



Hermann Wellenreuther, Carola Wessel, eds. *The Moravian Mission Diaries of David Zeisberger, 1772-1781*. Translated by Julie Tomberlin Weber. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005. x + 666 pp. \$65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-271-02522-3.

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## The Moravian Mission of David Zeisberger

Hermann Wellenreuther and Carola Wessel have given a valuable gift to English-speaking historians, theologians, and anthropologists by providing a translated edition of the diaries of Moravian missionary David Zeisberger. Shedding light on the contested region of the Ohio River Valley, these diaries, initially published in German, cover a critical period in American history, spanning from April 1772 through March 1781. The documents thus provide an opportunity for scholars to investigate the precarious relationships between colonists, English authorities, and a variety of Indian nation and kinship groups (with a focus on the Delaware). As a result of the period and location that it covers, the collection also provides a follow-up to Michael McConnell's study of Anglo-French struggle in his book *A Country Between: The Upper Ohio Valley and Its Peoples, 1724-1774* (1992).

Eighteenth-century Moravian records are generally a rich source of information on the society, politics, and culture of the world because of Moravians' own interest in the relationship between their communities and the larger world of which they were a part. Zeisberger's diaries are no exception to this and include detailed descriptions of Delaware practices and beliefs. In particular, Zeisberger's entries reveal the clear struggle of the Delaware in finding the best path between their traditional culture and that of the encroaching Europeans. In addition, the diaries provide a fascinating glimpse into the dynamics of conversion and worship within an unconventional Protestant faith that contained a strong mystical element. Although the editors do not discuss this aspect, it may well have struck a particular chord with their Indian converts.[1]

In addition to the diaries themselves, Wellenreuther and Wessel include an eighty-seven-page introduction, copious notes, a list of all congregants of the mission settlements, the minutes of two mission conferences, a set of

the statutes governing one Indian mission, and the minutes of an Indian council held at Detroit in 1781. They also include a series of maps, but unfortunately, as is often the case in publications today, most readers will need a magnifying glass to make good use of them.

The lengthy introduction, written by Wellenreuther, contains a section on "The Diary as Source," a very thoughtful analysis of the challenges posed by the diaries. These include Zeisberger's tendency to record events sometimes weeks after they occurred, his European bias, and the public nature of the diaries, which were intended to be read to Moravian congregations throughout Europe and America. Wellenreuther follows this analysis up with an equally thoughtful discussion of the issues involved in translation, which, in this case, is multilayered, moving from various Indian dialects, to German, and finally to English.

The introduction, however, could have benefited from covering some things more clearly. The editors generally assume a solid prior understanding of the organization and relations of the Delaware and other Indian groups. This is a very complex subject and at times the extent of detail appears to lose the knowledge of the forest among the trees. It could have been strengthened by the inclusion of charts to clarify alliances and a timeline of major developments. In general, the introduction would have been helped by more focus on the larger context both of the colonial American and American Indian experience and of the world of the Moravian Brethren. The bibliography, for example, does not reference Daniel Richter's work on the struggles of the Iroquois League outlined in *Ordeal of the Longhouse: The Peoples of the Iroquois League in the Era of European Colonization* (1992) or Tom Hatley's study of the Cherokee during the American Revolution in *The Dividing Paths: Cherokees and South Carolinians through the Era of Revolution* (1993).

Both books explore the ways in which the Indian nations strove to negotiate a path through the rapidly growing European population. It would have been worthwhile to compare their experiences with those of the Delaware as revealed in the diaries. There is also surprisingly little discussion of the Moravians' own belief system and practices. To understand their interests and motivations, it might prove helpful to read first the section on "Moravian Activity in North America before 1772," which provides some basic information.

Despite these frustrations, the publication of an En-

glish version of the Zeisberger diaries, not to mention the original German edition, is a monumental contribution to the sources for revolutionary America, early Christian missions, and the encounter between the Delaware and European cultures. It stands as a credit to Wellenreuther and a memorial to Wessel, who died shortly before the translation was published.

Note

[1]. See, for example, Katherine Carté Engel, *Religion and Profit: Moravians in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 87.

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