

VLR- 7/14/95  
DRHP- 10/30/98

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Johnsville Meetinghouse  
other names/site number Johnsville Old German Baptist Meetinghouse, DHR # 80-122

2. Location

street & number 8860 Johnsville Church Road not for publication N/A  
city or town Catawba vicinity  
state Virginia code VA county Roanoke code 161 Zip 24070

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination      request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets      does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant      nationally      statewide X locally. (     See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

*Walter Kress* 9/26/98  
Signature of certifying official Date

Virginia Department of Historic Resources  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property      meets      does not meet the National Register criteria. (     See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting or other official Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register
- See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Keeper

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Action

U. S. Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

Johnsville Meetinghouse  
Catawba, Roanoke County, Virginia

**5. Classification**

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property (Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u>  1  </u>	<u>  2  </u> buildings
<u>  0  </u>	<u>  0  </u> sites
<u>  0  </u>	<u>  0  </u> structures
<u>  0  </u>	<u>  0  </u> objects
<u>  1  </u>	<u>  2  </u> Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register   

Name of related multiple property listing (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)   N/A  

**6. Function or Use**

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: RELIGION      Sub: Religious facility - meetinghouse

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: VACANT/NOT IN USE

**7. Description**

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Other

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation            stone             
 roof            metal             
 walls            wood           

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

See attached continuation sheet.

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria** (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations** (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or a grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance** (Enter categories from instructions)

Ethnic Heritage

Religion

**Period of Significance** 1840 - ~~1963~~ 1948

**Significant Dates** 1874  
1887

**Significant Person** (Complete if Criterion B is marked above) n/a

**Cultural Affiliation**

**Architect/Builder** John Holsinger

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)  
See attached continuation sheets.

U. S. Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

Johnsville Meetinghouse  
Catawba, Roanoke County, Virginia

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

**Previous documentation on file (NPS)**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary Location of Additional Data**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository: Virginia Department of Historic Resources

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of Property .847

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

Zone Easting Northing	Zone Easting Northing
1 17 566630 4129910	2 _____
3 _____	4 _____
<input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

See attached maps.

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

See attached continuation sheet.

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title: D. Darlene Richardson

Organization: Virginia Department of Historic Resources/Roanoke Regional Office date July 23, 1998

street & number: 1030 Penmar Avenue, SE telephone (540) 857-7585

city or town Roanoke state VA zip code 24013

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets**

**Maps**

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs**

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

NPS Form 10-900  
(Rev. 10-90)

U. S. Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

OMB No. 1024-4018

Johnsville Meetinghouse  
Catawba, Roanoke County, Virginia

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**Property Owner**

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(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Park A. Dodd, Jr.

street & number 33356 Richmond Turnpike telephone (804) 994-2279

city or town Hanover state VA zip code 23069-2211

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**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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**SUMMARY DESCRIPTION**

The Johnsville Meetinghouse is located in the picturesque rural Catawba Valley of Roanoke County, where German immigrants and members of a Tunker congregation settled nearly two hundred years ago. The meetinghouse and its non-contributing components, two privys, are situated on approximately 3/4 acres of gently rolling land near the north fork of the Roanoke River.

The Tunkers "were not known to have built any churches at all in Germany;" and even after formal organization of the first Tunker Church in America on December 25, 1723, nearly fifty years passed before their first meetinghouse was erected in 1770 in Germantown, Pennsylvania<sup>1</sup>.

The simple architecture of the Johnsville Meetinghouse reflects the beliefs and lifestyles of the religious order and congregation that erected it in the nineteenth century. Tunker doctrine dictated that meetinghouse design be "a long, low building. . . itself [not] a stately or imposing edifice. . . where the old churches are all pretty much of the same style of architecture; where neither inside nor outside was a dollar spent for any sort of ornamentation."<sup>2</sup>

The style of architecture was bare in its simplicity, and far removed from such vanities as spires, towers, stained windows, painted or cushioned pews, ornamental pulpits, or anything else which could not show the passport of indispensable utility.<sup>3</sup>

Church doctrine dictated design for meetinghouse interiors, as well:

The church has two entrances, one for the women and one for the men. At the ends of the roof facing the center are several rows of plain wooden seats, while those in front of the pulpit--which is located at the side of the room directly opposite the entrances--face the platform. An aisle running through the center divides the room into two parts, one of which is occupied by the men, the other by women. The ministers occupy the platform during the service, each taking a part . . . it included, also a kitchen department, for the purpose of preparing the food part of the Lord's Supper. . . <sup>4</sup>

The Johnsville Meetinghouse is similar to numerous churches and schools that were designed by John Holsinger, a Tunker architect from Pennsylvania, during the nineteenth century.<sup>5</sup> Although no plans or data were located that would deny or confirm the use of Holsinger's plans for this particular meetinghouse; its construction was obviously modeled on Holsingers' design. The

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Johnsville Meetinghouse survives in excellent condition and retains a high degree of historic character and integrity.

