

5



FEMALE RELATIONSHIPS AND INTERCULTURAL BONDS IN MORAVIAN INDIAN MISSIONS

AMY C. SCHUTT

Traveling through New England in 1743 on the way to Shekomeko, a Christian Indian village in the vicinity of present-day Pine Plains, New York, the Moravian missionaries Jeannette and Martin Mack depended on the help and guidance of Indians who lived in small settlements in the Hudson and Housatonic river valleys. An “Indian widow” took special pains to help Jeannette through the dangers of a trek during an early February thaw. “Because the deep snows melted,” Martin reported, “we proceeded all day in the water,” and the Native woman “had to carry my wife across a river.” This widow gladly helped Jeannette, whom the Indian saw as her confidante. Leading Jeannette the next day “by the hand,” the widow “related to her with many tears what she had done throughout her life” and bemoaned her restless condition.¹

Eighteenth-century Moravian missionaries, who were German-speaking pietists and recent immigrants to the North American colonies, developed many abiding relationships with Indians. The example of the Indian widow and Jeannette Mack underscores the close connections between Indian and Euro-American Moravian women, who offered physical and emotional support to each other during trying times, including years of dislocation and depopulation among Native peoples. When the widow visited the Moravian mission at Shekomeko, she sought the company of other women.



On her previous visit to the mission, the Macks were not there, but her disappointment in not seeing them was offset by the presence of the missionary Anna Margaretha Büttner, whom the widow “loved inexpressibly.” With the missionary Anna Catharina Sensemann also stationed at Shekomoko, the Indian woman “believed now with certainty that she would receive much grace” at the mission.²

By the late 1740s, the center of Moravian mission activity among northeastern Indians had shifted from the New York–New England area to the borders of Pennsylvania, where increasing numbers of Native peoples from the Delaware Valley joined the mission. From their headquarters at Bethlehem in the Forks of the Delaware, the area near the conjunction of the Lehigh and Delaware rivers—the territory that, as discussed in chapters 8 and 9, below, had come under Pennsylvania control in the infamous Walking Purchase of 1737—the Moravians sent missionaries farther and farther west throughout the eighteenth century. During these years, they operated missions not only in the Hudson, Housatonic, and Delaware valleys but also eventually along the Susquehanna and in the Allegheny and Muskingum watersheds of the Ohio country. In the process, the Moravians made converts among many Native peoples classified linguistically as Algonquians, although this general label should not mask the ethnic and tribal diversity among them. The Moravians identified many of their first converts as “Mahikander,” that is, Mahicans, whose original homelands were in the present-day Albany, New York, area; others they termed “Sopus,” that is, Esopus Indians from lands on the west side of the Hudson, farther downriver from the Mahicans; and a few they called “Hoogland” (or Highland) Indians, from east of the Hudson. Another bloc appears as “Wompamosch” in the Moravian records; these were peoples largely from the Housatonic Valley. A large number of early Moravian converts also came from the Forks region near Bethlehem, and the Moravians called these Indians “Delawär.” Especially in later years, Moravian missionaries also met peoples they labeled “Mennisning” (that is, Minisinks or Munsees), whose homelands had been on the upper Delaware.³

By the time the Moravians encountered the Mahicans and other Hudson Valley peoples in the 1740s, these Indians had already been dispossessed of many of their homelands. During King George’s War (1744–48), Euro-American residents of the Hudson region were wary of the presence of Indians among them and of the Moravians’ missionary efforts. Rumors abounded that the Moravians were in league with the Indians in a Roman

Catholic plot to support the French during the war. Under pressure from encroaching and increasingly hostile Euro-American neighbors, many of the Mahicans from Shekomeko, along with some Native people from New England, moved to the Delaware Valley, where they lived under the auspices of the Moravians. They first settled near Bethlehem and then, increasingly, gathered with Delawares at a mission called Gnadenhütten on the upper Lehigh. Gnadenhütten grew into a flourishing settlement until November 1755, when other Delawares who were outraged at European expansion attacked the community; most of the missionaries were either shot or burned alive in the house where they had barricaded themselves. For the rest of the Seven Years' War and Pontiac's War, the Moravians struggled to regain a loyal Indian following—a difficult task at a time when Indians and colonists looked on each other with great hostility. After a tenuous peace returned to the borders of Pennsylvania, the Moravians set about rebuilding their seriously damaged operations by establishing the mission of Friedenshütten on the upper Susquehanna and expanding their work to Ohio country sites, including portions of present-day western Pennsylvania and the Muskingum Valley of Ohio.⁴

