

NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

Chattel With A Soul: The Autobiography of a Moravian Slave

In the mix of peoples that made up colonial Pennsylvania none came closer than black slaves to being seen but not heard. By the middle of the eighteenth century nearly 3,000 blacks lived in Pennsylvania, most of them slaves, and their number doubled before the Revolution and the gradual emancipation act of 1780 began to dismantle the institution that held them. Moreover, while they made up a relatively small percentage of the colony's population (never more than 7 percent and generally under 3 percent), black Pennsylvanians were much more visible than their numbers alone would suggest. Their color insured that even in Pennsylvania's heterogeneous society they stood out physically, and their condition of servitude brought them to the center of protracted debates both in Quaker meetings and in the Pennsylvania Assembly. As a result, there are numerous records *about* black slaves in the public and private archives of the colony and state. There are few records *by* them, however. Confined to a servile and often illiterate class, Pennsylvania slaves seldom had either the opportunity or the ability to tell their stories themselves. It is extremely rare to find an account in a slave's own words concerning any aspect of his or her life.¹

There are exceptions, though, and some of the finest are those in the Bethlehem archives of the Moravian church.² The Moravians not only accepted free blacks and slaves into their fellowship, but also expected them to perform all the duties that went with church mem-

¹ See, for example: Gary Nash, "Slaves and Slaveowners in Colonial Philadelphia," *William and Mary Quarterly* 30 (1973), 223-56; Jerome H. Wood, Jr., "The Negro in Early Pennsylvania: The Lancaster Experience, 1730-90," in Elinor Miller and Eugene D. Genovese, eds., *Plantation, Town, and Country: Essays on the Local History of American Slave Society* (Urbana, 1974), 441-52; and Jean R. Soderland, "Black Women in Colonial Pennsylvania," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 108 (1983), 49-68.

² The Moravian Archives, 41 West Locust Street, Bethlehem, Pa.

bership, including the preparation of a memoir (*Lebenslauf*). From a historian's point of view, these memoirs are one of the church's most interesting and important customs. During the eighteenth century every member of the church, regardless of race, sex, or standing, was expected to write or dictate an account of his or her life. Authors tended to focus on the spiritual events of their lives, but in the process they often provided marvelous vignettes of their temporal lives as well. After an individual's death, his or her pastor finished the memoir with an account of the death itself, read the entire document aloud as part of the funeral service, and filed it with hundreds of others in the congregational archives.³

Among the thousands of memoirs held in the Bethlehem archives are a few by slave members of the church. One of the best of these is that of Ofodobendo Wooma, who, as Andrew the Moor, was both a member and the property of Bethlehem's Moravian congregation from 1746 until his death in 1779. Andrew's⁴ memoir consists of four closely written pages of Old German script with a number of changes and additions between the lines and in the margins. Andrew himself certainly did not write the archives' copy of his autobiography, as the account of his death appears to be in the same hand as the story of his early years, but it is unclear just how it was prepared. In the first place, it is not even certain what language Andrew preferred to use. Most of his memoir is in German, but his last words are in English. It is inconceivable that Andrew could have lived in Bethlehem for thirty years without learning at least to speak and understand German, which was the native tongue of most early Moravians and the official language of their church. His dying words, however, suggest that he may have preferred the English he learned before coming to Bethlehem. Furthermore, although Andrew definitely could read English and probably German, there is no evidence one way or the other concerning his ability or inability to write either.

³ The most recent and most thorough discussion of these memoirs and of their strengths and weaknesses as historical documents is Beverly P. Smaby, "From Communal Pilgrims to Family Householders: The Moravians in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, 1742-1844" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1986).

⁴ I have chosen to use the name Andrew throughout this piece because the individual concerned used that as his name for most of his life and looked on it as a sign of his Christianity.

Thus, the archives' copy of his memoir could be an amended copy of one that Andrew wrote in German; it could be a translation of one he wrote in English; or it could be a transcription, and perhaps a translation as well, of one he dictated. Whichever of these it is, the voice behind it is that of Andrew. Both internal evidence and what we know of early Moravian funerary practices indicate that the memoir is truly autobiographical. And while some parts of Andrew's story are distinctly Moravian, the account of his enslavement and transportation to the New World describes vividly an experience endured by many enslaved Africans.

Andrew was born about 1729⁵ in a village belonging to the Igbo⁶ nation, an agrarian people living in a network of small settlements between the Cross and Niger Rivers in what is now southeastern Nigeria. His childhood memories include a number of features identified with Igbo society, such as food taboos,⁷ enslavement for debt,⁸ circumcision,⁹ the perception of whites as non-humans,¹⁰ and a familiarity with cannibalism,¹¹ but nothing Andrew said reveals the particular village or region of Igboland in which he was born. Wherever it was, life was probably comfortable. Most Igbo of Andrew's day supported themselves by cultivating yams and raising cattle, sheep, and/or goats, and reports of the society usually described it as one in which extremes of poverty and wealth were rare. Moreover, Igbo villages often enjoyed a relatively democratic system of government by councils of elders, which one modern scholar has said "were designed to combine popular participation with weighting for expe-

⁵ Andrew's autobiography gives his birthdate as 1729, while the date 1727 appears in a catalogue of single brothers: Bethlehem (also Christians Brun), Catalogue, Single Breth., & Older Boys, cir. 1743-1762, p. 7 (Moravian Archives).

