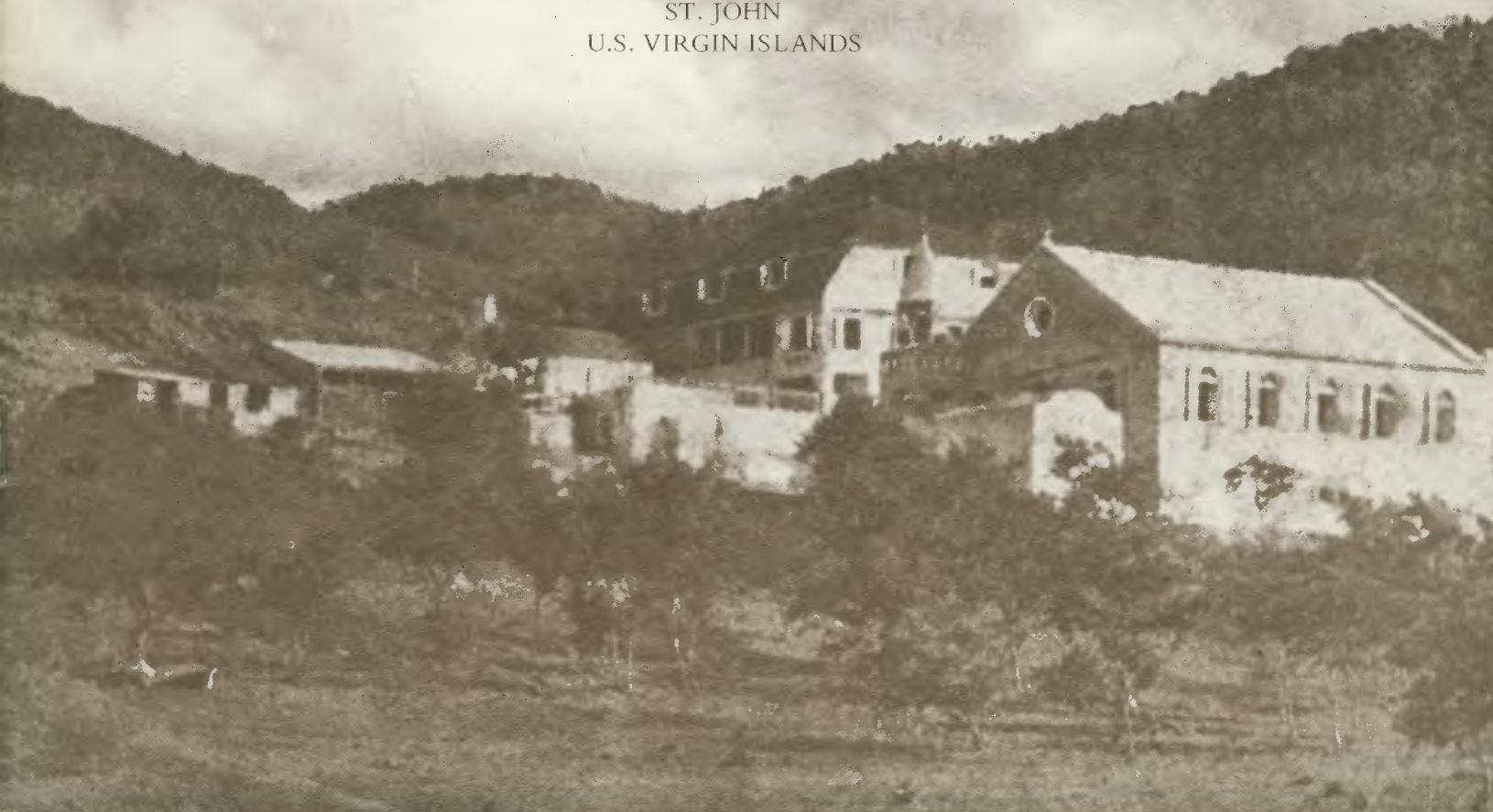


*200<sup>th</sup>*  
*ANNIVERSARY*



*EMMAUS*  
*MORAVIAN*  
*CHURCH*

SUNDAY, JUNE 27, 1982  
ST. JOHN  
U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS







## Emmaus Moravian Church

At the time of the establishing of Bethany in 1754, the Moravians sought to expand their missionary activity to other areas of the island. In 1756, they began preaching at Carolina in Coral Bay. The overseer of the estate was well-disposed towards the Moravians and wanted his slaves converted to Christianity. The missionary activities were increased at Carolina, when, in 1757, the slave Cornelius came to Carolina to do some masonry work on the plantation. He had been baptized by Martin and was a helper in the Moravian Church. When he arrived at Carolina, the overseer asked him to preach to the slaves on the plantation, and he then held services on Sundays as well as in the middle of the week. They were attended by a great number of slaves.

