The Reformed Churches were those that followed the pattern of doctrine and church organization developed by John Calvin at Geneva in the French-speaking part of Switzerland. The Reformed Churches are sometimes called the universal branch of the Reformation. Calvin's influence and teaching spread into the German speaking part of Switzerland and attracted what remained of the reforms of Zwingli. The followers of Calvin and Zwingli became the Swiss Reformed Church. Calvin's reformation spread into France where it became the French Reformed Church called Huguenots. In spite of the fierce opposition of both Catholics and Lutherans the Calvinistic reformation spread into southern, central, southwestern and western Germany. The German Reformed Church finally gained recognition and the right to exist in the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. Calvinism spread into the Netherlands where the long wars with Spain finally resulted in the split into Belgium and Holland with Belgium being Catholic and Holland with the Dutch Reformed as the dominant and established religion. Close ties existed between German Reformed and Dutch Reformed Churches with both recognizing the close kinship between the Canons of Dort of 1619 and the Belgic Confession of 1561 of the Dutch and the Heidelberg Confession of 1563 of the Germans. The Reformed faith was represented in the British Isles by the Congregational and Presbyterian Churches of England and by the Presbyterian Churches of Scotland and Ireland.

The same economic and religious conditions that moved the other Germans to seek a new life in America also brought the German Reformed to the New World. In fact the Palatinate where the majority of the people and their ruler were German Reformed had suffered most in the wars of the Counter-Reformation and in the French invasions of Germany. Most of the German Reformed came as "redemptioners," indentured servants who had to spend a stipulated time serving to pay for their passage to America. When their period of servitude was over they were as poor as when they first arrived. They did not come as organized groups but as individuals who were sold for their passage. Once they were free they scattered in the villages and towns and into the wilderness. They had no ministry to lead them. In the old country they had been accustomed to churches and ministers controlled and supported by the government or by church authorities. In the New World they had to take religious matters into their own hands. Too many of the German Reformed neglected or lost their religion in their isolation in the wilderness. Often the ill-informed were preyed on by religious free-booters and unworthy clerics. They were proselyted by the more missionary sects. Many of the early congregations were the result of meetings held by zealous laymen—often in their own homes. The German Reformed swarmed into Pennsylvania between 1727 and 1745 without pastors or teachers. The bulk of the immigrants came from the Rhineland provinces with so many coming from the Palatinate that Palatinate became almost a synonym for Germany.

The first German Reformed ministers to settle in the colonies were Henry Hoeger who founded a congregation at New Bern, North Carolina, in 1710, and
Samuel Gulden, who arrived in Pennsylvania in the same year. Gulden came with his family as a farmer and not as a minister. He preached in homes, in barns, and in groves, but formed no congregations.

The first German Reformed church building was built in Germantown in 1719. Since the congregation had no minister the cornerstone was laid by a Swedish minister.

John Frederick Hager and John Jacob Oehl ministered in succession among the Palatines in the Hudson-Mohawk region in the first quarter of the 1700's. Paulus van Vleck, a Dutch Reformed minister, ministered to the German Reformed at Neshaminy in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania.

JOHN PHILIP BOEHM (1683-1749)
and GEORGE MICHAEL WEISS (1700-1770)

One of the early guiding spirits of the German Reformed in Pennsylvania was John Philip Boehm, a schoolteacher from Worms who came to America in 1720. Boehm was the son of a German Reformed minister at Frankfort-on-the-Main. He had taught school for twelve years before coming to Pennsylvania. He settled in Montgomery County and began farming. He soon gained a reputation for piety as he helped conduct informal religious services among the pastorless people when van Vleck could not minister to them. By 1725 three congregations had been gathered at Falckner's Swamp, Skippack, and White Marsh. The three congregations began begging Boehm to become their pastor—he had been serving them informally. He was reluctant to assume the office because he had not been ordained. He warned them that it would be a violation of the order of the Reformed Church for him to accept the pastorate. The congregations had no other prospects of securing a pastor and were unanimous in their choice of Boehm. Before the end of 1725 he gave in to their wishes and for two years faithfully and diligently served the three congregations and also preached in the outlying districts and baptized hundreds of children.