Throughout years of migrations and struggles, Indian women relied on their relationships with Euro-American missionary women as well as with other Indian women to cope with the drastic changes in their lives. Traditional Native constructions of female identities and roles as well as Moravian constructions of gender powerfully shaped Indian women's responses to Christianity. In many cases, gender identification helped bridge cultural differences and gave Indian and Euro-American women entrée into each other's worlds. These female connections were particularly strong in the 1740s and the 1750s, the first two decades of Moravian mission activity among Native North Americans. Intercultural relationships were tested during wartime and in subsequent decades. Nevertheless, even during the 1760s and 1770s, female relationships would continue to play a major role in Native experiences of Moravian Christianity. More frequently in this later period, however, the task of creating these relationships fell to Indian rather than to Euro-American Moravian women.⁵

Both Indian and Euro-American women living in Moravian communities were constantly confronted with the gender divide. Theirs was a highly segregated world. Although Moravian towns were intensely communal places where men and women called each other "brother" and "sister"



and combined efforts in a project to serve Jesus, they were also places where the sexes kept their daily lives and religious practices distinct and often separate. One scholarly view of the evangelical 1740s and 1750s depicts these decades as a time of the “unprecedented appearance of women’s voices in the churches”—a fleeting moment when it seemed “there would be ‘neither male nor female.’” In one sense, the Moravians reflected this trend, but in another they did not. Indeed, the Moravians touted female spiritual leadership, especially before the 1760s; however, they rooted female ministry in gender difference, not in the erasure of sex-based distinctions. Gender identities were essential to the spiritual practice and theology of Moravian Christianity.⁶

The Moravians contended that people grew in their faith by associating with others among the faithful who were alike in terms of sex, age, and marital status. They believed that women could understand and successfully guide other women because they had comparable experiences. Furthermore, people in the same age range learned much from the example of peers who had similar needs. Finally, Moravians believed that individuals of like marital condition—single, married, or widowed—could help lead each other to Christ. Thus, they organized their communities around these social distinctions. They called their social groupings based on sex and other characteristics “choirs.” This choir organization had a major impact on the lives of Moravian women; as one scholar notes, “Women were to preside over the temporal and spiritual lives of each other from birth to death.” Women holding the offices of “Eldress (*Ältestin*), Choir Helper (*Chorpflegerin*), Deaconess (*Diakonin*), Choir Labouress (*Chorarbeiterin*), Acolyte (*Acolutha*), and Servant (*Dienerin*)” performed a variety of duties, all of which served a spiritual function, such as preparing other women to take Communion or assisting in the Communion service itself. In addition to these offices, one historian concludes that by 1758 “a total of twenty-seven women were ordained as *Priesterinnen* (female Presbyters or ministers)” by the Moravians, although she acknowledges that the records are vague about their actual roles.⁷

Northeastern Algonquian peoples also constructed distinct though connected worlds for men and women. Delaware and Mahican rituals at first menstruation and in preparation for marriage, for example, highlighted the separateness of female experience. Associating first menstruation with spiritual power, native peoples saw it as an occasion for following carefully prescribed actions. According to the Moravian missionary David Zeisber-



Figure 7 Moravian women—European, Native American, and African—presented to Christ. Johann Valentin Haidt, *The 24 Single Sisters Choirs*, 1751. Unitätsarchiv, Herrnhut, Germany.

