

GERMAN BAPTIST BRETHERN (DUNKERS)

GENERAL STATEMENT

The general statement of the early history of the Brethren, Dunkers, or German Baptist Brethren, is presented very largely in the section for the Church of the Brethren (Conservative Dunkers), the oldest and largest of these bodies. In view of the fact that they have been popularly known, not as "German Baptist Brethren," but as "Dunkers," or "Dunkards," that name has been preserved.

The denominations grouped under the name German Baptist Brethren (Dunkers) in 1926, in 1916, and in 1906, are listed in the table below, with the principal statistics as reported for the three periods. The denomination reported in 1916 as German Seventh Day Baptists is now known as Seventh Day Baptist (German, 1728), and the denomination then reported as Old Order German Baptist Brethren is now shown under its correct name, Old German Baptist Brethren; one body listed in 1916 was not reported at the census of 1906.

SUMMARY OF STATISTICS FOR THE GERMAN BAPTIST BRETHERN (DUNKERS), 1926, 1916, AND 1906

DENOMINATION AND CENSUS YEAR	Total number of churches	Number of members	VALUE OF CHURCH EDIFICES		EXPENDITURES DURING YEAR		SUNDAY SCHOOLS	
			Churches reporting	Amount	Churches reporting	Amount	Churches reporting	Number of scholars
1926								
Total for the group	1,279	158,248	1,206	\$11,110,013	1,182	\$2,293,622	1,067	133,483
Church of the Brethren (Conservative Dunkers).....	1,030	128,392	968	8,630,499	951	1,744,755	895	109,891
Old German Baptist Brethren.....	62	3,036	59	161,450	53	18,781	-----	-----
The Brethren Church (Progressive Dunkers).....	174	26,026	166	2,274,064	166	523,681	160	22,917
Seventh Day Baptists (German, 1728).....	4	144	4	18,000	3	2,400	3	144
Church of God (New Dunkers).....	9	650	9	26,000	9	4,005	9	531
1916								
Total for the group	1,283	133,626	1,188	5,055,835	1,154	924,630	1,097	136,365
Church of the Brethren (Conservative Dunkers).....	997	105,102	928	3,990,898	911	705,725	899	111,686
Old Order German Baptist Brethren.....	67	3,399	60	107,212	43	7,120	-----	-----
The Brethren Church (Progressive Dunkers).....	201	24,060	184	896,725	185	204,562	183	23,728
German Seventh Day Baptists.....	5	136	3	33,000	4	1,980	3	152
Church of God (New Dunkers).....	13	929	13	28,000	11	5,243	12	799
1906								
Total for the group	1,090	97,144	974	2,802,532	-----	-----	866	78,575
German Baptist Brethren Church, Conservative.....	815	76,547	741	2,198,957	-----	-----	708	66,595
Old Order German Baptist Brethren.....	68	3,388	57	89,800	-----	-----	-----	-----
The Brethren Church (Progressive Dunkers).....	202	17,042	172	472,975	-----	-----	156	11,850
German Seventh Day Baptists.....	5	167	4	40,800	-----	-----	2	130

SEVENTH DAY BAPTISTS (GERMAN, 1728)

STATISTICS

Summary for the United States, with urban-rural classification.—A general summary of the statistics for the Seventh Day Baptists (German) for the year 1926 is presented in Table 1, which shows also the distribution of these figures between urban and rural territory. All of the organizations reported in 1926, as in the earlier censuses, were in the State of Pennsylvania.

The membership of the Seventh Day Baptist (German) Churches comprises baptized believers who have been enrolled as members upon personal profession of faith. Baptism is by trine immersion, forward.

TABLE 1.—SUMMARY OF STATISTICS FOR CHURCHES IN URBAN AND RURAL TERRITORY, 1926: SEVENTH DAY BAPTISTS (GERMAN, 1728)