⁶ Until recently non-African writers have tended to use Ibo, which European explorers coined, rather than Igbo, which the nation itself uses. Lately, however, the latter has become more common, and I have chosen to use it. See Emmanuel M.P. Edeh, *Towards an Igbo Metaphysics* (Chicago, 1985), 14.

⁷ Elizabeth Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People* (London, 1976), 26; Elizabeth Isichei, *Igbo Worlds: An Anthology of Oral Histories and Historical Descriptions* (Philadelphia, 1978), 27 (interview with Nwaokoye Odenigbo), and 178 (field report of Francis Okafo Isichei).

⁸ Isichei, *Igbo Worlds*, 50-51 (account of Joseph Nwose).

⁹ Rems Nna Umeasiegbu, *The Way We Lived: Ibo Customs and Stories* (London, 1969), 4-5.

¹⁰ Isichei, *History*, 112-13.

¹¹ M.M. Green, *Ibo Village Affairs* (New York, 1964), 65, 158, and 255.

rience and ability.”¹² One must be careful not to romanticize life in pre-colonial Africa, but as Andrew grew up, he could at least look forward to entering a society with which he was familiar, one in which he understood the language, the social and religious mores and taboos, and the formal and informal operations of government.

The promise of such a life vanished, however, sometime around 1737, when the death of Andrew’s father sent the boy to live with a financially strapped older brother who used him to secure a loan. This use of family members as collateral was not unusual in Igboland; it was a common practice established long before the Igbo came into contact with Europeans. As one elder of the Alor village group recalled to a modern anthropologist: “from very early times slavery had been practiced in Alor. A person who needed money and had many children could go to a rich man in the community and ask him to give him some money in return for which the rich man was given one of the borrower’s children as a domestic slave.”¹³ Andrew’s account suggests that his experience was supposed to conform to the traditional limits of this Igbo practice. He would remain a domestic slave in the home of his brother’s creditor until the debt was repaid and would then return to his own family. By the eighteenth century, however, Igbo traditions had already begun changing in response to the arrival of Europeans, and Andrew became, instead, one of many debt-bound domestic servants who were sold by their temporary owners into the impersonal and permanent bondage of the Atlantic slave trade.¹⁴

The exact route by which Andrew came into the hands of white slave-traders remains a mystery. It is possible, however, to reconstruct the broad outlines of that journey on the basis of what Andrew and others said about it. It almost certainly began with an itinerant Aro trader. The Aro were one of many clans among the Igbo and by the early eighteenth century were well on their way to becoming the

¹² Nwanna Nzewunwa, “Pre-colonial Nigeria: East of the Niger,” in Richard Olaniyan, ed., *Nigerian History and Culture* (Harlow, England, 1985), 20-34; Philip D. Curtin, *Africa Remembered* (Madison, 1967), 60-69; Isichei, *History*, 21-35 (quote on 21).

¹³ Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa* (Cambridge, 1983), especially 11-15; Victor C. Uchendu, *The Ibo of Southeast Nigeria* (New York, 1965), 87-89; Isichei, *Igbo Worlds*, 50-52 (account of Joseph Nwose, quote on 50).

¹⁴ Lovejoy, *Transformations*, 108-11 and 115-22; Isichei, *Igbo Worlds*, 50-51 (account of Joseph Nwose) and 77-78 (account of Chukwu Nwanyaba).

nation's principal merchants. Sometime during the preceding century invaders from the south had settled among the Aro and had introduced them to the benefits of trade with the Niger delta. Residents of the delta region, like other coastal peoples of West Africa, were in a position to trade directly with the growing number of European ships arriving in search of gold and slaves, and groups farther inland could gain tremendous power over their own neighbors by establishing commercial links with such coastal peoples. The Aro did just that. Using their delta connection and the guns it provided, the Aro established themselves as brokers between the rest of Igboland and the African coast, and throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Aro merchants crisscrossed the nation exchanging manufactured goods—cloth, tobacco, gin, iron rods, and, later, guns—for slaves and other products of the interior.¹⁵ In all likelihood it was one of these Aro traders who bought Andrew from his brother's creditor. The boy then passed quickly through a series of owners and in "a short time" came to a region he called Nemils, where he passed from the Aro, or whoever else marched him across Igboland, to the hands of "those [blacks] who traded into the region."¹⁶

Just where this exchange took place remains unknown; all efforts to identify Nemils have failed. The name does resemble that of Nembe, the African name for Brass, a large slave entrepôt in the Niger delta, and Andrew's memoir does suggest that Nemils lay on a river large enough to be the Niger. But when someone inserted "Niger" between the lines of Andrew's story, in an apparent effort either to correct or amplify the text, it was stricken out, suggesting the subsequent correction of an earlier miscorrection. Moreover, Nembe's location in the Niger delta meant that it was usually the point at which captives from the interior completed a voyage down one of Africa's great rivers and passed into white hands. Andrew, however, began such a voyage in Nemils, which indicates that the town was too far inland to be Nembe.

