreds of rattlesnakes, freezing cold, grass so razor-sharp that it would rip his clothes to shreds, and poorly-marked trails. On the other hand, the unparalleled beauty of the unspoiled creation would inspire him once and again.

³ The word here refers to planted crops, whether on a large scale or small.

His parents had been among the second group of Moravian settlers, in 1736, to leave for the Georgia mission from Herrnhut. Young David and his siblings (George and Anna) had been left behind to finish schooling. Sent to Heerendyk, Holland to a “missionary preparation” school run by the Moravian brotherhood, he soon mastered the Dutch tongue. But schooling in those days was a different matter than that of today. The students were put on a

“You will not bear arms, either defensive or offensive ...”

From Zinzendorf’s letter to the Moravian colonists in Georgia. The Moravians eventually left Georgia to avoid military conscription.

heavy schedule, and discipline was very firm, if not outright brutal. So intense were the thrashings he received from the masters, his back carried the scars for the rest of his life.⁴ Falsely accused of stealing, David, now 16, planned his escape with another disgruntled youth from the school, John Michael Schober. Making their way to London, their story so touched the heart of General James Oglethorpe, British governor of Georgia, that he gave them supplies and a free trip to Georgia.

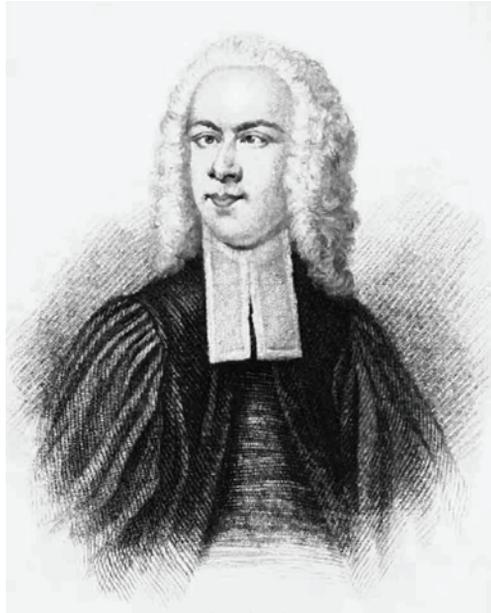
Arriving in Georgia to the surprise of all, one of the settlers noted in his diary about the arrival of “two bad boys.”

Nonetheless, his parents were happy to see him—even though they did not recognize him at first—and welcomed him into their home.

With the pressure on to take up arms, and forbidden to preach to the Indians, the little band of Moravians that remained in Georgia decided to head north to Pennsylvania with the ship which carried the famous evangelist George Whitefield. He, Whitefield, would eventually hire some of the Moravians to start building his orphanage at Nazareth for the Africans who had been brought as slaves to America. David was among the construction crew, and was on the scene when the first tree was felled for the construction. But a dispute concerning predestination caused the Calvin-

⁴ Such discipline was considered “normal” in many schools of the day.

istic Whitefield to angrily order the Brethren to leave his property.⁵ The Brethren withdrew to begin their own project at another location. Even though it was still March and snow lay upon the ground, the little band of Moravian pilgrims, David included, entered the woods to begin clearing the land that would eventually give rise to the modern city of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.



The Moravian Brethren contracted to build an orphanage for the English evangelist George Whitefield, but the contract was never finished as Whitefield clashed with the Moravians over predestination. Notice the funny eyes in this drawing ...
George was cross-eyed!

⁵ Some claim that the root of the problem was neither doctrinal nor Whitefield himself. Scotch-Irish neighbors wanted the Moravians removed. Whitefield did relent enough to permit the Brethren to remain over the winter.

*Chapter 3***European Comforts or American Hardships?**

“David,” asked Bishop David Nitschmann, “do you not return to Europe willingly?”

David was standing along the rail of the *James*, and the captain had given the command to cast off the cables. The Bishop had given his last farewells to the departing party that was returning to Europe. David had been chosen to go along to Europe as an escort for Count Zinzendorf. Now, within a minute or so, the gangplank would be drawn up and the ship would pull out of the New York harbor.

“No indeed,” David replied to the Bishop, “I would rather remain in America.”

“For what reason?”

“I long to be truly converted to God, and serve Him in this country,” replied the 21-year-old.

Grasping the young man by the shoulders, the pleased Bishop then said, “Then in God’s name boy, if I were in your place, I would leave this ship immediately and return to Bethlehem, with me.”

David needed no more urging. He picked up his life’s possessions, the whole half sack of them, and followed the Bishop down the gangplank. A minute or two later would have been too late!

Years later David would write about this incident: “At the time my heart was not yet converted to God, but I longed to enjoy his grace, and fully.”

Some months later, while the young men at Bethlehem were singing one of Zinzendorf’s hymns, David felt the words piercing deep into his heart. Hurriedly leaving the room while the last stanza was still being sung, he went out and spent several hours weeping and praying. The next day found a regenerated David Zeisberger, consecrated to taking the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the American Indians.

Chapter 4
Two Words or Jail?

“I am content,” said the 24-year-old young person.

What was this person content to give up? Did he have to buy a car without an air-conditioner? Did she have to be content with a bathroom that did not have matching colors for the sink, toilet, and tub?

No, it was David Zeisberger speaking to the Governor and Council of the colony of New York. On a trip to explore the possibilities of starting a mission among the Six Nations, he had been arrested. New laws in the colony prohibited “every Vagrant Preacher, Moravian, Disguised Papist” from evangelizing the Indians, unless they were duly licensed. Now, standing before the highest leaders of the colony, he was asked: “Will you take the oath?”⁶

“I hope the honorable council will not force me to do it,” David replied.

“We will not constrain you; you may let it alone if it is against your conscience; but you will have to go to prison again,” was the reply.

“I am content,” said David.

So he spent a total of 51 days in the New York City jail for refusing to swear.

He wrote while there: “We count it an honor to suffer for the Savior’s sake.” And, not willing to waste his time, he and his fellow-prisoner, Christian Frederick Post, spent their time in confinement studying Mohawk. With the help of the famed translator to the Indians for Pennsylvania, Conrad Weiser, the two were later released, after “paying their fines.”

Fifty-one days in jail, or say two words: “I swear.” David Zeisberger contentedly chose jail, rather than disobey his Savior.

6 An oath of allegiance to the British king. Zeisberger freely and honestly confessed that he was loyal to the king, and not a French spy, but he would not swear.

*Chapter 5***Fame or Service?**

During the years of his young adulthood, David grew in grace and learned to serve. He would be involved in important peace conferences and land sales involving the Indians and the colonies, usually in the role of an interpreter. He would meet and have dealings with Governor Denny of Pennsylvania, Benjamin Franklin, and some of the men who eventually were the framers of the Constitution of the United States of America.

With his linguistic and diplomatic skills, very easily he could have entered into the political or business world. Yet, he chose another road ... in one case, the road to Shamokin.⁷

On an evangelistic excursion up the two forks of the Susquehanna River, David and Martin Mack found death on all sides. What the European diplomacy and rifles could not do, their diseases did—small-pox and similar diseases eventually reduced the Indian population in the east to approximately 10% of its former numbers.⁸ There, in various huts scattered along the course of the river, lay dying, starving, stinking Indians. It is said that a kettle of boiled grass was considered a luxury.

David had been assigned “assistant” at the Shamokin mission. Wholeheartedly, he jumped into his duties. At that time, Shamokin was a couple days perilous journey from Bethlehem, over the steep Blue Mountains. Touched to the heart by a gift of silverware from Zinzendorf (delivered by the visiting Bishop and son-in-law of the Count, John de Watteville), the dying Chief Shickellamy made a vow to visit Bethlehem. Accordingly, David helped the old man make the journey, even though they had to travel at a “crab’s pace.” The chief wanted to know more about Jesus.

After a visit of several weeks, David again helped the old man return to his village on the Susquehanna. He soon was breathing

7 Present-day Sunbury, Pennsylvania, not the present town with the same name located some 20 miles to the east.

8 There is recorded an incident where the men in a besieged fort were counseled to send out a smallpox-infected blanket and hat as a gift to the attacking Indians. Germ warfare did not originate in the 20th century.

his last breaths with a bright smile—and with Brother David stroking his brow. Such was David Zeisberger: choosing to be with a dying Indian chief in the squatty little hut-town of Shamokin,⁹ rather than choosing to sit in the stuffed, high-backed chairs of Philadelphia.

