White Paper

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MORAVIAN ARCHIVES

Eastern West Indies Records Planning Project

White Paper

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PROJECT ACTIVITIES

The Moravian Archives in Bethlehem, Pa. (MAB) received an HCRR Foundations grant to assess the records from the Eastern West Indies (EWI), held by the Moravian Archives. The goal of the project was

1) To prioritize the material according to its humanities values, resulting in written guidelines for prioritization of treatment and digitization
2) To conduct an item-by-item collection survey of prioritized material, including condition reports, treatment plans and cost estimates
3) To develop a plan for the digitization of the collection and a plan for the long-term digital preservation of the images

Figure 1 The Moravian Archives in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania

History & Background

The Eastern West Indies Province of the Moravian Church includes the islands of St. Thomas, St. Croix, St. John, Antigua, Barbados, Tobago, Trinidad, and St. Kitts. Records from these islands are included in the 120-linear-foot collection of manuscripts and bound volumes in MAB's Eastern West Indies (EWI) Collection, dating from 1728 until the mid-20th century.

The EWI records were moved from the Caribbean to the Moravian Archives in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, in 1968 in order to prevent further damage from the tropical climate.

The EWI collection contains records from the central administration of the Moravian Church in the Eastern West Indies, as well as of the individual churches on the various islands. The records from the central administration (Provincial Elders' Conference, PEC) include minutes of the PEC and of the regional island conferences (1755-1963), correspondence (1795-1963), financial records and real estate (1728-1966), records on the individual islands (1818-1956), oversight over educational institutions (1840-1929), and maps and drawings. The records of the individual churches typically contain church registers (registers of baptisms, marriages, and funerals), membership lists, records on individual members, and real estate. The records date from the late eighteenth century to the mid-twentieth century.

Figure 2EWI in the recently upgraded storage vault

In their current condition, the great majority of the records in the EWI Collection cannot be considered accessible to either researchers or the public because of their great fragility. The poor condition of the documents results from long-term exposure to a tropical environment, creating severe losses due to water damage, insect damage, and even fire. In 1968 the EWI records were shipped to the Moravian Archives in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, in order to prevent further damage. From then on, the EWI records have been stored in a controlled environment in a climate-controlled vault with a fire suppression system.

After improving the storage conditions and ensuring continued access to the collections by the installation of adequate shelving in 2013, the conservation of the EWI collection became a high priority of MAB. The condition of many items in the collection is so poor that access has to be restricted. Besides preservation of these records, digitization is another goal. By digitizing the records we would be able to provide access to those people unable to travel to

Pennsylvania to consult the records, especially to the descendants of the people in the Caribbean whose history this is. The ultimate digitization and long-term preservation of the EWI Collection will serve to promote the historical significance of these currently inaccessible documents to scholars.

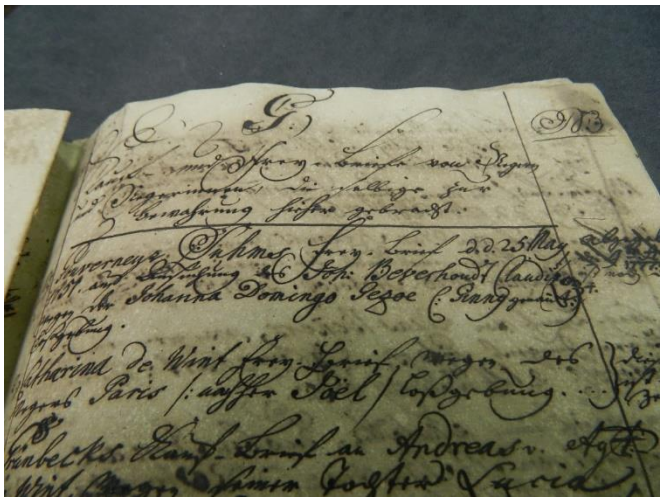

Figure 3 Register, Slave Purchases and Releases

Because of the size of the collection and the extent of the damage, the MAB launched the EWI Records Planning Project. This project was to provide essential documents for guiding a multi-year implementation plan to extend the life of the historic material and to make their intellectual content widely accessible through the use of digital technology. The planning phase is essential because the collection is both large and extraordinarily fragile. Ultimately, the implementation project will encompass conservation treatment of the most important and/or fragile items, the rehousing of all items, and the digitization of all unique and historically significant material. In order to accomplish this planning project, MAB applied for HCRR Foundations grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to assess the records from the Eastern West Indies (EWI). This grant was awarded in March of 2015. The project started in May of that year.