After Cornelius left, the services continued, and the missionary came from Bethany once every four weeks to preach in Coral Bay. Services were interrupted briefly during the last days of 1757, when rumors of an imminent slave rebellion were circulating. In the beginning of 1760, the services were started again when the rumors proved to be unfounded. In 1763, all preaching at Carolina was prohibited indefinitely. This was because of the attendance of a large number of unbaptized slaves who made so much noise that they caused a great deal of disturbance on the estate. The overseers allowed the slaves to attend service at Bethany instead, but as this was a quite a distance, few slaves went.

In 1767, services were again started at Carolina. At this time a sugar mill was being built on the estate, and several Moravians were employed to complete the building. They held services for the

slaves from May 8, 1767 until August, 1768, when the sugar mill was finished. The first service was held under a big tree and was attended by more than 300 black and several white people. Towards the end of the building of the mill, Cornelius came to help finish the work.

When the Brethren had finished their work at the sugar mill on Carolina, they wished to establish a permanent mission there, so that they could "maintain the fire which the Holy Ghost had lit." They requested a piece of land where they could build a mission house, but their request remained unfulfilled. It again became necessary for the slaves to travel to Bethany.

There is a conflict in reports concerning the actual organization of the Emmaus Congregation, but we do know that in 1782, Thomas de Malville acquired the estate Forsynet (Providence) and gave it to the Moravians who named it Emmaus.

It was then possible to finally begin a mission station in Coral Bay. The location was originally the home of Johannes Reimert Sødtnann, the island's Chief Magistrate. Sødtnann, along with his step-daughter, Helena, was slaughtered by the rebels in 1733. The present Emmaus buildings were constructed a little at a time, utilizing some of the ruins of Sødtnann's relatively palatial residence. Cornelius was the one who laid the cornerstone and helped construct the church at Emmaus.

After the construction of the second building, the original was converted into a dwelling and school. It is difficult to obtain an exact date for the com-





*Site of the first services by the Moravian Brethren in Coral Bay area.*

pletion of the buildings from available sources. We do know that there were both church and Mission house at Emmaus before the island was swept by a terrible storm in 1793.

In the 1860's, valiant proposals were made for self-support, native leadership, local management and education, but these brave plans soon met with setbacks. Epidemics of cholera and yellow fever took their toll, as did several devastating hurricanes. Repeated seasons of drought plus the fact that the cane industry could no longer compete with the European beet sugar production, resulted in loss of employment.