In 1727 Boehm's position as pastor of the three churches was challenged by George Michael Weiss. Weiss had been ordained in Heidelberg and had been sent to Pennsylvania by the Church of the Palatinate to found a Reformed Church in Philadelphia. Weiss was shocked and scandalized to find an unordained man serving as pastor. Weiss declared Boehm unfit to act as a pastor due to the lack of ordination, demanded his removal, and sought to take over Boehm's congregations. The members of the congregations rallied around Boehm and gave him full support. Boehm and his leading elder went to New York to confer with the Dutch Reformed ministers. They advised him to lay his case before the Classis of Amsterdam. The Classis declared that under the circumstances in America Boehm was justified in exercising ministerial functions but advised him to seek ordination immediately. Boehm was ordained by the Dutch ministers in New York on November 23, 1729. Weiss was present at the ordination. The ordination ended the opposition of Weiss and from that time Boehm and Weiss worked in complete harmony. Boehm sent a letter of gratitude to the Classis:

We could not receive this your letter without tears, because of our surprise and heart-thrilling joy, considering that the Reverend Classis had so graciously listened to the prayers of us poor people.

From this time the Classis of Amsterdam took great interest in the welfare of the German Reformed in America. Weiss took charge of the congregations at
Philadelphia and Germantown. Boehm kept the oversight of his three congregations and continued a fruitful ministry.

Before 1729 ended Weiss and Jacob Reiff, a wealthy German farmer and leading layman in the Skippack Church, returned to Europe to raise funds, to secure Bibles and to recruit ministers for the German Reformed in Pennsylvania. They made a strong appeal to the Classis of Amsterdam for support of the churches. They were quite successful in awakening great interest among the Dutch and the Germans. Weiss returned in 1731 bringing with him John Bartholomew Rieger, a physician who served churches in the neighborhood of Lancaster.

Weiss and Reiff secured both money and Bibles but the money became a source of great trouble. Reiff was accused of being dishonest in the handling of the money. After ten years of bickering the scandal was still embarrassing. Reiff insisted that the churches owed him a large sum instead of his owing money to the churches.

JOHN PETER MILLER

In 1730, John Peter Miller, a highly gifted young minister of high scholarly attainment, was sent to Pennsylvania by the Classis of Heidelberg, with special authority to administer the sacraments. He made a favorable impression on the Presbyterian Synod of Philadelphia and secured ordination from the Synod. He became pastor of the Reformed church at Tulpehocken and for four years worked with great success. During that time he had been attracted by Conrad Beissel and his Ephrata Society. Beissel visited Tulpehocken with the intention of trying to win the young minister. He succeeded. Miller was so impressed with Beissel that he resigned his pastorate and led his elders and most of the congregation into the Ephrata Society. After Beissel's death, Miller became the head of the monastic community, continuing as its head until his death in 1796. Miller exalted the mystical tendencies of Ephrata as contrasted with the doctrinally centered nature of the Reformed Church. His loss was a great blow to the Reformed.

GERMAN REFORMED FROM THE PALATINATE

In 1731 some eight hundred exiled Palatinites passed through Dort on their way to sail from Rotterdam to America. In a body they visited the Synod of South Holland. The Synod furnished the emigrants with supplies and medicine. After prayer and exhortation they sent them on their way with promise of more assistance. A committee of the Synods was set up to administer help to America. In 1732 the Palatinites sent back a report to the Reformed Synods of Holland:

