# MORAVIAN INFLUENCE ON INDIAN LIFE IN THE TUSCARAWAS MISSIONS, 1772 – 1777<sup>1</sup>

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By the middle of the 18th century, the Indians in the North American East had learned to realize that the white man's real intention was conquest of their territory itself, rather than concessions within it. By a shrewd alternation of military and diplomatic action they had been deprived of more and more of their ancestral hunting-grounds and arable fields. Belatedly aware that a timely alliance between the Iroquois and Algonquin nations might have expelled the intruders, they now saw that a gradual retreat toward the west was the only course open to the Indians, did they wish to maintain their national and tribal identities.

The Iroquois family of nations, who had long been bound together in a powerful federation, were less inclined to yield to the white pressure than were the Algonkian Indians in general, and the Lenni Lenapi, in particular, who had always been less politically minded and, therefore, less effectively organized than their more aggressive rivals. Eventually, the greater part of the Lenni Lenapi, better known as Delawares, left their land in the Delaware River basin and resettled on territory ceded to them by the Wyandottes. It roughly covered what is today the eastern half of the State of Ohio (1). Its boundaries ran, as follows: from the confluence of the Big Beaver with the Ohio up the Beaver and Mahoning Rivers; down the Cuyahoga to Lake Erie; then, along Lake Erie, westward to the mouth of the Sandusky; from there, in a generally southward direction, first to the headwaters of the Sandusky, and then, along a line slightly east of, and parallel with, the Olentangy and Scioto, to the headwaters of the Hocking River; down the Hocking to the Ohio; and finally up the Ohio, back to its confluence with the Big Beaver.

Among the part of the Lenni Lanapi nation, who had not left their old homeland, in the Delaware River basin, the Moravian Brotherhood had been successfully missionizing ever since the founding of the first Moravian settlements in Pennsylvania: Nazareth, in 1738; and Bethlehem, in 1741, even today the home of the Moravian Church in America (2). These two mission towns, and a few more, which had been settled and occupied by white brethren and sisters, attained permanence. Such mission towns, however, as had been built under the guidance of white Moravians by and for Indian converts, had eventually to be abandoned under the same political pressure that had previously driven about half of the Lenni Lenapi Nation into the forest lands across the Ohio River. First, the two mission posts on the Susquehanna, Friedenshütten and Schechschequanunk, had to be abandoned for Langundoutenünk (Friedensstadt), on the Beaver River (3); and shortly afterwards the converts and their Missionaries, from all three stations, again found themselves on the road to better promise; this time, to the Tuscarawas Valley, where the land for new settlements had been offered the Moravian missionaries and their flock of Indian converts by Netawatwes, the Great Chief of the Lenni Lenapi nation (4).

With the vision of a good ruler, Netawatwes had long realized the motivating force toward a better life, both economical and social, of morals such as taught in the gospel of Christ. Hence, he decided, with the consent of his Grand Council, to invite the Moravians to establish their teachings and mode of living among his

¹Paper read before the Anthropology Section of the Ohio Academy of Science at the annual meeting, in May, 1948, at Toledo, Ohio. It summarizes part of the research work done by Dr. Mahr for The Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Society in connection with the restoration of the Moravian Mission town of Schönbrunn. The Society contemplates a detailed publication of these studies when completed.

Lenni Lenapi (5) whom he knew to be too undisciplined and unprincipled to withstand unaided the various temptations introduced by the white man. The worst of them, rum, had long been undermining the physical and moral resistance

not only of his own people but of other Indians likewise (6).