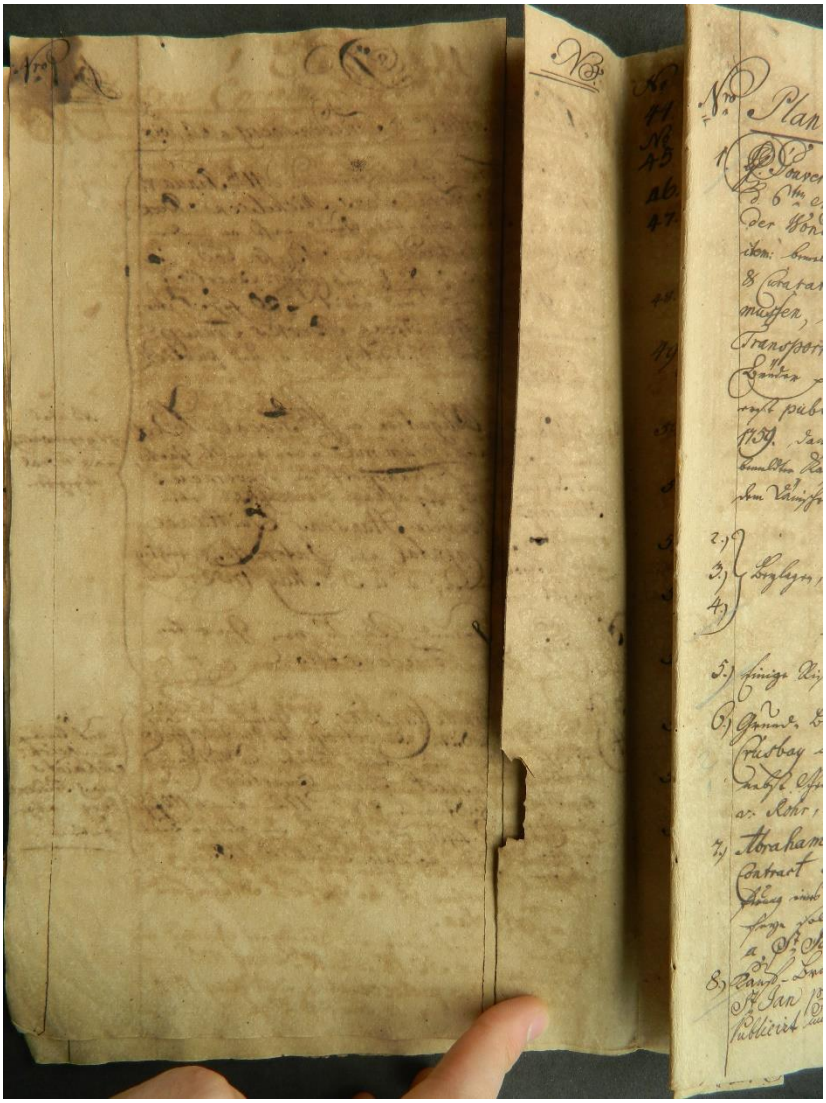

Figure 4 Example of extreme damage

Prioritization guidelines

The first goal of the project was to establish prioritization guidelines for the EWI collection. In May of 2015 the Moravian Archives formed a team of team of historians to evaluate and prioritize the material in the EWI collection according to its value to the humanities.

The team consisted of:

- Dr. Jon Sensbach, Department of History, University of Florida
- Dr. Katharine Gerbner, Department of History, University of Minnesota
- Dr. Natasha Lightfoot, Department of History, Columbia University in the City of New York.