ger, a young woman entered a period of isolation and fasting at this time, among the Delawares living in a "separate hut . . . with the blanket over her head." An older woman accompanied the girl, keeping her apart from all others, feeding her sparingly, and forbidding her "to do any work." After coming home "looking black, grimy and dishevelled" from "lying about in dust and ashes the whole time," the girl was "washed and dressed in new garments." Among the Mahicans, similarly, a girl menstruating for the first time lived "alone in the woods" and might stay away between fourteen and forty days. Zeisberger described a subsequent two-month period during which the young woman was "required to wear a cap with a long shield, so that she can neither see any one readily, nor be seen," on the completion of which she was free to marry. This practice was apparently quite old. William Penn remarked in the late seventeenth century that before marriage young Indian women of the Delaware Valley donned "something upon their Heads for an Advertisement, but so as their Faces are hardly to be seen."⁸

In addition to such ceremonies that marked female identity, occupational differences and daily responsibilities established boundaries of maleness and femaleness. Men and women pursued distinct though mutually supportive economic activities. Women's traditional duties included planting, cultivating, and harvesting crops. Zeisberger explained that Native women "plant[ed] corn, principally, making of this their bread, which is baked in the ashes, and preparing with it various dishes. Besides, they raise[d] pumpkins of various kinds, potatoes, beans and other vegetables." Moravian John Heckewelder described such communal agricultural work as an opportunity for women to construct relationships: "The tilling of the ground at home . . . is frequently done by female parties, much in the manner of those husking, quilting, and other frolics (as they are called), which are so common in some parts of the United States." Female work was intergenerational; as Zeisberger wrote, the young were "accustomed to work by their mothers, for as the women must pound all the corn in a stamping trough or mortar, they train[ed] their daughters in this and also in such other work . . . as cooking, bread-making, planting, making of carrying-girdles and bags."⁹

Men traditionally pursued their own gender-specific responsibilities, such as hunting and warfare. Although wives handled the drying of animal skins and the preparation of peltries, men had primary responsibility for tracking and shooting game. As experienced hunters, they had the duty of

instructing the community's boys in becoming skillful in these endeavors. Often this education was indirect. Youths listened to aged hunters who were "conversing together on those subjects, each, in his turn, relating how he acted, and opportunities for that purpose." Thus, when a boy "killed his first game, such as a deer or a bear," family members praised his having "listened attentively to the aged hunters, for, though young, he has already given a proof that he will become a good hunter himself." Another clearly defined male role was that of the warrior. "'A warrior's conduct ought to be manly, else he is no man,'" Indians told Heckewelder. A crucial phase of a boy's training was the seeking of a spirit, or manitou, to guide him through life. As part of an initiation ritual, he was put on a strict fast and expected to swallow powerful draughts that induced visions and trances, through which he hoped to receive a guardian spirit who would explain "what he was before he was born and what he will be after his death." Armed with these insights after undergoing physical trials, a youth had passed through an important phase in his training for warfare. Not all boys became warriors, however. Guardian spirits sometimes informed them that they were "not designed for a military life" and "that they are to be physicians, sorcerers, or that their lives are to be devoted to some other civil employment."¹⁰

By the mid-eighteenth century, boundaries between traditional male and female pursuits were shifting. A significant change occurred in Moravian missions where Indian men were encouraged to participate in agricultural work, previously the woman's domain. At Gnadenhütten, the Moravians usually expected Indian men to represent households when fields were divided among the converts. During a conference in 1747, for example, the missionaries recorded land allotments for six Indian men. And occasionally men did agricultural work for wages. In 1748, for instance, David, who was of mixed Mahican and Wompanosch parentage, used a horse belonging to the Indian Nathanael to plough a field for the Delaware Gottlieb, receiving payment from the Moravians "because Gottlieb" was "very poor."¹¹

In spite of the increasing role of men in agricultural production, there were still distinct, though permeable, boundaries between the work of Indian men and of Indian women living in Moravian missions. Women maintained a prominent and even dominant place in the regular tasks of planting, hoeing, and harvesting, and they requested and obtained land when the Moravians assigned lots, particularly if they were living without



a husband. At the 1747 conference, the single woman Esther requested one acre for planting, and Sara, whose husband David was absent for an indefinite amount of time, also asked for an acre. Female converts played crucial agricultural roles in the eighteenth century, although some of their tasks, such as haying, were now tied to the European introduction of livestock. Often women worked the fields while men engaged in building projects at the mission. In May 1747, most of the men at Gnadenhütten worked on building a mill dam while “the remaining went with the sisters to hoe corn.” The following month, the men began to construct a “milk-house,” and “the Sisters went hay-making.” In 1767 at the Friedenshütten mission on the Susquehanna, “the Sisters worked diligently in their fields.” Women also were still responsible for cooking, preparing foods from corn, meat, vegetables, and wild berries, and gathering hemp to make carrying bags, as they had for generations. They handled these and other traditional tasks while Native men continued to go on frequent hunting trips.¹²