In August, 1772, David Zeisberger, John Ettwein, and John Heckewaelder arrived in the Muskingum basin and forthwith laid out, on the Tuscarawas River, about two miles south of the present town of New Philadelphia, the village of Schönbrunn (7); and, in the same year, Gnadenhütten, 10 miles downstream from Schönbrunn (8). Through five years, these two settlements grew and prospered, both spiritually and economically, until, in 1777, they were seriously threatened by both of the conflicting parties engaged in the Revolutionary War, and had to be abandoned (9). In 1776, a third Indian mission town, named Lichtenau, had been founded in the immediate neighborhood of Netawatwes' capital (10), only to share the fate of Schönbrunn and Gnadenhütten a few years afterwards (11). It is an uncontested fact that the Lenni Lenapi chiefs did their utmost to keep neutral in the Revolutionary War (12), as well as they had in Dunmore's War, in 1774. In the latter conflict their War Captain, White Eyes, rather than Chief Netawatwes, had prevented the surging waves of Indian hatred from wiping out the Moravian mission towns and their Christian Indians together with the white True, it had been Netawatwes' initiative that had enabled the Moravians. to settle in the Lenni Lenapi territory, but it was White Eyes' firmness of purpose and character that, in those days, not only averted a catastrophe (13) but also brought David Zeisberger's religious and political plan of "a Christian Indian state in the midst of the aboriginal domain" close to being realized (14). Its eventual failure was brought about, in the course of the Revolutionary War, by forces beyond the control of either the Lenni Lenapi Chiefs or the wisdom of Zeisberger. At the close of the war it was evident that the dynamic force of the white man's westward surge had forever sealed the fate of Zeisberger's and White Eyes' static concept of a Christian Indian state with legally guaranteed territorial boundaries (15).

About 1870, Edmund de Schweinitz, Zeisberger's Moravian biographer, wrote-

these lines:

". . . along the Tuscarawas and the Walhonding, the Muskingum, Hockhocking, and Scioto, not a solitary Indian lodge remains; from the waters of Lake Erie to the bluffs of the "Beautiful River," not a remnant of the Lenni Lenapi can be found. A great and teeming commonwealth of Americans is in the place of that home which White Eyes would have given to his people. Such was the will of God." (16).

This concluding phrase, coming from a true historian, is just another way of saying that the success of the Christian Indian state plan might have changed the entire course of history, not only on this continent but, indirectly, in Europe likewise.

Prior to his coming to the Muskingum basin Zeisberger had long acquired a profound insight into Indian life and mentality (17). It was in close co-operation with Bishop Ettwein, a remarkable organizer and executive, that the guiding principles for the Moravian mission work among the Lenni Lenapi were worked out (18).

As a foundation they laid down a code of statutes binding for all Indians who wished to live as Moravian Christians. If, after a period of probation, the applicants found that they could not meet the stipulations of these statutes; or, if the Missionaries saw, in the character of the applicant, certain flaws unlikely to disappear, residence in the Moravian community was denied (19).

This code contains 19 articles, some of which enjoin the Indians to do, or not to do, something which, in some respect, was foreign to them. Other articles lay

down, as binding rules, certain moral tenets which, previously, it had been at their choice to observe or to ignore. Others took care of ruinous habits acquired from contacts with whites, for instance, use of strong liquor, and unsound trading practices.

The first three of these articles are divine laws, corresponding to the first, third and fourth Commandments of the Decalogue; that is, exclusive worship of the One True God, and His incarnation in Jesus Christ; observance of the Lord's Day; and Honor to Father and Mother, with a pledge to provide for their old age. All three of these injunctions were new to the Lenni Lenapi who, like other Indian nations, had no concept of religious dogma, although they had held some hazy notions which, in part, had come to them from tribal tradition, but, in greater part, through much polluted channels, from old-time contacts with other missions, mainly Roman Catholic. Nor had they been under any direct obligation to support their old people although it was usually done (20).

Article 4 makes the reception into the Moravian community dependent on the

consent of the Missionaries and an inquisition held by the Helpers.

Article 5 prohibits contacts with "thieves, murderers, whoremongers, adulterers, or drunkards." While, as a rule, the heathen Lenni Lenapi were not given to stealing, or murder, among themselves (21), they were highly promiscuous; committed adultery, with complete impunity for both men and women, married or unmarried (22); and reveled in alcoholic orgies that often involved an entire community, as it is attested by the Rev. David McClure, not a Moravian, on the occasion of his visit, in 1772, to Gekelemukpechünk, the capital of Netawatwes (23).

This native propensity to drunkenness caused the formulation, and relentless inforcement, of Article 13: "We will not admit rum or any other intoxicating liquor into our towns. If strangers or traders bring intoxicating liquor, the helpers shall take it form them, and not restore it until the owners are ready to leave the place." May it be said that the liquor traffic, to a great extent, was in the hands of Indian women (24) who, among numerous tribes, had the traditional right to sell, or trade off, most of what they or their husbands produced (25).

