

# Moravian Women's Association

Devotional Paper

April 2020

## Wonder Women! Then and Now

This month we focus our thoughts on two 'Wonder Women' who helped to develop and mould the Moravian Church during the 1700s.

Rebecca Protten was born into slavery but gained her freedom as an adolescent. She lived on the island of St Thomas during the 1730s and when she arrived on St Thomas from Antigua, Rebecca worked in the home of her master, the plantation owner Lucas van Beverhout who taught her the Christianity of the Reformed Church. Following his death, Rebecca was freed from slavery and from then on religion played a central role in her life. As we know, Moravian Missionaries arrived on St Thomas in 1732, and Rebecca joined them in their mission to convert the islanders to Christianity. Ten years later in 1742, she travelled from St Thomas to Herrnhut with the missionaries, where she met and then married Christian Protten. After spending time in Herrnhut, together they fulfilled Christian's life dream of starting a school in Christiansborg on the Gold Coast of Africa. Rebecca spent the rest of her life there until her death in 1780. Unlike many other groups of Christians at that time, women were very important in the Moravian Church. They still are today. Rebecca was treated as an equal along side her male Moravian brothers and, being ordained a few weeks after her marriage, she became one of the first ordained African American women in Western Christianity

Did Rebecca Protten ever meet Erdmuthe Dorothea Zinzendorf whilst in Herrnhut? The answer seems almost certainly 'yes'.

Erdmuthe married Count Zinzendorf in 1722 having met him at her brother's wedding the previous year. It seems that it was almost a marriage built on the business principals of a shared desire to bring 'souls to Christ' rather than that of love, despite the fact that they had 12 children! They say that behind every good man is a good woman and Erdmuthe was a good woman! She soon took over the day to day management of her husband's estate both in Berthelsdorf and at Herrnhut. She ran the orphanage which was part of the Moravian Settlement and probably worked alongside Rebecca in educating and nurturing the children in their care. She did not enjoy good health but was strong enough to give birth to 12 children and see 8 of them die at a young age. Erdmuthe came from nobility, was obviously well educated, intelligent and was a strong woman. She wrote a number of hymns and was instrumental in initiating the annual publication of our Daily Watchwords presently in its' 290 year of issue. Coming from very different backgrounds Rebecca and Erdmuthe both played a big part in Moravian Church history. Rebecca taught and helped to spread the Christian message to future generations thus possibly changing the course of history. Erdmuthe, along with her husband, allowed 'The Moravians' to settle on their land thus ensuring that the growth of Christianity continued – 'Wonder Women' indeed.

For Discussion

1. What does 'to be a missionary' mean to you?
2. Today we are called to be missionaries. How can we do this especially in these troubling and uncertain times?

'God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble'

Psalm 46 v1