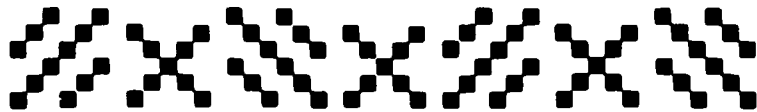


Hoosier Brethren and the Origins of the Restoration Movement

*David B. Eller**



Frontier Indiana was a patchwork of competing religious views and interests. The Great Kentucky Revival at Cane Ridge in 1801 had set the dominant spiritual mood for evangelical Protestants, and in the years following Cane Ridge the fires of revival had swept across the Ohio Valley. In the Hoosier state, as in the rest of the Midwest, the result was a tremendous increase in adherents to such sects as the Methodists and Baptists who were ready and able to serve up religion warm, if not hot.

An important part of the story of the growth of evangelical Protestantism in the Ohio Valley was the rise of the Disciples movement, popularly known as the "Restoration" because of its emphasis on restoring simple or "primitive" New Testament Christianity as the norm for faith and practice. The Disciples are usually said to have been inspired by Alexander Campbell, a Presbyterian turned Baptist reformer, and Barton W. Stone, a veteran of Cane Ridge. Working independently before 1832 and cooperatively thereafter, these two pioneer ministers led a reform crusade which resulted in the formation of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) by about 1840. In Indiana, however, Restoration activities previous to the mid-1830s were indigenous and largely independent of Stone and Campbell.¹

Although historians of the Disciples of Christ have long recognized the significant contributions of the German Baptist Brethren, or Dunkers, to Restoration reforms in southern Indiana, their accounts have usually been vague as to the congregations involved, their location, origin, and leadership. Breth-

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¹ The best study of the Indiana Restoration movement is Henry K. Shaw, *Hoosier Disciples: A Comprehensive History of the Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ) in Indiana* (St. Louis, 1966), esp. 19-111.

ren writers, who until recently were apparently unaware that several of their congregations merged into the Restoration movement, have not clarified this picture. However, a comparison of Disciples source materials with those of the Brethren reveals an explicit relationship between the two groups.² And an understanding of the tradition and religious views of the German Baptist Brethren helps to place their involvement with the Disciples in its proper perspective.

The German Baptists of the early nineteenth century were a closed, noncreedal, pietist, and anabaptist sect of European origin. Refugees of this group arrived in Pennsylvania as early as 1719. Like their Mennonite neighbors, with whom they were often confused, the Brethren grew and prospered in America. At least thirty congregation-communities were established before the Revolution, primarily in Pennsylvania, Maryland, and the Carolinas.³

The Brethren were distinguished from other religious groups by several important characteristics, perhaps the most significant of which was their form of baptism. The Brethren insisted on trine (i.e., thrice repeated) immersion, with face forward, in flowing water. It was from this practice that the popular designation Dunker, or Dunkard, was derived. Most Baptist groups, by contrast, immersed once, face backwards.⁴ Another unique practice of the Brethren was their observance of love feast. This church ordinance was patterned after the last meal which Jesus ate with his disciples in the upper room in Jerusalem (John 13). It consisted of the washing of feet, a

² One of the first discussions of Brethren contributions to Disciples beginnings in Indiana was H. Clay Trusty, "Formation of the Christian Church in Indiana," *Indiana Magazine of History*, VI (March, 1910), 17-32. Commodore Wesley Cauble, *Disciples of Christ in Indiana: Achievements of a Century* (Indianapolis, 1930), 30-38; and Shaw, *Hoosier Disciples*, 48-51, 79-82, treated the role of the Brethren in somewhat more detail. The standard treatment of the Brethren in Indiana is Otho Winger, *History of the Church of the Brethren in Indiana* (Elgin, Ill., 1917). Winger does not mention any of the congregations herein discussed or the Brethren relationship to the Disciples movement. Roger Sappington, ed., *The Brethren in the New Nation: A Source Book on the Development of the Church of the Brethren, 1785-1865* (Elgin, Ill., 1976), 114-22, contains source materials on Brethren involvement with the Disciples, much of it focusing on Indiana.

³ An excellent volume of source materials on the Brethren in colonial America is Donald F. Durnbaugh, ed., *The Brethren in Colonial America: A Source Book on the Transplantation and Development of the Church of the Brethren in the Eighteenth Century* (Elgin, Ill., 1967). Pages 172-91 contain a statistical ordering of congregations made in 1770-1772 by Morgan Edwards, a Baptist historian.

⁴ For a description of this form of baptism and a discussion of its importance for nineteenth-century Brethren see Sappington, *Brethren in the New Nation*, 131-68.

fellowship meal (the Lord's Supper), and communion with bread and wine. Love feast was held over a weekend, usually once or twice a year, and was one of the most important gatherings of the church.⁵

Several other characteristics made the Brethren a distinct people. They practiced nonresistance (defenseless pacifism) with regard to the state and civil authority. They developed an Annual Meeting, composed of representatives from each congregation, to decide matters of polity and doctrine. Like the Quakers and Mennonites, the Brethren also wore plain dress, which included bonnets and prayer coverings for the sisters and beards and broad-brimmed hats for the men. In addition, most Brethren in the early nineteenth century remained German in culture and preferred sectarian isolation to integration with the mainstream of American society.⁶

As was the case with many religious groups, Brethren were quick to move west with the frontier following the American Revolution. Dunker families had crossed the Allegheny Mountains into Kentucky shortly before 1790. Ohio had organized congregations by 1802, Indiana by 1809, and Illinois by 1815. Certain areas of southwest Ohio and north central Indiana became centers of Brethren activity in the mid- and late-nineteenth century.⁷ As many as fifteen Dunker congregations across the Ohio Valley may have joined the Restoration movement, and it is likely that most of these churches were located in southern Indiana.⁸

In contrast to most other pioneer Brethren congregations in Ohio or in other regions of the Hoosier state, Dunker congregations in southern Indiana had family roots in North Carolina, Kentucky, or both.⁹ For example, Olive Branch, which may have had preaching services as early as 1803, had

⁵ The love feast is described in *ibid.*, 168-77.

⁶ Floyd E. Mallott, *Studies in Brethren History* (Elgin, Ill., 1954), 149-63, 245-56, 267-74. A popular account of the Brethren in the 1840s is James H. Lehman, *The Old Brethren* (Elgin, Ill., 1976).