These scholars represented a range of the humanities subjects addressed by the material in the EWI Collection.

From June 22 – 26, 2015, Dr. Sensbach came to Bethlehem and joined Dr. Peucker on-site at MAB to review the EWI collection. During this week, Archives' staff brought out the entire collection for Dr. Sensbach. Dr. Sensbach's examination resulted in a first draft of his assessment. Dr. Peucker reviewed and discussed the first draft with Dr. Sensbach, after which Dr. Sensbach submitted a revised draft of his assessment. Sensbach's assessment was distributed to the other members of the team of historians who each submitted a written response in November and December of 2015.

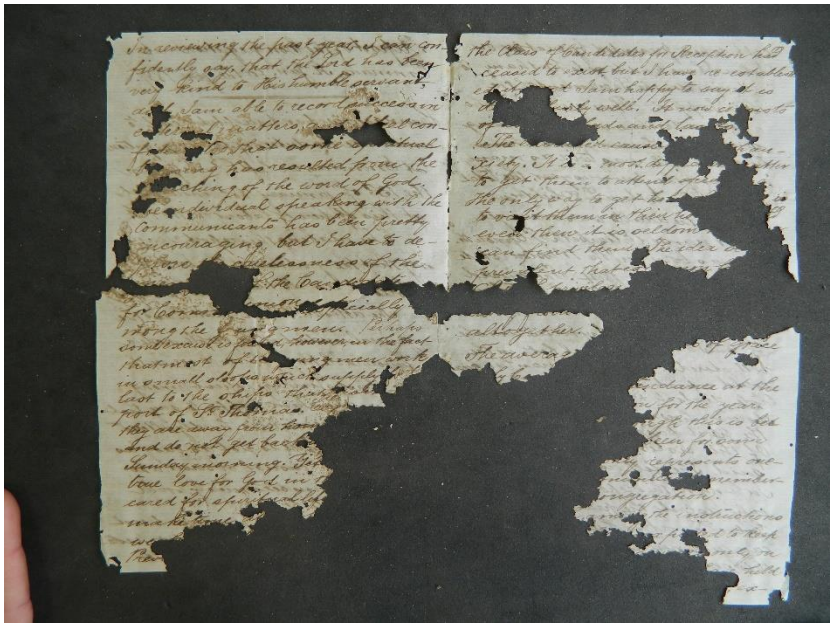

Figure 5 Sample of heavily damaged record in EWI collection

In his assessment Sensbach confirmed that "the importance of the papers extends far beyond their value to conventional church or denominational history, or even to mission history more broadly. Rather, they shine a very bright light on major events in global history." Therefore, Sensbach stressed: "These documents urgently need to be restored, preserved, digitized and made accessible for research and scholarship in the humanities, as well as for the benefit of modern descendants of the original enslaved parishioners, who number in the tens of thousands in the Caribbean and the mainland U.S."

The assessment stresses the overall value of the EWI records. Moravian records are rich in content because of "a carefully-crafted bureaucratic structure with an attention to organizational detail and an indefatigable commitment to record keeping." Sensbach considers the Moravian records not simply documentation of religious sentiment but rather a detailed record of slavery and the African diaspora that brought unnamed millions to America. For him, the transatlantic slave trade echoes insistently throughout the pages, sometimes in unprecedented detail. The records establish immediate connections between Africa and the Caribbean and provide the basis for historical and genealogical retrieval well into the mid-eighteenth century.

The team of historians was unanimous in their assessment of the records' value for the humanities:

- history: Atlantic slave trade, African experience in early America, African roots of Caribbean culture
- religious studies: transference of African religion to the Americas and their complicated encounters with Christianity, history of black Christianity
- linguistics: emergence of Dutch Creole that endured in the former Danish West Indies until well into the twentieth century
- genealogy: possibilities to reconstruct family lineages and connections to locations in Africa

According to the assessment, the EWI records occupy an important position "at the intersection of academic and public history."

Although all the documents in the collection are important in their own way and need to be preserved and digitized, not all possess what Sensbach calls the dramatic power "to evoke the lived experience of African-Caribbean people." Evoking the lived experience of African-Caribbean people is the overall, principal criterion for the prioritization plan.