A combination of Moravian attitudes about the importance of sex-segregated activities and the prevalence of gender-defined roles in daily occupations intensified relationships among women in Moravian missions. Although women and men did not worship and work completely apart from each other, women in Moravian missions expected to spend a large amount of time laboring and praying with other women and girls. Besides their shared economic activities, they created strong female bonds through numerous private conversations, through sharing responsibilities of leadership, through mutual assistance in childbirth and in the rearing of children, through specialized Moravian gatherings and groups for women and girls, and through school settings where female teachers and female students interacted with each other.

Conversations between women about spiritual matters were a frequent part of life in Moravian missions. Moravians believed it was essential to examine the state of each individual's heart for evidence of a deep personal connection with Jesus. Female leaders took over much of the responsibility for holding heartfelt conversations with the women of the community. At Gnadenhütten, Jeannette Mack paid innumerable visits to Indian women in their homes, where she conversed with them about their religious beliefs. During such talks, Indian women expressed many of their innermost thoughts and wishes. Absorbing the evangelical spirit of the mission, the Wompanosch Esther revealed to Mack a longing to become a missionary herself and “to go to St. Thomas” with a Moravian contingent working on

that Caribbean island. The missionary Anna Margaretha Bechtel, wife first of Gottlob Büttner and then of Johann Georg Jungmann, worked closely with Indian women from 1742 until 1781 with only a few interruptions. Like Jeannette Mack, Anna Büttner/Jungmann listened to female Indians express their deep spiritual needs. The days before Christmas were always a time of spiritual preparation in Moravian missions, and during this period in 1748 Jungmann “visited . . . in the huts and had an opportunity to hold a heart-felt address with several”—probably women because a number of the men were away hunting. At times, Jungmann and Jeannette Mack worked as a team. Together they met with the Wompanosch Sarah, who was the wife of the Moravians’ first convert at Shekomeko, pointing out to her “how necessary it was to know one’s heart.”¹³

Indian women built relationships with both Jeannette Mack and Anna Jungmann as confidantes and expressed sorrow when these and other Moravian women planned to leave mission villages. Martin Mack described the Shekomeko Indians’ disapproval of the plan for Jeannette to go to Bethlehem in the later stages of her pregnancy; their opposition was even greater because Anna Jungmann was already away from the mission, affording them no female missionary as a confidante. Martin Mack wrote, “I went to visit our Brethren and Sisters and told them I should soon go to Bethlehem. They askd immediately if my Wife went too, when I told them yes, they askd if we should soon come back again. The Sisters were not well pleased that she should go away too, while Buttner was not yet come home, and *Consequently they should have no Body to whom they could freely speak their Minds.*” In 1761, the Indian women at the Wechquetank mission near the Blue Mountains feared the missionary Margaretha Elisabeth Grube might leave them permanently because she seemed near death. Grube had often been ill over the previous few years. While living at Pachgatgoch in Connecticut, she suffered from a cough, fever, fainting spells, and even a hemorrhage. By early 1761, she was forty-five years old and once again extremely ill. After she recovered enough to participate in a Maundy Thursday foot-washing service, the Indian “sisters were especially gladdened” to see Grube “well again.” They had “prayed hard to the Savior to let her stay still longer.” As “poor children” unable to “succeed without a Sister,” they thanked the Savior for her renewed health.¹⁴