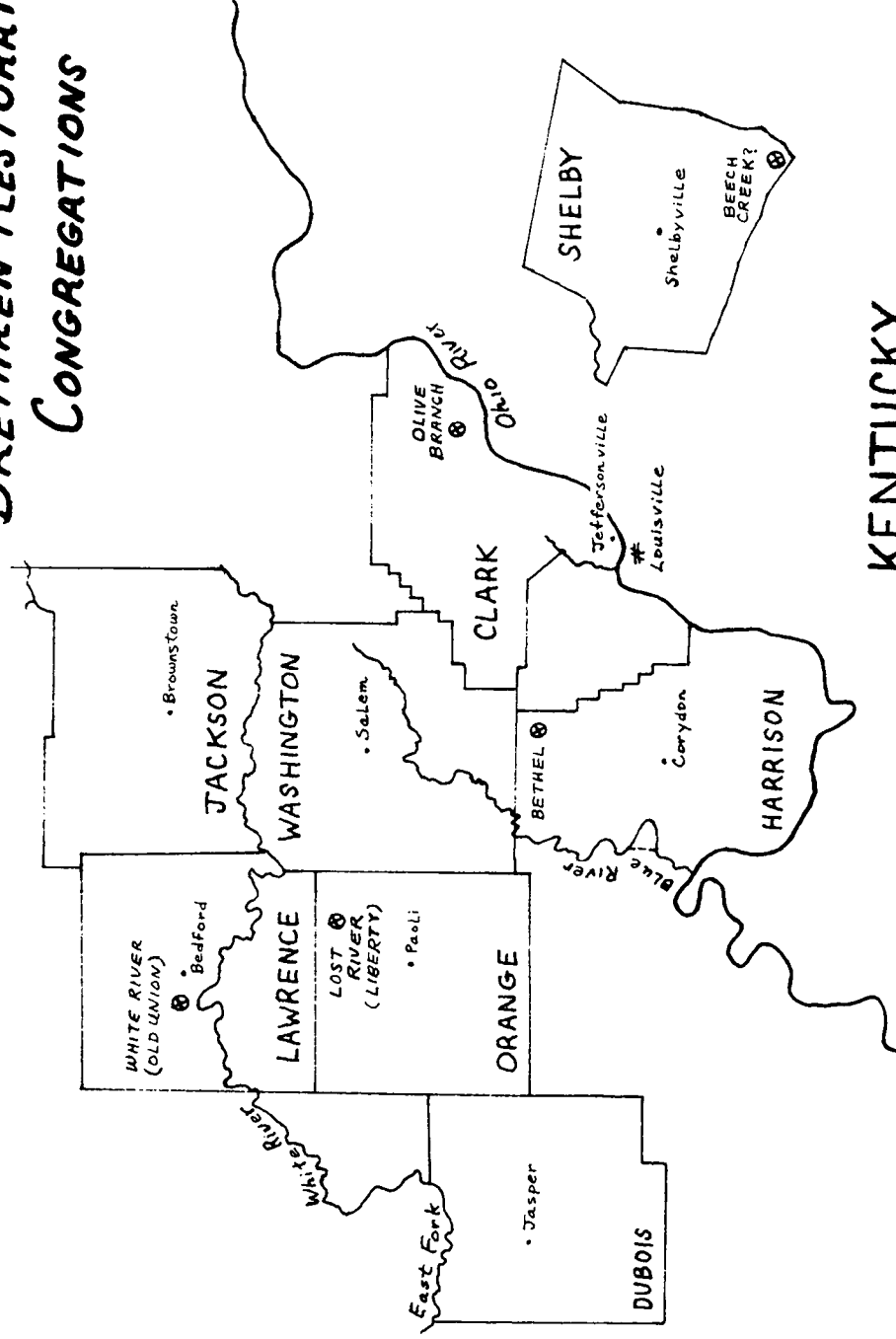
⁷ Sappington, *Brethren in the New Nation*, 15-102; Mallott, *Studies in Brethren History*, 112-48.

⁸ Madison Evans, *Biographical Sketches of the Pioneer Preachers of Indiana* (Philadelphia, 1862), 32. Not all of these fifteen congregations can be located or otherwise identified. Included in this figure may be Brethren congregations that joined the Restoration movement in Kentucky and Ohio. See David B. Eller, "Peter Hon of East Union," *Brethren Life and Thought*, XVIII (Spring, 1972), 5-12.

⁹ Most Brethren pioneers in the Ohio Valley came from Pennsylvania, Maryland, or Virginia. See Winger, *History of the Brethren in Indiana*, 15-16; Mallott, *Studies in Brethren History*, 119-20; and Lester H. Binnie, "Migration of Early German Baptist Brethren within the United States," *The Palatine*

INDIANA

BRETHREN RESTORATION CONGREGATIONS



Map prepared by David B. Eller.

definite ties to North Carolina. The church was located in present-day Owen Township, Clark County, a short distance from the Ohio River. Jacob Stutzman, a Dunker minister from Randolph County, North Carolina, settled in this area in 1802. Other families from Stutzman's former congregational area on the Uwharry River in North Carolina, including most of his large family, joined him in Indiana by 1806.¹⁰

Two of the earliest and largest Dunker churches in the Hoosier state were located to the west of Olive Branch in Orange and Lawrence counties. The Lost River congregation in Orleans Township, Orange County, was organized in 1819 by Brethren who had moved to this area from Shelby County, Kentucky. These families included the Hostetlers, Leathermans, Sniders, and Hardmans. To the north of Lost River was the White River church, located in Indian Creek Township, Lawrence County, and organized about 1821. Important families identified with this congregation included the Kerns, Ribelins, and Sears. Both the Kern and Sears families were from Nicholas and Bourbon counties, Kentucky, and prior to that from Rowan County, North Carolina. The Sears family had moved to the White River area by way of Harrison County,

Immigrant, V (Summer, 1979), 6-7. Sappington, *Brethren in the New Nation*, 29-53, was one of the first to call attention to the importance of Brethren migration from the South into Kentucky and the Midwest. See also David B. Eller, "The Brethren in the Western Ohio Valley, 1790-1850: German Baptist Settlement and Frontier Accommodation" (Ph.D. dissertation, Dept. of History, Miami University, 1976), 153-76, for a more detailed discussion of the southern background and origins of the Olive Branch, Lost River, and White River churches.

