

**MORAVIAN MOMENT # 64**  
**Rebekka Freundlich Protten, a woman of integrity**

In 1737, the Moravian Mission on St. Thomas was still struggling for survival. Understaffed, overworked and threatened by hostile forces in the European community, the Mission did not appear to have favourable at all at that time. There were only four Missionaries.

In addition to Friedrich Martin the leader who was ailing, the mission consisted of Matthaus Freundlich, a young shoemaker, and Johann Schoneweck and his wife. When the Schonewecks died later that year, the burden of the mission fell squarely on Martin, Freundlich and the young Rebekka. Was Rebekka going to make it? Was she qualified to hold such high position, especially because of her ethnicity?

It was at this crucial point that Martin proposed that Freundlich and Rebekka marry. She was a dedicated Christian, a free person and an effective missionary worker among the slave women though only twenty years of age. Why did Martin venture to make such a proposal? Martin felt that Rebekka's close association with both himself and Freundlich might lead to rumours, even accusations, of improper conduct.

On the negative side of the ledger, marriage between Europeans and people of colour though not specifically illegal, was rare, in spite of the fact that concubinage was relatively common. Although Rebekka herself harboured some hesitations about the propriety of the action, Matthaus Freundlich readily agreed. Martin joined the couple in marriage on May 4, 1738.

Throughout 1738, hostility in the St. Thomas community grew towards the mission. Most planters felt that their slaves were picking up dangerous ideas from the Missionaries. The marriage of Rebekka to Matthaus Freundlich only served to increase the opposition. At the best, the three missionaries endured daily insults by nearly everyone; at the worst, their meetings were interrupted and they were threatened with physical violence. In the summer of 1738, the mounting opposition found a voice in the person of Pastor Borm of the Reformed Church.

Teaching the slaves the fundamentals of reading and Christianity was one thing; interracial marriage was quite another. So it was that the Freundlich marriage became the event that sparked serious opposition to the Moravians.

On August 27, 1738, Pastor Borm filed charges with the Government, challenging the validity of the marriage. He argued that since Friedrich Martin himself had not been properly ordained for his Missionary post, then he lacked the real authority to perform the sacraments, including marriage. This tactic attacked not only the Freundlichs personally but also the foundation of the Moravian Mission itself. If these allegations were true, Borm argued, then all three of the offenders should be punished to the full extent of the law. In all of this Rebekka kept her integrity. She never flinched or wavered in her faith. Did she survive the ordeal?

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