Intricately tied up with the drinking of the Lenni Lenapi were their "dances" as well as their "sacrifices, heathenish festivals or games," forbidden, for Christain Indians, by Article 6. Gambling, by means of peachstones used in the manner of dice, and also with imported playing-cards, was, next to drinking and sexual promiscuity, the most ruinous diversion of the Lenni Lenapi (26). These endemic vices were a matter of vital concern to some of the chiefs. Netawatwes repeatedly tried to stop the evil practices but never succeeded for any length of time (27).

The Lenni Lenapi were also notorious for the looseness of their marriage bonds (28). Polygamy, although rarely practiced as such (29), frequently resulted in cases where a husband, or wife, had become tired of their partner and had simply left to live with somebody else. The children then followed the mother since they were considered her property. Those who were grown up could follow the father if they so wished (30). Hence, Article 12 was formulated, as follows: "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." At times, the Mission authorities found themselves hard put to reconcile their converts' married status with the Christian view on matrimony. After lengthy debates among the authorities of the Moravian Church, at Bethlehem, Bishop Ettwein seems to have tacitly agreed that Indians who, at the time of their reception into the Christian community, had in good faith married two women, should love and honor both wives (31).

Since, in accordance with tribal custom, marriageable adolescents were free to marry whomever they wished, even against the will of their parents (32) article 16, of the code, commanded "young persons" not to "marry without the consent of their parents and the minister;" this rule was to prevent unbaptized persons from being brought into baptized families, and thus create confusion (33). Intermarriage

with white persons was in no way opposed; Bishop Ettwein, on the contrary, is on record for having recommended that a certain young missionary marry "a pretty Indian Sister," prior to his being placed in charge of a mission station (34). That the Lenni Lenapi had no race prejudice either is evident from cases where, in heathen communities, Negro slaves owned by Indians married within the tribe (35); and from other cases where Indian women, who generally were fond of white children, ran after white men until they had attained their purpose (36).

The last of the nineteen articles was adopted in later years, during the Revolutionary War (37). It commands the Christian Indians "not to go to war," nor to "buy anything of warriors which had been taken in war." It was the acid test of their religious faith, for it certainly took as much courage to forsake their warrior's status in the face of tribal derision, as it required on the part of the missionaries to make such a demand of Indian males. The amazing fact remains

that the law was obeyed by the majority of the faithful.

One of the fatal shortcomings of the Indians and, particularly, the Lenni Lenapi, was their failure to decide upon a definite change from the life of the roaming hunter to the stationary existence of the farmer and cattle-raiser. Netawatwes and some of his councillors were well aware of the racial suicide forboded by such half-hearted wavering between the two economic principles (38). It seemed impossible to break the old habit of moving from one place to the other whenever their hunting grounds of the region became depleted, as each hunter shot from 50 to 150 deer a year; or merely, because fire-wood became scarce in the immediate neighborhood of their village (39). They simply left for another location, shiftlessly abandoning the corn crops their women had planted in the fields.

His desire to have the Moravian influence near at hand, and to make his people benefit from their example, was one of Netawatwes' principal motives for planting their missions in the Tuscarawas valley. Naturally, the missionaries were confronted with the same basic difficulties as was the Chief, but they succeeded where Netawatwes had failed, because they attacked the evil from its roots: faulty division of labor, and lack of any discipline whatsoever. Article 9 of the Moravian mission code reads, as follows: "We will obey our teachers and the helpers who are appointed to preserve order in our meetings, in the towns, and fields." The Missionaries had long realized that obedience was the primary requirement, if they expected the Indian men to do any work in the fields; chores, which theretofore had exclusively been done by the women. The men primarily were hunters and warriors; occasionally they put up a house or a fence, but everything else was left to the women, who tilled the soil; planted the seed; harvested the crops; gathered fire-wood; carried water; prepared the meals and sewed the clothing for the family; gathered the wild hemp for their making of carrying-girths; gathered rushes, along with the herbs and roots to dye them with; weaved the dyed rushes into mats; dressed deer-skins and made them into leggings and moccassins. On top of that, they bore the main labor load during the sugar-boiling season, in February and March, and were lucky if their husbands, in the predeeding winter months, had seen fit to carve enough wooden bowls and troughs to hold the maple-sap. Occasionally, a man would take a hand in keeping the sap from boiling over, while, as a rule, the men, during the sugar-season, were roaming the forests, hunting. in order to provide meat for immediate consumption, as well as for drying and storing it, to last through the summer.