¹⁰ Traditional Brethren interpretation is that the Four Mile church, organized in 1809 in present-day Union County, is the oldest Dunker church in the state. Winger, *Brethren in Indiana*, 59-60. The evidence presented in the text, however, suggests that Olive Branch may have preceded it. The Olive Branch meetinghouse was built in 1821 and located a short distance northeast of Jacob Stutzman's land. *Christian Record*, IV (April, 1847), 293-94, IV (June, 1847), 365-67; Deed Book 26, pp. 401-402, County Clerk's Office, Clark County Courthouse, Jeffersonville, Indiana. The congregation is also described in *History of the Ohio Falls Cities and Their Counties with Illustrations and Biographical Sketches* (2 vols., Cleveland, 1882), II, 379. Stutzman's North Carolina ministry is briefly discussed in Roger E. Sappington, "Dunker Beginnings in North Carolina in the Eighteenth Century," *North Carolina Historical Review*, XLVI (July, 1969), 224-28. Stutzman's family is described in John Scott Davenport, "A Multiple Census-Based Ordering of the Family of Jacob Stutzman (Sr.), Wife Barbara, the Dunker Minister Who Served the Uwharrie Congregation, N.C., 1764-1801," typewritten manuscript dated December 12, 1971, pp. 1-5. A photocopy of this manuscript is in the possession of the author of this article. Davenport's research on the immigration of North Carolina Brethren into the Ohio Valley has been of invaluable assistance in preparing this study. Unfortunately, there is little in the Clark County records or in local tradition which sheds light on the religious activities of the Stutzman family in Indiana prior to 1820.

Indiana, where Brethren had previously formed the Bethel church in present-day Morgan Township. The Foutz and Hon families were also associated with the Bethel congregation. In addition to Olive Branch, Lost River, White River, and Bethel, there were also Brethren settlements of southern background in Jackson, Washington, Monroe, and possibly Dubois counties before 1825.¹¹

The merger of the Brethren from southern Indiana with the Disciples movement was a gradual process which took place in two stages. The first of these was the formation of an association of congregations independent of the Annual Meeting. The second was contact between leaders of the association and those of the emerging Restoration movement.

Although all Brethren were supposedly unified by the Annual Meeting, close family ties, and traveling senior ministers called elders, the congregations in southern Indiana, because of their location and southern background, lacked adequate communication with other frontier Dunker congregations or the Annual Meeting. One Restoration source suggests that about 1820 the Brethren in southern Indiana formed themselves into an "Association" independent of the Annual Meeting because they were "unwilling to conform to all the rules observed by the brethren in Ohio, Pennsylvania and other states."¹² Brethren records indicate that at about this same time a group led by Adam Hostetler of Kentucky was removed from fellowship by the eastern church. It seems clear that the "Hostetler party" formed the basis of the independent Association with congregations in Kentucky, Ohio, and Indiana. The number of members in this schismatic group has been estimated by some Brethren writers as high as fifteen hundred.¹³

¹¹ *History of Lawrence, Orange and Washington Counties, Indiana* (Chicago, 1884), 544, 222; William H. Roose, *Indiana's Birthplace: A History of Harrison County, Indiana* (rev. ed. by Arville L. Funk; Chicago, 1966), 28; *History of Jackson County, Indiana: From the Earliest Time to the Present . . .* (Chicago, 1886), 442-43; Sappington, *Brethren in the New Nation*, 44-46. The pioneer Brethren congregations nearest to this cluster were Four Mile (1809) and Nettle Creek (1820) to the northeast in Union and Wayne counties and Raccoon Creek (1827) to the north in Putnam and Montgomery counties. These congregations probably had little or no contact with those mentioned in the text.

¹² Evans, *Biographical Sketches of the Pioneer Preachers*, 63. Joseph Franklin and J.A. Headington, *The Life and Times of Benjamin Franklin* (St. Louis, 1879), 163-64, suggests that the independent Brethren group broke away over the question of single immersion baptism. Such a conclusion is, however, unlikely. See note 22 below.

¹³ Abraham Harley Cassel, "Some Account of the Origin & History of the Far Western and Congregational Brethren also, of Eldr. [Elder] Rule and A.M. [Annual Meeting] Supremacy," June 7, 1886, Cassel Collection (Juniata College, Huntington, Pennsylvania).

Unfortunately, very little is known about Adam Hostetler. Originally from western Pennsylvania, he settled in Shelby County, Kentucky, in 1794 with his parents and other married brothers and sisters. At that time he and his father, Christian Hostetler (Hochstetler), were already ministers in the Dunker faith, the father preaching in German and the son in English. In 1825, after an extensive itinerant ministry among Brethren settlements in Kentucky, Indiana, and Illinois, the younger Hostetler moved to the Olive Branch community in Clark County, Indiana. He died there in 1826.¹⁴

For reasons which are not known, Adam Hostetler and Peter Hon, a young minister from Nicholas County, Kentucky, began to spread "strange doctrine" which was not in keeping with Brethren tradition. While existing Brethren records are vague, it is evident that Hostetler and Hon were expelled from the church sometime between 1816 and 1820. One source suggests that at least two church councils were held on the Hostetler-Hon controversy. The first met in 1820 in Muhlenberg County, Kentucky, and a second sometime later at Adam Hostetler's home in Shelby County, Kentucky. Brethren leaders from the eastern church attended both meetings. Hostetler and his followers faced several charges, including one which stated that they had become "too zealous in religious excitements," which more than likely suggests the sympathy of western Brethren for frontier revivalism.¹⁵ Other issues included both Hostetler's and Hon's failure to conform to the standards of the Annual Meeting regarding plain dress, their acceptance of slave ownership among Brethren, and their use of an innovative and unacceptable procedure for feet washing during the love feast.¹⁶

Another Brethren source indicates that Hostetler and Hon were expelled from the church at a council held in Muhlenberg County, Kentucky, in 1816. The issues before this meeting

¹⁴ Harvey Hostetler, *Descendants of Jacob Hochstetler, the Immigrant of 1736* (Elgin, Ill., 1912; reprint ed., Berlin, Ohio, 1970), 869; John Henry Moore, *Some Brethren Pathfinders* (Elgin, Ill., 1929), 71, 74-76. It is assumed that Hostetler resided in Kentucky until his move to the Olive Branch community. He owned land in both Jackson and Washington counties, Indiana, but is not listed in the 1820 Indiana census. Deed Book 25, p. 20, Clark County Courthouse; Deed Book C, p. 250, County Clerk's Office, Washington County Courthouse, Salem, Indiana; and Deed Book A, p. 1, County Clerk's Office, Jackson County Courthouse, Brownstown, Indiana. Hostetler is buried in the Olive Branch cemetery.