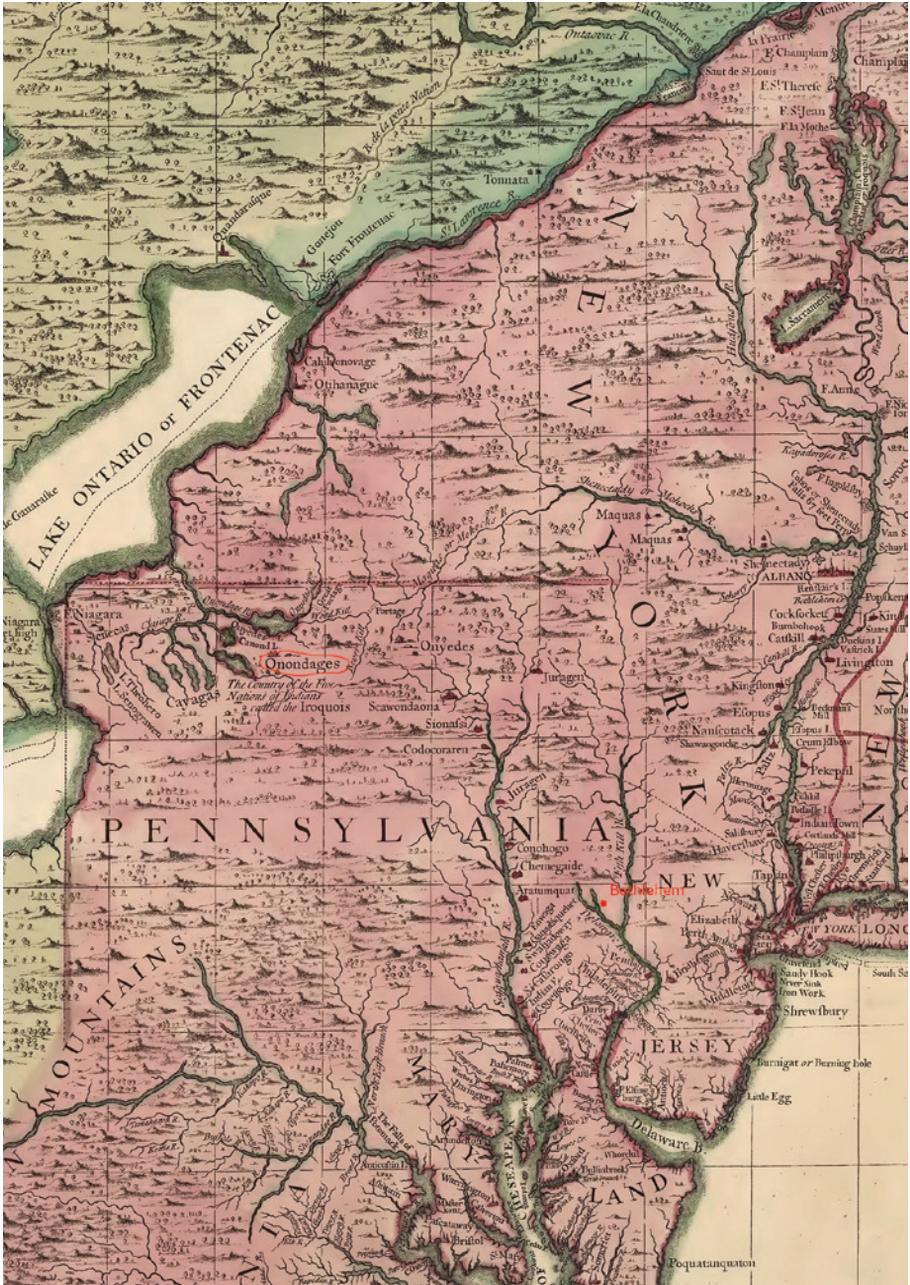
The year following the above incident, David and John Frederick Cammerhof were commissioned to make another attempt at getting permission to start a mission among the Six Nations in New York. To give yourself an idea of this journey, consult the map on the following page. Imagine yourself taking a hike from Bethlehem to Onondaga—cross country—with a map not exactly in proportion to reality!

There are no roads drawn on the map. Between Bethlehem and Onondaga there was nothing more than Indian trails. Travelers in the wilderness in those days followed the rivers,¹⁰ making portages between the different watersheds. But David had a vision of opening a mission among these powerful tribes. It was his attempted trip there some years back that had landed him in the jail at New York City. This time, he would not go by way of water (the Hudson), but rather overland. At Onondaga, where he and Cammerhof had arranged to meet the Great Council, the meeting had to be postponed until the members had recovered from a state of intoxication. Meanwhile, the two men decided that their waiting time could be redeemed by making a visit to the western nation of the Senecas. After a harrowing journey of several days, with little food and plenty of sickness—and the intoxicated Indians of one village firing shots jokingly over their heads as they ran to escape—they arrived at the Seneca “capital” to find the whole town¹¹ roaring drunk. From the looks of things, they had been drunk for several days, and it appeared that it would be a couple

9 In this place, the Brethren did not build one of their own Christian villages, but rather ran a sort of blacksmith shop and mission post combined, right “downtown.” It was a tough place—as war parties on their way to fight the tribes in Virginia passed through regularly—renown for “abominable orgies.”

10 Many times using canoes, but sometimes by foot.

11 Some two hundred dwellings.



of more before the “fire-water” would be gone.¹² Seeking a refuge from the curious and seriously intoxicated Indians, they were finally offered a small loft by the wife of one of the chiefs. It was extremely small—they both could barely lie down there—and extremely warm in the mid-summer sun. To add to the matter, Cammerhof was sick,¹³ so sick that he barely wanted to get out of bed.

David bravely sallied forth from their lodging to seek water from a distant spring. On the return trip, the drunken villagers roughly pushed him into a hut and drank all the water he had brought. On the next trip, he by-passed the main part of the village and sneaked the water in and made tea for his sick companion, who greatly appreciated it. Cammerhof would write about it: “It was the first nourishment I had taken in two days.”

That evening, David experienced another aspect of heathen culture. Out for an evening stroll, he returned about dusk to the town. A group of lust-driven women (either naked or almost so) suddenly gathered around him making lewd suggestions. David made his escape, fists flying in all directions to fend off his aggressive and intoxicated would-be seducers.¹⁴ Making a run for his loft, he grabbed a rafter and swung in the door as they tore the ladder away from under him.

By the first rays of the earliest light, after another night of listening to the howls from the drunken orgies, the two men made a hasty escape, without even one of the 100 village dogs barking. In their haste, they almost drowned crossing a ford in an area that was too deep. Cammerhof stayed under so long that David feared he would never come up. Returning to Onondaga, they finally secured approval from the chiefs of the Six Nations to send two missionaries to live among them to learn the language. Their proposal accepted, the two men departed for Bethlehem. Slightly

12 The natives were notorious for buying a large quantity of drink and staying drunk until the “supplies” were all gone. This spree usually lasted only a few days, but occasionally it could go for a couple of weeks.

13 He was naturally weak, and could only carry about a 20-30 pound pack. This made so that David had to carry an extra amount on this trip.

14 This is the only incident I noticed in my study of his life where David would resort to any sort of physical resistance.

over three months had passed since they had left. So arduous was their voyage—mentally, physically, and emotionally—that one biographer called it a “trip into hell.” Cammerhof would die only a few months after his return. Meanwhile, David Zeisberger would continue to choose such a lifestyle over an easy, well-paid position in a prosperous business venture in the city.



David Zeisberger chose to live in bark shelters like these, rather than accept a well-paid position in business or politics. David definitely had the qualifications for leadership in the business or political realm ... yet he chose to use those qualifications for the business of the kingdom of God!

*Chapter 6***Self-will or Contineny¹⁵?**

Our whole 21st century North American lifestyle is not conducive towards self-restraint. Rather, we are encouraged on every hand to splurge and “live and let live.” In fact, to not live that way is almost considered “anti-American.” After all, we are the “land of the free,” a land where individual liberties are only sacrificed if absolutely necessary.

David Zeisberger was blessed to have been able to spend his young adult years among a people who “sacrificed” their “liberties” for the sake of the gospel. Burning with a desire to spread the good news to the sin-sick and dying, Moravian missionaries sallied forth in every direction from their “base” at Herrnhut, Germany. Some of these valiant soldiers of the cross established themselves at Bethlehem, Pennsylvania to become the “base” for the work of evangelization in the northern district of the North American colonies. Let us consider a few moments what was called the “General Economy” at Bethlehem.¹⁶

The focus of the whole community was missions. To gain permission to live at Bethlehem, one had to submit his heart to the vision of the community. If not, he would be kindly, but very firmly, denied permission to live on the premises. What was this vision?

For patient devotion and heroic self-sacrifice these humble toilers at the Bethlehem-Nazareth “Economy” are worthy of consideration. They built their own houses; they made their own clothes and boots; they tilled the soil and provided their own meat, vegetables, bread, milk, and eggs; they sawed their own wood, spun their own yarn, and wove their own cloth; and then, selling at the regular market price what was not required for their personal use, they spent the profits in the support of preachers, teachers, and missionaries in various parts of North America. For

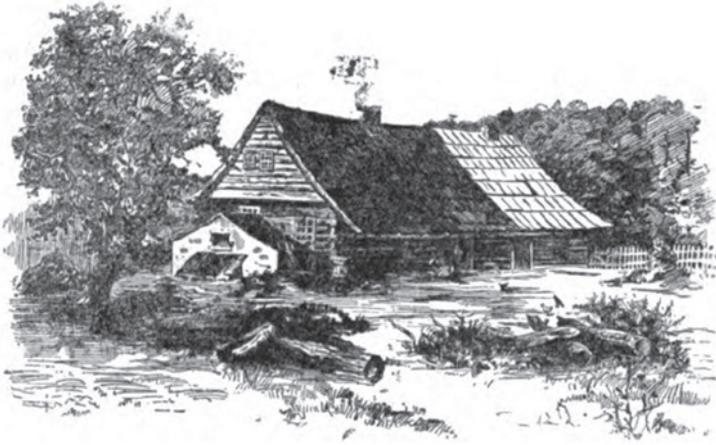
15 To remember the meaning of “contineny”, think of a continent as land that is held together, rather than flung apart as islands. Thus, a continent person is one who can hold himself together rather than fly apart in temptations.

16 I personally do not suggest we follow the “Economy” to the letter, but its spirit and intention can speak volumes to us if we have ears to hear.

a motto they took the words: "In commune oramus, in commune laboramus, in commune patimur, in commune gaudeamus"; i.e., together we pray, together we labor, together we suffer, together we rejoice. The motive, however, was not social, but religious. "It is nothing," said Spangenberg himself, "but love to the Lamb and His Church." For this cause the ploughman tilled the soil, the women sewed, the joiner sawed, the blacksmith plied his hammer; for this cause the fond mothers, with tears in their eyes, handed over their children to the care of guardians,¹⁷ so that they themselves might be free to toil for the Master. Thus every trade was sanctified; and thus did all, both old and young, spend all their powers for the Gospel's sake.

If there is any distinction between secular and sacred, that distinction was unknown at Bethlehem and Nazareth. At Bethlehem the Brethren accounted it an honor to chop wood for the Master's sake; and the fireman, said Spangenberg, felt his post as important "as if he were guarding the Ark of the Covenant." For the members of each trade or calling a special series of services was arranged; and thus every toiler was constantly reminded that he was working not for himself but for God. The number of love feasts was enormous. At the opening of the harvest season the farm laborers held an early morning love feast; the discourse was partly on spiritual topics and partly on rules of diet; then the sickles were handed out; and the whole band, with hymns of praise on their lips, set off for the harvest field. For days at a time the Single Brethren would be in the forest felling trees; but before they set off they had a love feast, and when they returned they had another. As soon as the joiners had the oil-mill ready they celebrated the event in a love feast. The spinners had a love feast once a week. The joiners, the weavers, the cartwrights, the smiths, the hewers of wood, the milkers of cows, the knitters, the sewers, the cooks, the washerwomen—all had their special love feasts. At one time the joyful discovery was made that a Brother had served a year in the kitchen, and was ready to serve another; and thereupon the whole settlement held a general love feast in his honor. For the mothers a

17 This practice, I think, could have been greatly improved upon.



THE FIRST HOUSE OF BETHLEHEM, 1741.

