

The Church of the Brethren (Dunkers/Dunkards)

~ Chronology, before 1900 ~

- 1708 At Schwarzenau, Germany, a group of reformed and Lutheran Pietists founded this Brethren group, a denomination in the Free Church Tradition. They adopted practices and beliefs along Anabaptist lines.
- 1719 Virtually the entire movement migrated to North America between 1719 and 1729 due to severe persecution and economic necessity. Known in America as *German Baptist Brethren* or *Dunkers* or *Dunkards* they settled at Germantown, Philadelphia, PA. Their leader and first minister was Alexander Mack, Sr.
- 1767 The Church of the United Brethren in Christ has been in existence since 1767. Despite the similarity in name, they are historically unrelated.
- 1855 When Bishop Matthias Brinser was expelled from Brethren in Christ Church for building and holding services in a meetinghouse, members organized their own group, United Zion's Children. In 1954, it became the United Zion Church.
- 1881 The Old German Baptist Brethren organized. They left because they considered the Church of the Brethren not conservative enough.
- 1882 A sharp division within the Church of the Brethren resulted in the organization of the Brethren Church, in Ashland, Ohio, the next year. Also termed Progressive Dunkers, they left the Church of the Brethren (Conservative Dunkers) because they considered the old group too conservative.

Dunker is a derivative of the German *tunken* which means "to dip or immerse," identifying the method of immersion employed by this group of the church. They practice triple immersion, baptizing the believer three times--in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. They have been known by many names: *tunkers*, *Taufers*, and *Dompelaars*, but they were first called Brethren when organized in Germany in 1708.

The Brethren founded groups across the country, with heaviest concentrations in Pennsylvania, Virginia, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and California.

In its bicentennial year, 1908, the group adopted *Church of the Brethren* as its official name.

~ Records, Resources ~

There are several major branches of the Brethren. However, there are also several groups with similar names which are historically unrelated. The River Brethren includes Brethren in Christ, Old Order (or Yorker) Brethren, United Zion Church, and the Plymouth Brethren.

Church of the Brethren General Offices
1451 Dundee Ave.
Elgin, IL 60120

Bethany Theological Seminary
Butterfield and Meyers Roads
Oak Brook, IL 60521

Brethren Church
524 College Ave.
Ashland, OH 44805

Brethren in Christ Church (River Brethren)
P.O. Box 290
Grantham, PA 17027

Brethren Historical Library and Archives
1451 Dundee Avenue
Elgin, IL 60120

Church of the United Brethren in Christ
302 Lake St.
P.O. Box 650
Huntington, IN 46750

Old German Baptist Brethren
Elder Clement Skiles
Rt. 1, Box 140
Bringhurst, IN 46903

~ Bibliography ~

Bittenger, Emmert F. *Heritage and Promise*. Elgin, IL.: Brethren Press, 1970.

Durnbaugh, Donald F. *The Brethren in Colonial America*. Elgin, IL: Brethren Press, 1967.

The Brethren Encyclopedia. 3 vols. Philadelphia/Oak Brook, IL: Brethren Press, 1983-84.

The Brethren in the New Nation. Elgin, IL: Brethren Press, 1976.