¹⁵ Isichei, *History*, 58-66; Lovejoy, *Transformations*, 82-83; Philip D. Curtin, *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History* (Cambridge, 1984), 47-49; Isichei, *Igbo Worlds*, 43 (account of Ikwebisi Ezechinyelu Ejiofor); John Hatch, *Nigeria: A History* (London, 1971), 67-68.

¹⁶ For later accounts of similar journeys in the hands of slave-traders, see Isichei, *Igbo Worlds*, 50-52 (account of Joseph Nwose), 288-90 (account of David Okparabietoa Pepple), and 292-93 (account of Mgbeke of Umuoji).

The traders who bought Andrew in the Nemils market were part of the institution that really held Africa's slave trade together. They were residents of the coastal region who traveled inland to exchange European products for captives collected in the interior and brought the latter back to the coast for resale to European slavers. Some details of their practice varied from region to region and time to time, but its basic nature remained the same throughout West Africa and across several centuries.¹⁷ Thus, the men who carried Andrew down an unknown river to an unknown port probably operated very much like those described a century later by John Adams, an English ship's captain, when he came to buy slaves at Bonny, a Niger delta slave station through which thousands of Igbo passed into American slavery. "Fairs, where the slaves of the Heebo nation are obtained," wrote Adams

are held every five or six weeks at several villages, which are situated on the banks of the rivers and creeks in the interior, and to which the traders of Bonny resort to purchase them.

The preparation necessary for going to these fairs generally occupied the Bonny people some days. Large canoes, capable of carrying 120 persons, are launched and stored for the voyage. The traders augment the quantity of their merchandise, by obtaining from their friends, the captains of the slave ships, a considerable quantity of goods on credit, according to the extent of business they are in the habit of transacting. Evening is the period chosen for the time of departure, when they proceed in a body, accompanied by the noise of drums, horns, and gongs. At the expiration of the sixth day, they generally return, bringing with them 1,500 or 2,000 slaves who are sold to Europeans the evening after their arrival, and taken on board the ships.¹⁸

It was probably just such a flotilla that brought twelve-year-old Andrew to the African coast, perhaps to Bonny itself. There he waited in a pen or prison of some sort while his final African owner tried to find a buyer for him among the ship captains calling from Europe

¹⁷ Lovejoy, *Transformations*, 92-107; Curtin, *Cross-Cultural Trade*, 57-59; Daniel C. Littlefield, *Rice and Slaves: Ethnicity and the Slave Trade in Colonial South Carolina* (Baton Rouge, 1981), 33-34; Michael Craton, *Sinews of Empire: A Short History of British Slavery* (New York, 1974), 68-83.

¹⁸ Adams quoted in Isichei, *Igbo Worlds*, 12.

and America. In Andrew's case this may have taken somewhat longer than usual because he was an Igbo, a people whom many Europeans and Americans credited with a tendency to choose suicide over slavery. If one did buy an Igbo, the conventional wisdom was to buy a young one in the hope that he or she would prove more tractable; so perhaps Andrew's age compensated for his origins.¹⁹ At any rate, a buyer was found and Andrew left for America aboard a ship bound for Antigua. But he did not stay in Antigua. He and some thirty other Africans were sold there to a New York ship's captain who took them north to be resold in New York City, and there, sometime in 1741, Andrew passed to an unnamed Jewish merchant and began his life of servitude in America.²⁰

Andrew spent less than five years in New York, two with his first owner and slightly longer with a second. But he considered this the pivotal period of his life and devoted the bulk of his autobiography to it, for it was during these years that he encountered and embraced Christianity. The Igbo of Andrew's day were animists. They worshipped an all-powerful creator god and a pantheon of lesser gods associated with particular parts or phenomena of the visible world (earth or lightning, for example). These lesser gods could use their control over events in their sphere to punish or reward human actions, and when an Igbo suffered what seemed to be divine retribution, he or she often sought a priest's advice on how best to appease the angry deity.²¹ Thus, when Andrew learned that his master planned to sell him in Madeira, he did the sensible thing and asked his neighbors, who were more familiar than he with the local gods, from whom and how he should seek divine assistance. They in turn taught him the Lord's Prayer and urged him to ask their god for deliverance. This Andrew did, promising to follow the new deity if it brought him to a good master.

¹⁹ Littlefield, *Rice and Slaves*, 8-10; Isichei, *History*, 44.

²⁰ Andrew did not mention this first owner's occupation, but his dealings with Madeira and with Thomas Noble suggest that he was a merchant.

²¹ Isichei, *History*, 24-27; J.O. Kayode and E. Dada Adelowo, "Religions in Nigeria," in Olaniyan, ed., *Nigerian History and Culture*, 234-38; Edeh, *Towards an Igbo Metaphysics*, especially 102-11 and 116-17; C.G.A. Oldendorp, *A Caribbean Mission*, translated and edited by Arnold R. Highfield and Vladimir Barac (Ann Arbor, 1987), 193 (this is a modern translation of Oldendorp's 1770 *Geschichte der Mission der evangelischen Brueder auf den caraischen Inseln S. Thomas, S. Croix und S. Jan*).