¹⁵ Cassel, "Some Account of the Far Western Brethren."

¹⁶ *Ibid.* See also Moore, *Brethren Pathfinders*, 89-90; and Martin Grove Brumbaugh, *A History of the German Baptist Brethren in Europe and America* (Mount Morris, Ill., 1899), 535-36.

were not given except that Hostetler and Hon were thought to have followed in the heretical footsteps of one John Ham. The identity of Ham is obscure. He was supposedly an eighteenth-century North Carolina Dunker leader who openly preached the final restoration of all souls from hell, or "universalism." Ham and his sympathizers were placed out of the church by the Annual Meeting of 1797. Some of them later moved to the Green River country in Warren County, Kentucky. Universalist, or "restitution," ideas were widely held among the frontier Brethren in western Kentucky, Illinois, and Missouri.¹⁷

Universalism, however, was probably not a significant factor in the formation of the independent Brethren Association in Indiana. Of the churches in this group, only Olive Branch seems to have had connections with universalists and may have embraced universalist doctrine. The Stutzman family had close associations with Brethren universalism in North Carolina. Adam Bower, who had had contacts with the Stutzmans and other Brethren in North Carolina, moved near the Olive Branch community in 1805. He had "universalist preaching" in his Indiana home as early as 1812.¹⁸

In any event by 1820 the Hostetler Brethren were in disagreement with Annual Meeting Brethren over a variety of issues concerning both doctrine and practice. It was not long, however, before the Association itself was embroiled in a controversy over the form or mode of baptism. Peter Hon and Abraham Kern of the White River church began to advocate and employ a single action immersion rather than the customary dipping three times.¹⁹ When this shift in practice began is not known. It may have dated from the very beginnings of the Association, perhaps even earlier. The reasons for the change

¹⁷ John Wolfe, "Pioneer History," *Brethren at Work*, VII (February 22, 1882), 4. See also Moore, *Brethren Pathfinders*, 74-76; and Henry R. Holsinger, *Holsinger's History of the Tunkers and the Brethren Church* (Lathrop, Calif., 1901), 762-64, 219-26. Wolfe supposedly obtained his information from "minutes" of the 1816 council which had been attended by his pioneer minister father, George Wolfe (1780-1865). For more on John Ham see Roger E. Sappington, "Two Eighteenth Century Dunker Congregations in North Carolina," *North Carolina Historical Review*, XLVII (April, 1970), 192-99. See also John Scott Davenport, "The Quest for the Identity of John H., Banned Carolina Dunker Who Took Universalism West," typewritten manuscript dated 1977, pp. 19ff. A photocopy of this manuscript is in the possession of the author of this article. Davenport suggests that a more logical and definable candidate for the "John H." expelled by Annual Meeting is John Hendricks, not John Ham. Hendricks was a Dunker universalist pioneer minister active in North Carolina, Kentucky, and Missouri.

¹⁸ Durnbaugh, *Brethren in Colonial America*, 330; *History of Ohio Falls Cities*, II, 416.

¹⁹ Franklin and Headington, *The Life and Times of Benjamin Franklin*, 163-64; and Evans, *Pioneer Preachers*, 32.

are also not clear. It is possible that both Hon and Kern were influenced in Kentucky by the more numerous Baptists.

Interestingly enough, the Brethren Annual Meeting of 1821, which assembled in Somerset County, Pennsylvania, addressed itself to the single immersion problem. The existing minutes do not record which congregation sent the following query, but it could well have originated out of the unrest in southern Indiana and Kentucky. Article six of the minutes questioned "Whether members (persons) might be received into the church who have been but once immersed (without rebaptizing them in the manner we believe it ought to be done according to the gospel)?"²⁰ The answer of the meeting is surprising, perhaps, in that it indicated flexibility on the part of the eastern leadership. After affirming that trine immersion was the true baptism, the Brethren decided that "if such persons would be content with their baptism and yet acknowledge the Brethren's order as right, we would leave it over to them and receive them with the laying on of hands and prayer."²¹ This answer does not suggest that ministers were permitted to employ a single-action immersion. It may have been, however, a gesture of reconciliation to the western Brethren. Those baptized by Hon and Kern could remain in full fellowship with the brotherhood if the traditional practice was affirmed as correct. If the decision of the Annual Meeting was indeed such a gesture, it met with no known reply. So powerful was the move toward single immersion within the western Association that by 1826 its advocates completely dominated the independent group.

It was at approximately this point in time, around 1827, that John Wright of Washington County, Indiana, leader of a small group of independent Baptist churches, suggested a merger between his group and the Dunkers.²² This action marks the beginning of the second stage in the transition of the

²⁰ *Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Church of the Brethren; Containing All Available Minutes from 1778 to 1909* (Elgin, Ill., 1909), 45. There is no direct mention in these minutes of Adam Hostetler's expulsion or of the formation of an independent Association of Brethren in southern Indiana and Kentucky. The phrases in parentheses are most likely editorial clarifications by Henry Kurtz, a frequent clerk of the Annual Meeting who published the first edition of minutes in 1867.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² An alternative sequence suggests that Wright proposed union with the Brethren several years earlier, about 1822, but clearly after the question of single-immersion baptism had been settled. The Brethren agreed, called themselves "Christians," and formed a new organization with the Baptists. In this sequence the ministry of Joseph Hostetler, discussed below, would have taken



JOSEPH HOSTETLER

Reproduced from Madison Evans, *Biographical Sketches of the Pioneer Preachers of Indiana* (Philadelphia, 1862), 56.