Joining together to face death strengthened bonds between women in Moravian missions. Anxieties about Grube brought Native women together to pray that she might be spared. In other cases when death seemed



inevitable, women expected to end life surrounded by those in relationship with them. The death of the Delaware Beata demonstrated how much she valued one last moment of comradeship with Margaretha Grube to ease her passage to the next life. Beata had been baptized in 1746 at Gnadenhütten, where she first lived as a widow and then as the wife of the Wompamosch Zachaeus. Her life had been one of many trials, including seeing ten of her eleven children precede her in death. Because she was extremely ill, the Moravians expected her to die on the evening of March 5, 1762; however, she lived yet one more day. "I know certainly why the Savior did not take me to himself last night," Beata proclaimed from her deathbed. "It was because I still had something left to say to Sister Grube. . . . Now I am completely done, and I have nothing more weighing on my heart. I go now with joy to kiss the wounds of Jesus."¹⁵

Frequently Indian women ministered to each other through spiritual conversations. Esther, who had been baptized in 1742 at Shekomeko, was one of the most influential women among the Indian converts. Sometimes she knew the feelings of other Indian women in the missions before the missionaries learned of them. Sara "testified to Esther: she was ashamed that she believed that the [Moravian] Brethren did not love her. She feels now, however, otherwise in her heart." When Sara wished to have her newborn child baptized, she approached Esther, saying "if her child could be baptized, she would certainly consider it a great mercy." Esther was also a point of contact for Native women visiting the mission for the first time. One Delaware "widow with three children," who had come to Gnadenhütten from the Susquehanna, approached Esther and complained that "she was very poor" and "had not a bite to eat for herself or for her children." Esther was the conduit for ensuring that the woman received nourishment, possibly using the occasion to converse on spiritual topics.¹⁶

Some of the closest relationships between Indian and Euro-American women included those individuals, such as Jeannette Mack and the Indian Esther, who shared the oversight of community members. As was true in predominantly Euro-American Moravian communities, women in Native American missions served as spiritual leaders of other women. Esther's and Mack's relationship blossomed as they cooperated in overseeing the women at Gnadenhütten. The Gnadenhütten records demonstrate how each depended on the other as she exercised her authority: "Esther held a fellowship meeting with Mack about her own condition as well as about how things were with the other Sisters in their huts." Mack depended on

Esther to help her understand how Indian women responded to the Moravians, to learn “how things were” in Indian homes. Together they discussed the situation of female members of the community, fulfilling their supervisory role jointly rather than individually. That Esther continued to confide in Mack about her own beliefs demonstrated the depth of their relationship.¹⁷

Anna Margaretha Mack, Martin’s second wife, and another missionary, Johanna Schmick, organized religious events that encouraged bonding between themselves and female Indian leaders, sometimes called *Arbeiterinnen* (laborers) or *Conferenz-Schwwestern* (conference sisters). At separate “class” or “band” meetings, the *Conferenz-Schwwestern* could pray, sing, and witness to one another. “Toward evening,” one spring day in 1754, “Sisters Anna and Johanna had a class meeting with the conference sisters.” About a month later they held “a nice band meeting with the conference sisters.” With these small-group meetings, the Moravians built unity among female leaders, both Indian and Euro-American.¹⁸

One important basis for the relationship among Indian and Euro-American women in Moravian missions was their shared experience of motherhood. Women depended on each other to deal with the difficulties of childbirth and to assuage anxieties about their newborns. The Indian mothers Beata and Sarah had called on Jeannette Mack to help them through labor and delivery. Mack acted as confidante and probably midwife for Sarah, whose labor was prolonged. After a Communion service at Gnadenhütten, Sarah returned home and “immediately began to have pains.” She quickly called for Jeannette Mack to “remain with her all night as she was certainly about to give birth.” While Jeannette tended to her through an agonizing travail, Sarah found comfort in her belief that, for her sins, her “Savior suffered greater pain. . . . And she continued on this topic until the child was born.” Mack’s duties were less onerous when Beata gave birth to her child because her labor was shorter. After attending a worship service, Beata “sent for Sister Mack” who helped her give birth in about an hour. The missionary Anna Rauch assisted in the delivery of the daughter of the Indians Lydia and Philippus and “blessed the child by means of a heartfelt prayer.”¹⁹