In his unabashedly pragmatic conversion experience Andrew conformed precisely to what we know of Igbo reactions to the Christian missionaries who visited their African homeland in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. According to Elizabeth Isichei's *History of the Igbo People*, most members of that nation accepted Christianity only when they believed that to do so would bring them some tangible, temporal benefit, such as relief from a stigma imposed by African custom or economic advancement through the educational opportunities provided converts by a mission school.²² Andrew's African gods had failed him when they sanctioned his enslavement and transportation to America. When, therefore, a new deity seemed to bring Andrew to a kindly new master and save him from further abuse, the young slave was ready to forsake his earlier faith and follow this more powerful god.

His conversion might have proved short-lived had he gone to the wrong master. Most American slaveowners were, at best, indifferent to the spiritual state of their workers, and many were positively hostile toward efforts to Christianize them. This was especially true in New York during the early 1740s, because the coincidence of rising religious enthusiasm, as the Great Awakening spread, and the discovery of an alleged plot to burn the city and murder its white residents had convinced many of the latter that slavery and evangelism were a deadly combination.²³ But Andrew's new owner, New York merchant Thomas Noble, was different.

Noble was a member of the Moravian church, which at the time accepted slavery but tried to help the enslaved. In Moravian eyes slavery was part of God's creation; as Bishop August Gottlieb Spangenberg explained, "it is not by chance, rather from God, that one man is a master and the other a slave."²⁴ Nor did eighteenth-century Moravians doubt which people God had chosen to enslave; they shared the then current belief that servitude was a curse borne by

²² Isichei, *History*, 160-68.

²³ David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Ithaca, 1966), 196-222; Peter Wood, *Black Majority* (New York, 1974), 133-36; Gerald Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion: Slave Resistance in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (New York, 1972), 17-18; David S. Lovejoy, *Religious Enthusiasm in the New World* (Cambridge, 1985), 201-6.

²⁴ Quoted in Christian Degn, *Die Schimmelmanns im atlantischen Dreieckshandel: Gewinn und Gewissen* (Neumunster, 1974), 47.

blacks as divine retribution for the sins of Ham, son of Noah and, they believed, the progenitor of the world's black population.²⁵ None of this put slaves beyond the Moravians' concern. On the contrary, the church felt what two of its modern historians have called "an imperative obligation" to preach among the heathen, including slaves, and to accept as converts those few whom God had chosen. And although conversion would not alter a slave's legal status, it would, according to Moravian leader Nicolaus Ludwig, Count von Zinzendorf, "[take] away that Stubbornness Laziness Unfaithfulness & Ill will which made their Slavery so hard" and see them "deliver'd from ye Slavery of ye Devil & brought into the Liberty which is in Xt [Christ] Jesus."²⁶

The Nobles, therefore, did what they could for Andrew's soul. They introduced him to Moravian missionaries, saw that he learned to read the Bible, and insisted that he pray with the family. But Andrew wanted more. He yearned to join his master's church, and Thomas Noble would not have his slave baptized. This too was in keeping with Moravian practices of the time. Until the last third of the eighteenth century the Moravian church was reluctant to accept converts. Under the direction of Count von Zinzendorf, Moravian missionaries were free to preach wherever they were welcome, but only the relatively small number of their listeners whom God had touched were to be baptized and admitted as candidates for membership in the church.²⁷ Naturally, it took time to identify and prepare those whom God had chosen, and the Moravians believed it took even longer in the case of slaves because, as Zinzendorf explained,

²⁵ Davis, *Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*, 63-64 n.2, 217, 307, 316-17; "Count Zinzendorf's Farewell Letter wrote to the Negroes in St. Thos. when he departed from them, Feb. 15, 1739," West Indies, Miscellaneous Letters, 1739-1769 (Moravian Archives).

²⁶ J. Taylor Hamilton and Kenneth G. Hamilton, *History of the Moravian Church* (n.p., 1967), 43-44; "Count Zinzendorf's Farewell Letter wrote to the Negroes in St. Thos. when he departed from them, Feb., 15, 1739," West Indies, Miscellaneous Letters, 1739-1769.

²⁷ David A. Schattschneider, "The Missionary Theologies of Zinzendorf and Spangenberg," *Transactions of the Moravian Historical Society*, 22, part III (1975), 213-33; Jan Marinus van der Linde, "Herrnhuter im Karibischen Raum," in Mari P. van Buijtenen, Cornelis Dekker, and Huib Leeuwenberg, eds., *Unitas Fratrum* (Utrecht, 1975), 241-42. This reluctance to accept converts was especially pronounced during the early 1740s; see Oldendorp, *Caribbean Mission*, 415.

"a Heathen is used from his Infancy to do ye bad & has never learn'd it any better."²⁸ So Andrew waited.