John Heckewaelder, more objective than Zeisberger as a critic of Indian sociology, defends the Lenni Lenapi male against the opprobrium of shiftless loafing and pleasure-seeking. He argues that the women's "hard and difficult employments are periodical and of short duration, while their husbands' labors are constant and severe in the extreme." Since on the husband's "exertions as a hunter, their existence depends," "he must keep his limbs as supple as he can, he must avoid hard labor as much as possible." Hence, he cannot think of taking "upon himself

a part of his wife's duty, in addition to his own," or "he must necessarily sink under the load, and, of course, his family must suffer with him (40)."

Whatever the merits and demerits of the two sexes, they were the results of an unbalanced division of labor, typical of a transitional economy that no longer rested exclusively on hunting and gathering, but had not yet reached the full

stage of farming and cattle raising.

It was the aim of the Moravian mission system to shift the economic balance of the Lenni Lenapi definitely to farming, by means of a well considered division of labor between men and women. The men were to restrict their hunting excursions to a minimum, both in extent and frequency (41), while the women's burden was to be lightened by making their former activities in the fields joint enterprises of both sexes, in the form of community labor (42). Community labor was also demanded of the men when public structures had to be put up, such as a church, or a school house, or fences around the town and fields; or when the increase of the convert population called for the building of a number of new houses. In such cases, the women as a group provided food for the men as a group (43). missionaries gave much thought to the even spreading of labor and leisure over the hours of the day, as well as over the whole year. The real secret of their success was their wisely calculated long-term planning. They decided what had to be done, at what season of the year, and with how many workers available over how long a period (44). In order to assure the desired results, Article 17 was drawn up, as follows: "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."

There is no evidence from the mission reports that the local administration's economic efforts were ever frustrated by Indian reluctance to work, let alone, defiance. On the contrary, there are numerous entries testifying to both the excellent planning of community projects and their amazingly speedy completion (45).

One of the first things to be done, once that the site of a new mission station had been selected, was the laying out of the prospective town in the manner which the Moravians called "regular" and which they followed in all their settlements. The basic plan pattern is the same in every Moravian mission town: namely, an aligning of the houses, along cross streets, in town blocks of equal size, symmetrically arranged right and left of a main street functioning as the symmetry axis, with the Church on a key point of the symmetry system.

This was in fundamental contrast (as coercive as it was intentional) to the Lenni Lenapi's native notions of settlement. They had been in the habit of building their houses as close to, or as remote from, each other's as they chose; and of abandoning their lodgings whenever they had a mind to, and, with them, their cultivated fields, provided they had cared to cultivate any (46). Those at Schönbrunn, Gnadenhütten, and the other missions, found themselves fitted in a framework of geometric boundaries, as equal parts of a structural unity, in both the physical and social sense; a structure, not merely tangibly static but also inspiringly dynamic, in that it almost automatically mobilized all its individual members for the service of the whole.

The plausibility of this system, and of the methods sustaining it, not only captivated the Indian converts living by it, but it also caught the imagination of those among the heathen Lenni Lenapi, who had eyes to see and ears to hear. They realized that the magic of form, such as embodied in Schönbrunn and Gnadenhütten, might merit acquisition by imitating its outer shape, so as to serve as an arcanum against the forces of evil, which were breaking up their national life from within. In 1775, the heathen Lenni Lenapi laid out for themselves a brandnew town on which Zeisberger comments in these words:

"Their new town has been laid out and staked off in the form of a cross-street, lying along the Muskingum, the design having been copied from us. . . . Each tribe, clan and nation is to have its own street."

A few lines below he points out their faulty approach, as follows:

"As they have much work and there are many people, who, however, hinder each other because they do not know how to portion out their tasks, our brethren, upon their request, gave them good advice and told them how we proceeded in our Towns, which pleased them so that they declared they would follow our example." (47).

Needless to say, the project failed miserably.