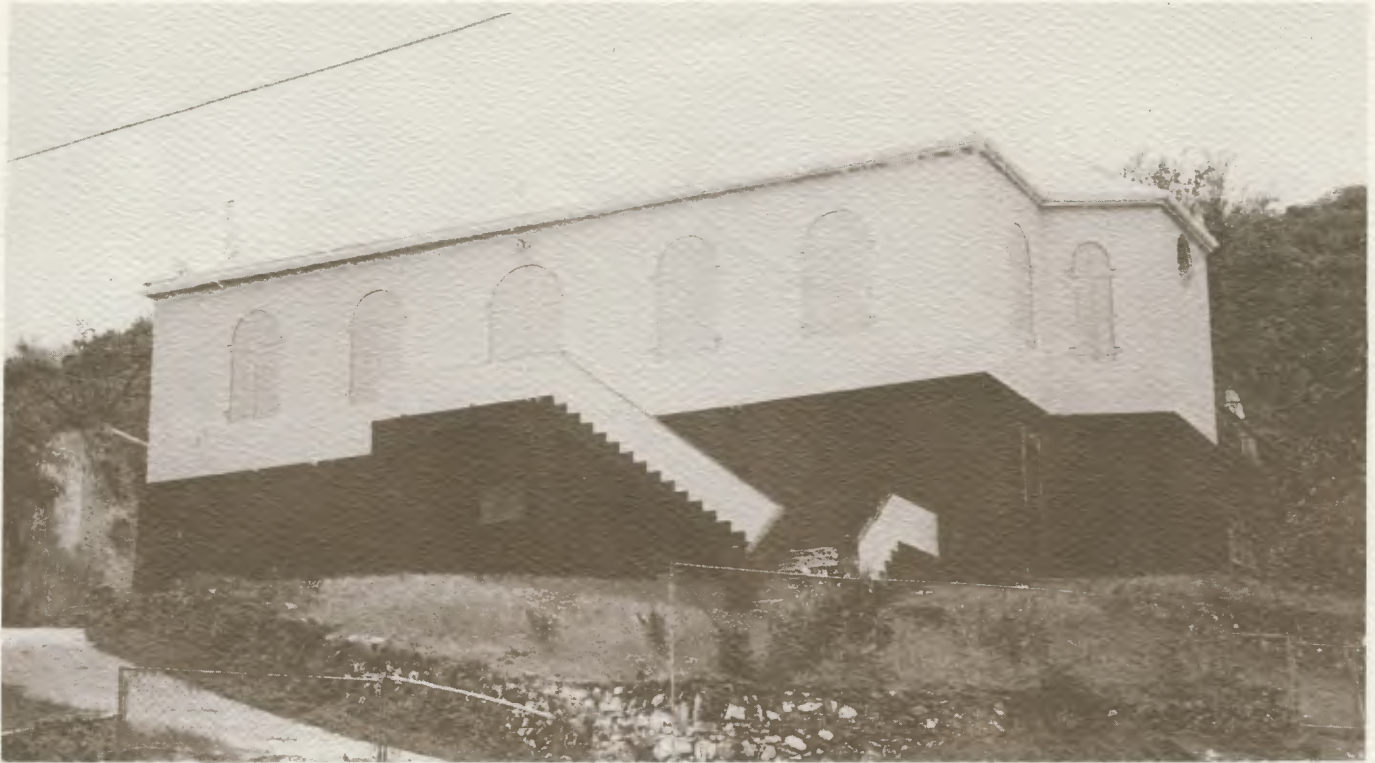
The years following 1900 saw a steady worsening of economic conditions. What with depreciation of sugar on the world market, the effects of World Wars, droughts and the rise of the cost of living, the average islander found it difficult to support his family, let alone support the church. Emigration from the island has been a major factor in the loss of members.

No one should fail to stress the dedicated service and loyalty of the members or of the ministry through the years, despite the hardships they experienced.



*Genip tree marks the site called Mission Rest, stopping place when travelling between Emmaus and Bethany.*





*Emmaus Moravian Church, 1982*



*The Belfry, 1982.*

In an article in the *West India* magazine of December 1902, the Rev. A.B. Romig wrote: "A new conquest began with the advent of the missionaries, and soon there were few who had not yielded to the influence of the gospel. In this sheltered haven the life and work of the Church proceeded very quietly. The Moravian Church in St. John occupies a unique position. Owing to the isolated condition of the inhabitants in these days when prosperity is only a memory, the people depend upon the Church for the lead in every influence for moral and social improvement as well as healthful amusement. Its work has been the blessing of the island for the last 150 years, and the people owe it a debt of gratitude not always realized."

Ours is truly a Heritage of which we can be proud. We have been hearing much this year about those who have gone before and served us unselfishly despite many hardships. Now it behooves us to be willing and prepared to serve the present age and to look to the future with joy and determination to better serve our Lord Jesus Christ and our fellow-man. May the years ahead prove that we have been faithful.

God gives the very best to those who leave the choice to him.



## The Mission House

The Emmaus Moravian Mission House is undoubtedly one of the oldest buildings on St. John which is still in use today. It has been the center of church and community activity for 200 years. While the manse suffered damage in several hurricanes, it was not severe enough to alter the basic structure and character of the original building. The major alteration was in the roof structure which was changed after the manse lost its roof in 1916 (during the process the pastor, Rev. Penn, took refuge at Carolina in the home of Mr. E.W. Marsh.

All sources indicate that the present day mission house is the same building which was erected in the late 18th century by the Moravian Brethren under the leadership of Cornelius. It is thus of great historic value. With its severe yet grand appearance it portrays some of the finest Moravian architecture. Today it stands as one of the most distinctive landmarks on St. John.