The first house in Bethlehem, which David helped to build, was a log building that housed the dozen and a half human occupants, along with the section for the cattle.

special meeting was held, at which an expert gave instructions on the art of bringing up children; and at this meeting, while the lecturer discoursed or occasional hymns were sung, the women were busy with their hands. One made shoes, another tailored, another ground powder for the chemist's shop, another copied invoices and letters, another sliced turnips, another knitted socks.

For each calling special hymns were composed and sung. If these hymns had been published in a volume we should have had a Working-man's Hymnbook. Thus every man and woman at Bethlehem-Nazareth had enlisted in the missionary army. Never, surely, in the history of Protestant Christianity were the secular and the sacred more happily wedded. "In our Economy," said Spangenberg, "the spiritual and physical are as closely united as a man's body and soul; and each has a marked effect upon the other." If a man lost his touch with Christ it was noticed that he was careless in his work; but as long as his heart was right with God his eye was clear and his hand steady and firm. At the head of

the whole concern stood Spangenberg, a businessman to the finger tips. If genius is a capacity for taking pains, then Spangenberg was a genius of the finest order. He drew up regulations dealing with every detail of the business, and at his office he kept a strict account of every penny expended, every yard of linen woven, every pound of butter made, and every egg consumed. As long as Spangenberg was on the spot the business arrangements were perfect; he was assisted by a Board of Directors, known as the *Aufseher Collegium*; and so great was the enterprise shown that before the close of his first period of administration the Brethren had several farms and thirty-two industries in full working order. It was this which impressed the British House of Commons, and enabled them, in the Act of 1749, to recognize the Brethren "as a sober and industrious people." So deeply was Earl Granville impressed that he offered the Brethren a hundred thousand acres in North Carolina. At length, accompanied by five other Brethren, Spangenberg himself set off to view the land, selected a site, organized another "Economy," established two congregations, named Bethabara and Bethany, and thus became the founder of the Southern Province of the Brethren's Church in America.

But his greatest success was in the Northern Province. For many years the Brethren at Bethlehem-Nazareth maintained nearly all the Moravian preachers in North America. In Pennsylvania they had preachers at Germantown, Philadelphia, Lancaster, York, Donegal, Heidelberg, Lebanon, Lititz, Oley, Allemaengel, Emmaus, Salisbury, Falkner's Swamp, the Trappe, Mahanatawny, Neshaminy, and Dansbury. In Maryland they had a station at Graceham. In Jersey they had stations at Maurice River, Racocon, Penn's Neck, Oldman's Creek, Pawlin's Hill, Walpack, and Brunswick; in Rhode Island, at Newport; in Maine, at Broadbay; in New York, at Canajoharie; and other stations at Staten Island and Long Island. They opened fifteen schools for poor children; they paid the traveling expenses of missionaries to Surinam and the West Indies; they maintained a number of missionaries to the Indians. Thus did Spangenberg, by means of his "Economy," establish the Moravian Church in North America. We must not misunderstand

his motives. He never made his system compulsory, and he never intended it to last. As soon as the “Economy” had served its purpose it was abolished by Spangenberg himself (1762). It is easy to object that his system interfered with family life. It is easy to say that this Moravian Bishop had no right to split families into sections, to place the husbands in one abode and the wives in another, to take children from their mothers’ arms and place them under guardians. But Brother Joseph had his answer to this objection. At Bethlehem, he declared, the members of the “Economy” were as happy as birds in the sunshine; and, rejoicing in their voluntary sacrifice, they vowed that they would rather die than resign this chance of service. The whole arrangement was voluntary. “There are no walls around Bethlehem,” said one of its leaders. Not a man or woman was pressed involuntarily into the service. If a man joins the volunteers he is generally prepared, for the time being, to forego the comforts of family life, and these gallant toilers of the “Economy” were volunteers for God.¹⁸

Now let us consider another aspect of life at Bethlehem: the rules of conduct.¹⁹

§.2. We specify in advance that no one can be resident here in Bethlehem who does not belong to the Brethren’s Church or who, being allowed to stay here for a time, does not want to be guided by her rules.

§.3. At the same time [we declare] that nothing may be taught here which is opposed to what is contained in the Act of the United Brethren in England of the Year 1749 which was presented to the Parliament of Great Britain. If someone has his own opinion, he may certainly hold it. He must, however, not discuss this with another, much less try to teach it publicly.

§.4. Because it is a basic principle among us that God is not only a God of order, but also that one must obey all human ordinances in order to obey the will of the Lord, so we must set out from the beginning that everyone who wants to live among us will love the

18 The above paragraphs describing the “Economy” are for the most part a direct quotation from Hutton’s “A History of the Moravian Church.”

19 For space and interest, I have deleted or shortened some of the points.

authorities who are set up to take care of all human ordinances, will acknowledge his office, and will conduct himself as well according to the community and settlement institutions which have been introduced in our Church, and will submit himself freely and from the heart, and will not set himself against any servant of the Community or against anyone who otherwise holds office when [that person] orders or demands something.

§.6 [We require] also that the provincial and country taxes ... be paid promptly by everyone ...

§.7. Because a Community Settlement also has all sorts of things to decide about what is best for the whole settlement, or a portion thereof—for example, it has to provide for the poor [and] keep a night watch or see to it that there is a watchman in the square by day to maintain order in the settlement; it should make a waterworks or public spring, provide certain lanterns for night, lay out lanes or footpaths, maintain the God's Acre,²⁰ erect a public building, and make ordinances against ... the outbreak of fire—so when the community through the Community Council unanimously or by the majority of votes has decided something, no resident should withdraw [his support], rather he should take his proportional share, just as the others do.

§11. We also don't want to tolerate any quarrels or arguments among us, much less suits against each other ...

§.12. Every resident must work and eat his own bread. Whoever has official business in the community and thus cannot support himself, for him the community must provide the necessities. Whoever cannot work because of old age or lack of ability, him will the community feed insofar as he has no relatives who are responsible to do so according to God's law.

§.13. Not only so that good products are made and sold for a cheap price, but also because in the opposite case some resident might, through neglect of the same [principles of good business] bring the settlement into bad repute and put it in a situation of

20 The cemetery ...



The Sisters' House in Bethlehem still stands, two and a half centuries after it was built. Early Moravians lived with their age and marital status peers. David spent quite a number of years living in the nearby Brothers' House with the other single young men. Everyone at Bethlehem was dedicated to a single cause: the glory of God. The good of the individual was sacrificed for the good of the community.

disadvantage, therefore we want to ordain a College of Master Craftsmen among us which from time to time has to see to it that these points are observed in all crafts. The masters of all crafts ... will make arrangements for [controlling the quality of] the goods and setting the prices for cheapness.

§.15. All cheating and crossing one's neighbor in commerce or lending, be it direct or indirect, shall be regarded as scandalous among us and, like all heathen sins, not to be tolerated.

§.16. Here belongs also all damage which may be inflicted on orchards and food gardens, meadows, cottages, hedges and other fences in the fields through the burning or chopping down of the trees in the forest. Likewise, by keeping doves, hunting, birding, or fishing in the Manakesy when it is not expressly permitted. And whoever ruins something in the springs, paths, houses, or elsewhere shall make it good again.

§.17. Nor should anyone allow swine or other livestock, except for turkeys, chickens, geese or other feathered animals, to run free ... Dogs should not be kept in the settlement except for a purpose ...

§.18. The lanes should be kept clean and orderly by those who live along them ...

§.19. So that the residents do not restrict each other in buying and selling where something is best and cheapest, the Committee of Arbitrators will see to it that no one overbids another, thus causing prices to rise.

§.20. Because we do not want to tolerate among us strange people [*i.e.*, non-residents] going from house to house selling things, no resident may buy anything in this way. Instead, those who do public harm should be sent away ...

§.21. It is an important thing to us to avoid temptation, harm to souls, and annoyances. All house fathers, choir²¹ houses, and

21 When one sees the word "choir" in Moravian writings, he should remember that it merely means "group."

institutions therefore have to make such arrangements in their families that evil may be prevented as much as possible. They should see to it that their people are at home at the right time in the evening and that all running around at night is prevented. Parents and masters are responsible for their children and families and for the orderliness of their house and shop ...

§.22. All disorderly beings, sins, and heathen spirits, as they are wont to be named, still can be conveyed through excess in eating and strong drink, insofar as such products can give cause for unhealthy curiosity. For example, immoral books and engravings do not belong among us, nor will similar persons be tolerated when they, for example, do not give heed to the warnings given [to them]. Thus it shall not be suffered that people gather in the dark anywhere in this settlement, regardless of whether anything improper can be proved or not.

§.23. Whoever sees or hears or discovers anything whereby either the settlement or also only a single person could suffer danger or damage to soul or body or otherwise in some way offense or annoyance, that person is not allowed to keep such things quiet, but he may also not speak about it indiscreetly ... Whoever does not report such a matter to the proper place and at the right time shall be regarded as an accomplice.

§.24. Not only careless, disorderly, and unnecessary contact between the sexes, but also that which according to our Choir Principle is not allowed shall carefully be avoided. [This injunction forbids contact between] married as well as single people [and] outside of as well as within the village. There also should be no running around and playing by children in the lanes.

§.25. In order to avoid all disorder, temptation, or impropriety, no couplings or secret marriages should occur among us, rather all marriages should take place with the foreknowledge and approval of the Congregational and Choir Workers. Whoever wants to act differently, saying that it is a matter affecting his own person or that is a matter of consent, he may well live where he wants—only not among us.

§.26. No one may take a farmhand, maid, apprentice, servant, Negro, or journeyman into his household without the prior knowledge and approval of the Committee, and everyone shall send away such people who become seducers.