We think there are altogether fifteen to sixteen thousand German Reformed in Pennsylvania, but these people live scattered over more than three hundred miles of territory, and there are no churches in the land. We have thus far only two regularly called ministers, and it is almost impossible to ascertain the actual number of members. The most of those who come here are compelled to sell themselves for their passage money, and also their children, who generally must serve until their twentieth year. Here in Philadelphia some 100 are in service of the English people, but they have the privilege to attend our service. Others in the country who have no opportunity for the exercise of the Reformed religion, resort to other sects, of which
there are a great number in the land, or they accustom themselves to live without religion....We have no candidates at all for the ministry, and only a few school teachers, because the people live so far from each other that they cannot send many children to one locality, wherefore the children must be allowed to grow up in the greatest ignorance....During the past year (1731) nearly 4,000 souls arrived in ten ships. By far the smaller number had any means, and the most of them had to be sold for their passage money.... When these people have served out their time, they are just as poor as when they first arrived, and it takes a long time until they contribute anything to the church.

SWISS GERMAN REFORMED

Between 1730 and 1736 there was a large migration of Swiss German Reformed. They settled largely in the region between the Delaware and Schuylkill rivers. John Henry Goetschius and Conrad Wirtz, two young Swiss Reformed pastors labored among these people and formed several congregations.

ZINZENDORF AND THE GERMAN REFORMED

When Zinzendorf arrived in Philadelphia he not only ministered to his Moravians but he also ministered to Lutheran and German Reformed congregations that had no pastor. Henry Antes, a German Reformed minister had already proposed a federative union of the German churches and had called the first of seven meetings or synods that met within six months in 1742 to consider such a union. During the first meeting in Germantown Zinzendorf stayed in the home of John Bechtel, minister of the German Reformed church at Germantown. After the fourth meeting all the German groups except the Moravians, the German Reformed and the Lutherans abandoned the meetings. After the first meeting Zinzendorf took the lead in the meetings. His attempt to form his "Church of God in the Spirit" brought a crisis in the German Reformed churches. For a time the friendly relations had existed between Lutherans, Reformed, and Moravians. Increasingly the Reformed and the Lutherans resented the domineering ways of Zinzendorf, his use of Moravian hymns and the lot. There was a growing fear that Zinzendorf intended to use the meetings to establish a union dominated by the Moravians. Among the German Reformed Boehm led the resistance to the unity movement and published a series of letters warning Germans against the Moravians. He sent letters to the Deputies of Holland. After the seventh synod the meetings were discontinued. The Lutherans sent Muhlenberg to block the unity plans of Zinzendorf and to rally the Lutherans to their cause. The Reformed also turned against Zinzendorf and went their own way. Boehm's letters not only warned against Zinzendorf but also gave an accurate picture of the condition of the Reformed churches. The numbers of the Reformed were growing but most of the new members were very poor. There was a great need for more ministers. Boehm himself had founded and organized thirteen German Reformed congregations--no other German Reformed Minister came close to his record. Bechtel who was sympathetic with Zinzendorf was dismissed from his congregation of the German Reformed in Germantown in 1744 and shortly thereafter he joined the Moravians.
A PROPOSED UNION OF DUTCH, GERMAN AND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCHES

Throughout the colonial period close relations existed between the Dutch and German Reformed churches and the Presbyterians. They all belonged to the Reformed movement of Calvin and there was great similarity in their credal statements, in their doctrine and organization. Fierce persecution had strengthened the ties. Again and again the German Reformed had been helped by the Dutch and the Presbyterians. In 1738 the Dutch Deputies appointed Peter H. Dorsius, a Dutch Reformed Minister in Bucks county to be their commissioner and inspector to aid the German churches. Five years later, in 1743, the synods of Holland, through Dorsius, proposed a union of the Dutch, German and Presbyterian churches in the colonies. The Presbyterians refused to consider the proposition. The German Reformed politely declined. Boehm in a letter to Holland (March 18, 1744) explained that the Germans did not understand the English language and that any divergence from the Heidelberg Catechism would be regarded as a defection from the true religion and would prove very harmful. He respectfully pled, "We trust that the reverend Christian Synods will not take it ill of us, that we humbly request to be permitted to abide by our Church order established from the beginning in our churches."

