

## **A Brief Historical Sketch of Anna Maria Samuel and Her Family, the First Moravian Family of African Descent in the American South**

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September 2021

The free and enslaved community of Africans and African Americans played an integral part in the growth of Salem and the success of the girls school that became the foundation of Salem Academy and College. In the late eighteenth century, both enslaved and free African Americans were part of the Moravian community in Wachovia. In Salem, enslaved people were owned by the Wachovia Administration of the Church or leased from nearby owners. Until the early 1800s, people of color participated in many aspects of community life, including church and choir memberships.

Anna Maria Samuel was born into slavery in 1781 on Christmas Eve and baptized that same day. She was the first-born child of Johann and Maria Samuel who were slaves in Bethabara as well as members of the Moravian Church. Thus Anna Maria was baptized at her birth and raised as a Moravian. She grew up speaking English (the language of her parents) and German (the language of the Moravians in Wachovia). The marriage of Johann and Maria Samuel was arranged by the Moravian Church in 1780. It was the first African-American Moravian marriage in the South.<sup>1</sup>

Anna Maria's father, Johann Samuel (1750-1821), was the first slave owned by the Moravians in Wachovia and the first Black convert to the Church in the American South.<sup>2</sup> Purchased in 1769, he worked in Bethabara at different jobs. Eventually, he became a farm supervisor. His abilities and expertise were respected enough that he exercised authority over both Black and White workers. As Moravians in Wachovia gradually adopted the racial attitudes of their English speaking neighbors, this situation became unacceptable by the end of the century, but, in the first decades of the Moravian community, free and enslaved people worked together on a more equal basis than in the surrounding areas of North Carolina.

Anna Maria's mother, Maria Samuel (?-1821), was originally called Ida. She was an enslaved *mulatta*<sup>3</sup> who was bought by the Town of Salem in 1778 to work at the Tavern. According to the laws of the time and the condition of her purchase, she was set free after 17 years of work. Like her husband, Maria requested admission to the church and was baptized in 1780 in Salem.

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<sup>1</sup> Jon F. Sensbach, 132 (*A Separate Canaan*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998.)

<sup>2</sup> John Samuel was baptized on November 13, 1771 at the consecration of the Gemein Haus in Salem. He joined the Bethabara Congregation. His baptism was the first in the Salem Congregation now known as Home Moravian Church.

<sup>3</sup> Maria Samuel was the daughter of an enslaved African man and a free White woman. At the time of her birth under the legal system of colonial Virginia, her status was similar to that of an indentured servant. Therefore, the town of Salem was required to set her free at a set time. "The Negro woman Mary in Bethabara was declared free in Virginia already after she would have served her 31st year. This was confirmed yesterday at the County Court (Germanton), when some Brothers were there (including Frederic Marshall). Her children are also going to be free after they have reached the age of 21" (March 7, 1797, Board of Supervisors, Research Files, Old Salem). Also see *Records of the Moravians* 6:2594.

According to Moravian custom, the church arranged the marriage of Johann and Maria Samuel in 1780 at which point Maria moved to Bethabara to join her new husband. Johann and Maria's marriage within the church provided a safety net for their family. The Moravians pledged to keep enslaved families together if married in the church, although the marriages were not recognized by North Carolina law.

Before his baptism as a Moravian, Brother Samuel was known as Sam and his wife, Sister Maria Samuel, was known as Ida. Both adopted new names and were addressed as brother and sister as a symbol of their membership in the community. Spiritually at least the Black members of the Moravian Church were considered equals to German American Moravians. They worshipped together, lived together, and ate together. Before his marriage, Johann Samuel was a member of the Single Brothers' Choir. During worship services, he sat with the other Single Brothers and exchanged the ritual kiss of peace.

Nevertheless, enslaved members of the Moravian Community were not equal to free Moravians by law. They were owned by the Church. If they broke community rules they faced the very real possibility of expulsion which could mean being sold away from home and family.