§.27. Except in the inns, no one shall be given a place to sleep for the night without the consent and foreknowledge of the Warden or the Committee.

Likewise, no one should travel overland nor send anyone of his household [traveling] without it having previously been registered and, in all cases, having gotten the good counsel of the Warden.

§.28. All commerce and lending shall take place without bidding and counter bidding, by simple agreement, and ordinarily using cash or cash equivalents. Giving and receiving credit shall be avoided as much as possible.

§.29. To be arrested for debt, or to arrest each other would be totally improper among us. In order to prevent this, whoever borrows or lends capital should do this with the foreknowledge of the Committee ...

§.30. Whoever borrows should pay it back at the hour he has agreed to do so. And whoever lends shall set such a time as he likely can be repaid. Nor should anyone take for his use and borrow something without the foreknowledge of the one to whom the thing belongs.

§.31. No resident shall practice another trade than the one that he has begun with the knowledge and will of the Committee, nor shall he impinge on any other business in the settlement.

§.32. No one should waste his time with the practice of doctors, surgeons, or midwives without the knowledge and consent of the Warden and the Committee, nor without their foreknowledge get any advice except from those persons authorized and appointed in the community.

§.33. Should someone through God's will fall into insanity, so God's mercy should be shown to him, he should be carried in

a friendly way, given over to understanding persons, cared for by them in body and soul, otherwise not be talked to about it and, when he has recovered, not spoken to about what went on before.

§.35. Should someone move here from another place and want to become eligible to live here, he must first of all lay his external affairs before the Committee immediately, but above all his debts and if and how he can repay them. If the same is demanded, he must pay them before he can receive his permission to stay here.

§.39. In order to prevent all disgrace, disunity or temptations in the name of the community, the Committee of Arbitrators is responsible for keeping all these points under exact observation, all the more because no one is compelled to belong to our community and all retain the freedom to leave here.

§.40. Should it now occur that someone can no longer live in Bethlehem, then the Committee must make clear on several occasions that he must leave the settlement.²²

Rules ... Submission to authority ... Giving up rights ... Are these “anti-spiritual” as well as “anti-American”? Look at what was required to live at Bethlehem, and look at what one community dedicated to missions accomplished. In 1747, there were approximately 400 inhabitants at Bethlehem; but 56 of them were “absent in the service of the church”—1/8 of the congregation away in the harvest fields!!

Now, you decide if rules and authority are always anti-spiritual. To live at Bethlehem, one had to sign that he would submit himself to the rules of the community. David Zeisberger’s name is at the top of the list for the single young men’s choir in a document preserved in the archives at Bethlehem. He “gave up his rights” for the privilege of being a part of a grand missionary enterprise. Count Zinzendorf, recognizing his abilities and consecration, had him ordained “perpetual” missionary to the Indians.

²² http://bdhp.moravian.edu/community_records/regulations/brotherly_agreement/batranslation.html

Chapter 7
Fear or Faith?

One would be hard-pressed to call the Moravian missionary Christian Frederick Post a wimp. With a bounty on his head from the French, Frederick walked up to the French-held Fort Duquesne²³ to deliver an offer of peace to the Indians of the area. Yet, Christian turned back on the “Forbidden Trail”²⁴—a trail that the Seneca forbade any white man to travel—when the cantankerous Indians of the area threatened to cut off his ears.

Now, David Zeisberger and two converted Indians assailed to pass this very trail. He was, indeed, the first white man known to travel it.

Arriving safely at some Indian villages along the Allegheny River, David had other fears to confront. While some of the natives wanted to hear the Gospel message, others resisted. For eight days, David and his companions preached. He wrote in his journal:

“It is with them, as it is with all the Indians at the beginning; they hear the words, can understand and comprehend but little of it, yet they always ask to be taught more. They cannot understand until spiritually roused, then their understanding is cleared and they are able to receive what is taught them. “

“Never yet,” he wrote also, “did I see so clearly painted on the faces of the Indians both the darkness of hell and the world-subduing power of the Gospel.”

But Wangomen, a local herb-doctor, withstood. This *shaman* preached three levels of heaven, each progressively better and more satisfying, and a form of reincarnation. David would note: “Such preaching the Indians enjoy.” He added: “I must confess that nowhere else among the Indians have I found such desperate heathenism. Here Satan has his power, he sits enthroned, here he

23 Later Fort Pitt, now Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

24 It may have been forbidden from the fact that it was an area of abundant wild game. The trail passed from the headwaters of the Susquehanna to the headwaters of the Allegheny in northern Pennsylvania and southern New York.

***David Zeisberger describes the Indian religious practices
of a village on the Allegheny river ...***

“At the first sacrifice, after each meal, there was a slow and measured dance, led by an Indian rattling a small tortoise shell filled with pebbles, and singing of dreams or chanting the names of the various manitous¹ which the assembled company worshiped.

The second differed from this merely in the disgusting appearance of the men, who, before beginning the dance, stripped themselves to their breech-cloths and smeared their persons with white clay. At the third, ten or more tanned deer skins were distributed among old men and women, who wrapped them around their shoulders, left the house, and, turning to the East, invoked the Great Spirit on behalf of the family which gave the feast.

The fourth was called Machtugu. It required an oven, constructed of twelve pieces of twelve different sorts of wood, not more and not less, and covered closely with blankets. Into this were put twelve stones of medium size, heated to their great est intensity, and then the entertainer crept in, and eleven guests strewing tobacco upon the stones, and praying to his manitou. Meanwhile a friend, hired with twelve fathoms of wampum, stood in front of a post covered with the head and hide of a buck, and, turning his face to the East, called upon the same manitou. This continued until the occupants of the oven were unconscious when they were dragged out. A feast of bear's meat began as soon as they had arrived. Machtugu, repeated twelve times, rendered a man certain of salvation.

At the last feast the Indians gorged themselves with the flesh of the bear, which they devoured as long as they could, in the natural way. When this was no longer possible, they forced it down their throats until the stomach rejected the monstrous load. Thereupon they fell to again, passed through the same ordeal, and finally drank the liquid fat. The sicker they got, and the more frequently they vomited, the better pleased was the manitou.”

1 Manitou is a term used to designate spirit beings among many Algonquian groups of Native Americans. (Wikipedia)

is worshipped by the heathens and accomplishes his work in [and among] the children of darkness.”

Concluding the week of sermons—the young people went to parties every night after the preaching—David laid before the elders the prospect of returning to visit again. Several sub-chiefs showed enthusiastic support to the idea. But Wangomen, who held a higher sway, began his own sermon.

There are two ways to heaven, he explained, one for the Indian, and one for the white man. In fact, the one for the Indian was more direct ...

The showdown began.

During a pause in the sermon of the healer/chief, David interjected:

“I told you clearly enough several days ago that there is but one way of salvation, and the Savior is Himself the Way. All men, be they white, black, or brown, desirous of being saved, must come to him, as poor lost sinners, who know and feel that they are sinners and are seeking forgiveness.”

Slightly rebuffed, Wangomen continued saying that he had known God for many years and had spiritual conversations with him. Asked if he knew the Lord who had been wounded and shed His blood for him, he replied: “No, I know nothing of Him ...”

David had had enough. Pointing his finger at the man whose word could order his immediate execution and scalping, David said:

“If you do not know, I do know and will now tell you. The devil is your god, whom you preach to the Indians, for you are his servant. He is the father of lies and from him all lying proceeds. For this reason you can tell the Indians nothing but lies to deceive them. You declare that you are concerned about God, but this is not true. When you celebrate Kentckey²⁵ and you pray, whom do you worship? It is surely the devil; do not imagine that you have any part of communion with God, for you must not think He has any pleasure in your pretended worship, since this an abomination before Him.”

25 An Indian feast.

The *shaman* replied: “But I cannot understand your teaching, it is something quite new and I cannot understand it.”

A deathly quiet stare-down between the fearless missionary and the man who had the authority to order his scalping followed.

David then continued:

“I will explain that to you. Satan is the king of darkness and dwells in no light. Where he is there is darkness. He dwells within you, him you feel and not God as you say. For this reason your understanding is so darkened that you can understand nothing concerning God and his word. For several days I have been preaching to you. I have endeavored to make the message clear. Yet you cannot understand it. Were I to devote months, even years, to preaching to you, you would not be able to understand the gospel tidings, even though the words are not hard words, but may be understood by a child. But if you will turn from Satan and his teachings and will give up your Indian abominations and come to the Savior as a poor, wretched lost man, who knows nothing and plead with Him for grace and mercy, then He may have mercy upon you and deliver you from the power of Satan. In that case it will be possible that you will learn to understand something of God and his word. Now it is impossible. Yet there is opportunity; if you turn to the Savior help can be granted. But do not delay, make haste and save your soul.”

For a long time no-one spoke. Finally someone asked Wangomen if David’s request for a return visit could be granted. Subdued, Wangomen arose and said that he would be glad to hear more, as he was a poor man. Assured permission to return, David’s party began the three-week journey back to Bethlehem, crossing once again the “Forbidden Trail.”

He wrote some years later, when fear threatened him in another situation:

“... I am about my duty; and even if I should be murdered,²⁶ it will not be my loss, but my gain, for then will the fish return to his native element.”

26 Different men, white and red, sought to kill him on various occasions.

*Chapter 8***Worldly Alliances and Friendship, or Purity**

Several years passed since the fore-mentioned visit to the Allegheny. Several Christian Indian villages had been founded and the converts living among them numbered in the hundreds. David knew first-hand the Indian culture—he knew that a good part of it was simply abominable.

Not that he was biased. The culture of the white man also had its detestable aspects. From all sides, the faith of the converts was attacked. Indians offered drunken orgies to the youth—often organized, purposely, just outside the Christian villages. White men sold the booze, as well as spiritual drunkenness: they peddled an apostate form of Christianity that put on an outward show but offered no practical fruits of righteousness.

David knew that the man who follows Jesus has some forsaking to do: old customs, old habits, old ideas, old ambitions, and last but certainly not least, old friends.