The manse was permitted to deteriorate to the point where it was no longer habitable and by

1960, a small "temporary" dwelling was built just west of the manse. The first floor continued in use for social events, small group meetings, 4H Club, Cub Scouts and community meetings.

It seems most fitting that in this year of anniversaries, the restoration of the manse is being realized. It will again be the landmark it deserves to be. The first floor will continue to serve church and community as well as provide a church office and a kitchen to facilitate preparation of lovefeasts and dinners. The second and third floors will be the residence for the Pastor. The accommodations will be adequate, comfortable and yet in keeping with the period. There will be three dormers on each side of the roof as there were in the original building.

We take this opportunity to thank the Virgin Islands Conference of the Moravian Church, architect Glover Thompson, friends and organizations on the mainland as well as local residents for joining hands with the Bethany and Emmaus congregations in realizing this dream.



*Emmaus Manse (Mission House), 1982.*





*Emmaus Manse reconstruction begins, 1982.*

## Brother Cornelius

Cornelius was a slave born on St. Thomas. His mother was one of the first members of the Moravian Congregation. She was baptized in 1740 and was named Benigna after Count Zinzendorf's daughter. She worked as an untiring sister in the church and when she died in 1761, she was buried in the Brethren Cemetery at New Herrnhut, a very special honor. Cornelius was baptized in 1749 by Bishop Johannes Watterville.

Cornelius worked as a "National Helper" in the Moravian mission beginning in 1753. The brethren described him as a reliable person, whose manners set an example to both blacks and whites. He was an outstanding helper and unusually capable teacher. His people always showed him respect and acknowledged his authority. He was the youngest and most intelligent of the helpers: the only one used to preach the Gospel in public. He was an honest and humble man. His wife,



*Brother Cornelius (courtesy Lito Vals)*



Barbara, was a faithful helper among the women.

Cornelius was a free man in 1767 when he was building a mill on Estate Carolina in St. John, having previously bought the freedom of his wife and children. As a master mason, he was employed by the government in the construction of many public buildings. He helped build all of the Moravian churches on all three islands with the exception of Midlands and Memorial. He also built most of the mission houses and schools. While Cornelius was working at Carolina, he spent his free time preaching and teaching which was instrumental in the establishment of the mission at Emmaus. He was an untiring worker in the Lord's vineyard and brought many, both black and white, into the fold.

After having converted de Malville to the Moravian Faith, he was instrumental in having de Malville translate the New Testament into Dutch Creole so that the slaves could learn to read and also to learn about Christianity.

Cornelius died as an old man in 1801. As a special honor he was buried in the little cemetery of his white Moravian Brethren at New Herrnhut on St. Thomas. The Creole inscription on his tombstone is as follows:

"Hieso rust die grbeent van die getraute  
Dienaar en Friend Jesus.  
Em ka loop na si Liefde Heers."

(Here rest the bones of the true servant and friend of Jesus. He has gone home to his master's love.)

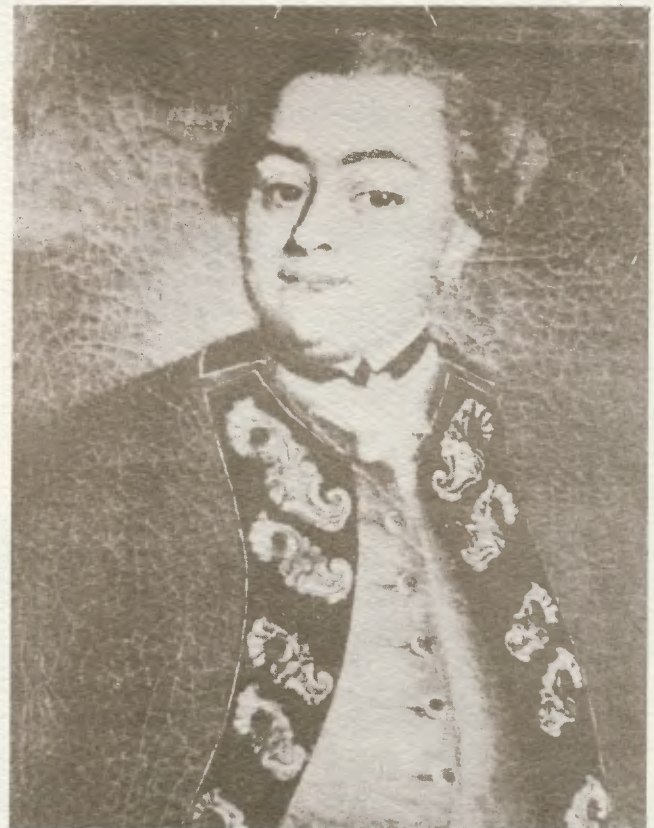
## Thomas de Malville

It is of considerable historic import to note that the tract of land given for the Emmaus Church and Mission was donated by Governor Thomas de Malville, a native St. Thomian, who lays claim to being the first native governor of the islands under the Danish regime.