Finally, in late 1745, Thomas Noble dropped his objection to Andrew's being baptized, though it is impossible to say why. Perhaps Andrew had waited long enough to convince Noble that he understood what he was doing; perhaps Noble, who died the following April, sensed his approaching death and wanted to see Andrew's conversion completed before his own demise; or perhaps the answer lies in Andrew's brief reference to George Whitefield and the latter's offer to baptize him. Whitefield was perhaps the greatest evangelist of the eighteenth century.²⁹ He was also, despite being ordained in the Anglican church, quite close to the Moravians during the early years of his ministry. Sometime before 1739 Whitefield met Thomas Noble, and the two men evidently became fast friends; Whitefield's journals and letters reveal Noble's admiration for the great evangelist, and Whitefield stayed with his "dear friend, Mr. Noble" whenever his duties took him to New York.³⁰ It was on one of these visits, in the summer of 1745, that Whitefield met Andrew and offered to baptize him.³¹ Noble rejected the offer probably on the grounds that it was premature. By the end of the year, however, he had changed his mind and decided to send Andrew to the Moravian community of Bethlehem for baptism, and while any one of the factors mentioned above could explain this change of heart, its timing and the fact of

²⁸ Quote from "Count Zinzendorf's Farewell Letter wrote to the Negroes in St. Thos. when he departed from them, Feb. 15, 1739," West Indies, Miscellaneous Letters, 1739-1769. This attitude is also evident throughout Oldendorp's *Caribbean Mission*, especially 227-28 and 372.

²⁹ For a recent appraisal of Whitefield, see Lovejoy, *Religious Enthusiasm*, 154-214.

³⁰ William V. Davis, ed., *George Whitefield's Journals* (Gainesville, 1969), 344-45, 415, 486-87; George Whitefield, *Works of the Reverend George Whitefield* (6 vols., London, 1771-1772), 1:121-22, 202-3, 208, 227, and 307-9. Noble was also one of the trustees for a nondenominational meetinghouse built in Philadelphia in 1740 to accommodate Whitefield when he preached there: Charles P. Keith, *Chronicles of Pennsylvania, from the English Revolution to the Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle, 1688-1748* (2 vols., Philadelphia, 1917), 1:360-62.

³¹ Whitefield came to America just once while Andrew was with the Nobles: Stuart Henry Clark, *George Whitefield: Wayfaring Witness* (New York, 1957), 200-10. On that trip he was still in Boston in late July 1745 (see Whitefield, *Works*, 2:80-82) and arrived in Philadelphia in September (see J.A. Leo Lemay and P. M. Zall, eds., *Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography* [New York, 1986], 89n.).

Noble's evident admiration for Whitefield strongly suggest that it came in response to the latter's offer.

Whatever the reason, or reasons, behind it, Andrew's journey to Bethlehem quickly led to the realization of his greatest wish. Soon after his arrival, in January 1746, Andrew began meeting with Nathanael Seidel, pastor for the single men, to prepare for his baptism and admission to the church. Finally, on February 15, he knelt before Bethlehem's congregation to answer publicly a series of catechistical questions concerning his faith and his desire to serve Christ and, in the Moravian fashion, was baptized "into the death of Jesus" and welcomed with a "kiss of peace."³² In his memoir Andrew spoke only of "the bliss" he felt on joining the church, but it must also have been a frightening moment for the young slave. He was still only sixteen years old and just five years removed from his Igbo homeland. The audience he faced that day was white and largely German-speaking, while he was black and probably addressed them in halting English. And to symbolize his new birth into Christianity he received a new name; York, as he had been known since his arrival in America five years earlier, became Andrew, a name that carried great weight among the Moravians in Bethlehem. The first Andrew the Moor had been a particular favorite of Count von Zinzendorf until the former's death in 1744. He had frequently traveled in the count's entourage and after his death was chosen by Zinzendorf to represent West Indian blacks in "das Erstlingsbild," a group portrait of the first individuals from various peoples converted by Moravian missionaries. Moreover, the first Andrew had been a member of Bethlehem's congregation from its formal organization, in June 1742, until he sailed for Europe with Zinzendorf early the next year.³³ Thus, many of those who welcomed the second Andrew into their midst in 1746 had known his celebrated predecessor and may have had high, albeit unspoken, expectations for the newcomer.

Unfortunately, Andrew's own words stop with his admission to the

³² Adelaide L. Fries, *Customs and Practices of the Moravian Church* (Winston-Salem, 1973), 31-32; Jacob John Sessler, *Communal Pietism Among Early American Moravians* (New York, 1933), print opposite p. 94; Oldendorp, *Caribbean Mission*, 447-49.

³³ Joseph M. Levering, *A History of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, 1741-1892* (Bethlehem, 1903), 122, 136, 160.

church. He lived in Bethlehem for another thirty-three years but wrote nothing about his experiences during that time. There are, however, other materials in the Moravian Archives that refer to Andrew, and from these it is possible to describe his life as a Moravian slave—a life that was different from either that of other Moravians or that of other slaves.

