

Bernese Anabaptist History: a short chronological outline (Jura infos in blue!)

1525ff	Throughout Europe: Emergence of various Anabaptist groups from a radical reformation context . Gradual diversification and development in different directions: Swiss Brethren (Switzerland, Germany, France, Austria), Hutterites (Moravia), Mennonites [Doopsgezinde] (Netherlands, Northern Germany), etc. First appearance of Anabaptists in Bern soon after 1525. Anabaptists emphasized increasingly: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freedom of choice concerning beliefs and church membership: Rejection of infant baptism, and practice of “believers baptism” (baptism upon confession of faith) • Founding of congregations independent of civil authority • Refusal to swear oaths and to do military service • “Fruits of repentance”—visible evidence of beliefs
1528	Coinciding with the establishment of the Reformation in Bern , a systematic persecution of Anabaptists begins, which leads to their flight and migration into rural areas. Immediate execution ordered for re-baptized Anabaptists who will not recant (Jan. 1528).
1529	First executions in Bern (Hans Seckler and Hans Treyer from Lausen [Basel] and Heini Seiler from Aarau)
1530	First execution of a native Bernese Anabaptist: Konrad Eichacher of Steffisburg.
1531	After a first official 3-day Disputation in Bern with reformed theologians, well-known and successful Anabaptist minister Hans Pfistermeyer recants. New mandate moderates punishment to banishment rather than immediate execution. An expelled person who returns faces first dunking, and if returning a second time, death by drowning .
1532	Anabaptist and Reformed theologians meet for several days in Zofingen : Second Disputation . Both sides declare a victory.
1533	Further temporary moderation of anti-Anabaptist measures: Anabaptists who keep quiet are tolerated, and even if they do not, they no longer face banishment, dunking or execution, but are imprisoned for life at their own expense. Shortly thereafter it is clarified that “quiet Anabaptists” (<i>stille Täufer</i>) will only be tolerated if they attend Reformed Church services and have their children baptized.
1534	New Reformation regulations require Anabaptists to be registered in lists.
1535	Renewed intensification of punishment measures: whoever refuses to swear to the 1534 regulations and stubbornly adheres to Anabaptist thinking will be banished and executed upon return: women by drowning, men by the sword; later, remorseful Anabaptists are allowed to use a recantation form (<i>Täuferbrief</i>) to avoid execution at the last hour.
1538	Many Anabaptists from the Emme River valley (<i>Emmental</i>), where the movement has become increasingly strong, participate in a third official disputation in Bern lasting several days. Further intensification of repression : Immediate execution of ministers (<i>Redliführer</i>), systematic use of torture and paid “Anabaptist hunters” (<i>Täuferjäger</i>), confiscation of Anabaptist property, etc. However, measures are not applied consistently and are eventually moderated in part.
1566	New Anabaptist mandate requires sworn affirmation of 1534 regulations at special meetings. Resisters must be reported and have three months to sell their property and leave the territory permanently (but Anabaptist leaders to be arrested immediately). Those who return shall be executed. Those who swear affirmation and become backsliders will be harshly punished (left to the judgment of the government, but always with confiscation of property). Anabaptist property is to benefit, among other things, the alms fund of the municipality concerned and to reward denouncers
1571	Last official execution of a Bernese Anabaptist: Hans Haslibacher from Sumiswald. About 30 executions of Bernese Anabaptists have been documented to date, although actual numbers might be higher. Over the centuries, many more Anabaptists fell victim to illness or exhaustion as a result of harsh prison sentences, while fleeing, or while serving as galley slaves—though none of these appear in any magistrate’s execution statistics.
1579	New Anabaptist mandate: Repeal of provision allowing Anabaptists to depart without punishment taking proceeds of their property with them. General confiscation of Anabaptist property. Pastors make lists of Anabaptists during mandatory annual home visits.
1585	New comprehensive Anabaptist mandate . Explicitly named among reasons for a renewed increase in Anabaptism are unsatisfactory conditions within the Reformed Church itself. Renewed intensification of measures against Anabaptists, though without apparent lasting success in hindering their growth.
1644	New comprehensive Anabaptist mandate renews and clarifies earlier measures.
1648ff	End of the 30-Year-War in Europe <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased immigration by Anabaptists from the Bern, Zürich, and Basel regions to Alsace (France) and Palatinate (Germany)—in part due to massive Dutch Mennonite support. • These new congregations begin over time to assimilate into their new, more tolerant surroundings. This development bears marks of biblical-theological, ecclesiastical and cultural openness, as well as a spiritual ebb and loss of Anabaptist identity. • Later Anabaptist immigrants and refugees from Switzerland are sometimes shocked at such developments among the brothers and sisters of their faith who arrived before them. They detect worrisome signs of spiritual decay against which they must be on guard. (Note later emergence of the Amish in 1693.)