Brethren into the Restoration movement. The necessary preparation for Wright's proposal, however, had taken place previously within the Association under the leadership of Joseph Hostetler, a minister in the Lost Creek congregation and a nephew of Adam Hostetler. More was at issue than the mode of baptism. The very identity of the southern Indiana Brethren as a distinctive religious group was in question.

More is known about Joseph Hostetler than about any other minister in the Association. Born in Kentucky, he moved to Indiana in 1818, when he was already a licensed preacher in

place within the context of an already combined Dunker-Baptist association, which is unlikely. For varying interpretations of these events see Evans, *Pioneer Preachers*, 32-33, 66-67; Trusty, "Formation of the Christian Church in Indiana," 19-20; Cauble, *Disciples of Christ in Indiana*, 34; and Eugene B. Scofield, "Indiana," in John T. Brown, *Churches of Christ: A Historical, Biographical, and Pictorial History of the Churches* (Louisville, 1904), 217-18. The reconstruction of events in Shaw, *Hoosier Disciples*, 49-51, 78, seems most accurate. It is clear that the Brethren merged with the Baptists before the Edinburgh unity meeting of 1828, discussed below.

the Brethren fraternity. After settling in Orange County he was ordained in 1821 by his uncle, Adam, during an annual gathering of the newly formed Association. Young Joseph was known as the "boy preacher," and he apparently had considerable powers of persuasion. Between 1821 and 1825 he is believed to have visited several Brethren communities, baptizing over one hundred converts. This period in his life was also marked by intense spiritual searching and personal study. One result was a growing dissatisfaction with Dunker sectarianism, a dissatisfaction which became intensified by his reading of Alexander Campbell's monthly periodical, the *Christian Baptist*.²³

Published from 1823 to 1829, the *Christian Baptist* was an early voice of the Restoration movement and reflected its founder's criticism of narrow, sectarian, Baptist practices. Campbell and his supporters discarded denominational names, believing that "Christian" was sufficient title for the converted. They taught primitive, New Testament Christianity as the only rule of faith and practice, baptism by immersion for believers only and as necessary for the remission of sin, weekly observance of communion (the Lord's Supper), and local congregational autonomy. Campbell believed that higher levels of church government, such as the Brethren's Annual Meeting, were without biblical authority and should be purely advisory.²⁴

A letter written by Joseph Hostetler to Campbell in December, 1825, reflects not only the young preacher's searching but also the rapid growth of membership within the Association.

A sincere desire to know the truth as it is in Christ, is the sole cause of these lines. . . . I belong to a church called "German Baptists," sometimes

²³ A biographical sketch of Joseph Hostetler is given in Evans, *Pioneer Preachers*, 57-73. Evans' account must be considered primary data. Hostetler was living in Illinois when *Pioneer Preachers* was published in 1862, and he contributed a short address to his "dear brethren" at the conclusion of Evans' sketch. On page 6 of the book Evans states: "The materials for the work have been obtained, chiefly, from the surviving pioneers—to whom the author acknowledges his obligations—and the facts, incidents, and in most instances the dates may be confidently relied upon."

²⁴ Much valuable information on Campbell and his ideas may be found in Robert Richardson, ed., *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell* (2 vols., Philadelphia, 1869-1870). The standard history of the Disciples is William E. Tucker and Lester G. McAllister, *Journey in Faith: A History of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)* (St. Louis, 1975). Also helpful is James D. Murch, *Christians Only: A History of the Restoration Movement* (Cincinnati, 1962). For a brief discussion of the influence of the *Christian Baptist* on the early Restoration movement, see Winfred E. Garrison and Alfred T. DeGroot, *The Disciples of Christ: A History* (St. Louis, 1948), 175-79.

"Dunkards," whose government is the New Testament only. They are not the same in principle or faith with those of the old connection in Pennsylvania, Virginia, Maryland, and Ohio; but an order that took rise from them in Kentucky, by one *Teacher* [Adam Hostetler], in Shelby about six years ago, amounting now to about two thousand, having about 24 teachers, and increasing fast. Our views of christianity you expressed in the *Christian Baptist* vol 2d, . . . and in the whole second volume I do not see anything to divide us in sentiment, though I do not approve of some things in your 1st and 3d volumes.²⁵

Hostetler went on to question Campbell on several points of doctrine. Why, for example, did not he, as an advocate of primitive Christianity, practice footwashing and the holy kiss of charity or observe communion at night, following the apostolic (and Brethren) practice? Reflecting the debate within the Association, Hostetler also asked for Campbell's opinion on trine immersion baptism. "I yet think it [trine immersion] is the proper action of baptism, and think that it should not be performed transversely, but forwards, in the most humble manner of obedience."²⁶

Campbell lost little time in replying to the concerns expressed. Although Hostetler specifically requested a personal response, Campbell printed both the letter and his answer in the *Christian Baptist*. His basic point was that many Brethren practices, such as the holy kiss and footwashing, were social customs of the apostolic church and not rituals required for discipleship. He also expressed his preference for single immersion since baptism in the New Testament is spoken of as one act.²⁷

Hostetler's biographer recorded the young Brethren's overall reaction to Campbell and the *Christian Baptist* in this way:

he read with eagerness though not with entire approbation; for being yet identified with a sect he felt that the blows descended too fast and too heavy. But still the light entered; the faith once delivered to the saints and long obscured by the traditions of men, became more and more apparent; objections to creeds and sects continued to be multiplied; until he found it impossible to refrain from a full and public avowal of his sentiments.²⁸

It seems evident that Hostetler was persuaded by Campbell's logic and soon adjusted his doctrinal perspective.

Accordingly, in the spring of 1826, Hostetler announced that he would preach on "primitive Christianity" at a specified

²⁵ J[oseph] H[ostetler], "To the Editor," *Christian Baptist*, III (March 6, 1826), 162-63.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ A[lexander] C[ampbell], "Reply to the Above," *ibid.*, 163-67.