Although Andrew was a communicant member of the Moravian church, he lived with at least two regular reminders that he was still a slave. The most obvious was his lack of a surname; for thirty-three years he appeared in church records as “Andrew der Mohr.” This was a pattern unique to the non-whites in Bethlehem. Some had two Christian names, such as the mulatto slave Ann Cherry, the Malay Samuel Johannes, and the free black Christian Anton, but no non-white in Bethlehem seems to have had a proper surname.³⁴ Among whites, on the other hand, such names were universal, although a few especially prominent men went by Christian names alone. August Spangenberg, for example, was often called simply Joseph, but that was for an altogether different reason; Andrew’s name was a sign of racism and Spangenberg’s of respect. A second, and probably more disturbing, reminder of Andrew’s status was the fact that from time to time *his* congregation exercised its property rights over blacks it owned but who were not members. In 1775, for example, it sold Sarah, a slave purchased two years earlier to work in Bethlehem’s Sun Inn.³⁵ And when Christian Anton, a free black who had been baptized but not admitted to the congregation, asked to marry Ann Cherry, a mulatto slave who belonged to the church and had also been baptized but not admitted, he was permitted to buy his wife on time but with the stipulation that “in Case the said Christian Anton should not pay off the said Capital, . . . then the said Ann Cherry and Her Issue remain bound unto the said . . . August Spangenberg and Peter Boehler [who held her in the church’s interest].”³⁶ Cases

³⁴ The difference between white and non-white members is especially evident in membership lists; see, for example, the roster of single brethren at the end of their 1748 choir diary, Brethren’s Choir Diary, Dec. 7, 1744—April 5, 1762 (Moravian Archives).

³⁵ Grethe Goodwin, “From Lovefeasts to Fiestas,” Mss. in Moravian Archives.

³⁶ “Agreement with Christian Anton the Negro about his Wife Ann, formerly Margret the Mulattowoman, June 8, 1762,” Slaves (Moravian Archives).

like that must have impressed on Andrew that he was still a piece of property and not the free man he had been born.

Still, as a member of the congregation, Andrew's servitude entailed a much lighter burden than that endured by most American slaves. In 1760 August Spangenberg described the life of Bethlehem slaves in a letter to Moravian missionaries working in the West Indies. "At Bethlehem, we too have negroes," wrote Spangenberg.

Because of our love to them we do not free them, for they would be in a worse condition if they got free as if we kept them. Actually they are not slaves with us, and there is no difference between them and other brothers and sisters. They dress as we do, they eat what we eat, they work when we work, they rest when we rest, and they enjoy quite naturally what other brothers and sisters enjoy.³⁷

Spangenberg's description certainly does not apply to slaves who were not congregation members, and it does overlook the psychological burden of slavery, but it is an accurate rendering of Andrew's material life.

When he came to Bethlehem, Andrew was an adolescent male old enough to enter the Single Brethren's Choir—one of the characteristic subgroups into which Moravian congregations were then divided, and he went to live with the other single men in their large stone house just across a courtyard from the Congregation House (*Gemein Haus*).³⁸ Members of the choir, including Andrew, slept in communal dormitories, wore plain clothing furnished by the choir, ate together in a refectory next door,³⁹ and spent their days working for the choir and congregation (Andrew was described as a day laborer and probably spent most of his days in farm or construction work).⁴⁰ In spite of his color and legal status, Andrew also occupied a niche like any other brother in the hierarchy of bands into which the choir was

³⁷ Memorandum of August Spangenberg, Jan. 8, 1760, quoted in Susan Lenius, "Slavery and the Moravian Church in North Carolina" (Honors thesis in history, Moravian College, Bethlehem, 1974), 108n.

³⁸ Brethren's Choir Diary, Dec. 7, 1744—April 5, 1762, entries for Feb. 15, 1746 and Sept. 13, 1746; William J. Murtagh, *Moravian Architecture and Town Planning* (Chapel Hill, 1967), 36-39.

³⁹ Murtagh, *Moravian Architecture*, 51-52n.

⁴⁰ Bethlehem (also Christians Brun), Catalogue, Single Breth., & Older Boys, cir. 1743-1762, p. 7; Gillian L. Gollin, *Moravians in Two Worlds* (New York, 1967), 156-64.

divided in order to provide the members with close supervision and spiritual support, and in 1747 he was one of eight single brethren chosen to attend a synod in nearby Germantown.⁴¹

Andrew left the single brothers in 1762, when at the age of thirty-three he married a free black member of the congregation named Magdalena.⁴² The bride was thirty-two and, like the groom, a native of Africa brought to America as a child. She had been in Bethlehem since 1747, when her owner sent her from Philadelphia to live with the Moravians, had been a member of the church since 1748, and had been free since she was manumitted in 1752.⁴³ After their marriage Andrew and Magdalena moved out of the Single Brethren's and Single Sisters' Choirs and joined that of the Married People, though exactly where they lived is unclear as married couples lived in a number of different buildings. During their seventeen years together they produced three children, but little is known about them. One, a son named Andrew, was born and died in 1767 and is buried in the cemetery of the Bethlehem congregation—known like other Moravian cemeteries as God's Acre.⁴⁴ Concerning the other two children mentioned in Andrew's memoir, the records are silent.

Andrew himself survived until 1779. On February 13 of that year, at about age fifty, he died, probably from a respiratory ailment of some kind. In keeping with Moravian tradition, Andrew's death was announced to the community through a series of trombone chorales and followed the next day by his burial in the married men's section of God's Acre. His memoir was then filed in the church archives, and today it provides a vivid glimpse of the author's journey from freedom in Africa to slavery in Pennsylvania.

⁴¹ Brethren's Choir Diary, Dec. 7, 1744—April 5, 1762, entries for Sept. 13, 1746 and April 27, 1747.

⁴² Marriage Records, Bethlehem Moravian Congregation, vol. 1, entry dated Jan. 21, 1762 (Moravian Archives).