1650ff	Growth in the number of Anabaptists and sympathizers (<i>Halbtäufer</i> i.e. “half-Anabaptists”) in the Bern region, especially after the defeat of the Peasants’ Revolt in 1653 , leads to increased repression by Bernese authorities.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bans on Anabaptist meetings and any sheltering of Anabaptists. Also arrests, heavy fines, expulsions, deportations, lifelong banishment, confiscation of property, and sentencing to the galleys. In spite of this, Anabaptism continues to grow, especially in the regions of Oberaargau, Emmental and the area around Thun/Oberland. <p>Explanations why parts of the local population from time to time demonstrated considerable sympathy toward the Anabaptists:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dissatisfaction with their own church conditions coupled with a yearning for spiritual renewal allow them, in the context of the Early Pietism movement (1680ff), to view Anabaptism from a more favorable perspective. Others consider solidarity with and advocacy for the Anabaptists primarily as a means to counter an unpopular, aristocratic-urban authority whose thirst for power is extending noticeably even into rural areas.
1659ff	<p>To combat the continued growth in local Anabaptism, Bern creates a special commission called the “Delegates for Anabaptist Affairs” (<i>Committierten zum Täufer-Geschäft</i>, later called the <i>Täufer-Kammer</i> or “Anabaptist Chamber”).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> New extensive Anabaptist mandates (1659, 1670f, 1693). Numerous petitions on behalf of the Bernese Anabaptists come from the Netherlands—from Mennonites, representatives of the Dutch Reformed church and the government. These vex and unsettle Bernese authorities.
1669	<p>Bernese government issues a secret directive for the recruitment of informers and “Anabaptist-hunters” (<i>Täuferjäger</i>), including a bounty for each captured Anabaptist.</p>
1671	<p>According to a new mandate, every Bernese village with resident Anabaptists must bear the costs of sending respected inhabitants to Bern as “hostages” until the Anabaptists have been captured.</p> <p>As a result expulsion and flight of some 700 Bernese Anabaptists to the Palatinate, which had a tolerance law since 1664. Dutch Mennonites provide generous financial and logistical help.</p>
1693	<p>The Pietist-minded pastor from Lützelflüh, Georg Thormann, publishes a moderately anti-Anabaptist writing, “Touchstone of Anabaptism” (<i>Proberstein des Täufertums</i>) to warn Reformed sympathizers about the dangers of converting to Anabaptism and to encourage active involvement in their own church.</p>
1693	<p>Self-critical report by the Bernese clergy, including complaint from pastors that can hardly say anything critical about the Anabaptists because “almost everyone is so well-disposed towards them, that nobody wants to listen if we preach against them”.</p>
1693ff	<p>Amish-Reist Schism</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Anabaptist elder Jakob Amman (born 1644, from Erlenbach in the Simme valley (<i>Simmental</i>), later lived in Oberhofen on the Lake of Thun and, since approx. 1680, a resident in Alsace) makes a pastoral tour through Swiss Anabaptist congregations in 1693 to promote a return to more consistent practice of faith and congregational discipline. This results in serious differences of opinion (especially with elder Hans Reist), which during a meeting in <i>Emmental</i> in the summer of 1693 led to a rupture and schism within Swiss Anabaptism, and soon thereafter also within related groups in Alsace and southern Germany.