**Exterior**

The Johnsville Meetinghouse is a simple, one story, one room building with five bays and a partial basement. Set on a coursed stone foundation, the basement has a solid wood paneled door and one six-over-six window. The building's wooden frame is clad with painted, hand-planed clapboards. All windows are handmade and constructed of wood with double hung sashes and nine-over-nine panes held together with wooden pegs; even the glass is handmade as evidenced by distinctive wave patterns in the glass. The two entry doors are paneled and constructed of solid wood. The gable roof consists of standing seam sheet metal with two on-seam flues: one interior-end brick chimney from the basement fireplace and one on-seam metal flue at the center.

**Interior**

The Johnsville Meetinghouse is one large room with a high ceiling and unfinished wood plank floors. The walls are horizontal tongue-and-groove beaded wood with wooden plank wainscoting. Two paneled, solid wood doors are situated on the south side of the interior: one leads to a small storage area; the other provides access to a wooden stairway that leads to the kitchen area in the basement. Most of the hand-planed wooden pews face the rear of the building (front of the congregation) and are painted dark red. On the back rows there is evidence of children having etched their names and initials into the wooden pews. Wires still hang cross-wise across the room and are suspended by wires from the ceiling and stabilized by pieces of wood. The wires were used to hold the men's wide-brimmed hats during church services. A long wooden table at the rear of the church faces the congregational pews and was the seating location for the minister and deacons during services. A simple wooden table separates the ministers' area from the rest of the congregation. Two cast iron wood stoves are situated on separate ends of the room; stovepipe is suspended with wires and extends overhead across the room and attaches to the single metal flue at the center of the room. The room is lit by four suspended pendant fixtures with glass globes.

A kitchen and storage area are located in the solid coursed stone half-basement. A huge stone fireplace and hearth, used for cooking at special church events, is located on the south wall; the floors are solid rock, as well.

**Additions/Alterations**

Original lath and plaster walls were covered with beaded wood on walls and ceiling c. 1920; electricity and electrical wiring added for lighting purposes; metal guttering, and graveled area for parking; dates unknown. The old, leaky, metal, standing seam roof was replaced with a new, standing seam sheet metal roof in October 1997.

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**Secondary Associated Structures**

Two privys of modern, concrete block construction are situated on opposite sides at the south end of the lot. Each privy has a gable, metal standing seam roof, one solid wood doors, and solid seating with five cutouts--two of which are child-sized. According to oral tradition, the privys are believed to have been constructed c. 1950-1960.



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**8. Statement of Significance**

The Johnsville Meetinghouse is eligible for listing, locally, in the National Register under Criteria A for its association with the migration and settlement of German immigrants, especially German Baptist Tunkers, into the Valley of Virginia; under Criteria C for its culturally distinctive design by German Baptist Tunkers and for its construction entirely by local German Baptist settlers; and under Criteria Consideration A, as the meetinghouse was a doctrine-guided building that became a significant symbolic component of the Tunkers' religious beliefs, practices, and identity nationally, as well as in western Virginia and Roanoke County. The Johnsville Meetinghouse has remained in German Baptist ownership and is the only known frame meetinghouse in Roanoke County to stand essentially unaltered since its construction in 1874.

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**Historical Background and Significance** The entire history of the Johnsville Meetinghouse is deeply rooted in the history of German immigrants and the doctrine of a distinctive German religious sect known as the Tunkers. The Tunker Church was first organized in Schwarzenau, Germany near the Eder River in 1708 by Alexander Mack, a religious reformer. Germany's increased hostility to the newly formed religion inspired group members to seek sanctuary away from the Motherland and in the fall of 1719, Alexander Mack and twenty Tunker families embarked on a voyage to America.<sup>6</sup> In the history of America's settlement and growth by immigrants, the first German Baptist Tunkers arrived in America "two generations later than other Palatine German groups such as Mennonites, Lutherans, and the Reformed."<sup>7</sup> A predominance of the German immigrants sought settlement in Pennsylvania which was a religious haven and Quaker state established by William Penn. Dissension arose among church members during the transatlantic voyage and upon arrival in Philadelphia, the members dispersed; some remained in Philadelphia while others settled in Germantown, Shippack, Otey, and Conestoga.<sup>8</sup> The Tunker Church in America was formally organized and their first Love Feast was held in Germantown, Pennsylvania on December 25, 1723.<sup>9</sup> The Tunkers "were not known to have built any churches at all in Germany" and nearly fifty years passed before their first meetinghouse was erected in Germantown in 1770.<sup>10</sup>