Based on the assessment and the reviews the following criteria for prioritization were identified: Biographical content, age of the records, potential to shed light on the African-Caribbean connection and/or African culture in the Caribbean, informational value to document daily life in the Caribbean, and informational value for the internal development of the Moravian Church.

In the initial assessment by the team of historians the physical condition played a role as a factor in the prioritization. It was clear that a historically valuable document ranked higher on the prioritization list when it is in a fragile condition. During the conference call it was decided to leave this criterion to the conservators from the Conservation Center for Art & Historic Artifacts in Philadelphia, who visited MAB after the work of the team of historians was completed (see below).

- **Biographical content**:

  The most striking element of the EWI records, according to Sensbach, is "the profusion of names, tens of thousands of names—the baptized, the sanctified, the married, the recalcitrant, the punished, the born and the dead--year after year, list after list, page after page, name after name." The missionaries faithfully recorded activities of their parishioners. The value of this Moravian practice becomes even greater when we realize that for most of the people, except perhaps for an occasional plantation inventory, there would be no other record they ever existed: "By naming those who for the most part could not write, had no way to record their own lives, and have therefore vanished from history, the documents offer a tool to begin the restoration of historical visibility." The team ranks this criterion as the most important criterion.

- **Age of the records**

The team of historians worked under the assumption that the earliest records are the most valuable because of their rarity and their ability to link to the African origins. Early records are rare; much has already been lost.

- **Potential to shed light on the African-Caribbean connection and/or African culture in the Caribbean**

Some of the records provide direct information on African survivors of the middle passage. Missionaries noted ethnic identities of the converts, designating Creole or a multitude of African origins. The EWI records offer historians of the slave trade clues about the variety of origins of the Caribbean's enslaved communities.

- **Informational value to document daily life in the Caribbean**

Moravian presence in the Caribbean began in 1732 and continues until this day. Therefore, Moravian records present insight in the development of Caribbean society over a long period. The records document life in various parts of the Caribbean before and after emancipation

- **Informational value for the internal development of the Moravian Church**

In addition to the criteria above, some of the records are important because of the insight they provide about the Moravian Church itself: correspondence between missionaries, reports, instructions received from administrative boards in Europe, North America, These records show how the Moravian Church established itself in the Caribbean, how it interacted with local officials, and how the mission stations developed into a self-governing province within the worldwide Moravian Church.

During an extensive conference call on January 15, 2016, these criteria were further discussed. One topic of conversation was the selection of the most important items that needed immediate attention. It was clear that because of the high costs, preservation and digitization of the entire collection was probably not realistic in the near future. Based on Sensbach's onsite assessment and on Gerbner's and Lightfoot's reading of Sensbach's report and the Archives' finding aids, the team had selected a series of items they recommend for preservation. This list is part of the assessment. Their list did not cover all items in the EWI collection but was a selection of the top items in the collection.

The Archives' staff, however, felt the need for an overall assessment of the collection based on the criteria defined by the team of historians. During the conference call a system was presented by the Archives' staff to assign numerical ratings to each item in the collection. According to this method, it is possible to rate each item in the collection. Each category can be weighed differently. It is also possible to reduce the rating, for example, if the information in

the item is widely available. This could be the case if records are duplicated and exist elsewhere or if they are printed. The team felt if the information of an item in need of preservation existed elsewhere as well, the item would rank lower in priority.

The system with numerical ratings also allows for the results of the survey by the conservation team to be included. Conservators Marianne de Bovis, Rebecca Smyrl, and Richard Homer from the Conservation Center for Art & Historic Artifacts in Philadelphia came to the Moravian Archives on February 3–5 and 16–19, 2016, and examined a total of 631 items in the EWI collection. During examination the condition of each item was described; the number of pages with content was estimated; treatment and housing proposals with estimates were developed; and each item was assigned a conservation priority level. This conservation priority level was integrated into the formula to determine the prioritization rating of each item.

