

## THE BRETHREN IN EUROPE

The Brethren movement began in 1708 in Wittgenstein, Germany, in the village of Schwarzenau. Eight men and women covenanted to follow their Lord in faithful obedience despite resistance from secular and religious authorities. The movement spread rapidly from Schwarzenau to other German areas, especially in the region around Büdingen, in the Palatinate, and in Krefeld. Religious pressure and economic necessity combined to make migration to North America necessary. Two large groups left, in 1719 and in 1729, as well as several smaller parties. By 1750 the Brethren had been transplanted to America.

There the Brethren spread across the continent, planting themselves largely in isolated rural communities. They kept pace with the Westward migration and were sometimes pioneer settlers. Today the Brethren number 141,400 members in 1,063 congregations in the United States. Overseas membership is not counted in these statistics. Missionaries from several of the Brethren groups, starting in 1894, developed active congregations in India, China, Nigeria, Argentina, Ecuador, and other nations. Most of these have united with indigenous churches and are thriving under local leadership. There are six major bodies today which stem from the Schwarzenau movement. The Church of the Brethren is the largest; followed by the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches; The Brethren Church; the Old German Baptist Brethren; the Dunkard Brethren; and the Conservative Grace Brethren Churches, International.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Brethren began returning to visit the sites of their origins. After World War II many volunteer workers from the Church of the Brethren did relief work in Germany, helping to alleviate the devastation and misery created by war and the influx of refugees. A center was established in Kassel for the many activities of the Brethren Service Commission. International workcamps and other programs were organized for Schwarzenau. In 1956 a sum of money was given by Brethren in the USA to help make possible the construction of a new school for village. This was named the "Alexander Mack School," after the first minister of the Brethren.

In 1958 Schwarzenau was the scene of the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of the beginnings of the Brethren. Representatives of several Brethren groups participated in the service, held near the Eder River where the first baptism took place. Since that time many Brethren, individuals as well as tour groups, have visited Schwarzenau and other sites of Brethren origins. This pamphlet is intended to provide helpful information for anyone wishing to make such visits.

### PLACES OF INTEREST

(Refer to map, next page.)

**Berleburg.** During the Pietist period of the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, Berleburg was governed by Count Casimir (1687-1721), a relative of Henrich Albrecht through a different line of the Wittgenstein ruling family. The famous Pietist version of the scriptures, the Berleburg Bible, was published here between 1726 and 1742. In the well-preserved castle is an outstanding library/archives which contains an important letter from Christopher Sauer I to his friends in Berleburg. This induced many to emigrate to America.

**Schwarzenau.** Birthplace of the Brethren, Schwarzenau/Eder was first mentioned in records in 1059. In the early 18<sup>th</sup> century it became a place of refuge for religious dissenters driven from their homes in other parts of Germany, France, and Switzerland. These refugees were permitted

by Count Henrich Albrecht (1658-1723) to build temporary homes in an area overlooking the valley; this was called *Hüttental* (Valley of Huts).

The Brethren held their first baptism in the Eder River in August, 1708. Some two hundred left the area in 1720 and moved to Surhuisterveen in Friesland (The Netherlands). See pages 6 and 7.

**Kassel.** Home of George Grebe, one of the first eight Brethren at Schwarzenau, a master gunsmith at the court. Kassel became the center of Brethren Service activity in Germany after World War II. The Brethren erected a large building in the city (located on Witzenhäuserstrasse) as a center for their programs. It is now used by the city as a school.

**Büdingen.** This charming town was the center of the Marienborn area. After 1711 the Schwarzenau Brethren established here a daughter congregation.

Count Karl August (1667-1725) was fairly tolerant of religious dissent but in 1714 he issued a ban on public religious activity not sponsored by the state church. The local Brethren left the area and settled in and around Krefeld. The private archive in the remarkable castle contains many documents about the Brethren, including the only extant letter written by Alexander Mack, Sr. Nearby is the village of Düdelsheim, birthplace of Peter Becker. The Moravians had a colony at Herrenhaag.