MICHAEL SCHLATTER (1716-1790)

Several German Reformed ministers came to America in the 1730's and 1740's but most of the people from the German Reformed Church had neither pastors nor churches. The numbers from Germany rapidly increased and there was also a great influx from the German speaking part of Switzerland. The Classis of Amsterdam continued appeals to the Synods of Holland for aid to the poor German Reformed who had scattered in the backcountry of most of the American colonies. The Synods sent money, Bibles, and medicines but only a few ministers.

The coming of Michael Schlatter in 1746 marked the beginning of a new period in the history of the German Reformed Church in America. Schlatter came as a representative of the Dutch Synods to minister to the Germans. He had been born in Saint Gall in Switzerland. He received his education in the universities of Switzerland and Holland. For a time he was a teacher in the Netherlands and there he was ordained. He served briefly as a pastor in Switzerland before he offered himself to the Dutch Synods as a missionary to the German Reformed in Pennsylvania. He was fluent in both Dutch and German. The Dutch Synods had assumed responsibility for the German Reformed congregations in America. They appointed Schlatter to be their representative in Pennsylvania to visit the churches, to form new congregations where they were needed, and to organize them into a "presbytery" or "coetus," subject to the Synods of Holland. He landed in Boston and three days later set out for New York and Philadelphia. In Philadelphia he discovered there were only four settled Reformed ministers in Pennsylvania trying to minister to some 15,000 members. At once he began a tour of the German settlements. He was shocked at the personal quarrels, name calling, and frightful accusations among the German Reformed. One of the first unpleasant things he had to deal with was to get the money contributed by the Dutch churches from the tight-fisted and dishonest Reiff. Reiff presented a report showing that instead of his owing the churches, they actually owed him a hundred gulden. Schlatter worked tirelessly to bring a better and happier spirit in the congregations.
With amazing energy he restored harmony and awakened and inspired new zeal in the sluggish congregations. He infused new life into the congregations at Germantown, Goshenhoppen, Lancaster and Tulpehocken.

On October 12, 1746 the Pastors Boehm, Weiss, and Rieger met with Schlatter at his request in Philadelphia to lay the groundwork for the establishment of the coetus (synod) that the Dutch Synods had proposed. On January 1, 1747 Schlatter was installed as pastor of the churches of Germantown and Philadelphia. He used this position to win commitments to cooperation in forming the coetus. On September 29, 1747 four ministers and twenty-seven elders representing twelve churches convened in Philadelphia. It was the first organizational gathering of the German Reformed Church in America. The new coetus adopted the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dort as the standards of the German Reformed Church in America. The task of the Coetus was to provide ministers for the congregations and to give general supervision. The Coetus was handicapped from the beginning. In the first place it did not include all the Reformed congregations in the colonies nor all the ministers. More important, it was not an autonomous body. The Dutch synods acting through the Classis of Amsterdam retained a veto power over all its acts. It did not have authority to ordain ministers. The need for ministers was great but always there was the delay of securing permission to ordain from Holland. The procedure proved quite awkward. From its creation in 1747 to 1775 the Coetus was joined by twenty-eight ministers; twelve were ordained by the Coetus and sixteen were sent to America from Holland. The German Reformed church continued to be plagued by a great shortage of ordained men and by the continual springing up of independent congregations led by unordained or discredit ministers.

Schlatter was tireless in his oversight of the Reformed churches travelling from northern New Jersey to the Great Valley of Virginia. In four years he travelled eight thousand miles and preached 635 times. In 1751 he estimated that in Pennsylvania there were 30,000 German Reformed members in fifty-three congregations served by only four settled, ordained ministers.