²⁸ Evans, *Pioneer Preachers*, 64.

day and time at Orleans, Orange County, Indiana. A crowd, perhaps generously estimated at one thousand and including several of his fellow Dunker ministers, gathered for the address. For an hour and a half the boy preacher spoke on the theme that "the disciples were called Christian first at Antioch." In doing so he squarely placed himself in sympathy with Campbell's emerging Restoration movement. So powerful was his preaching that the audience was moved against the use of denominational names. Some of the Brethren ministers, however, were not so easily convinced. Hostetler was informed that he would face stern charges at the next yearly meeting of the Association. Not wanting to leave the decision of that body to chance, he undertook a personal visit to each member congregation explaining his position.²⁹

Evidence suggests that the Association meeting of 1826 took place in August at the Somerset Creek (East Union) meetinghouse, which was Peter Hon's home congregation in Nicholas County, Kentucky. The irony of the occasion must have been apparent to some. An independent Brethren association, formed after the expulsion of Adam Hostetler from the Annual Meeting church for holding non-Brethren views, now listened to his nephew explain why a Brethren identity should be altogether terminated. Young Joseph Hostetler so completely vindicated himself of all charges that he was asked to deliver the main address at the next annual gathering of the Association. He reportedly thought to himself: "This day death passed upon this ecclesiastical body. About this time next year it will breathe its last; and my discourse shall be its funeral."³⁰

It was apparently at the yearly Association meeting of 1827 that John Wright and his brother, Peter, of the Blue River Baptists came to the Brethren with their plea of unity. Joseph Hostetler no doubt delivered his "funeral discourse." Adam Hostetler, who had been the strongest Brethren preacher of the previous generation and who might conceivably have been in a position to influence the Brethren away from reforms inspired by Campbell, had died the previous September. The Dunkers and the Baptists agreed to form one fraternal organization and to call themselves "Christians." John Wright then proposed that the new coalition consider merger with the New

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 65.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 66; Margret Kern Garrard, *The Family of Conrad Kern* (n.p., 1968), 38.

Lights, and he was authorized to undertake correspondence with them for this purpose.³¹

Frontier New Light Christian churches are difficult to define precisely. One such group, based in Kentucky and led by Barton W. Stone, emerged out of the Great Kentucky Revival. Other unrelated and independent "old Christian" movements, primarily Methodist and Baptist in background, were active in New England, Virginia, and North Carolina before the turn of the century. The earliest New Light congregations in Indiana were of the "old Christian" connection rather than from the Stone group. It is likely that John Wright wrote to the "Eastern Conference of the Christian Church in Indiana," an organization formed in 1827 primarily of "old Christian" congregations. Beverley Vawter was the clerk of this conference.³²

The traditional interpretation of John and Peter Wright's merger efforts has been that a unity conference of Baptists, Dunkers, and New Lights was arranged for July, 1828. Representatives met on a farm just south of Edinburgh in Bartholomew County, Indiana. No detailed minutes or records of this meeting were kept, of course, for fear of setting up new denominational rules and creeds. Joseph Hostetler, John Wright, and Beverley Vawter, each representing their religious traditions, agreed to drop denominational names and creeds and to work cooperatively in a loose organization called the "Southern District."³³

Two reports of the Edinburgh conference which appeared in Barton W. Stone's monthly publication, the *Christian Messenger*, describe the 1828 meeting in other terms which give an entirely different flavor to the proceedings. According to these reports the meeting was merely the "second Conference of the

³¹ Adam Hostetler's will was admitted to probate in Clark County, Indiana, in October, 1826. Will Book B, p. 342, Probate Court, Clark County Courthouse. Wright's merger proposal is briefly discussed in Cauble, *Disciples of Christ in Indiana*, 34; and Trusty, "Formation of the Christian Church in Indiana," 19.

³² For more on the various New Light groups in the Ohio Valley see Shaw, *Hoosier Disciples*, 27-36, 60-71. Vawter was born in Virginia and baptized a New Light in Kentucky. He moved to Jefferson County, Indiana, in 1819 and was a popular preacher among various New Light and nominally Baptist churches. As with Joseph Hostetler, by 1827 Vawter had also come under the influence of Campbell and the *Christian Baptist*. Evans, *Pioneer Preachers*, 101-25. See also *Christian Messenger*, I (August 25, 1827), 240.

³³ Cauble, *Disciples of Christ in Indiana*, 34, 37; Trusty, "Formation of the Christian Church in Indiana," 20, 22-23. Evans, *Pioneer Preachers*, 67, suggests that the unity conference of 1828 took place within the context of what would have been the last meeting of the Brethren Association. It seems clear, however, that the conference was not arranged by the Dunkers.

Eastern District of the Christian Church." The presiding elder, Jesse Hughs, recorded the ministers present. Included were John Wright, Peter Wright, and Beverley Vawter. Neither the name of Joseph Hostetler nor that of any other clearly recognizable Brethren minister is on this list.³⁴ Another New Light minister, Joseph Hatchitt, described the Wright brothers at Edinburgh:

The Wright Brothers, whose names you will see in the minutes have been formerly denominated "Depending Baptists," but lately have laid that name aside, and now call themselves the "church of Christ." I judge there are six to eight elders among them, and many churches. When we met in conference together, we could find nothing to separate us asunder. In fine, we saw as nearly eye to eye as any company of Elders who have assembled in modern times—and there was such a sweet spirit of love.³⁵

The correspondence of Hughs and Hatchitt does not suggest that a formal merger of any kind took place. Indeed, Brethren participation in this meeting is doubtful. The number of elders listed as being in the "church of Christ" more clearly reflects John Wright's group of Baptists alone than it does a combined Dunker-Baptist organization. Still, it is evident that the Wrights were in full cooperation with the New Light body. They were asked to bear a letter of greeting to another New Light Christian conference in Harrison County, and John Wright was also chosen a member of a "presbytery" (committee) to ordain a candidate to the ministry.³⁶

The mystery of who merged with whom remains. It is clear that after 1827 the Brethren Association ceased to function as a separate group and that its leaders became public advocates of the Restoration movement. Joseph Hostetler and Peter Hon traveled widely in 1829 and 1830 among Brethren communities in Indiana, Kentucky, and Ohio urging full participation in the movement.³⁷ It was John Wright, however, who played the crucial role of bringing the Brethren into Restoration activities in Indiana. His personal relationship to the Brethren merits further attention.

³⁴ Jesse Hughs, "[Correspondence] For the Christian Messenger," *Christian Messenger*, II (September, 1828), 259. Other ministers at the conference included Henry Logan, Jesse Frazier, James Doudle, James Daughtery, William Tracy, William P. Richie, Thomas Johnson, Josiah Ashley, and Joseph Hatchitt. The unordained ministers were Pliny Hatchitt, James McCoy, and Leonard Henry.

