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**Moravian Archives Bethlehem nearing completion
of NEH-funded project to assess Caribbean records**

In March 2016 the Moravian Archives in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, received a \$37,982 grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) to fund a planning project for the conservation and digitization of 120 linear feet of archival records documenting Moravian mission work in the eastern West Indies, with an emphasis on the history of the Caribbean's enslaved populations.

The Moravian Archives is a non-profit church organization that serves as the official repository for the records of the Moravian Church in America – Northern Province. Over 500 researchers visit the archives annually to study its holdings which primarily document Moravian church activity in North America, South America, and the Caribbean.

The Humanities Collections and Reference Resources Grant awarded by the NEH will serve to improve accessibility to the Eastern West Indies Collection at the Moravian Archives. The project began long before an NEH grant was in sight. A conservation report of the collection in 2014 revealed that many materials were too fragile to be handled by researchers. This extreme condition results from long-term exposure of the records to a tropical environment and damage from water, insects, and fire.

Earlier this year the entire collection was surveyed by historian Dr. Jon Sensbach (University of Florida). Senbach's report was then reviewed by historians Dr. Natasha J. Lightfoot (Columbia University) and Dr. Katharine Gerbner (University of Minnesota). An itemized list was made of the entire collection with a weighted system that took into account a variety of factors, such as enduring value in the humanities, duplication factor, genealogical relevance, and physical condition.

For about two weeks, the collection was studied by a team of conservators from the Conservation Center for Art & Historic Artifacts. Item-level condition reports, treatment plans and cost estimates were formulated. Sights are now set on future funding efforts and ultimately towards the long-term preservation and digitization of the collection. The "Eastern West Indies Planning Project" is the first step towards the goal of making this unique material fully accessible to researchers worldwide.

In 2012 the Moravian Archives received its first grant from the NEH in order to install movable shelving in the main vault. "Previous support from the NEH allowed us to double the capacity of our manuscript vault," said Moravian Archives director and archivist Dr. Paul Peucker. "We are excited about this new and unique opportunity to make an important piece of Caribbean history more accessible to researchers and especially to people in the Caribbean."

Created in 1965 as an independent federal agency, the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) supports research and learning in history, literature, philosophy, and other areas of the humanities by funding selected, peer-reviewed proposals from around the nation. More

information about the NEH can be found at www.neh.gov. Stay up to date with the Eastern West Indies Planning Project at www.moravianchurcharchives.org.