In a speech to Wangomen, as David and his converts prepared to move away from his community a couple years after their “collision” mentioned above, David said:

“I have on several occasions told you we are a people different from others, and I wish that you could understand what I am going to say. We are not able to live as other Indians do, we do not like heathenism, on the contrary we abhor it. We live only to please the Savior and to do his work. It is the same with us white brethren. We are separate from the world. There are only two kinds of people in all the nations of the world; Namely, children of the world and children of the Savior; the former are on the way to eternal destruction, the latter on the way to eternal life. I have often heard that many of you have said: Why should we believe in the white people, they look quite different than we do,

because their skin is white and ours is brown. We do not want you to believe in the white people but in the Savior, because you could learn very bad things from the white people, things which are even worse than what you do. You call me Schwannak, which means white man; we can see that you do not make any difference between us and all other white people. Try and use your intelligence and judgment which God has given you and open your eyes, then you will see the difference! I take it you realize that my way of living is different from that of other white people. We are children of God and all those who believe in God and His five wounds are our brothers and sisters, whether their skin is white, brown or black. All together we form one people of God.”

Towards the end of his life, David wrote in his diary:

“Experience fully proves, that when souls are once converted to our Savior from among the wild²⁷ Indians, it is absolutely requisite to their growth in grace and godliness, that they thenceforward renounce the world, with its afflictions and lusts, quit and separate themselves as much as possible from their former heathenish connections and friendships, hear the word of God frequently and seek pleasure in company of their fellow Christians. Whoever cannot resolve to live thus, and at the same time pay more attention than is usual among the heathens to domestic duties, (with which the life of a hunter is at variance²⁸), is in great danger of making shipwreck of his faith, of which we fear that we have woeful example here, Gideon and Thomas, not to mention others.”

The question about “crossing cultures” has been a stickler to all missionaries. Some well-meaning people have essentially become dictators, forcing their converts to adapt to the incomprehensible culture of the message-bearer. Others, in what appears to be a reaction, refuse to give any practical input into the newly

27 David differentiated between the converted and the unconverted by his use of the word “wild.”

28 These words are David’s. The Indian hunts could last weeks and months at a time, with the men all living in the woods and roaming up to hundreds of miles from their home village.

converted “heathen”—leaving them to grope confusedly along; the missionary, refusing to make practical biblical applications to them, hopes they find their own way out of their tangled messes.

David Zeisberger tried a somewhat novel approach. Taking what he deemed the best of both the Indian and the white cultures, he founded separate villages, usually located at least a couple of miles from the Indian settlements, thus hoping to avoid the worst of the unrestrained lustful activities of the native culture. At the same time, he realized that the Indians were Indians, and would never “fit” into the advancing white colonist culture: in fact, he himself did not “fit in.”

Securing permission from the highest chiefs, he would start a village. In most occasions, he and his converts would start “from scratch” in the middle of the “bush.” Carefully laying out a street and parcels,²⁹ a community would begin to form. Only converted or seriously-seeking Indians were given permission to become part of the community.³⁰ All strong drink was prohibited from entering the town. Breakers of this ordinance had their “fire-water” confiscated until they left—and on at least one occasion the abominable liquid was poured out onto the ground.

Below is a list of the rules for those desiring residence within the village:³¹

- I. We will know no other God but the one only true God, who made us and all creatures, and came into this world in order to save sinners; to Him alone we will pray.
- II. We will rest from work on the Lord’s Day, and attend public service.
- III. We will honor father and mother, and when they grow old and needy we will do for them what we can.

29 The native settlements were known for their utter lack of planning, the huts peppered around according to the whim of the individual builder.

30 With rare exceptions, whites were not allowed to settle in the Christian communities. But it must be remembered that genuinely Christian white people were rare in the neck of the woods where David founded his villages.

31 There are slight variations in the several extant versions from different communities.

IV. No person will get leave to dwell with us until our teachers have given their consent, and the helpers³² have examined him.

V. We will have nothing to do with thieves, murderers, whore-mongers, adulterers, or drunkards.

VI. We will not take part in dances, sacrifices, heathenish festivals, or games.

VII. We will use no tshapiet, or witchcraft, when hunting.

VIII. We renounce and abhor all tricks, lies, and deceits of Satan.

IX. We will be obedient to our teachers and to the helpers who are appointed to preserve order in our meetings in the towns and fields.

X. We will not be idle, nor scold, nor beat one another, nor tell lies.

XI. Whoever injures the property of his neighbor shall make restitution.

XII. A man shall have but one wife—shall love her and provide for her and his children. A woman shall have but one husband, be obedient to him, care for her children, and be cleanly in all things.

XIII. We will not admit rum or any other intoxicating liquor into our town. If strangers or traders bring intoxicating liquor, the helpers shall take it from them and not restore it until the owners are ready to leave the place.

XIV. No one shall contract debts with traders, or receive goods to sell for traders, unless the helpers give their consent.

XV. Whoever goes hunting, or on a journey, shall inform the minister or stewards.

XVI. Young persons shall not marry without the consent of their parents and the minister.

32 Native brethren who “helped” in community decisions.

XVII. Whenever the stewards or helpers appoint a time to make fences or to perform other work for the public good, we will assist and do as we are bid.

XVIII. Whenever corn is needed to entertain strangers, or sugar for love-feast, we will contribute from our stores.

XIX. We will not go to war, and will not buy anything of warriors taken in war.

In these villages, each family had its own personal “plantation” and was responsible to provide for his own needs. As well, the village usually had “community projects” with which each family was expected to help—perhaps maple syrup/sugar production, a corn patch to hoe to feed the many visitors,³³ taking care of the orchards, or a log-cutting crew for the chapel or school.

“Jewel of the Susquehanna” was the name applied to Friedenshutzen.³⁴ With its 250 acres of cultivated land, two miles of fence, and streets that were swept daily by the modestly dressed and veiled Indian sisters,³⁵ it surely glimmered as a ray of beauty in an otherwise debauched land. The unconverted Indians marveled at the changed countenance of their believing friends and relatives; so much so that some of the unbelievers were known to have washed the paint off their arms and faces—without being asked to do so—before entering into the chapel to hear the Word preached. Colonel Morgan would say, “The Indians in Zeisberger’s settlements are an example to civilized whites.” Indeed, the believers were known to pay their debts to the penny!

But Friedenshutzen and other Pennsylvania villages had been abandoned and the Indians, believing and unbelieving, were forced into the Ohio valley—more specifically, the western side of the Ohio River. For some years, the Ohio was the boundary between the white-man’s land and Indian lands. David helped or-

33 These villages probably entertained tens of thousands of guests during their days—English, French, and American, as well as Indians of practically every tribe in the upper Ohio, Susquehanna and Delaware valleys.

34 Near present day Wyalusing, Pennsylvania.

35 These industrious ladies also brought hay down the river in boats from the fields—7 miles upstream!

ganize several Christian villages along the Tuscarawas River. He himself lived at Lichtenau, only several miles from the Delaware “capital.”³⁶

Then came the war. The colonists would call it the American Revolution. The English would call it the War of the Rebellion. One Indian leader would note that David Zeisberger and his converts “were between two exceeding mighty and wrathful gods, who stood opposed with extended jaws.” The British would send the war hatchet³⁷ to the Delaware from Detroit. The Americans would woo them from Fort Pitt. When one side sent a letter asking him to join their cause, David threw it into the fire. For a couple of years David and his Indian brethren held enough sway among the non-Christian Indians of the northern Ohio valley, some 10,000 warriors, to keep most of them neutral.³⁸

Slowly, after the death of an influential chief with close ties to David, the tone of the councils changed to war tones. David, only a couple miles from the “capital” had a choice—stay and have the young men and children sucked into the war spirit, or move on.

He moved on, abandoning Lichtenau, the “meadow of light.” Better to move the lighthouse than have its mirrors tarnished by hatred.

36 Present-day Coshocton, Ohio.

37 A “war-hatchet” was sent to other villages to invite other Indians to join a war cause.

38 In human terms, David, unwittingly, may have done as much for the Colonies as any other man. Had the Indian tribes of the Ohio valley joined the English at the beginning of the conflict (which they did do later), the precarious balance of the first couple of years may well have swung to the British side. By keeping peace with the Indians, the western settlements were able to then send their forces to the eastern seaboard to fight against the British soldiers there. Had the colonies been forced to defend the western front as well as the eastern, only God knows what may have been the result!

*Chapter 9***Escape or Co-suffer**

“Captive-town” some later called it. David Zeisberger merely referred to it as the mission on the Sandusky. His move to this place was indeed more of a capture than a mission venture, but a missionary at heart will turn even a capture into a mission.

David was now entering his 7th decade of existence. Newly married,³⁹ he and his converts had been forcibly removed from the prospering villages they had founded on the Tuscarawas. With British encouragement from Detroit, warriors from northwest Ohio had gone to the Christian villages, and after trying to persuade the brethren to abandon their homes, finally felt compelled to force them to do so. It was autumn, just before the corn harvest. 5000 bushels of corn in the several hundred acres under cultivation were in the fields surrounding the Christian towns, as well as pumpkins and other fruits. It has been estimated that they were forced to abandon \$20,900.00 worth of household goods, livestock and crops—about \$350,000.00 in current value.

Rather unceremoniously,⁴⁰ David and his fellow helpers were forced to abandon practically all and begin a 20-day trek northwest. David wrote in his journal:

“And thus we turned our backs upon our homesteads and places where we had enjoyed so much good and blessed from the hands of the Savior. Before us we could see nothing wherein to rejoice, nothing but need, misery, and danger.”

39 He was 60 years of age when he entered into marriage (June 4, 1781, at Lititz, Penn.) with Susan Lecron, 37 years of age, on his last trip to the east. His friends pressured him to get a wife to “take care of him” as he was so involved in his work that he “forgot” to take good care of himself at times... Almost 10 years earlier, one of his co-missionaries had written: “If Brother David does not live with a married couple who can care for him for a time again, he will not be able to hold out long.” Leaving Lititz a few days after her wedding, Susan spent the next 27 years in the woods, without one single furlough, before returning to civilization. God bless missionary wives!!

40 David and the other male missionaries were stripped almost naked and put to shame before all the Indians for three days. One of the white men in the group of “captors” did give David some clothes after a while—a woman’s nightgown.