ITEM	Total	In urban territory ¹	In rural territory ¹	PER CENT OF TOTAL ²	
				Urban	Rural
Churches (local organizations).....	4	1	3		
Members.....	144	19	125	13.2	86.8
Average per church.....	36	19	42		
Membership by sex:					
Male.....	62	9	53		
Female.....	82	10	72		
Membership by age:					
Under 13 years.....	2		2		
13 years and over.....	142	19	123	13.4	86.6
Per cent under 13 years.....	1.4		1.6		
Church edifices:					
Number.....	4	1	3		
Value—Churches reporting.....	4	1	3		
Amount reported.....	\$18,000	\$5,000	\$13,000	27.8	72.2
Average per church.....	\$4,500		\$4,333		
Parsonages:					
Value—Churches reporting.....	1	1			
Amount reported.....	\$2,000	\$2,000			
Expenditures during year:					
Churches reporting.....	3	1	2		
Amount reported.....	\$2,400	\$1,900	\$500	79.2	20.8
Current expenses and improvements.....	\$1,000	\$1,000		100.0	
Benevolences, missions, etc.....	\$900	\$900		100.0	
Not classified.....	\$500		\$500		100.0
Average expenditure per church.....	\$800		\$250		
Sunday schools:					
Churches reporting.....	3	1	2		
Officers and teachers.....	24	3	21		
Scholars.....	144	28	116	19.4	80.6

¹ Urban territory includes all cities and other incorporated places which had 2,500 inhabitants or more in 1920, the date of the last Federal census; rural territory comprises the remainder of the country.

² Per cent not shown where base is less than 100.

The data given for 1926 represent 4 active Seventh Day Baptist churches, with 144 members. The classification of membership by sex and by age was reported by all of the 4 churches, including, however, only 1 which reported any members under 13 years of age. None of the local organizations reported debt on church edifices; and there was no debt on the 1 parsonage which was reported.

Comparative data, 1890–1926.—Table 2 presents, in convenient form for comparison, a summary of the available statistics of this denomination for the censuses of 1926, 1916, 1906, and 1890.

TABLE 2.—COMPARATIVE SUMMARY, 1890 TO 1926: SEVENTH DAY BAPTISTS
(GERMAN, 1728)

ITEM	1926	1916	1906	1890
Churches (local organizations).....	4	5	5	6
Increase ¹ over preceding census:				
Number.....	-1		-1	
Per cent ²				
Members	144	136	167	194
Increase ¹ over preceding census:				
Number.....	8	-31	-27	
Per cent.....	5.9	-18.6	-13.9	
Average membership per church.....	36	27	33	32
Church edifices:				
Number.....	4	3	6	3
Value—Churches reporting.....	4	3	4	
Amount reported.....	\$18,000	\$33,000	\$40,800	\$14,550
Average per church.....	\$4,500	\$11,000	\$10,200	
Debt—Churches reporting.....			2	
Amount reported.....			\$3,600	
Parsonages:				
Value—Churches reporting.....	1	1	1	
Amount reported.....	\$2,000	\$2,000	\$900	
Expenditures during year:				
Churches reporting.....	3	5		
Amount reported.....	\$2,400	\$1,980		
Current expenses and improvements.....	\$1,000	\$1,605		
Benevolences, missions, etc.....	\$900	\$375		
Not classified.....	\$500			
Average expenditure per church.....	\$800	\$396		
Sunday schools:				
Churches reporting.....	3	3	2	
Officers and teachers.....	24	24	13	
Scholars.....	144	152	130	

¹ A minus sign (-) denotes decrease.² Per cent not shown where base is less than 100.

HISTORY, DOCTRINE, AND ORGANIZATION¹

DENOMINATIONAL HISTORY

Among the earlier settlers in the United States² was John Conrad Beissel, who with others arrived in Boston in the fall of 1720. They reached Philadelphia October 20, 1720.

These people fled from the Palatinate in Germany on account of religious persecution. John Conrad Beissel was a skilled baker and an adept in music. He became converted in 1715, then 25 years of age. In due course of time he joined the Pietists and was initiated into the Rosicrucian mysteries. Because of persecutions by his fellow craftsmen and church authorities he decided to come to America and join the brotherhood on the Wissahickon in the vicinity of Germantown, Pa., arriving in 1720.

Great was his surprise when he learned that the community had ceased to exist as an organized body. Kelpius, their leader, was dead. Köster, a prominent member, had returned to Germany, and others were scattered. Some lived near by as hermits.

Matthai, a hermit whom Beissel consulted, advised him to remain in Germantown for a time and learn the weaver's art. Acting upon this advice, he indentured himself to one Peter Becker of Germantown, who had come from the Schwartzenu community in Germany the year before (1719), and who later became the founder of the German Baptist Brethren or Dunkards.

¹ This statement, which differs somewhat from that published in Part II of the Report on Religious Bodies, 1916, was furnished by Miss Emma C. Monn, secretary of the Seventh Day Baptist Missionary Board.

² See Church of the Brethren (Conservative Dunkers), p. 236.