³⁵ Joseph Hatchitt, "A Letter from Elder J. Hatchitt," *ibid.*, 260-61. Although Hatchitt refers to minutes, his and Hughs' correspondence were personal reports not official minutes.

³⁶ *Ibid.*; Hughs, "Correspondence," 260.

³⁷ Evans, *Pioneer Preachers*, 33-34, 67.

The Wrights were a family of Quaker background from near the Uwharry Brethren area in Rowan and Randolph counties, North Carolina. John Wright was born there but grew to adulthood in Powell's Valley, Virginia. After a short period in Wayne County, Kentucky, he moved to Clark County, Indiana, where he was baptized in 1808. In 1810 he relocated on the Blue River in Washington County. He was soon joined there by his father, Amos; uncle, Philbert Wright; younger brother, Peter; and other brothers as well. John, Amos, and Peter are credited with forming the Blue River Baptist Church in 1811. They all eventually became preachers. John Wright continued to reside in this general area until his death but spent his last eight years in an extensive itinerant ministry.³⁸

The Blue River Baptist Church and others organized by the Wrights in a "Blue River Association" have been variously described as "free will" or "dependent" Baptists. Presumably this meant that like the Brethren, and in contrast to most American Baptist groups that developed out of the Calvinist tradition, the Wrights emphasized man's "free choice" in securing salvation. Also like the Brethren, their churches were non-creedal and organized on the principle of the Bible alone as sufficient guide for faith and practice. Accordingly, they did not identify with the more numerous "general" Baptists. Indeed, the closest and earliest association of the Wrights in Indiana was with the Brethren.³⁹

Amos Wright had become a Dunker in North Carolina, probably when he married into a German Baptist family. His brother, Philbert, married into the Sears family, which was also Brethren. While Restoration sources do not describe John Wright as a Dunker, there is at least one local tradition from Olive Branch which so remembers him:

the Dunkards had a church early in this century [nineteenth] in what is known as Owen Township. It is known by the name of Olive Branch chapel. Revs. Messrs. John Wright and Mr. Hughes, the former a Dunkard and the latter a New-Light, united and formed a union Rev. John Wright, who came from North Carolina, had but few followers, and of course it was easy to go over to the new faith. The great hindrance to the coalition with the Dunkards was

³⁸ *Ibid.* A biographical sketch of John Wright is given in *ibid.*, 29-41.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 30-31. It would be incorrect to assume that the Dunkers or the Blue River Baptists were much concerned about orthodox theological positions. As biblical literalists they were more interested in faithfully observing New Testament commandments. Calvinism is a body of doctrine based on the teachings of the Geneva Reformer John Calvin which emphasized the omnipotence of God, man's sinful nature, and the salvation of God's chosen, or elect, by unearned grace alone. For a discussion of Brethren theology in the early and midnineteenth century see Sappington, *Brethren in the New Nation*, 123-98.

their mode of worship. But the union dispensed with trine baptism, or dipping three times, which according to their discipline was a necessary part of their religion. Feet-washing, too, was discarded by Rev. Mr. Hughes and between them both a satisfactory settlement of conflicting views was made.⁴⁰

While no date is given in this account, it does confirm Brethren and New Light cooperation. Reverend Hughes may well have been the same Jesse Hughs who chaired the Edinburgh conference.⁴¹

This passage identifying John Wright with the Dunkers, however, raises more problems than can be resolved. Wright's merger proposal to the Hostetler Brethren supposedly came after they had agreed to adopt the single immersion mode of baptism. According to the above account, Wright himself practiced trine immersion. The passage also indicates that Hughes compromised on feet washing, a practice central to the Brethren but unknown in New Light circles. If Wright were indeed a Dunker, he rather than Hughes should have yielded on this point. And it is known that Wright, who regularly conducted services at Olive Branch in the 1840s, practiced feet washing in his later ministry.⁴² Whatever Wright's religious background—Dunker, independent free will Baptist, or some combination of the two—his relationship to the southern Indiana Brethren was obviously close, and his influence among them was apparently quite strong.⁴³

Several Brethren ministers became leading advocates of the Restoration. Joseph Hostetler remained perhaps the most

⁴⁰ *History of Ohio Falls Cities*, II, 373.

⁴¹ Little is known about Jesse Hughs. He was apparently affiliated with the "old Christian" New Light movement of the eastern states rather than with Barton W. Stone. Although he was the presiding officer at the organization of the "Eastern District of the Christian Church" (Indiana) in 1827, Hughs is not considered by either Shaw or Cauble to have been a major figure in the Indiana Restoration. The available Clark County marriage records do not indicate any ministerial activity for him beyond 1829; in Lawrence County he performed marriages from 1828 until at least 1835. Marriage Record C, pp. 18, 22, Clark County Courthouse; Marriage Record A, pp. 229, 391, 506, County Clerk's Office, Lawrence County Courthouse, Bedford, Indiana. See also Shaw, *Hoosier Disciples*, 32, 35n.

⁴² The best source on Wright's later ministry is John Wright, "Record of the Life and Pilgrimage of John Wright, Sr., 1844-1850," typewritten manuscript (Washington County Historical Society, Salem, Indiana). Wright kept this diary, which consists primarily of travel accounts, after the death of his second wife. There are numerous references to former Brethren congregations and personalities which he had known from the beginning of the Restoration movement, perhaps earlier.

⁴³ Indicative of Wright's close relationship with the Dunkers was his friendship with Abraham Kern. Sometime before 1837 Kern assisted Wright in a merger of the "Southern District" with the Silver Creek Regular Baptist Association in Clark and Jefferson counties. Evans, *Pioneer Preachers*, 34, 39.

influential. He traveled widely in Indiana, Michigan, and Illinois; labored in and organized a number of new "churches of Christ"; defended Campbellism from Methodist attacks in a pamphlet entitled *Calumnies Refuted*; and while in Illinois debated publicly with pioneer Dunker Elder Isham Gibson.⁴⁴ John Ribble, David S. Lewis, and Christian Hostetler, a younger brother of Joseph Hostetler, also had Brethren backgrounds and worked in the Restoration movement. These men were from the Lost River church—today known as Old Liberty. Abraham Kern from White River—today called Old Union—his brother Conrad of Monroe County, and his first cousin Alexander Kern of Lawrence County became "Christian" preachers. Peter Hon and his brother Solomon, both of Kentucky, and George H. Hon of the Bethel and later Old Liberty congregations were still other ministers of Brethren background who were active in the Restoration. Much like Joseph Hostetler, Peter Hon traveled and preached widely in Kentucky, Indiana, and Ohio, organizing new Restoration congregations.⁴⁵ In fact, all the identifiable ministers in the independent Brethren Association eventually joined the Campbell movement.