This was in spite of the fact that the brethren fed whosoever visited their communities, regardless of their political persuasion. Even the “captors” were fed well. David wrote:

“We had to give them provisions, slaughter swine and cattle for them, and this we did still cheerfully, if only they had left us longer in peace.”

The last public service at the Gnadenhutten chapel,⁴¹ given by David, was on the theme of Divine Love. “We will quietly await whatever He permits. We will not defend our lives by force of arms, for that would be putting ourselves on a level with the heathen, and we are children of God.”

Every heart present was touched. Tears trickled down cheeks. The unconverted pagans in their midst sat with heads bowed. John Heckewelder wrote that he had never witnessed another scene like it and that it seemed that Jesus Himself were visibly present. But the “captors” were persistent: The missionaries must abandon the villages.

Finally, seeing there was little other alternative to the demands, the believers packed what little they could take along and left, escorted by the Loyalist Indians.

The 20-day voyage included the births of two babies, and the death of a two-year-old, as well as the sinking of two canoes about which David noted that “the brethren lost all they had, for they sank to the bottom.” Whether he referred to himself or not, it is not known, but many of his own possessions were in one of the lost canoes. Towards the end of the trip, the “captives” were driven “on like cattle, without having the least compassion for children and sisters, for they left them no time to give the children drink once.”

Arriving at their new “homeland”, David noted that “the Wyandot⁴² left us and went ten miles to their homes after they had abandoned us in the wilderness, where there was no food to be found and no game to hunt, and many among our brethren had nothing left to eat, but lived upon what those, who yet had some-

41 The nearby Schonbrunn chapel was said to be able to hold about 500 persons, and at times was overfilled with listening natives.

42 That is, the last of their “captors.”

thing, divided among them.”

Three hundred persons abandoned in a wilderness with winter fast approaching... His new wife would write about those days saying, “Many times the Indians shared their last morsel with me, for many times I spent eight days in succession without any food of my own.” David himself noted that they were forced to eat dead cows and horses. Some corn was available for purchase, but the price eventually rose to \$8.00/bushel!⁴³ And besides, a summons for the white missionaries to appear in Detroit shortly arrived. The British commander was worried that the missionaries had taken sides with the Colonies and demanded to talk with them about “meddling with Public Matters.”

So the men began their journey. Much of the route was swampland—so mucky that Heckewelder wrote that the horses sank “belly deep into the mire, which frequently obliged us to cut strong poles to prize them out again.”

Standing before the highest British official at Detroit,⁴⁴ Ar-ent De Peyster, David was absolved of any traitordom against the British Empire. In fact, the commander offered them aid and gave his blessing upon his work. At one point, De Peyster even offered the missionaries a free return trip to the colonies to escape the hard times his converts were passing. Bethlehem was flourishing by this time, becoming an industrial town ... There was plenty of food there ... Comfortable houses ... Lots of fellowship with other believers ... David chose to return to his “beloved brown brethren.” He wrote:

“There could be no question whether we should accept the commandment’s offer, for it was our duty and necessity to venture everything for our Indian Church.”

43 This would be the equivalent of over \$130.00 in current value. And corn today can be bought for about \$3.00-6.00 per bushel!

44 David’s description of this town is striking: “... the place here is like Sodom.” “A sink of iniquity, a wicked and accursed place.” While the French had a church and an old priest who read mass, “the English and Protestants have neither church nor preacher, and wish for neither.” One of the missionaries noted that the inhabitants of Detroit had abandoned the use of “breeches” and wore loin-clothes like the Indians. They also noted that this was normal conduct for all the outposts in the area.

*Chapter 10***Bitterness or Forgiveness**

It would hardly seem proper to write a biography about David Zeisberger and not include the story of Gnadenhutzen. This tragedy is perhaps the best-known incident of the Moravian missions to the Ohio Valley Indians. Sad day it was . . .

The story of the Gnadenhutzen actually began when the first Europeans “discovered” North America. Christopher Columbus did not discover America—Asian peoples had already discovered and settled here some centuries before, if not a millennium or two!

But Europeans tend to think of themselves as a bit more advanced than their brothers are. To them, America was essentially free for the taking. The more conscientious of them paid, albeit sparingly (in general), the Asians for the land they claimed, but others simply moved in and declared it their own.

Initially the Asian peoples—mistakenly called Indians—did not make much of a fuss. There was lots and lots of land, and the white-skinned settlers were relatively few. Furthermore, many of them were religious dissidents, conscientious and agreeable neighbors.

But soon the number of settlers swelled. No longer were they seen by the Asian peoples as curious friends who had strange customs and inventions—now they came by hordes. It appeared to some as nothing less than an invasion, ruining prime hunting lands.

From the very coasts of the Atlantic, the Asians soon found themselves pushed inland. Treaties and land sales were frequent—often involving rum or whiskey. The white men would get the Indians drunk and then strike a deal with them while the latter remained intoxicated. After sobering up, the Indians would find they had sold land at crazy low prices.

Or, there was outright treachery. The famed “Walking Purchase” is a good example. The Indians agreed to sell the white men a tract of land, the width of which would be the distance that

a man could walk in 1-1/2 days.⁴⁵ The price finalized, the white men hired two of their fastest runners to take off. Eighteen hours later, the winner collapsed about 45 miles from the starting point. The Indians felt cheated. They had expected it to be about 30 miles. "You should have leisurely walked along," they said. After all, it was supposed to have been a 1-1/2 day "walking purchase," not a 1-1/2 day "running purchase."

But the white men held their ground. The Indians moved further west.

Atrocities were committed by both sides. Murders, scalpings, and kidnappings were a continual scene on the frontiers of the white settlement. Frustrated government officials were almost helpless to stop the white advance. They, the governments of the colonies, made treaties with the Indians, with full intentions of keeping them. But independent-minded settlers pushed past the lines drawn on the maps. If the government complained, the settlers threatened to rebel.

Finally, in our story, the Ohio River was chosen as the boundary. To the west was Indian land, to the east, white man land. Disgruntled people on both sides moved back and forth, killing, abducting, and destroying. Revenge revenged revenge.

In the time of Gnadenhutten on the Tuscarawas,⁴⁶ another factor was involved. The white men were fighting among themselves. The British were trying to put down a rebellion in the colonies that they had started. Gnadenhutten lay smack in the middle of the western front. Northwest was Detroit, held by the British. Southeast was Fort Pitt, held by the colonies. More than literally being between the two enemies, David and his converts were also "in the way" symbolically: they refused to take sides. David wrote:

"We do not want to have anything to do with the affairs of state, that is not our business. We are glad if only we can live unmolested and be at peace with everybody."

45 A common measurement to the Indians, who knew practically nothing of European surveying.

46 There were at least two other Moravian Indian communities that were given the same name.

However, Detroit at last ordered the removal of the Moravian missionaries. The above narrative of “Captive Town” relates this story in brief. It was winter now. Food was scarce. In their abandoned villages along the Tuscarawas—about 100 miles away—were hundreds, if not thousands, of bushels of corn, buried in the snow.

Securing permission from their captors, about ninety Christian Indians, using horses, went to fetch some of it. For several days they gathered and bagged the much-needed food. On the morrow, they would return.

Unbeknownst to them, another scene was unfolding. Some claim it was a conspiracy to get rid of the Christian Indians. After all, non-resistant people are a kind of thorn in the flesh to both sides in the midst of a war—at least in the eyes of some.

While the peaceful brethren harvested the corn, an Indian war party crossed the Ohio River and raided a few settlements in Washington County, Pennsylvania. Killing a few and taking a few captives along, the war party recrossed the Ohio and headed for Gnadenhutten. Along the way, they found that Mrs. Wallace and her 2-1/2 year-old son were too bothersome, so they killed them both and hung them up in trees along the way, knowing that a rescue party would likely be on their tail.

Arriving at Gnadenhutten, they informed the Christian Indians of their deeds. Appalled, the brethren reproved them and urged them on. Before leaving, the warriors sold a dress to one of the young girls. Realizing their danger, the brethren held a council as to what they should do. Naively, they decided to stay and finish the harvest, trusting that the rescuers would respect their claims to Christianity—after all, they were personal friends with some of the people at Fort Pitt.

The “rescuers,” more correctly the “revengers,” arrived at Gnadenhutten not many days later. The colonists appeared friendly at first, even offering to take them to Fort Pitt for protection, so much so that the believing Indians were sucked into the net. After gathering most of them into the village from the fields, the accusations started to fly.

“You are warriors, and we know that you are thieves. Look at all the metal pots, the tools, and the white men’s clothing among you. You stole that from our frontier settlements.”

Vainly, the brethren proclaimed their innocence, explaining that they had bought such items from traders. Isaac Glikhikan, converted Delaware captain and respected leader among the brethren explained: “We do not go to war anymore. We are followers of the Son of God and do no men harm.” But there stood the young Indian girl, wearing the dress of the woman that had been impaled on the tree a few days earlier—the blood of its former owner still on it.

A few of the settlers believed the Indians. In fact, many of them may have. But the white man’s goods in the village, the bloody dress, and the recent funeral services in their settlement stirred up emotions in the group that Colonel David Williamson could hardly squelch.

A vote was decided—those that wanted to spare the Christian Indians could step forward. Eighteen of the approximately 200 settlers did so and went away from the scene, “calling upon the Almighty to witness that they washed their hands of the crime about to be perpetuated.”

The brethren were permitted to spend one night in prayer and praise. In the morning, the slaughter began. With a cooper’s mallet, one of the colonists began smashing the heads of the Indians. After doing fourteen, he handed it to one of the others saying, “My arm fails me; go on in the same way; I think I have done pretty well.”

The older Indians were also scalped. But even after being knocked in the head and scalped, one of the young boys, Thomas, awoke from his daze and escaped.⁴⁷ With another escapee, they made their way back to David Zeisberger and the others encamped on the Sandusky River. “The blood flowed in streams . . .” Thomas

47 Thomas lived quite a number of years after his ghastly experience, suffering thenceforward from “fits”. One day while traveling alone in a canoe, he drowned, evidently from one of his seizures, as he was known to be an excellent swimmer. Imagine going through life after having been, quite literally, scalped!!!