In addition to the advantage of having their families recognized, another important advantage for slaves who converted to the Moravian Church was the opportunity for education. Johann Samuel paid annual school fees for all his children to be educated in Bethabara before his emancipation. Records of the Church in Bethabara make mention of the fact that Anna Maria "diligently applied herself to learning congregational verses, and gladly attended the children's services and congregation meetings."<sup>4</sup>

As the Samuel children got older, the boys stayed in Bethabara. There was not a school for older girls at the time in Bethabara, so Anna Maria was sent to Salem to join the Older Girls' Choir. On June 4<sup>th</sup> 1793, she entered the Older Girls Choir and began living in the Single Sisters' House. According to the Single Sisters' Diary, "At ten o'clock was the reception of two children into their choir: [Elisabeth] Stockburger and black Anna Maria, both from Bethabara. At two o'clock was their Lovefeast. After that they were seen in classes, then followed the festival homily."<sup>5</sup> As a member of the choir, Anna Maria joined with the other Single Sisters in rituals and activities such as lovefeasts, choir meetings, classes, and chores.

An enslaved girl living, praying, and studying together with the daughters of free White members of the community was not viewed as forbidden by 18th century Moravians in North Carolina. As a baptized Moravian, Anna Maria participated in the life of the church. There is evidence that her participation was not unique. Records from the Elders Conference reveal that

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<sup>4</sup> Death Notice of Anna Maria Samuel, Bethabara Church Book, 1798.

<sup>5</sup> Single Sisters' Diary, June 4, 1793, Moravian Archives.

permission was given to an enslaved girl named Hanna to attend school in Salem in 1785.<sup>6</sup> Although it is not known if Hanna every attended classes, the Single Sisters' diary records that Anna Maria lived with them until 1795 when she returned to Bethabara.

The entire Samuel family (first the parents and then the children) was freed over a period of years by the Church when the Bethabara Committee decided to phase out slaveholding in the town. Maria was freed according to the terms of her purchase in 1795. Johann was emancipated in 1800 by legislative act as requested by The Bethabara Church. Their children (except the child born free in 1801) were freed in 1797. After emancipation, the family rented a farm near Bethabara.<sup>7</sup> Johann and Maria continued to live near Bethabara for the remainder of their lives. They suffered financial hardship in the early 1800s and died only weeks apart in 1821.<sup>8</sup>

There is no record of Anna Maria from the time she left Salem until she became ill and died of a fever on February 13, 1798. Her funeral was held in Bethabara where she was buried in Bethabara's God's Acre. At this time, burials were not segregated in southern Moravian cemeteries. Her gravestone is in the section set aside for single sisters according to Moravian custom.

Anna Maria's family continued to live in Bethabara as free people of color. Of her six siblings, three brothers and a sister lived to adulthood. By the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the attitudes of the Moravians towards and treatment of slaves had changed for the worse. The church communities in Wachovia stopped welcoming both enslaved and free people of color to live as spiritual equals in their midst. Church services were first segregated by order of the Elders Conference in Salem in 1789 when African Americans were asked to sit in the back rows. In 1823 a separate church for African Americans was built in Salem at the south end of Church Street.<sup>9</sup> This church eventually came to be known as St. Philips, the oldest African American church in North Carolina.

Some of Anna Maria's siblings worshipped at St. Philips where they were well-known for their musical talents. Two of her brothers, Jacob and Christian Samuel, played violin and provided music for the services in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century in Salem where they lived and died as free men.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Grant P. McAllister, "Report for Salem Academy and College: A Study of the School's Education of Female Slaves and Its Involvement with Slavery," 4, accessed September 10, 2021, <https://www.salemacademyandcollege.org/ams/historical-research>

<sup>7</sup> Jon F. Sensbach, *A Separate Canaan*, 173.

<sup>8</sup> Salem Board Minutes, March 8, 1813 (*Helper Conferenz furs Ganze*) Vol. 7, 3204.

<sup>9</sup> Segregation was even practiced in death. After 1813 only white Moravians were allowed to be buried in Salem's God's Acre. By 1819 the strangers' graveyard beside St. Philips which had been used for non-Moravians was being called the "negro graveyard" and was used by strangers and black Moravians alike. (See C. Daniel Crews. *Neither Slave nor Free: Moravians, Slavery and a Church that Endures*. Winston-Salem: Moravian Archives, 1998.)

<sup>10</sup> See exhibit in the reconstructed log church for St. Philips, Old Salem Museum and Gardens, NC.