At about the same time that the western Association Brethren were merging into the Restoration, the Brethren of the Annual Meeting shut the door on single immersion. In 1827 the issue of the proper mode of baptism was raised, but the Meeting reaffirmed its decision of 1821. The following year the matter was again introduced. This time the Meeting counseled that candidates from other churches ought to be baptized again in the "true manner." Between 1832 and 1834 several new queries were introduced on the subject, but the language of the Meeting became more and more uncompromising. Trine immersion became again the only form of baptism which the Brethren recognized.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 68-71; Shaw, *Hoosier Disciples*, 50n; and Minnie S. Buckingham, ed., *Church of the Brethren in Southern Illinois* (Elgin, Ill., 1950), 220. There are no known copies of Hostetler's tract still extant.

⁴⁵ Biographical data on many of these ministers are not readily available. For the Hostetlers see Hostetler, *Descendants of Jacob Hochstetler*, 846, 862. For the Kerns see Garrard, *Family of Conrad Kern*, 30-33, 37-39, 46-47. For the Hons see "Restoration Pioneers—The Honn Family," *Christian Standard*, LIII (April 13, 1918), 1; and Mamie Honn, "History of the Honn Family of Coles County, Illinois, 1676-1938," December, 1938, typewritten manuscript. A photocopy of this manuscript is in the possession of the author of this article. For a discussion of the life of Peter Hon see Eller, "Peter Hon of East Union," 5-12. A brief sketch of Lewis, who also served in the Indiana legislature, may be found in *History of Lawrence, Orange and Washington Counties*, 340. Ribble, who died in 1828, was one of the earliest ministers in Washington County; he is buried in the Liberty (Lost River) cemetery.

⁴⁶ *Minutes of the Annual Meeting*, 51-52, 55-57.

Although the Hostetler Brethren may be considered advocates of the Campbell Restoration after 1827, the change from Dunker to Disciple was apparently gradual. Evidence suggests that Abraham Kern's congregation may not have fully embraced the movement until 1832; Olive Branch not until 1839.⁴⁷ Joseph Hostetler wrote that his father, a deacon in the Dunker faith from 1796, did not support the Restoration until 1831. Other members may have retained a Brethren identity much longer.⁴⁸ It is also true that while the Brethren gave up some unique practices and customs, they retained others. Feet washing, for example, was practiced by John Wright, Peter Hon, and Joseph Hostetler until the close of their active ministry. Hostetler vigorously defended this service as a church ordinance in print as late as 1847.⁴⁹

After 1827 the schism which began with the expulsion of Adam Hostetler and Peter Hon was complete. The noncreedal faith of the Brethren, their emphasis on New Testament primitivism, their similarity with Campbell on the necessity of adult (believer's) baptism—these factors made the Dunkers of Hostetler's Association ripe for a redefinition of their religious identity along Restoration lines. In 1820 it must have appeared to Adam Hostetler, Joseph Hostetler, Abraham Kern, and Peter Hon that the eastern Brethren were becoming more sectarian in terms of church government, distinctive dress, continued use of the German language, and integration into American culture and values—all in an age when unity and cooperation among frontier Christians were being stressed. The Brethren in southern Indiana and Kentucky clearly wanted to practice their faith without the restrictions of the eastern church and the Annual Meeting. They favored an independent frontier spirit, and their Association was an attempt to capture that spirit. Once they abandoned trine immersion baptism, however, there was little which separated them from other frontier Baptist groups.

It is a paradox of the Disciples Restoration that Campbell's crusade for undoing denominationalism eventually gave rise in fact to yet another denomination. The Hostetler Brethren, how-

⁴⁷ James M. Mathes, "Another Old Soldier Gone," *Christian Record*, third series, II (December, 1858), 375; *Millennial Harbinger*, new series, III (December, 1839), 471.

⁴⁸ "Obituaries," *Christian Record*, IV (February, 1847), 256. In a letter to David B. Eller, August 10, 1979, Jason Rainey Adamson states that his grandmother, Louise Sears Adamson, a member of the White River church, never changed from her Dunker faith.

⁴⁹ Joseph Hostetler, "Feetwashing," *Christian Record*, IV (January, 1847), 205-208.

ever, undoubtedly viewed their involvement as a return to primitive Christianity without the narrow strictures of Dunker tradition. The Hostetler-Wright merger in 1827 was the first of many in Indiana, only indirectly influenced by Campbell, which over time became identified as the Disciples of Christ.⁵⁰

By 1839, when the Disciples held their first state convention in Indianapolis with Barton W. Stone as the featured speaker, the Dunker background congregations were in full cooperation. A partial census of participating congregations compiled at that time includes Lost River, White River, Olive Branch, and Bethel.⁵¹ The southern Indiana Brethren had become Disciple Christians.

⁵⁰ The Hostetler-Wright merger may well have been the first combination of different religious traditions in the Restoration movement. It took place five years prior to the 1832 agreement between Campbell and Stone to work cooperatively. Shaw, *Hoosier Disciples*, 49, suggests that, chronologically, the Brethren became churches of Christ (with Wright's group), then a New Light Conference (Christian), and finally, Disciples of Christ.

⁵¹ Francis W. Emmons, "Statistics of Indiana," *Millennial Harbinger*, new series, III (August, 1839), 345, see also 551. Lost River had a membership of one hundred with Joseph Hostetler, Christian Hostetler, and David S. Lewis as elders. White River had one hundred members, Abraham Kern and Alexander Kern, elders. Bethel's statistics, added somewhat later, credited that church with seventy members, Adam Sears, George H. Hon, and D[avid?] Fouts, "preaching Brethren." Olive Branch had ninety members in 1844. *Christian Record*, II (October, 1844), 94.