Missionary women were not always present at the births of the children of Indian converts but sometimes instead paid visits soon after delivery. Although the Wompanosch Elisabeth “gave birth in the woods” near Pachgatgoch, Anna Catharina Sensemann came soon after to visit the mother



with her newborn daughter. Similarly, immediately following the birth of a daughter to an Indian named Magdalena, the missionary Martha Büninger brought “something to her for her comfort.” And Anna Jungmann visited the Delaware Juliana following the birth of a son who, Juliana joyfully announced, had been “baptized with the Savior’s blood” and had a “new name,” Gottlob.²⁰

In a few instances Euro-American women depended on Indian women to help them through childbirth and its related difficulties. At a small Susquehanna mission, Johannes Roth reported that Indians had helped his wife Marie recover after the birth of their first child. Although he did not specify the sex of these helpers, it is likely most were women. In the Ohio country, the Indian Anna Salome “was accounted the best midwife among the Indian Sisters,” and she attended the delivery of a son named Christian David to the missionary Anna Maria Sensemann. Because some Moravians considered Euro-American women to be physically weaker than their Indian counterparts, they believed that they needed substantial help during childbirth. Zeisberger expressed admiration at the “very strong bodily constitution” of Indian women. He seemed impressed that some Indian women “go into the woods by themselves and bring their children to the house when they have seen the light of day.”²¹

Still, there were limits to how willingly Moravians turned to Indian women to assist in the births of their children. Moravian missionary women sometimes sought out Euro-American midwives in other settlements, even though Indian women were available nearby to help. This was true of Jeannette Mack in 1744 and of the missionaries Schmick in 1753 and Jungmann in 1751 and 1755. Heckewelder also voiced his preference for a Euro-American woman to assist his wife Sarah in delivering their first child. Everything was going well as they awaited the baby, but he “was not without worry and difficulty.” Although there were “skilled Indian sisters who could be used in this matter,” Heckewelder believed their talents in delivering infants “suit[ed] their own better than to such a weak person as Sarah.” Only after finding a Euro-American woman to help his wife could he feel “reassured about the matter.”²²

Despite these obstacles, other circumstances encouraged association and friendship. The Delawares and Mahicans came from matrilineal societies that stressed the bond between women and children. Kinship bonds were strongest in the female line, outweighing the connections between husbands and wives in nuclear family units. In the communities Indians

and Moravian missionaries constructed together, motherhood was similarly highly valued. Moravians described the Trinity as a holy family, consisting of a papa, the little boy Jesus, and a Holy Spirit who offered “mother-care” and spoke in a “mother-voice.” Preparing the converts for a Communion service, a missionary wrote, “we saw the dear Mother” was acting upon the hearts of the prospective communicants. Out of a common sense of responsibility for children and shared value in the roles of mothers, then, Indian and Euro-American women constructed friendships in Moravian missions.²³

Indian and Euro-American women participated in baptismal ceremonies for the children of one another, serving as sponsors, or godparents, for baby girls. As sponsors, these women blessed the recipient of baptism, laying their hands upon the child’s head. Because a Euro-American child might have one or more Indian godparents and an Indian child one or more Euro-American sponsors, these baptisms signified and strengthened the bonds between participating Indians and Euro-Americans. In 1758 three Indian women—Esther, Bathsheba, and Rachel—were sponsors for the newborn girl of the Macks. At the 1763 baptism of the daughter of the missionaries Joachim and Christina Sensemann, the child was brought into the church, where her godparents were the Indians Martha, Thamar, and Johanna. When Johann Ludwig, son of the missionaries Marie and Johannes Roth, was born in 1773, the Mahican Christina shared in sponsoring the child with Zeisberger and Anna Jungmann and her husband. The sponsors for Beata, the newborn daughter of the Indian couple Lydia and Philippus at Gnadenhütten, included several Euro-American women as well as the Indian Esther.²⁴ One of Beata’s sponsors was the missionary Anna Rauch. Mutual concern about Beata forged bonds between Rauch and the mother Lydia, who clearly saw Anna as a major participant in the rearing of her child. When Beata was three months old, Lydia announced to Rauch that “because she had no children, so she shall have this one for her child.” According to the Gnadenhütten records, “Anna was astonishingly glad of this. Many would not have been so glad if they had been given £1000.” More than likely the Indian woman did not see herself being entirely replaced as Beata’s mother but rather saw Rauch as a powerful supplement to her own mothering. Nonetheless, the episode provides a striking example of the trust between female converts and missionaries.²⁵

