

RIVER BRETHREN

GENERAL STATEMENT

In the latter part of 1750 about 30 Mennonite families in Canton Basel, Switzerland, after a long period of persecution, during which they suffered both imprisonment and loss of property, decided to emigrate westward. They went first to England, and in the fall of 1751 set sail for America. The voyage across the Atlantic was disastrous, one of the ships, with all their goods, being lost, and they landed poor and destitute. One company, including John and Jacob Engle, and others whose names are uncertain, settled near the Susquehanna, in the western part of Lancaster County, Pa., in the spring of 1752.

In 1770, as a result of the labors of some members of the Lutheran, Mennonite, and Baptist churches, who were grieved at what they considered the formalism which then characterized the churches, there was, in that region, a notable revival, which was attended by many conversions. It was conducted principally by Messrs. Otterbein, Boehm, Bochrans, and the Engles, representing the different bodies. Subsequently difference of views arose in regard to the form of baptism, some holding that the applicant should make choice of the method, while others claimed that trine immersion was the only proper form. The result was that they mutually agreed to work independently, in accordance with their various interpretations of the Scriptures.

The believers in trine immersion had no regular organization, but were in the habit of designating the various communities as brotherhoods. There was thus the Brotherhood down by the River, meaning in the southern part of Lancaster County; also the Brotherhood in the North, the Brotherhood in Dauphin, the Brotherhood in Lebanon, the Brotherhood in Bucks and Montgomery, etc. The outlying brotherhoods looked to the brotherhood in the southern part of Lancaster County as the home of the organization, and it was probably due to this fact that the general term "River Brethren" was given to the entire body. Another explanation has been given by some, namely, that they were in the habit of baptizing in the river. With the development of these brotherhoods it seemed advisable to select some one to perform the duties of the ministerial office, and the choice fell upon Jacob Engle, who thus became their first minister.

In course of time dissensions arose concerning what would now be called minor points, which ultimately caused divisions. In 1843 the body known as "Yorker" or, as some have termed them, "Old Order" Brethren, withdrew, and in 1853 the body known as "Brinsers," but later as "United Zion's Children," also withdrew.

The three bodies grouped under the name River Brethren, in 1926, 1916, and 1906, are listed in the following table, with the principal statistics as reported for the three years.

SUMMARY OF STATISTICS FOR THE RIVER BRETHREN, 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.....	119	5,697	94	\$426,860	98	\$99,084	70	5,444
Brethren in Christ.....	81	4,320	72	348,860	74	92,901	63	5,057
Old Order or Yorker Brethren.....	10	472	6	600	6	500	7	387
United Zion's Children.....	28	905	22	78,000	18	5,683		
1916								
Total for the group.....	112	5,389	91	\$286,000	102	\$34,752	67	5,458
Brethren in Christ.....	72	3,805	64	218,875	69	31,841	58	4,631
Old Order or Yorker Brethren.....	9	432	3	400	3	400	9	827
United Zion's Children.....	31	1,152	27	67,125	30	2,511		
1906								
Total for the group.....	110	4,569	92	\$165,850			41	2,812
Brethren in Christ.....	73	3,397	72	143,000			39	2,695
Old Order or Yorker Brethren.....	9	423						
United Zion's Children.....	28	749	20	22,850			2	117

OLD ORDER OR YORKER BRETHREN

STATISTICS

The data given for 1926 represent 10 active churches of the Old Order or Yorker Brethren, all reported as being in rural territory. The total membership was 472, comprising 176 males and 296 females. The classification of membership by sex and by age was reported by all of the 10 churches, none of which reported any members under 13 years of age.

The membership of this denomination consists of those persons who have been admitted to the local churches upon profession of faith and baptism by immersion.

There were no church edifices, parsonages, nor Sunday schools reported, and the churches in the State of Pennsylvania were the only ones reporting expenditures during the year.

Comparative data, 1890-1926.—Table 1 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 1.—COMPARATIVE SUMMARY, 1890 TO 1926: OLD ORDER OR YORKER BRETHREN

ITEM	1926	1916	1906	1890
Churches (local organizations).....	10	9	9	8
Increase over preceding census:				
Number.....	1		1	
Per cent ¹				
Members.....	472	432	423	214
Increase over preceding census:				
Number.....	40	9	209	
Per cent.....	9.3	2.1	97.7	
Average membership per church.....	47	48	47	27
Expenditures during year:				
Churches reporting.....	6	3		
Amount reported.....	\$500	\$400		
Current expenses and improvements.....		\$250		
Benevolences, missions, etc.....	\$200	\$150		
Not classified.....	\$300			
Average expenditure per church.....	\$83	\$133		

¹ Per cent not shown where base is less than 100.

State table.—Table 2 presents the statistics of the Yorker Brethren by States, giving the number and membership of the churches for the three censuses from 1906 to 1926 and the total membership for 1926 classified by sex.

TABLE 2.—NUMBER AND MEMBERSHIP OF CHURCHES, 1906 TO 1926, AND MEMBERSHIP BY SEX, 1926, BY STATES: OLD ORDER OR YORKER BRETHREN

STATE	NUMBER OF CHURCHES			NUMBER OF MEMBERS			TOTAL MEMBERSHIP BY SEX, 1926		
	1926	1916	1906	1926	1916	1906	Male	Female	Males per 100 females ⁽¹⁾
United States.....	10	9	9	472	432	423	176	296	59.5
Pennsylvania.....	8	6	5	406	351	356	151	255	60.2
Ohio.....	1	2	2	28	39	39	8	20	-----
Indiana.....	-----	-----	1	-----	-----	5	-----	-----	-----
Iowa.....	1	1	1	38	42	23	17	21	-----

¹ Ratio not shown where number of females is less than 100.

HISTORY, DOCTRINE, AND ORGANIZATION¹

In 1843 a number of the River Brethren withdrew from the main body, claiming that the original doctrines of the founders were being departed from, particularly in regard to nonresistance and nonconformity to the world. Most of those who withdrew resided in York County, Pa., whence they received the name of "Yorkers," or "Yorker Brethren." They are also known as the "Old Order Brethren," and thus are sometimes confused with the Old Order German Baptist Brethren. They have no church edifices, and the services are frequently held in large barns.

¹ This statement, which is substantially the same as that published in Part II of the Report on Religious Bodies, 1916, has been revised by Mr. Samuel H. Sherer, and approved by him in its present form.