One of the militiamen who opposed the killing of the Moravian Indians was Obadiah Holmes, Jr. Among his observations of the incident was that “one Nathan Rollins & brother had had a father & uncle killed took the lead in murdering the Indians, ... & Nathan Rollins had tomahawked nineteen of the poor Moravians, & after it was over he sat down & cried, & said it was no satisfaction for the loss of his father & uncle after all.”



Burial site of the 96 non-resistant Christian Indians at Gnadenhutten, Ohio.

would remember.

David was shocked to hear the news. Approximately one-third of his congregation had been murdered by people whom he considered friends. Furthermore, although he probably did not ever know it, Simon Girty, a loyalist with whom he later had a good relationship, seems to have gone along with the war-party that had raided the settlements. Disguising himself so as not to be recognized, Simon went up and down the east bank of the Ohio River and urged the settlers to destroy the Indians camped at Gnadenhutzen, blaming them for the raids. Some say the whole affair was a plan to eliminate the Christian Indians.

Friends turned foe. Foe and betrayer later turned friend. Unspeakable atrocities. Cold-blooded murders. David walked in the middle of it all. Although he seems to have leaned somewhat toward the Colonist cause during the war, he never openly took sides. In fact, he had open communication with both sides, and both sides openly supported his work among the Indians, sending him supplies on occasion.

But the best part of the story is ... David Zeisberger never got bitter about any of it!

Like Thomas at
Gnadenhutzen,
Robert McGee was
scalped (by the Sioux
Chief Little turtle in
1864) and survived. It
is hard to imagine!!



*Chapter 11***Retirement in Fair Fields or Hard Work?**

David was now in his 77th year. It was high time, according to human reasoning, that the old man take it easy. He now lived in Upper Canada.⁴⁸ Around him laid a prosperous Christian Indian village that he had helped to organize. Sure, it was cold; so cold that the ink froze to the pens and the morning found ice on the blankets—from their own breath freezing. After leaving Captive Town, he and his converts had lived in various communities in Michigan, Ohio, and Ontario. Now he was comfortably settled in a bountiful community, his faithful wife by his side. A nice chapel, two schools, almost fifty other homes, a carpenter shop, storehouses, and barns besides. The Great Northwestern Fur Company was purchasing about 2000 bushels of corn each year from the believers, close to 5000 pounds of maple sugar was processed yearly, the community's baskets and mats were in demand, and they supplied hand-made canoes to all the neighboring towns. Cattle thrived, fences surrounded 300 cultivated acres, fruit trees budded, clover bloomed—the community name was nothing less than Fairfield.

But ...

The American Congress had granted the Moravian Church three 4000-acre plots of land, surveyed and with a title, in the Tuscarawas valley as a goodwill gesture for the Gnadenhutten murders that had occurred there some years before.

Should the brethren go back?

It was like the reviving of an old racehorse. The mention of returning to their old home had the same effect upon many of the converted Indians. Finally, it was decided that David and several Indian families, seven in number, would return as a kernel to revive the mission on the Tuscarawas. Joyfully selling their possessions, the Indian brethren did not count it loss that they were

48 Southern Ontario. We in the USA usually think of “upper” as meaning north. Thus it strikes us as strange that the southernmost part of Canada be called “Upper Canada”. But if you start at the mouth of the St. Lawrence River and head upstream, southern Ontario suddenly becomes “Upper Canada”!

giving up established homes for overgrown wilderness. David's example had taught them well. He would write:

“Our Indians are accustomed to leave all when called upon, and they do it cheerfully.”

So David, 77 years of age, packed his bags once more. He rented a U-haul truck and loaded up for the six-hour drive to the Tuscarawas.

No. He loaded a canoe and set out on the journey that would take fifty-one days. For the 13th time he would start a Christian Indian village. Arriving at the site, he would write:

“Our land here has acquired such a wild appearance since we left in the year 1771,⁴⁹ that we can hardly know it again.”

Missionary blood still flowed in David Zeisberger's veins.

David spent ten more years at his last settlement, Goshen, dying there on November 20, 1808. Some of his last words were, “The Savior is near, perhaps He will soon come and take me to Himself.”

During his long life, he wrote “A Delaware Indian and English Spelling-book,” with an appendix containing the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, some Scripture passages and a Litany; “A Collection of Hymns for the use of the Christian Indians,” translated from the English and German Moravian Hymn-books, and including the Easter, Baptismal and Burial Litanies; a volume of “Sermons to Children,” translated from the German; a translation of Spangenberg's “Bodily Care of Children”; “A Harmony of the Four Gospels,” translated from the Harmony prepared by Samuel Leiberkuhn; and a grammatical treatise on the Delaware conjugations. He also prepared a lexicon, in seven volumes, of the German and Onondaga languages, an Onondaga Grammar, a Delaware Grammar, a German-Delaware Dictionary, and other works of a similar nature. All this besides voluminous diaries and journals.

He was so acquainted with Indian culture that he could give speeches and sermons in their language and in their bombastic,

49 17 years had passed ...

to this temptation. So weakened in body that he could not hear well or write, he was forced to publicly reprove them for getting drunk—only half the congregation had showed up for Easter services, the rest were getting drunk in the woods. He was compelled to warn them:

“... There is a house here in which the following persons [he named them] are living, who have given themselves up to every kind of vice. They act like wild beasts, and not like men. They do not belong to our people; and yet they want to be masters in this town ... I will add a few words for their special benefit, and in the way of warning for all ... The Bible contains not only sweet promises, but also fearful denunciations upon the children of darkness, and says, particularly, that neither drunkards, nor fornicators, nor murderers, nor evil-doers of any kind will inherit the kingdom of God, but will, unless they repent, be cast ... into hell-fire, where they will be tormented forever and ever, without the possibility of escape, or hope of salvation. I wish you to hear this, once more ... so that, on the Day of Judgment, you may not bring forward as excuse for you wickedness that I and your teachers did not tell you the consequences if you persist in your present course.”

Such a sermon is not the kind that a preacher desires to be his last sermon. But for David it was. Furthermore, he was facing depression, as in his eyes his life's work was a failure. The converts gathered around him now numbered only a score or so, and many of these were falling away. The old glory days of revival had passed. As well, reports came in of other Moravian mission ventures that claimed thousands upon thousands of conversions: from the West Indies, Surinam, Greenland, and Labrador and from South Africa. So in spite of his knowing human nature, he was a discouraged man going to his grave.

He also knew the fickleness of the white man. He would sigh about his fellow missionaries in his last days, noting that the searching out of new mission fields among the Indians had almost ceased to be and that the young missionaries who did arrive on the field now had to come with loaded-down pack-horses, whereas he

had went out with little more than a strong faith in God.

And then there was the Moravian Brethren storekeeper in nearby Gnadenhutzen—now resettled by white “brethren”—who sold alcoholic beverages on the very grounds where such drinks had been banned before. In fact, even the Ohio legislature forbid the selling of the “fire-water” on the missions grounds, with the exception of the one store-owner who had a license—a member of the Moravian Brotherhood ...⁵¹

But should David be discouraged as he lay dying? He knew he would be buried in “God’s Acre,” where many other believers—most of them Indians—had already been placed. There were those in that plot in whom he could have confidence that they also would gather around the throne, rejoicing at the final trumpet. He had preached to Mahicans, Wampanoags, Nanticokes, Shawnee, Chippewas, Ottawas, Wyandots, Unamis, Unalachtgos, Monseys, Onondagas, Cayugas, and Senacas: from Massachusetts to Michigan. Furthermore, native brethren had carried the message further on, until it was said that Indians beyond the Mississippi River had heard the message of salvation.

Thousands of Indians had been baptized. The missionaries generally withheld adult baptism until there were evident signs of a change in heart. It is true, many apostatized; many were scattered abroad into the wilds when the villages were ransacked; many had simply gone to their final reward. David lay dying among the second and third generations of Christian Indians.

He had seen their fathers acknowledge women as equal beings and perform labors generally left for the females in their society. He had seen them lay aside their feathers, paint, and ornaments and begin to dress very plainly, clean and neat, as he himself was known to dress. They stayed home and raised families instead of going off on extended hunts leaving the women and children to fend for themselves. The planted and worked hard instead of lolling in the sun. They had rejected the war hatchet.

And David could not know, except by faith, that there would be some Indians who would continue in the faith, passing the

51 It is to be remembered, though, that total abstinence was almost unheard of in those days.

torch to the next generation. This did occur, for a great-grandson of Gelelemend⁵² (converted chief of the Unami Delaware), John Kilbuck by name, would become a missionary to the Alaskan Eskimos, dying there in 1922. Up into the 20th century, there would be a little band of “praying Indians” on the reservations of Kansas and Oklahoma, where the white men would eventually push the few remaining Delaware.

So lived David Zeisberger. Bishop Ettwein would say of him: “If only our little⁵³ David could be at more places, or if we had more such Davids!”

David never would allow his name to be put on a salary list, to become a “hireling” as he would call it. Not that he felt doing so was always wrong. But for him, just seeing a soul come to the Lamb for cleansing was enough reward for him.



From the east coast, the Lenni Lenape (Delaware) were pushed to Kansas. This 1867 photo shows a Lenni Lenape farm on a reservation there. For many years after their settlement there, there was a small band known as the “Praying Indians,” product of the Moravian mission efforts.

52 David Zeisberger’s testimony of this man is as follows: “Ah, how has this man, the great chief of Goshachgunk (where David had his encounter with Wangomen) changed! How now is he become so meek that he comes like any other sinner, weeps and begs for grace at the Saviour’s feet ...”

53 Remember, David barely passed the 5-foot mark in physical stature.

Chapter 12

And Us ... Readers or Heeders?

Somebody call 911!! Bethlehem is in distress!

While doing the research for this book, I visited Bethlehem, Pennsylvania two times. Walking on the very grounds where David Zeisberger had trod, I noted, among other things, how that paganism has taken over—right in Bethlehem itself.

Entering a bookstore that boasted a sign that read “MORAVIAN BOOKSTORE-1745”—within a hundred yards of where David had slept many times in the still-standing single-brothers house—I looked for some old books on Moravian Church history. Among its thousands of titles—mostly non-religious, but some promoting philosophy and other religions—I finally found a few Bibles near a corner.