Sex-segregated religious meetings also offered opportunities for female relationships to flourish. Baptized Indian women met apart from men,



girls apart from boys, and widows apart from widowers. Typically, women ran the meetings for women and girls. Esther held at least one women's meeting at Shekomeko in New York. Jeannette Mack and Jungmann held widows' worship services at Gnadenhütten, as did Anna Sensemann at Pachgatgoch. In the midst of a deadly smallpox epidemic in 1764, "Sisters Grube and Schmick held several fellowship meetings for the Sisters and the older girls," which had an especially powerful effect on the unbaptized girls. Sometimes these sex-segregated meetings included love feasts, which were simple meals representing the Lord's Supper and the shared meal or *agape* of the early Christians.²⁶

A ritual for mothers and mothers-to-be at Gnadenhütten in 1747 brought Indian and Euro-American women together around their common concern for child rearing. "The white sisters today had a love feast with the Indian sisters who have children and with those who are pregnant," the mission diary recorded, noting that the women were moved to tears as they expressed their heartfelt desires to one another. These meetings were a version of the mothers' groups that met at Bethlehem in this same time period. Some of these gatherings were for pregnant women because the Moravians believed that the maternal role began during pregnancy. Expectant mothers, according to Moravian thinking, needed to be cautious because they had already begun to influence their unborn children. Whether in specialized women's meetings or in less formal conversation and whether in Bethlehem or in mission towns, Indian and Euro-American women shared their thoughts and desires, which often centered on their children.²⁷

Female relationships in Moravian missions spanned generations, as when teachers worked with students in sex-segregated schools. While informal education occurred in choir and band meetings and through conversations, the Moravians also utilized formal classroom schooling. Probably the most influential teacher was Anna Jungmann, who started a school for Indian girls at Gnadenhütten in September 1747 and taught there, with some interruptions, until the mission's demise in 1755. Jungmann had previous teaching experience among Euro-American children, having worked in the Falkner Swamp school and in the Bethlehem nursery, which housed and educated Moravian children from about age eighteen months. After many years of service, Jungmann was consecrated a deaconess, an office that included the duty of assisting the minister during Communion.²⁸

One of Jungmann's prime teaching qualifications was her familiarity with Indian languages. The Moravians took a multilingual approach, and they expected their missionaries to learn Native languages and to use them as part of schoolroom routines. Along with her first husband, Gottlob Büttner, Anna had studied Mahican at Shekomeko. In 1743 she was able to offer her first address in Mahican. By the time she opened the Gnadenhütten school for Indian girls, she had several years' experience in the language. At Gnadenhütten she also began to learn Delaware, and by 1752 it was reported that she could converse in it. As more and more Delaware converts joined the mission in the 1750s, her knowledge of their language became invaluable.²⁹

Linguistic ability, combined with Jungmann's concentrated attention on young women and girls, built significant relationships with her students. On a number of occasions the Moravians reported that Indian children were, as one report put it, "always so happy when they are able to go to school." Girls felt free to converse with their teacher, probably because they knew that she could speak in their own language and paid particular attention to female concerns. Jungmann also cared for her pupils outside of class. One fourteen-year-old who may have attended school under Jungmann's tutelage turned to the missionary when she felt the need to express her spiritual longings. The girl "stood at the door of a house and wept many hot tears and asked Sister Jungmann" that the missionaries "remember her and baptize her with the Savior's blood."³⁰

Relationships between Indian and Euro-American women were especially strong in the Moravian missions of the 1740s and 1750s. The rich evidence from this period contrasts with material from later decades, suggesting a shift in female relationships. During the 1740s and 1750s, a sizable number of Euro-American women were active in the missions, including Jungmann, Jeannette Mack, Anna Margaretha Mack, Büninger, Rauch, Schmick, Grube, Anna Catharina Sensemann, and Margaretha Hagen. Yet, when the Moravians redirected their mission work to the Susquehanna Valley in 1765, no female missionaries came to the new mission Wyalusing (renamed Friedenschütten) until about a year later when Schmick arrived. She was the sole Euro-American woman at Friedenschütten until the arrival of Jungmann in the latter part of 1769. The next year, Marie Agnes Roth joined her husband at the nearby Schechschequanunk mission. These three female missionaries later moved to Ohio country missions, although Roth returned east in 1773. Sarah Heckewelder, Anna Maria Sensemann, and