Small congregations of Tunkers began to settle in the Shenandoah Valley as early as the 1720s. In southwest Virginia, the earliest groups of German immigrants from Ephrata, Pennsylvania settled near the New River between 1738-1740.<sup>11</sup> German settlement into the Valley of Virginia was facilitated by the Treaty of Lancaster, in 1744, an agreement between the English in Virginia and the Six Nations of Indians stipulating that the English could settle "as far as the mountains and no further."<sup>12</sup> Native Americans reportedly held respect for William Penn and "welcomed his German neighbor from the north."<sup>13</sup>

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Not until 1785--when Virginia's General Assembly adopted the Statue of Religious Freedom and Virginia became the first government in the world to establish and maintain separation between church and state--did an influx of German immigrants from Pennsylvania settle into Virginia. The Germans were more "inclined to locate in well-defined settlements;"<sup>14</sup> and in the 1780s, a "substantial colony of brethern formed the New Amsterdam [community] in Botetourt County."<sup>15</sup> Many members of the Johnsville congregation could trace their roots to the New Amsterdam congregation and its founding families in Botetourt Co.

During much of the eighteenth century, German Baptist settlement in Virginia occurred primarily in "two distinct areas. . . one in the upper Shenandoah Valley and the second in the south, in Franklin and Botetourt Counties. The two areas were separated by fifty miles--Rockbridge County--which was settled mostly by Scotch-Irish."<sup>16</sup> The earliest Tunker meetinghouse erected in Virginia was in 1822 in Rockingham County. Prior to that time, many congregations met in church members' homes or barns. In 1836, the main body of the Tunkers came to be known as "The Fraternity of German Baptists"; this was modified in 1871 when they became "the German Baptists."<sup>17</sup>

In Virginia, there was no need to construct meetinghouses to accomodate large congregations until the 1850s when the church began to advocate "a more effective missionary endeavor . . . to have the Truth more universally spread."<sup>18</sup> Beginning in the 1840s, approximately ten Tunker meetinghouses came to be constructed in Roanoke County during the nineteenth century.

Another preaching point of the Peters Creek congregation was established west of the Peters Creek meetinghouse in the Catawba Valley in the 1870s and became known as Johnsville. The earliest meetings were held in the barns of Peter Garman and John Brunk because they had floors in them. In 1874 the group of Brethern built a new meetinghouse on land given by Griffith John, for whom the meetinghouse was named.<sup>19</sup>

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According to Elder Jacob Grisso, senior elder of the Johnsville Church in 1908, the "brethren held meetings in their houses and barns when I was quite a little boy. The [Johnsville] church was organized about 1840, with twenty or twenty-five members. It was then known as the Montgomery congregation. Now [1908] we have a membership of sixty or seventy."<sup>20</sup>

The Johnsville Meetinghouse is similar to many nineteenth century meetinghouses that were designed by John Holsinger, a Tunker architect from Pennsylvania; please see Exhibit A.<sup>21</sup> According to interviews conducted of Johnsville congregation descendants, there is a consensus that the meetinghouse was built by the local congregation members.<sup>22</sup>

The Johnsville Meetinghouse was built seven years before the Tunker Church split into three separate churches in 1881-1882:

The ultra conservatives were the Old Order German Baptists; the conservatives retained identity as German Baptists but were expelled by the Old Order for being progressive; and the "true" progressives formed the Brethern Church.<sup>23</sup>

The separation meeting for the Johnsville church was held on June 18, 1883 when Elder Abraham Crumpacker, two ministers, two deacons, and thirty members of the congregation identified themselves as Old German Baptist Brethren.<sup>24</sup>

After reaffirming its longtime association and loyalty to the Old Order German Baptists, the Johnsville congregation continued to hold meetings at their meetinghouse. Three years later, in 1886, Griffith John died. Although Griffith John had donated the land to the church, he failed to convey legal ownership to the congregation in his lifetime. According to church doctrine, German Baptists did not go to law with one another and this included issues of real estate.<sup>25</sup> In 1887, Griffith John's son, John John--who was then county assessor for the Catawba District of Roanoke County--set out to remedy this error.