Outside, on the nearby park-grounds that contain some of the original buildings of the Moravian settlers, lay a man, not Indian, dressed in nothing more (literally) than a modern loin-cloth—a pair of shorts. At a nearby museum, the sight of a young girl with a pierced nose—no, she was not a Nez Perce (French for “pierced nose”) Indian—who “guarded” the pretty paintings in an air-conditioned room struck me as an example of modern laziness.

In an earlier visit, leaving the Moravian College library, I noted the young lady standing near the entrance door, dressed in the attire of a harlot and smoking the Indian’s gift to the white man—tobacco. How Bethlehem needs missionaries, I thought!

Yea, how all of North America needs missionaries!

Two hundred years have elapsed since David Zeisberger passed to his eternal reward. North America has changed drastically since then—David Zeisberger would in no ways recognize Bethlehem nor the Ohio Valley. From an estimated 3 million souls at the coming of the Europeans, the North American population has exploded 100 times, to approximately 300 million.

300,000,000 eternal souls; and a good part of them are as pagan as the party-loving Indians that David walked among. Sure, some things have changed; but there are striking similarities. No

longer do rum-traders roam the woods looking to sell their goods in isolated Indian villages. Now it is cocaine and meth dealers who stalk and seduce America's youth to destroy their souls. No longer does someone beat a deerskin drum to get the passions of the youth aroused to dance and fornicate; now North America's youth download rap music from the Internet to play on their iPod®.

No longer is North America a primitive wilderness of vines, huge trees, and swamps. Now it is a tangled mess of endless pavement and high-rise apartments—the “concrete jungle.”

No longer are there herb-doctor *shamans* who preach that there are three ways to heaven, one for the black man, one for the brown man, and one for the white man. Now there are about 300 million ways: every man has his own way and one is not supposed to “bother” others with his opinion.

But God saved and delivered hundreds of North American heathen using men like David Zeisberger. To God be the Glory! Should you try to give undue glory to David Zeisberger, and were he to find it out, he (if he could) might well run you out of town like he did whiskey-traders that came to ply their wares in his villages.

To God only be the glory for souls saved!

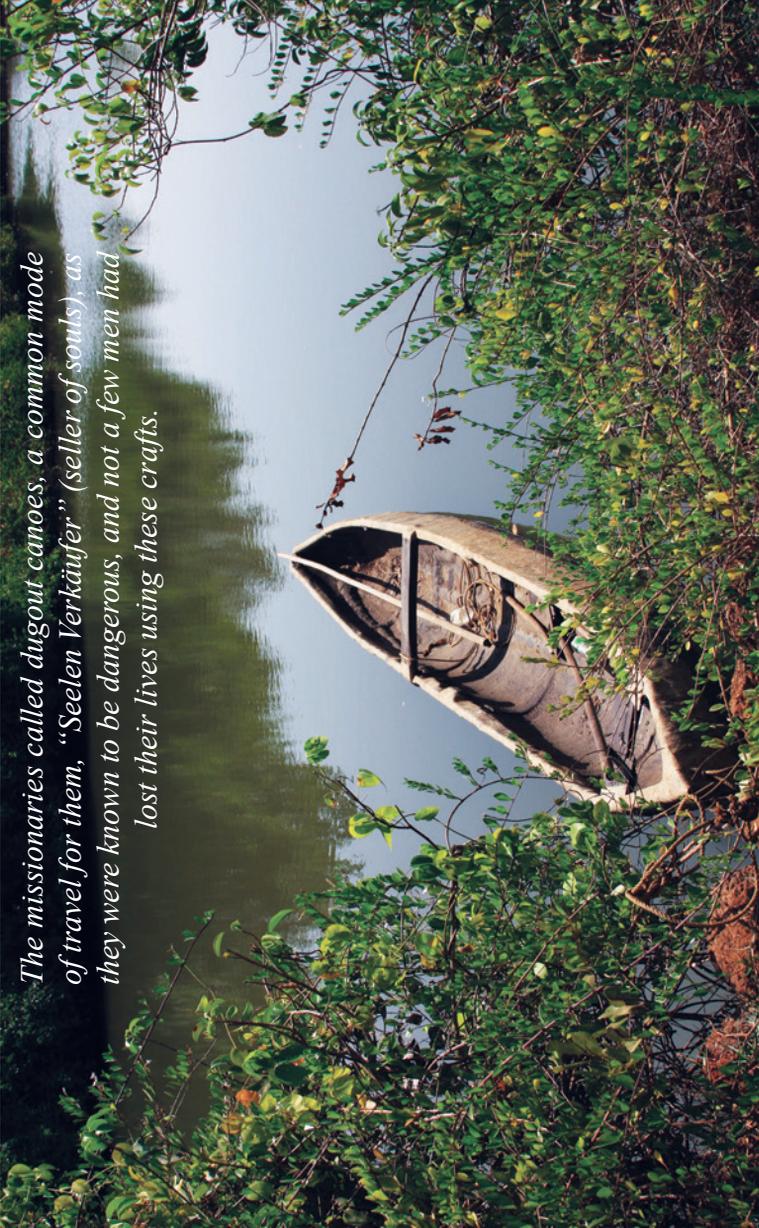
Yet, God uses men—men like David Zeisberger who consistently choose the spiritual over the natural—in the work of saving heathen.

And America desperately needs missionaries to preach the Lamb among its millions of pagans that roam its concrete jungles.

“If only our little David could be at more places, or if we had more such Davids!”

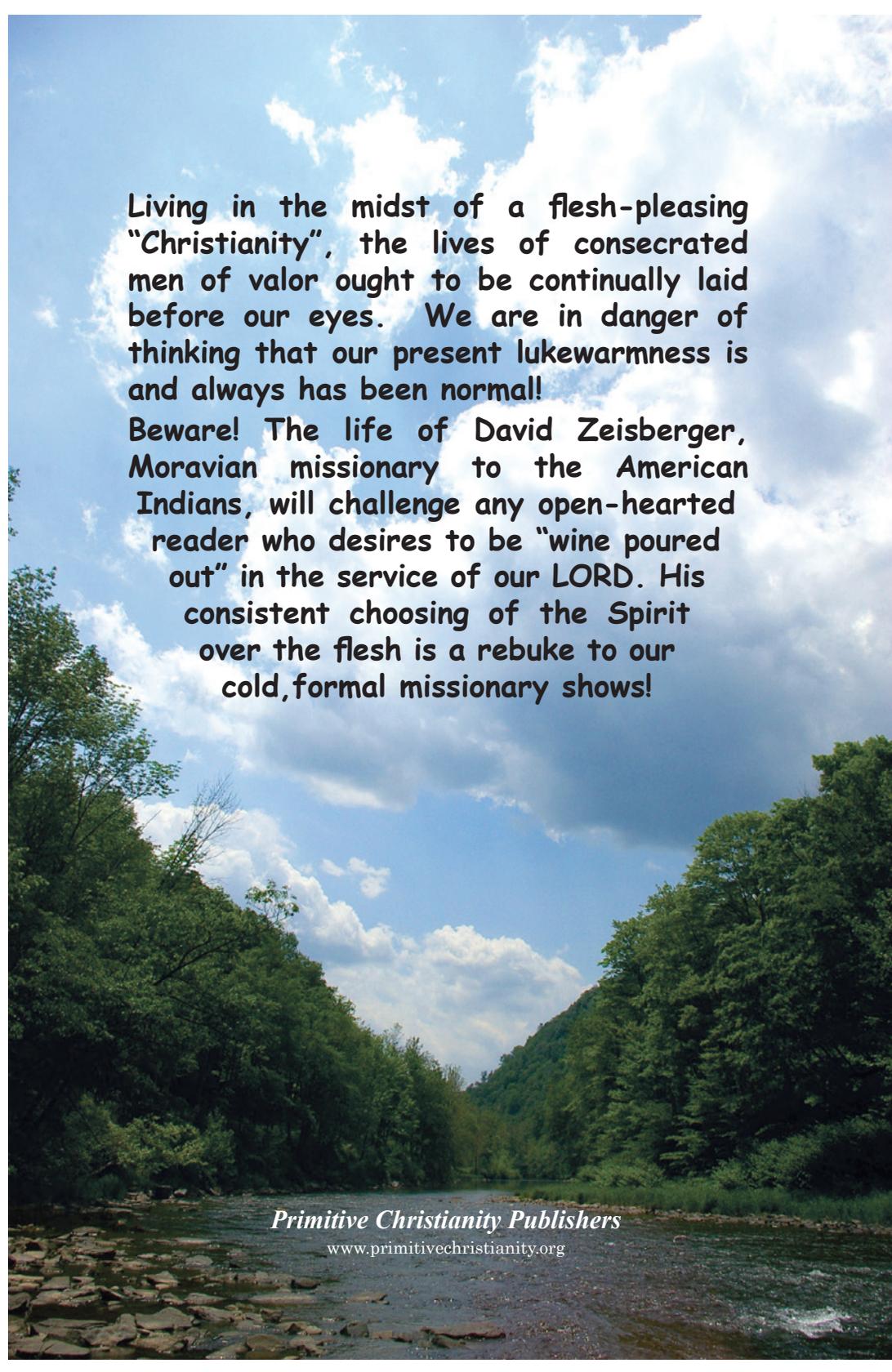
AMEN!!

The missionaries called dugout canoes, a common mode of travel for them, “Seelen Verkäufer” (seller of souls), as they were known to be dangerous, and not a few men had lost their lives using these crafts.



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A scenic view of a river flowing through a lush green forest under a blue sky with white clouds. The river is in the foreground, surrounded by rocks and greenery. The trees are dense and vibrant green, lining both banks of the river. The sky is a clear blue with scattered white clouds, creating a bright and peaceful atmosphere.

Living in the midst of a flesh-pleasing "Christianity", the lives of consecrated men of valor ought to be continually laid before our eyes. We are in danger of thinking that our present lukewarmness is and always has been normal!

Beware! The life of David Zeisberger, Moravian missionary to the American Indians, will challenge any open-hearted reader who desires to be "wine poured out" in the service of our LORD. His consistent choosing of the Spirit over the flesh is a rebuke to our cold, formal missionary shows!

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