1698ff	<p>Amish leaders admit their own guilt and mistakes (acting all too hastily and without consultation), however, their attempts at reconciliation are rejected by non-Amish Anabaptist leaders.</p>
1699	<p>Bern wants to deport native Anabaptists to the East Indies.</p>
1699	<p>Great Bern Pietist Trial: Results in expulsion of several radical Bernese Pietists, including Samuel König.</p>
1710	<p>Over 50 Bernese Anabaptists deported and sent down the Rhine River. Once they cross the Dutch border they are released by authorities.</p>
1711	<p>Bernese authorities grant a temporary “amnesty” due to massive pressure from the Netherlands:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anabaptists may depart without punishment within a certain time period, and are permitted to take their possessions, but lose citizenship (<i>Heimatrecht</i>). Mass exodus of about 350 Anabaptists (Amish and non-Amish) on four ships down the Aare and Rhine River, primarily towards the Netherlands. <p>Due to similarity of beliefs with those in the Netherlands the Anabaptists of Swiss heritage are sometimes called <i>Mennists</i> or <i>Mennoniten</i>.</p>
1712	<p>Expulsion of Anabaptists from Alsace by edict of French King Louis XIV creates fear among Bernese authorities that Anabaptists will return: The stream of Bernese Anabaptist migration now heads towards the Jura mountains in the Bishopric of Basel (well into the 19th century), and the regions of Neuchâtel and Montbéliard, later increasingly to North America (Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Ont.).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the following decades essentially all Amish Anabaptists (primarily from Thun and Oberland) leave the Bern area. A number of Non-Amish Anabaptists remain, primarily in the Emmental or seek refuge in the Jura: But what was intended as a temporary refuge, becomes a permanent establishment. <p>Conditions of settlement defined by the governing Bishop of Basel for the Jura mountains:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not in the villages (in the valley) but in the highlands (at about 1000m altitude) - no proselytism (mission) - no land can be acquired (only cultivated on lease)

	- immediate departure when told to leave
1715ff	<p>Increasing complaints from the local French-speaking population in the Jura (Bishopric of Basel):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The land taxes which Anabaptists paid, were said to be too high 2. Anabaptists did not invest much in agriculture, thus reducing the amount to be tithed 3. Anabaptists were taking away residential area 4. The cattle of Anabaptist farmers was consuming too much and was liable to spreading infections 5. Anabaptists were a bad example (eg. because they held secret nightly meetings, refused to do military service etc.) 7. Shortage of firewood due to the production of cheese by Anabaptist farmers <p>The bishop is in a dilemma: on one hand economic profit because of high Anabaptist working morale, on the other hand these complaints from the locals against economic competition and against the religious non-conformist attitude of the Anabaptists.</p> <p>1730 : First official expulsion order from the bishop</p> <p>Church services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - At the beginning in the woods, in gorges ("Bridge of the Anabaptists" near Corgémont, engraved date 1633) and caves ("Geisskirchlein" / chapel of the goats near Souboz, 1779), later in private homes. - Gradual formation of different congregations in the Jura: Bänderichgraben (Péry), Sonnenberg (Mont Soleil), Münsterberg and Kleintal (Montagne de Moutier / Petit Val), Tscheiwo and Gräteli (Chaluet / Graiter), Muntschro (Mont Girod near Court), La Chaux-D'Abel, but also at Bucheggberg near Solothurn including the southern slopes of the Weissenstein mountain range). <p>Church life</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - High priority of Bible reading and congregational singing. Growing authority of elders. - Relief Fund for the poor ("Armengut" - progressive social security) - Spiritual counselling and material aid of fellow-believers under pressure in the Emmental (through visits from Jura elders) - Private schools (eg. in Jeangui, La Pâturatte, Moron, Fürstenberg etc.) - Annual meetings for elders, preachers and deacons in Talvogne near Sonceboz - Interaction with the congregations in Palatinate and Alsace (conflict resolution, early revivalistic meetings [1750ff Moravian influence?])
1718	New, strict Anabaptist mandate (already in 1714, 5 Bernese Anabaptists were again sent to the galleys in Sicily).
1719	Founding of new schools and parishes to combat Anabaptism in Trub, Langnau, Lützelflüh, Sumiswald, etc. (This occurred earlier in Eggiwil [1631], Schwarzenegg [1693] and Heimiswil [1704])
1743	<i>Täuferkammer</i> dissolved. (See 1659)
1750ff	Continual uncertainty in legal affairs leads both in the Emmental and in the Bishopric to continually more emigration - to the Montbéliard-Belfort area, Alsace-Lorraine, German territories, Basel, in the 19 th century mainly to North America. Key challenge: To Stay or to Leave? Theological selection : Often emigrants are those who are not or less ready to compromise – leaving behind a theological vacuum At the same time: Increasing sympathy for Anabaptism from influential pietists and enlightenment circles
1798f	Collapse of "old" Bern. Constitution of new Helvetic Republic provides freedom of religion and conscience and a tolerance law, which lifts all „penal laws of previous governments against religious persuasions and sects.“
1810ff	Power of restorational tendencies grows leading to fresh repression of Anabaptism: Administration of mandatory baptisms in Langnau; plans for a special "Anabaptist Law" (<i>Täuferordnung</i>), including dress requirements for Anabaptists (1816).
1815	At Congress of Vienna , canton of Bern annexes Jura territories formerly belonging to the bishopric of Basel, dashing hopes of Anabaptists from the original part of the canton that they might enjoy the alleviation of restrictions recently enjoyed in Jura. Anabaptist fear of renewed repression, agricultural crisis and famine (1816ff) lead to extensive emigration (e.g. founding of the Sonnenberg congregation in Ohio, 1819/21ff, named after a Swiss congregation) Continual weakening of the Emmental congregation due to emigration necessitates that Jura elders provide intermittent supervision. Nevertheless, the Emmental congregation experiences growth through transfers from the State Church. (In the Emmental there is more and earlier participation in local religious renewal movements than in the Jura!) Cf. Various waves of Revivalism / "Réveil" 1815ff
1820	A new law legally recognizes births and marriages that have taken place in Anabaptist congregations: factual recognition of Anabaptists as a religious organization. However, this was limited to those already on membership lists in 1820: proselytizing was forbidden (1823). Considerable growth in Emmental congregation after the decree of 1820 (and in the context of a contemporary revival movement) stokes the apprehensions of authorities.