**Ronneburg.** Not far from Büdingen is the scenic castle of the Ronneburg, a center for many dissenting church groups over the years. Among the most interesting was the Community of True Inspiration (the Inspired) which is now located at the Amana colonies in Iowa. The group migrated to the United States in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

**Schriesheim.** This was the birthplace of Alexander Mack, Sr., in 1679. The family mill (where Mack was born) is the *Talmühle* (Valley Mill). It is located on the road to Wilhelmsfeld, east of the town. The picturesque *Rathaus* (town hall) once held many records of the Mack family, now located in the town archives. A local tavern (*Deutscher Kaiser*) was once owned by the Kling family from which Mack's wife came. Looming above the town is the Strahlenburg castle, partially in ruins. It is now used as a restaurant.

**Heidelberg.** Heidelberg was the scene of much Pietistic activity during the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, some centering around professors at the university. Conrad Beissel, the founder of the Ephrata Community, was born in 1690 at Eberbach on the Neckar River east of the city. Nearby Ladenburg was the birthplace of Christopher Sauer I in 1695; his father was a Reformed pastor.

**Surhuisterveen.** A refuge for the Schwarzenau Brethren between 1720 and 1729. Points of interest: the Mennonite (*Doopsgezinde*) Church; Kortwolde, a former pond in a local pasture where the Brethren baptized new members. The archive in Leeuwarden contains a few records on Brethren marriages.

**Rotterdam.** The port of exit for many Brethren, who left for America in 1719, 1729, and 1733. The Maritime Museum contains exhibits which show the type of ships used in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.



Nearby is Hellevoetsluis which was the actual place of embarkation.

**Krefeld.** A city known in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries for its textile industry, introduced by the Mennonites who thus enjoyed a limited toleration. In 1715 the Marienborn-area Brethren came here after being expelled from Büdingen and surrounding villages. Six Brethren from nearby Solingen were arrested in 1717 because of their baptism in the Wupper River. Points of interest in Krefeld: the Mennonite Church, built in 1645 and reconstructed after World War II; the *Heimatmuseum* (museum of local history).

**Jülich.** Site of a fortress to which the Solingen Brethren were sent for imprisonment at hard labor in 1717. A very moving record of their experiences was written by one of the prisoners, William Grahe. They were released in 1720 through the intervention of Dutch authorities.

**Palatinate.** The geographical area from which most of those came who later joined the Brethren. Villages of interest are: Eppstein, Lamsheim, Alzey, and Frankenthal. Also of interest: the Gutenberg Museum at Mainz, with a 1743 Sauer Bible donated by the United States government; the Reformation monument at Worms.

**Strasbourg (Strassburg).** Captured by the French in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Strasbourg was still largely German in culture in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Small conventicles or Bible study groups of Pietists gathered in homes near the cathedral. Members were expelled as dissenters from 1701-1705. Michael Eckerlin was the center of one the groups before his expulsion. His sons later became leaders of the Ephrata Community in Pennsylvania. Points of interest: the cathedral with its mechanical clock; the Rohan museum; the statue of Gutenberg.

**Basel.** Pietist activity in Basel centered on the Boni family, who lived in the village Frenkendorf near Basel. Andrew Boni and his brother Martin were incarcerated in the *Spalentor* (Spalen gate) in 1706; Andrew Boni was expelled from the city in 1707 and became one of the first Brethren at Schwarzenau.

**Bern (Berne).** Early Brethren leader Christian Liebe was seized in Bern in 1714 while visiting the local Anabaptists (Mennonites). He and four companions were held in the *Käfigturm* (cage tower) before they were sent to Turin, Italy, as galley slaves. They were later released through the efforts of Pietist leaders in Switzerland and Mennonites in The Netherlands.

## VISITING SCHWARZENAU

**Hüttenthal (Valley of Huts).** A cluster of farm dwellings on a hillside overlooking Schwarzenau, the site of the homes of the first eight Brethren. The original huts, built by religious refugees in the 18<sup>th</sup> century with the permission of the Count of Wittgenstein, no longer stand, but there is one rambling, half-timbered building, part house and part barn, claimed by some to have been the home of Alexander Mack; it houses the Alexander Mack Museum.

**Panoramic View.** A few yards west of the Hüttenthal, the road commands an excellent view of the Eder Valley, the river, the town of Schwarzenau, and the surrounding hills.

**Eder River.** Place where the first eight Brethren were baptized. They drew lots and the person chosen baptized Alexander Mack, who then baptized the others. The actual site on the river is not known.

**Alexander Mack Schule.** Built in 1956. A large part of the construction cost was contributed by members of the Church of the Brethren. The courtyard in front of the school was the site of the 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Convocation in 1958. Note the mural on the outside of the school and the mosaics that surround the drinking fountain. The building is no longer used for educational purposes.