In order to assure a continued success of their mission plan, the missionaries paid great attention to a proper upbringing and adequate schooling of the converts' children (48). Schönbrunn and Gnadenhütten as well as the other mission towns had schools in which religion, reading, writing, and a little arithmetic were taught in the native language. The textbooks were the work of Zeisberger who completely mastered the Lenni Lenapi dialect; both he and Heckewaelder conducted the school at Schönbrunn (49). Regular attendance was demanded, and the parents, especially the mothers, were exhorted to train their children away from idleness (50). Since the girls had always been taught to work anyway, this admonition mainly applied to the boys who, under native conditions, were never urged to do anything they did not wish to do (51). In the training of their children, even the Christian Indians appear to have been rather negligent, for again and again new admonitions had to be issued to the parents to take better care of their children and keep them clean and busy.

In general, the missionaries interfered as little as possible with their converts' ancestral customs. Of course, certain habits in dress and ornamentation had to be curbed (52). Christian Indians were not expected to wear nose-rings; or grow a scalp-lock (53) and pluck out the rest of their hair; or to use body and face paint; or tattoo their faces and bodies (54); or hang silver ornaments in their hair, and silken ribbons on their clothing, as it was a fashion with the women, and to some extent also with the men. Such were heathenish customs "not suitable for church members," as Zeisberger puts it (55).

The range of this article does not permit to present more reasons why it is to be regretted, that the course of history had decided against Zeisberger's plan for a Central Christian Indian State.

Not in terms of regret but rather in the form of constructive, although belated, advice did Thomas Jefferson enjoin the Indian chiefs of his day, among them several Lenni Lenapi, in repeated letters, to ward off the extinction of their race by doing essentially what the Moravians had set out to teach them. In a letter, undated, but probably of 1808, to the Lenni Lenapi War Captain Hendrick, Jefferson wrote these words:

". . . if you wish to increase your numbers you must give up the deer and buffalo, live in peace, and cultivate the earth. You see then, my children, that it depends on yourselves alone to become a numerous and great people. Let me entreat you, therefore, on the lands now given you to begin to give every man a farm; let him enclose it, cultivate it, build a warm house on it, and when he dies, let it belong to his wife and children after him. Nothing is so easy as to learn to cultivate the earth; all your women understand it, and to make it easier, we are always ready to teach you how to make ploughs, hoes, and necessary utensils. If the men will take the labor of the earth from the women they will learn to spin and weave and to clothe their families. In this way you will also raise many children, you will double your numbers every twenty years, and soon fill the lands your friends have given you, and your children will never be tempted to sell the spot on which they have been born, raised, have labored and called

their own. When once you have property, you will want laws and magistrates to protect your property and persons, and to punish those among you who commit crimes. You will find that our laws are good for this purpose; you will wish to live under them, you will unite yourselves with us, join in our great councils and form one people with us, and we shall all be Americans; you will mix with us by marriage, your blood will run in our veins, and will spread with us over this great island." (56).

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# With abbreviations used in the Notes

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- (13) SD 7 (Feb.-May, 1774); deSchZ, pp. 413-419.
- (14) deSchZ, p. 413.
- (15) *Ibid.*, p. 419.
- (16) *Ibid.*, p. 419. (17) *Ibid.*, chapters VI-XX.
- (18) *Ibid.*, chap. XXI. (19) *HN*, p. 238 ff; *DeSchZ*, p. 378 f. (20) *ZH*, p. 123 f.
- (21) Ibid., p. 123.

- (22) *Ibid.*, p. 20 f. (23) *McCD*, pp. 73–80. (24) *ZH*, p. 117. (25) *Ibid.*, p. 16; HH, p. 158.
- (26) *Ibid.*, p. 118 f.
- (27) *Ibid.*, p. 117. (28) *Ibid.*, pp. 20 f., 82 f.
- (29) *Ibid.*, p. 81.

- (30) *Ibid.*, p. 99. (31) *HJE*, p. 107.
- (32) ZH, p. 79.
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- (34) *Ibid.*, p. 105 & n. (35) *ZH*, p. 124.

- (36) *Ibid.*, p. 141. (37) *HN*, p. 240. (38) *SD 1* (May 7, 1772).
- (39) ZH, pp. 14, 87. (40) HH, chap. XVI.

- (41) ZH, p. 14. (42) SD 11 (June 16, 1775), GnD (June 15, 1773), et al.
- (43) GnD (Aug. 23, 1773)
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- (55) See note (52).
- (56) *CJ*, p. 503.