Beissel was cordially received into the devout family of his master. He suggested to Becker that he call together his former companions to try to renew their religious zeal, advice which he evidently followed.

Having finished his trade of weaver, Beissel now determined to carry out his original purpose, and with a former companion visited the Conestoga Valley in Lancaster County. There in the primitive forest by a spring they built a cabin on the banks of the Muhlbach (Mill Creek), a branch of the Conestoga River. The two men entered upon a life of seclusion and prayer. They exhorted their neighbors when opportunity offered and imparted instruction to young men who were sent to them. This was virtually a free school, the curriculum strictly religious and moral.

Later, others of Beissel's ship-companions joined him. Religious meetings were held regularly in the small hut in the forest and about the country as opportunity offered. They also visited different communities or settlements. Their mode of life, earnest exhortations, and revival services aroused much attention among the settlers.

In 1722 the Germantown Baptists began to make journeys to the scattered ones through the Province (Pennsylvania) and to hold religious services. On December 25, 1723, some candidates for baptism chose Peter Becker as their baptizer. Following this they organized into a congregation. They continued to make journeys and hold services with the other communities. In 1724 Beissel submitted to baptism by his friend and former master, Peter Becker. Beissel and two of his companions were then already observers of the seventh day as the Sabbath.

The newly baptized elected Beissel as their teacher. Upon his ordination to this office a large measure of the spirit rested upon him and he conducted all meetings with astonishing strength. This congregation held its first love feast December, 1724.

In the year 1728 Beissel published a little book on the Sabbath. It was so effective that the congregation now publicly adopted the Sabbath as the day for divine services. The observance of the Sabbath brought persecution. They were imprisoned by the authorities and fined. This congregation consisted of both the solitary and householders.

They had been much beholden in divine work to the Germantown Baptists. But as they embraced and taught doctrines such as celibacy and the observance of the seventh day as the Sabbath, which were at variance with the tenets of the Germantown Baptists or Dunkards, dissensions arose, and Beissel and his followers formally withdrew from them and organized as Seventh Day Baptists in December, 1728.

In 1732 Beissel left his congregation and removed to Ephrata, a few miles distant. Here he was joined by others of both sexes who shared his ideas and whom he organized into the Ephrata Society. Celibacy was enjoined. Separate houses were built for the two sexes, each of which was organized in monastic fashion, the "brothers' house" having its prior, the "sisters' house" its prioress. The society grew rapidly. Industries were organized on the communistic plan, which flourished. But Beissel thought them out of harmony with the spiritual purpose of the community; they were, therefore, soon greatly curtailed and kept subordinate to the religious idea. Ephrata had, however, one of the first schools (1735) in that part of the country, and its printing establishment (1742) was one of the earliest and best. A Sabbath school (for Bible study) was organized there by Ludwig Höcker, assisted by his sister (1738).

As time advanced the celibate membership diminished. Toward the close of the nineteenth century, celibacy as a feature of the society had disappeared entirely, the properties being under control of a board of trustees.

About 1764 a settlement of Seventh Day Baptists was made at Snow Hill, 3 miles north of Waynesboro, Franklin County, Pa. Members from Lancaster County and other places joined them. Here, too, a Seventh Day Baptist Society was organized (1800). Its government was similar to that of Ephrata, but the building was more modern. Religious services were held in the Saal, a large room in the building for that purpose. Later (1829) a church was built near by. The last member of this society died in 1894. The property was legally transferred to the congregation in 1900. In each of these communities the members of the congregation and the societies met for worship.

Formerly the German language was used in religious services. Gradually came the change to English, which is now used exclusively.

DOCTRINE AND ORGANIZATION

The points of doctrine on which special emphasis is laid are: (1) The inspiration of the Bible; (2) one God, the Father, and Jesus Christ, his Son, the Mediator; (3) the Ten Commandments as still the rule of righteousness for all mankind; (4) baptism by trine forward immersion; (5) foot washing in connection with the communion service; (6) the anointing of the sick; (7) the blessing of infants; (8) observance of the seventh day as Sabbath; (9) the ministry of elders and deacons selected to guide the church and subject to election by each local congregation. The doctrine of nonresistance is held to be involved in the sixth commandment.

Each congregation elects delegates to the General Conference which convenes annually the third week in May. Ministers are delegates by virtue of their office, and are entitled to vote.

Home missionary work is under the care of the missionary board.

There is no special educational or philanthropic work.