⁴³ Kirchen Buch der Gemeinde in Bethlehem, vol. 1, entry dated May 8/19, 1748 (Moravian Archives); manumission dated March 3, 1752, Slaves. Coincidentally, Magdalena's owner, Charles Brockden, was one of Thomas Noble's fellow trustees of Philadelphia's nondenominational meetinghouse: Keith, *Chronicles of Pennsylvania*, 361-62.

⁴⁴ Augustus Schultze, "The Old Moravian Cemetery of Bethlehem," *Transactions of the Moravian Historical Society* 5 (1899), 99-267 (entry for Andrew).

The blessed Brother Andrew the Moor has had the following drawn up of his life

I, Andrew the Moor, was born in Ibo⁴⁵ land, in the unknown part of⁴⁶ Africa and was circumcised when I was 8 days old, according to the custom of my nation. My name was Ofodobendo Wooma. My father died when I was about 8 years old, and my brother, who was poor and had 5 children of his own, took me to live with him. But not long thereafter, he borrowed 2 goats from a man for 2 years and gave me to him as security. He was supposed to give me back when he received the goats back, but he did not wait for that, he handed me a pipe of tobacco on the road which I trampled underfoot and he took that as cause and sold me to another after a year's time.⁴⁷ For a short time I was often bought and sold again, and came from one nation to another, the language of which I did not understand, until I was brought to a large district called Nemils,⁴⁸ where a merchant of the region bought me, clothed me, and [placed] me in his house with his other servants. A few weeks afterwards, the servants removed me at their master's order to another house not far away. I was immediately locked inside the house. I was frightened and trembled with fear because I found myself in a place where the heads of at least 50 dead men hung. It was the house of a cannibal. Though this nation generally does not eat men, nevertheless, some still eat human flesh to make themselves appear barbaric and important. I expected to be slaughtered at once, and they appeared to have an appetite for me because I was young. But my companion demanded more for me than they wanted to give. For this reason he took me further, brought me again to the aforementioned district, took my clothing, and sold me to one of those who traded into the region. I was immediately taken into a vessel with a number of others whose

⁴⁵ The writer originally spelled this "Eboe," and it was corrected with the interlinear addition of "Ibo."

⁴⁶ The phrase "the unknown part of" seems to be a marginal addition.

⁴⁷ Originally, this sentence read: ". . . but he did not wait for that but sold me to another. . . ." It was altered to the wording offered above through an addition written at the foot of the page for insertion at this point and the striking out of the second "but."

⁴⁸ Someone wrote "Niger" above Nemils but then struck it out.

language I did not understand. That made me very sad until I came across a girl from my region who comforted me very much. The first 3 or 4 days they gave me nothing to drink and nothing to eat except pork, which in my country it is forbidden to eat; whoever eats pork, the others hate and shun him as a very wicked man. Because I was almost starved, I was finally⁴⁹ obliged to eat a little of it. We were brought to the coast of Guinea;⁵⁰ the girl and I kept together there and awaited what was going to happen to us. One morning we were terribly frightened because we saw 2 white people coming toward us. We thought sure they were devils who wanted to take us, because we had never before seen a white man and never in our lives heard that such men existed. One of them, the captain of a ship, signaled us that we should follow him, which we did with great apprehension and were brought to a ship where we saw 3 or 4 negroes and expected any moment that someone would knock us down. But the people on the ship were untied and there appeared to be about 60 blacks, so our fear faded and I comforted myself that I would be treated like they were. We were brought to Antigua where I was sold with some 30 others to a captain from N York, who sold me in N York to a Jew who named me York. That was the year 1741, and at that time I was about 12 years old. The first year I had nothing to do but run in the streets with other youths, where I learned many ungodly things.⁵¹ In the 2nd year, my master planned to sell me in Madeira for a pipe of wine. I was very worried about that, spoke to several neighbors, and asked their advice. They said they could not help me, that I should ask God to help. I asked how and what I should pray.

⁴⁹ Interlinear addition of "finally."

⁵⁰ Andrew's claim that he reached the Atlantic coast in Guinea may indicate that he was taken west from Igboland and then south to the Bight of Benin, but a more likely explanation is that Andrew, like many early writers, used the term "Guinea" very loosely. For a general discussion of this problem, see Philip D. Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* (Madison, 1969), 104-5. For another eighteenth-century example of Guinea's extending to the Niger delta, see Oldendorp, *Caribbean Mission*, 159.

⁵¹ Andrew almost certainly exaggerated the freedom he enjoyed in 1741. A number of mysterious fires that year had sparked rumors of a conspiracy between slaves and renegade whites to destroy the city and murder many of its white residents. The result was a series of spectacular trials, gruesome executions, and repressive laws designed to restrict even further the already limited ability of blacks to move and meet in New York. See Herbert Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts* (rev. ed., New York, 1974), 192-95.