Moravian Archives Eastern West Indies Collection Survey | Date of Report: 2/4/2016 | Conservator: Richard Homer | CONSERVATION CENTER *for art and historic artifacts*

IDENTIFICATION

Title/Description: Friedensfeld Station Diary (pr. form)
Temporary Number: 151
Date: Apr. 1896 - May. 1899
Reference Code: C.27.4
H (in): 9 | W (in): 10 | T (mm): 9 | Estimated Pages: 140 | Object Type: Bound | Priority: 2. Moderate (further loss likely w/use)

DESCRIPTION/CONDITION

SUPPORT
Type: Laid, Ruled, Wove
Condition: Brittle, Insect damage, Stains/discoloration, Surface dirt/grime
Notes:

MEDIA
Type: Brown, Colored, Graphite, Ink, Manuscript, Pencil, Printed, Various
Condition: Migration/haloing, Strikethrough/sinking
Notes:

STRUCTURE
Type: Through-the-fold
Condition: Loose leaves/sections, Projecting leaves, Sewing broken, Spine lining inadequate, Split book block, Split inner hinges
Notes:

COVER
Type:
Condition: Board/s missing, Spine missing
Notes: Cloth with manuscript at front

Imaging Issues:

TREATMENT PROPOSAL

SUPPORT/MEDIA
Collate/document
Surface clean
Humidify/flatten
Mend leaves

STRUCTURE/COVER
Clean spine/disbind

HOUSING PROPOSAL
Folder
Four-flap enclosure
Custom-sized corrugated clamshell box

Figure 6 Sample of a condition report by CCAHA

The prioritization rating is based on the following formula:

$$\frac{(3B + 2A + 2C + D + M + E) \times P}{Dup}$$

B = Biographical Content

5: rich in biographical content: church registers, catalogs, records with names and much additional information

3: records with names and some additional information; records where some names are mentioned, such as minutes

1: records with names but no additional information: attendance lists of Sunday schools

A = Age of the records

5: pre 1800

4: 1800 – 1850

3: 1850 – 1900

2: 1900 – 1950

1: post 1950

C = Potential to shed light on African-Caribbean connection, African culture in the Caribbean

5: records listing African origins of the population

3: records documenting African culture in the Caribbean (early diaries, reports, letters in Creole languages)

1: small potential to shed light on African-Caribbean connection and/or African culture in the Caribbean

D = Informational value to document daily life in the Caribbean

5: Minutes of Helpers meetings; remark books, registers of exclusion

3: diaries, annual reports; financial records documenting live on plantations; church minutes, correspondence

1: little informational value to document daily life in the Caribbean

M = Internal Moravian Church

5 documenting the life of the local missionaries, mission stations

3 Documenting church policies in the EWI

1 General Moravian church: synods, news letters

E = Exceptionality

The team felt that some records are to be rated higher although they do not fall under any of the other categories, for example, because they document an area that has not

received scholarly attention at all (such as St. Kitts) or they document a historically important location ("one of the oldest Moravian churches in the Caribbean"); documents that would otherwise slip through the cracks (e.g., "a very old and brittle slave ode for the Leeward Islands from 1690-1730" in box 22)

5 additional points

Dup = Duplication factor

Is information also available elsewhere?

5 printed information; widely available

2 handwritten, but duplicates of material in other collections; legal information, information possibly available in other state archives

1 might be available elsewhere but appears rare; unique

P = Physical Condition

The team of conservators from the Conservation Center in Philadelphia assessed each item in the collection to determine the preservation need. There are four priority levels:

4 extensive damage (cannot be used without treatment)

3 moderate damage, (fragile, further loss likely with use)

2 minor (mainly cosmetic damage)

1 only new housing needed

In the formula, the different categories are weighed differently according to the recommendations of the team of historians.

After the team of historians and the conservators had finished their work, MAB staff developed the implementation plan and white paper.