Susanna Zeisberger would also go to the Ohio country, but not until the early 1780s. Thus, for much of the period between 1765 and the end of the Revolution, Jungmann and Schmick were the only female Moravian missionaries who spent significant time with the Indians, even though several hundred Indians joined the missions during these years.³¹

The decline in the number of active female missionaries came at a time when the Moravians were restricting women's roles in church and community life.³² Given the limitations on female leadership and the decline in the number of female missionaries on the frontier, one would expect to see more apathy, as well as resistance, to Moravian Christianity among Indian women after 1765. Interestingly, although it becomes more difficult to trace Indian–Euro-American female relationships, many Indian women still eagerly joined the Moravians. Between 1765 and 1781, just under two hundred female Indians were baptized, including both infants and a substantial number of older girls and women.³³

Schmick's and Jungmann's long-standing connections with Indian women contributed a great deal to these conversions.³⁴ Even more important, however, was the work of the female converts themselves, especially those who held mission offices as *Helperinnen* (helpers) or *Arbeiterinnen* (laborers). Indian women maintained the spiritual work they had done in the 1740s and 1750s and became even more important after 1765 as Euro-American women became less available. Church leaders at Bethlehem recognized the need for loyal and active Christian Indian women to carry on mission work when they deemed the revolutionary frontier too dangerous for Euro-American women. In 1778 they sent the following instructions to the Ohio country: "Because the [Indian] Sisters have no [Euro-American] woman to work among them . . . choose faithful and beloved Indian Sisters whom the others accept."³⁵

Despite the obvious influence of Moravian terminology, Indian women continued to interpret Christianity for each other, putting it in a familiar language and cultural context for potential and recent converts.³⁶ The deathbed statement of the convert Sophia demonstrates that they continued to see themselves as spiritual guides to other Indian women long after the 1750s. Sophia had joined the Moravians in 1764 and soon married a Mahican from a prominent Christian Indian family. As she lay dying in Ohio in 1801, she bemoaned her inability to accompany a group planning to leave soon on a mission to the White River in present-day Indiana. "I would willingly have travelled with my husband . . . , but cannot," she

said. Sophia spoke proudly of her own past efforts: “I have lived many years in the congregation and have seen how it has gone with us. When our Saviour and our teachers wanted us to move to a new place, in order to make known the gospel to the heathen, I have always found that it was good to go there.” Urging other able-bodied Indian women to make the trek, she held up the promise of loving relationships with the women on the White River: “I commission you to go thither in my stead. You are aged and have experience: go and speak to the women there that you may have many sisters.”³⁷

Sophia’s statement underscores how the formation of female relationships—the process of bonding as “sisters” to one another—powerfully shaped Indian women’s experience of Christianity and structured an important element of social connections across Pennsylvania’s Euro-Indian frontier. At the height of female missionary activity during the 1740s and 1750s, Indian and Euro-American women constructed close ties that ensured loyalty to the Moravians for years to come. As the Moravians became more patriarchal and restrictive toward Euro-American female missionaries, Indian women countered this trend by keeping their work central to the missions, building on their traditional expectations of a matrilineal Indian world with gender-specific roles. They did not assume all the tasks that Euro-American women had performed—none apparently taught school, for example. But their discourses and participation in mission workers’ conferences, and their continuing economic contributions, guaranteed a female presence and authority in Moravian missions. Given the turmoil of life along frontiers, relationships between Indians and Euro-Americans were always fragile, requiring careful tending and sustained commitment. Indian and Euro-American women in Moravian missions offer remarkable examples of such commitment. Nevertheless, by the 1760s the Moravians’ decreasing reliance on Euro-American women missionaries led to a decline in intercultural female relationships in their missions, contributing to the widening of the social and political gap across frontiers.