De Malville became a real friend of Cornelius, so much so that he had Cornelius' portrait painted and presented it to Herrnhut. This painting still hangs in the Moravian archives in Herrnhut, East Germany. A copy is found in this publication. De Malville was converted to the Moravian faith by Cornelius, who had become his confessor. He became a convert to the Moravian Church at a time when the Lutheran Church was the church of the establishment.

Governor de Malville was an outstanding administrator. A man of refined humanitarian instincts, he established the first compulsory Sunday School for slaves and translated the bible into Dutch Creole, so that the slaves could be instructed in the Christian faith. He considered the education of the slaves a preparatory stage to their freedom.

De Malville died in 1798 and was deeply mourned by the Moravian Brethren who, in him, had lost a



*Governor General Thomas de Malville*

true friend. According to his wishes he was buried in one of the simple graves in the Brethren's cemetery in Friedensthal. He was buried without the "pomp and circumstance" due him as Governor General, but according to the simple habit of the Moravians.



## The Moravians and Education

The Moravians have always recognized the value of education in conjunction with their endeavors to win the world for Christ. They believed that to really understand the Gospel, one had to be able to read it. Individual instruction was the general educational method until schools were constructed and even afterwards for adults. When the first building was erected, which doubled for school and church, only the children of slaves could be gathered for classes. The slave himself had to be reached individually, often at night, sometimes as he worked in the fields. Slow and ineffective as this may seem, the slaves responded to this personal attention and the Moravian congregation grew steadily.

In 1839, Governor Peter von Scholten introduced free and compulsory education for slave children. The Moravian Brethren were to administer the teaching, von Scholten said, "Because of the Moravian Brethren's irreproachable conduct, the simplicity of their teaching the gospel, and the way they take care of their congregation, I believe we cannot find anybody more qualified for the instruction of the unfree children." Von Scholten decided to have Moravian teachers, if possible, because the mission was already on the islands and had forty missionaries there. They knew the population and conditions of life, knew the Creole language, were also capable of teaching English and had experience in teaching with good results. Finally, they only asked a small remuneration! Of the seventeen schools to be conducted for the slave children, two were already functioning on St. John — one in Bethany and one in Emmaus.

Two other schools were built: one at East End and the other at Mary's Point. The school was conducted from 9 am - noon; children under nine years of age attended classes Monday - Friday while those aged 9 - 12 attended on Saturdays. The superintendent of these schools was for thirty

years committed to a Missionary of the Moravian Church.

In addition to preaching the gospel, teaching, learning new languages and translation work; the missionaries also served as judges. Because of the remoteness of the area, people were encouraged to take their problems to the missionaries before making the long trip to Cruz Bay. As a result, very few cases ever reached the courts.

The Brethren were also craftsmen; many of them worked together with the slaves and they learned how the slaves expressed themselves. The Brethren taught their crafts to the slaves and made attempts to teach the children and women to make baskets. It was hoped that ultimately the sale of baskets would become a means of providing many a St. John family with pin money.

Moravian customs are among many that linger from long ago. Some are lively still. Long ago, lovefeasts were held late at night so that the slaves might attend after the day's work was done. Today, lovefeasts are a daytime affair with much visiting back and forth among the congregations. It is a time to renew acquaintances, visit with relatives and perhaps reminisce of "days gone by."

One custom almost dead is group story telling. To entertain themselves, slaves gathered in a circle, each making up part of the story. Sometimes they accompanied themselves with rhythmic music produced on homemade instruments; a pair of dried calabashes rattling with seeds, a dried gourd scored and scraped with a nail, a drum made from a goat-skin stretched over a keg. The "scratchy band" still assembles whenever and wherever a few players are in the mood. Through the years the school or first floor of the manse were the site of many a musical evening, or drama, children's program or other social event.