Of particular interest are the details of John John's deed of conveyance which reveals that two German Baptist congregations shared the same meetinghouse:

[Conveyance of the Johnsville Meetinghouse] to George Brunk, Allen Brillhart, and Jacob Grisso, trustees of the German Baptist (or Tunker) Brethern, composing the Johnsville congregation. . . and to Charles Wells, Sr., John S. Garman, and Mark Hix, trustees of the *Old Order* German Baptist (or Tunker)

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Brethern, composing the Johnsville congregation of the second part. . . dated  
January 15, 1887.<sup>26</sup>

The *Old Order* German Baptist trustees paid \$130 plus interest; the German Baptist trustees paid \$73.07 plus interest toward acquiring the meetinghouse. The deed was specific in acknowledging that “the parties of the second part [Old Order] are jointly and equally represented in this deed.”<sup>27</sup> This fact is historically significant given that the Tunker church had split up over core differences just five years prior. The two congregations shared use of the meetinghouse well into the twentieth century, when the German Baptist portion of the Johnsville congregation became associated with the Church of the Brethern.

In 1963, the German Baptists conveyed their interest in the Johnsville Meetinghouse back to the Old Order German Baptists, who retained ownership and made use of the church until the early 1990s. Several Old Order members have since passed away and the congregation has dwindled in size, nearing extinction. The Old Order trustees conveyed the Johnsville Meetinghouse to Park Dodd in 1997. Mr. Dodd is a descendant of German Baptists and is keenly interested in the building’s preservation.

The Johnsville Meetinghouse is one of only two known meetinghouses to survive virtually unaltered and in its original form. It maintains integrity of setting, architecture, and until recently, use. Johnsville Meetinghouse is the sole surviving structure still strongly associated with *Old Order* German Baptists in Roanoke County. As a beloved symbol of the region’s early history, Johnsville Meetinghouse stands much as it did one hundred and twenty-four years ago: a living legacy of the small religious order and congregations that helped to populate the Virginia frontier.

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Footnotes

1. Sappington, Roger E. *The Brethern in Virginia* (Harrisonburg, Virginia: Park View Press, 1973), p. 36.
2. Holsinger, H.R. *Holsinger's History of the TUNKERS and the Brethren Church* (Oakland, Ca.: Pacific Press Publishing Co., 1901), 243-4.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid, 195.
5. Holsinger, p. 365.
6. Ibid, p. 123.
7. Zigler, D.H. *A History of the Brethren in Virginia* (Elgin, Ill.: Brethren Publishing House, 1908), p. 33.
8. Holsinger, p. 123.
9. Bittinger, Emmert F. *Alleghany Passage: Churches and Families, West Marva District Church of the Brethren 1752-1990* (Camden, Maine: Penobscot Press, 1990), 11.
10. Sappington, p. 36.
11. Heavener, Rev. U.S.A. *German New River Settlement*. Private publication, n.d.
12. Kegley, Mary B. & F.B. *Early Adventurers on the Western Waters*, Volume I, p. 7-8.
13. Zigler, p. 37.
14. Heavener, p. 6.
15. Zigler, p. 40.
16. Ibid, p. 33.
17. Holsinger, p. 273.
18. Zigler, p. 65-66.
19. Sappington, p. 114-115.
20. Zigler, p. 161.
21. Holsinger, p. 365.
22. Interviews with David Brunk, Park Dodd, and R.J. Garman, Roanoke County, October 1997 -January 1998.
23. Holsinger, p. 275.
24. Interview with David Brunk, Roanoke County, January 1998.
25. Holsinger, p. 215.
26. Roanoke County Deed Book 7, Page 205. Roanoke County Circuit Court, Salem, Virginia.
27. Ibid.

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**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Bittinger, Emmert F. *Alleghany Passage: Churches and Families, West Marva District Church of the Brethren 1752-1990* (Camden, Maine: Penobscot Press, 1990).

Heavener, Rev. U.S.A. *German New River Settlement*. Private publication, n.d.

Holsinger, H.R. *Holsinger's History of the TUNKERS and the Brethren Church* (Oakland, Ca.: Pacific Press Publishing Co., 1901).

Interviews with David Brunk, Park Dodd, and R.J. Garman, Roanoke County, October 1997 - January 1998.

Kegley, Mary B. & F.B. *Early Adventurers on the Western Waters*, Volume I, p. 7-8.

Roanoke County Deed Book 7, Page 205. Roanoke County Circuit Court, Salem, Virginia.

Sappington, Roger E. *The Brethern in Virginia* (Harrisonburg, Virginia: Park View Press, 1973).

Zigler, D.H. *A History of the Brethren in Virginia* (Elgin, Ill.: Brethren Publishing House, 1908).

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**BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION**

Please refer to attached maps. *ROANOKE COUNTY TAX PARCEL: 30.00-1-30.*

**BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION**

The boundaries for the nominated property include the historic meetinghouse, graveled parking area, and two privys, according to a recent survey conducted when the property was conveyed from trustess of the Old German Baptist Church of Johnsville to the current owner, Mr. Park Dodd.

Johnsville  
Meetinghouse,  
Catawba,  
Roanoke Co, VA

UTM Coordinates:  
17/566630 E  
17/4129910 N