In 1751 the Coetus sent Schlatter back to Europe to clarify, improve, and solidify the organizational relationships with the Dutch Synods, to raise money, and to enlist ministers to serve the churches. In a short time he was able to raise 12,000 pounds for the American congregations, under the condition that the Coetus was to remain under the Classis of Amsterdam. Holland and West Friesland promised a subsidy of 2,000 gulden for five years. Schlatter was disappointed in not being able to find ministerial candidates in Holland nor at Heidelberg or at the Swiss universities. He turned to the little pietistic university at Herborn. There he secured six young men willing to accompany him back to America. One was Philip William Otterbein. He returned to America in 1752 with the six young men, with funds, and with 700 Bibles to be distributed free of charge.

Schlatter's vigorous leadership began to arouse suspicion and criticism that he was hungry for power. There was growing dissatisfaction with the way he divided the money from Holland. There were growing signs that reliance on money from Holland and the control exercised by the Dutch Synods was undermining the self-reliance of the American congregations. In 1753 Schlatter sought release from the Synods of Holland to devote his attention to education.
THE ENGLISH SOCIETY FOR THE PROMOTION OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD AMONG THE GERMANS

Before his trip to Europe Schlatter had prepared appeals for help to be circulated in both Dutch and German. An English minister in Philadelphia, David Thomson, translated Schlatter's appeal into English. The English appeal awakened great interest in the plight of the German Reformed. Some 20,000 pounds were raised in England to establish charity schools in Pennsylvania among the Germans. David Thomson took the lead in organizing the English "Society for the Promotion of the Knowledge of God" among the Germans. In 1755 Schlatter was invited to become the superintendent of the society's "charity schools." He accepted the invitation because of his great interest in education. The society's propaganda presented a caricature of the Germans in Pennsylvania that was considered most insulting by the Germans. Editorials by the German journalist, Christopher Saur, so greatly aroused German public opinion that the "charity schools" were doomed to failure. Schlatter reluctantly resigned. His usefulness was further curtailed. For two years he served as a military chaplain and then retired to private life. Schlatter's educational ideals were treasured and carried forward by his successors in the Reformed Church.

PHILIP WILLIAM OTTERBEIN (1726-1813) AND PIETISM AMONG THE GERMAN REFORMED

After the retirement of Schlatter the German Reformed Church was plagued by an extreme pietist wing known as "new lights." A radical pietism arose that minimized Reformed doctrine, disparaged the regularly constituted ministry and concern for church order, and emphasized an emotional conversion experience. Those caught up in this extreme pietism found Zinzendorf's proposals for unity more attractive and some were drawn to the various radical sects. The leader of this pietism among the German Reformed was Schlatter's most promising of the six recruits he brought back from Europe, Philip William Otterbein. He had been educated and ordained in Nassau under pietistic influence. From the beginning he had held strenuous views of the Christian life. He served several congregations in Pennsylvania and Maryland with distinction. In 1774 he was called to serve as pastor of the Second Reformed Church in Baltimore. This congregation had been formed by a group that had seceded from the First Church under the leadership of an enthusiastic lay leader. Otterbein accepted the pastorate. His pietistic tendencies grew and his doubts concerning Reformed dogmatics increased. He took a great interest in the new Methodist societies that were springing up. In 1784 he participated in the ordination of Francis Asbury as bishop of the Methodist Church in America. In 1800 Otterbein became the founder of a "New Reformed Church," the United Brethren in Christ.

AN INDEPENDENT GERMAN REFORMED CHURCH

The Coetus carried on its work after the retirement of Schlatter. In 1772 it began ordaining its own ministers. In 1791, a year after Schlatter's death, the Coetus in a friendly way declared its independence from the Dutch Synods. In 1793 in a meeting at Lancaster attended by thirteen ministers, a fully self-sufficient and independent synod of the German Reformed Church in America was formed. The German Reformed congregations had developed and
adopted a Presbyterian form of organization. The church consisted of about 13,000 active communicants and about 40,000 adherents. There were about 178 congregations scattered from New York City and Northern New Jersey, through Pennsylvania and Maryland, into the valley of Virginia. There were a few congregations and only one pastor beyond the Alleghenies. There was still a great shortage of ordained pastors.