They taught me the Lord's Prayer. In the evenings I knelt down and said, "O Lord, our neighbors said you were so good and you gave each man what he asks from you. If you will help me to a good master in this city, then I will love you for it." The next day my master offered me to Mr. Noble, to whom he was in debt, and Brother Henry von Vleck (his clerk or apprentice) took me away. To my great sorrow, Mr. Noble did not want to have me because I was too young and weak to do his work. After [that] I was brought to him a 2nd time and was again absolutely refused. I told this to our neighbors, that Mr. Noble had an inclination to buy me if I were stronger. They replied that there was no better man in N York than he, and that I should without fail ask the Lord to so dispose him that he would buy me, which I did that same evening. I said to my unknown Lord that our neighbors had again described Him to me as very merciful and Mr. Noble as a very good master, and that if He wished that I were to come to Mr. Noble, then I would always love Him thereafter. The day after I was brought with another negro youth to Mr. Noble's house for a 4 week trial, at the end of which the other youth was sent back and I was bought by Mr. Noble. About this time the first Brethren came to N York and lodged with Mr. Noble. They often told me that our Savior had shed his blood for me and all black men and that He had as much love for me, and everyone, as for white people, which I did not believe. On the contrary, I thought that God only loved people who were important in the world, who possessed riches, and so forth. But I resolved when possible to find out whether what I so often heard from the Brethren was true. Mr. Noble sent me to school and because I was very eager, I learned to read in less than half a year. From that time on I always had the N. Test. or another good book in my pack and read from it whenever I had the time and opportunity. Mr. Noble held morning and evening prayers with his family and even though I was often in the same room, I never prayed with them, but crept into a corner, went in my room later and prayed and did as I had seen and heard them until Mrs. Noble said one time that since our Savior had suffered and died as much for me as for them, I could be as blessed as them and I should pray with them, which I did. But I always repeated them in my room when I was alone. I was very anxious about my salvation and attempted to receive it through my own power. In the mornings, after my master awoke, I often undertook to do my work

for the day joyfully, to deal in love with every man, and to pray continually. But unfortunately it often happened soon after my resolution that the day's time had slipped past and caused me [such] anguish that I dared not pray again until the next day. Then I hoped the Lord would have forgiven my trespass. There often came over me through prayer in my room such fear that I thought the devil was standing behind me. Once when I perceived this hard and troublesome road to salvation completely and saw no possibility to reach my goal, I resolved to throw myself out of a window and thus make an end to my sinful life. I was already standing in the opening and wanted to make the leap. Then it was as if someone pulled me back. In the process I returned to my senses and with a thousand tears begged forgiveness of the Savior. From that time on I had an opportunity to recognize my unworthiness and powerlessness daily, and the Savior's love and mercy and his selfless passion and death made such an impression on my heart that I wished nothing so much as to become a genuine black offering to Jesus and a member of the congregation. I often had a great longing to be baptized, and Mr. Whitefield once offered to baptize me, but Mr. Noble refused. At the end of the year 1745, Mr. Noble permitted me to go to Bethlehem, where I arrived with a joyful heart the 9th of Jan. n. St. 46 with the brothers Wm. Edwards and John Hopson. I had various blessed conversations with Br. Nathanael [Seidel] and opened my whole heart to him. Mr. Noble, who had given me to Br. Spangenberg, also came to Bethlehem several weeks after me to a synod.⁵² During his stay, on Feb. 15th, I was baptized into Jesus' death by Br. Christian Rauch and named Andrew. (He was the first negro whom the Brethren baptized in Pennsilv.) It is impossible for me to describe the bliss that I felt in my heart as a result. The following Sabbath I had the great grace of enjoying the body and blood of the beloved Savior with the congregation through the Holy Sacrament. In April of that same year I went to N York to serve Mr. Noble in his illness and after his passing I returned to my dear Bethlehem. This is the extent

⁵² This sentence originally read: "My master also came to Bethlehem. . . ." and was changed with an addition in the margin for insertion here, the striking out of "my master," and the interlinear addition of "Mr. Noble."

of his account.⁵³ Here on the 21st of Jan. 1762 he was united with the now widowed Magdalena in holy matrimony, which the Savior blessed with 3 children, only one of whom, the son Andrew,⁵⁴ after only a short time longed to be beyond the body. Our blessed brother enjoyed in the congregation a blessedly happy passage,⁵⁵ and it was a true joy to him to be able to tell a poor black something of the Savior. He happily praised the Lord and related what the Savior had done for his soul. And his election, that he came out of the darkness and into the light and from the power of Satan to God and into the congregation as a believer, was always very significant and important to him.⁵⁶ In his worldly affairs he was faithful and diligent. For several years he had been burdened with a strong cough. His longing to be home with the Lord became so [illegible word] that he could barely await the blessed [illegible word], and often sighed, "O my dearest Savior, O come soon & fetch me."⁵⁷ Yet he was very patient and calm. On the evening of the 13th he gently passed away, and his end showed that he had believed.

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⁵³ This sentence marks the end of Andrew's autobiographical account and the start of his pastor's conclusion.

⁵⁴ Interlinear addition of "the son Andrew."

⁵⁵ The original wording of this clause was "Our blessed brother enjoyed a blessed passage in the congregation"; it was changed through the interlinear addition of "happy" and the use of numerals to indicate the preferred word order used above.

⁵⁶ This entire sentence is a marginal addition for insertion here.

⁵⁷ Andrew's wish to die is expressed in English in the document, the only time that language is used, suggesting that English may have been his preferred tongue even after thirty-three years in a German-speaking community.