**Evangelical Church.** Built in 1860. Center of worship for most Schwarzenau residents.

**Herrenhaus.** Schwarzenau's most impressive building. Built in the 16<sup>th</sup> century as a home for widows of the Counts of Wittgenstein and rebuilt in 1789 as a hunting castle, it has also served as a residence of members of the Sayn-Wittgenstein-Hohenstein family, descendants of Count Henrich Albrecht (1658-1723), who himself lived there for a time and who granted the early Brethren religious freedom. The concluding session of the 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration was held on the bank of the Eder next to the Herrenhaus near the old bridge.

**Bridge.** The old stone bridge with its graceful arches, so often appearing in photographs and so long associated in the imagination of the Brethren with their origins, was torn down in 1974 and replaced by a functional modern bridge.

**Street Name.** On the south side of town, there is a street named Alexander Mack-Strasse.

**Old Mill.** Once a flour mill and woolen mill, then a saw mill; it is now a residence. Some have regarded this as Alexander Mack's mill because he was a miller, but there is no evidence this is true. The Mack family mill was in Schriesheim, Alexander Mack's boyhood home. Still, this mill is worth seeing as an example of how a mill of Mack's time was constructed.

**Gasthäuser.** There are two inns in the town which provide overnight accommodations and meals.

## RESOURCES

### Books

Brumbaugh, Martin G., *History of the German Baptist Brethren* (Elgin, IL: Brethren Publishing House, 1899). Reprinted 1907, 1961, 1971.

Durnbaugh, Donald F., ed., *European Origins of the Brethren* (Elgin, IL: The Brethren Press, 1958). Reprinted 1967, 1974.

Durnbaugh, Donald F., *Fruit of the Vine: A History of the Brethren, 1708-1995* (Elgin, IL: Brethren Press, 1997).

Schultz, Lawrence W., *Schwarzenau Yesterday and Today* (Winona Lake, IN: author, 1954). Revised edition published in 1977.

Willoughby, William G., *Counting the Cost* (Elgin, IL: The Brethren Press, 1979). A biography of Alexander Mack, with information on the early movement.

### Articles

Durnbaugh, Donald F., "On Brethren Pilgrimages," *Messenger* (June, 1977).

Morse, Kenneth I., "A Stroll Through Schwarzenau," *Messenger* (March, 1978).

Morse, Kenneth I., "Walking the (Schriesheim) Streets He Knew," *Messenger* (July, 1979).

Morse, Kenneth I., "In Marienborn, Memories Linger," *Messenger* (May, 1980).

### DVDs and Videos

*Back to Schwarzenau: Celebrating 300 Years of the Brethren Movement* (Ambler, PA: Brethren Encyclopedia, 2008), a 2 DVD set.

*Brethren Heritage Tour*, produced by David Sollenberger (Ambler, PA: Brethren Encyclopedia, 1996), VHS.

*Brethren Heritage Collection* (Elgin, IL: Brethren Press, 2008), a 4 DVD set.

*By Water and the Word: The Birth of the Brethren*, produced by David Sollenberger (Elgin, IL: Church of the Brethren General Board, 1996), VHS.

## SUGGESTED ITINERARIES

<b>Longer</b>	<i>Approx. Distance in Kilometers*</i>	
Start: Geneva		
Bern	Geneva to Bern	120
Basel	Bern to Basel	100
Strasbourg	Basel to Strasbourg	140
Heidelberg area	Strasbourg to Heidelberg	140
Schriesheim		
Eberbach		
Ladenburg		
Palatinate		
Frankfurt/Main area	Heidelberg to Frankfurt	100
Büdingen		
Ronneburg		
Düdelnheim		
Marburg/Lahn area	Frankfurt to Marburg	100
Schwarzenau		
Berleburg		
Laasphe		
Kassel	Marburg to Kassel	80
Krefeld area	Kassel to Krefeld	250
Jülich		
Groningen	Krefeld to Groningen	280
Surhuisterveen		
Rotterdam	Groningen to Rotterdam	250
<b>Shorter</b>		
Start: Frankfurt/Main		
Büdingen	Frankfurt to Büdingen	50
Marburg/Lahn	Büdingen to Marburg	90
Schwarzenau	Marburg to Schwarzenau	50
Berleburg	Schwarzenau to Berleburg	10

*\*One kilometer = 0.6 miles*

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