Figure 7 CCAHA team at work at Moravian Archives

Publicity

- ongoing postings on the Moravian Archives Facebook page and a staff member's Instagram during the project
- information on the Moravian Archives website: www.moravianchurcharchives.org
- *Voices from the Vault: Newsletter from the Moravian Archives*, no. 22 (2015) (http://www.moravianchurcharchives.org/publications/voices-vault/)
- *Voices from the Vault: Newsletter from the Moravian Archives*, no. 24 (forthcoming) (http://www.moravianchurcharchives.org/voices.php)
- Presentation by Dr. Paul Peucker at Nisky Moravian Church in Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas, US Virgin Islands, January 23, 2015
- Presentation by Dr. Paul Peucker at the Caribbean Genealogical Library in Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas, US Virgin Islands, January 24, 2015 (see online video https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cw17wtNam74).
- Posting on SAA Archivists of Religious Collections Section Facebook page, May 25, 2016
- Thomas J. McCullough, "Caucus News," announcement and explanation of NEH grant and project, *Mid-Atlantic Archivist* 44, no. 4 (Fall 2015): 14 (https://marac.memberclicks.net/assets/documents/maracfall15.pdf).
- Nicole Radzievich, "Moravian record books hold little-known history of slaves," *The Morning Call*, 16 May 2015 (http://www.mcall.com/news/local/mc-bethlehem-moravian-slave-archives-20150516-story.html), and video (http://www.mcall.com/news/local/mc-video-moravian-archives-slave-records-20150423-premiumvideo.html).
- "Moravian Archives in Bethlehem receives funding for digitization project," *Express-Times*, 9 Apr 2015 (http://blog.lehighvalleylive.com/community-calendar/2015/04/moravian_archives_bethehem_rec.html).
- Dick Eastman, "Virgin Islands Records to be Digitized," Eastman's Online Genealogy Newsleter, 5 May 2015 (https://blog.eogn.com/2015/05/05/virgin-islands-records-to-be-digitized/).
- Aldeth Lewin, "Moravian Archives to Digitize V.I.Records," *Virgin Islands Daily News*, 4 May 2015.
- Margot Maddison-McFadyen, blog about the EWI records on http://www.maryprince.org/#!moravian-archives/iydod

Accomplishments

- Prioritization guidelines
- Item-by-Item Collection Survey, prepared by the Conservation Center for Art & Historic Artifacts, May 3, 2016, including a condition description, a treatment and/or housing proposal, a conservation priority level, and cost estimates.

- Digitization plan, prepared by the Conservation Center for Art & Historic Artifacts, May 24, 2016
- Implementation Plan
- Established contacts with
    - dLOC (Digital Library of the Caribbean)
    - Caribbean Genealogical Library in Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas, US Virgin Islands Caribbean Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives (CARBICA)
    - Latin American and Caribbean Cultural Heritage Archives Roundtable (LACCHA)
    - Danish National Archives (Asbjørn Hellum) and their Danish West Indian records digitization project
    - Susan Laura Lugo, Territorial Archivist of St. Thomas US Virgin Islands

Audiences

As part of the EWI Records Planning Project we reached out to the following audiences, some overlapping:

1) Scholars and educators, who serve as proxies for the furtherance of additional outreach to their peers and pupils,
2) Caribbean peoples, who strive to learn the complex and evolving history of their region through the use of available primary sources, through a visit by Dr. Peucker to Antigua in December of 2014 and to St. Thomas in January 2015
3) Archivists, librarians, and other information professionals, serving as potential reference guides for requests that may be answered through the EWI Collection, and
4) Genealogists and family historians involved in researching individuals that once lived in the Caribbean, a region that often leaves genealogists in a difficult position to find primary sources.

Especially the extensive article in the local newspaper, placed on the front page of the Sunday edition, reached a large local audience.

Continuation of the Project

This project laid the foundation for future work. With the assessments and surveys as the outcome of this planning project, we will continue to work towards accomplishing the goal of preservation and digitization of the EWI records. With the prioritization guidelines and the documentation from the conservators in hand, the Moravian Archives will continue to plan for the preservation and digitization of the EWI collection. The implementation plan lays out the various activities and the time plan to realize these. It will be important to continue to promote public interest in the collection and the project. The implementation plan will guide us during the next few years.