1832ff	Emergence of "New Anabaptist" (Neutäufer) congregations due to work of Samuel H. Fröhlich, combined in the region of Bern with influences of the Anabaptist and revival movements. Today they are known as "Evangelical Anabaptist Congregations" (Evang. Täufer-Gemeinden [ETG]). 1835 schism in Emmental "Old Anabaptist" (Alttäufer) congregation. After 1840 the movement spreads beyond Switzerland, Alsace and southern Germany to Eastern Europe and North America. (In the USA they are called the Apostolic Christian Church) and develops after 1860 into an increasingly "closed" fellowship.
1835ff	Continuing disagreements regarding the question of military service (among "Old" and "New Anabaptists").

1848ff	Switzerland evolves from a federation of states into a federal state: same rights and duties for all! Obligatory military service , also for Anabaptists: theoretically starting in 1848 but not enforced until 1874. Once again, many emigrate, especially from the Bernese Jura .
1862ff	Itinerant ministry by South German Mennonites: regular visits to Switzerland. Increasing influence of holiness movement . (Chrischona!)
1874	Institution of universal mandatory military service: Motivates a final group exodus of Swiss Anabaptists to North America.
1880ff	Discussion of domestic and foreign missions: Commissioning of the first overseas missionaries : Rodolphe and Maria (Gerber) Petter to work among the Cheyenne Indians in Oklahoma, 1890.
1882ff	Founding of "Zion's Pilgrim" (Zionspilger), weekly publication of the "Conference of Old Evangelical Baptism-minded Congregations" (<i>Konferenz der Altevangelischen Taufgesinnten-Gemeinden</i>) (edited at Langnau)
1890ff	Spiritual vacuum is followed by new growth from revival movements, though at times deficient in understanding traditional emphases and concerns—at times calcified—of earlier Anabaptists. Bernese Anabaptists build their first meetinghouses : Cernil (1883) , Langnau-Kehr (1888), Jeangui (1900) , Moron (1892) , etc. (in Basel, already 1847)
1895	Publication of Reformed Pastor Ernst Müller's (Langnau) "History of Bernese Anabaptists" (<i>Geschichte der bernischen Täufer</i>) sets new standards for a fairer historical treatment of Anabaptism.
1905	<i>Internal division within the "New Anabaptists" (Neutäufer) among the "Tolerant" (Vertragsamen) and the "Intolerant" (Unvertragsamen). (These latter, today in Bärau, Münsingen, Busswil etc..)</i>
1906ff	Tendencies of perfectionism in some Jura Mennonite circles – in the context of the challenge of pentecostal movements
1914ff	Due to questions related to private schools and use of German language, Anabaptist congregations in Jura become entangled in
1940ff	struggles surrounding the formation of a new independent French-speaking canton of Jura . (1963—cases of arson on Anabaptist farms)
1929ff	Economic crisis : Interwoven financial guarantees among Anabaptists cause financial ruin for many. Many farms are sold.
1937	"Old Anabaptist" (<i>Alttäufer</i>) congregation in Emmental revises its confession of faith : reconciliatory tone in relation to the State Church. General abandonment of requirement for re-baptism and absence of an article on non-resistance lead to hefty critique within conference.
1938	First Swiss-wide Mennonite Youth Day (Jugendtag) held at Les Mottes in the Jura, later in Tramelan, with over 1000 participants at times!
1941ff	Discussion regarding mandatory church tax for the "Old Anabaptists" (<i>Alttäufer</i>) in Emmental. Rejected in 1941 by Church Director Dürrenmatt, approved by an official Reformed opinion in 1946, then rejected again in 1947. As a result, the Synodal Council declares Anabaptist church activity to be "consonant with that of the State Church". The Reformed periodical "Sower" (<i>Sämann</i>) reports "Former differences have disappeared" and declarations of blessing and goodwill are offered.
1945ff	After the second World War more and more members begin leaving hamlets and isolated farms in the mountains to seek education and work in the valleys, in villages and cities. This geographic and sociological transition is also reflected in congregational and theological processes of change (for example the increasing cooperation with other churches ["Swiss Evangelical Alliance" (<i>Allianz</i>) and "Verband Evangelischer Freikirchen und Gemeinden in der Schweiz – VFG Freikirchen": Influence of mainstream evangelicalism ; "Arbeitsgemeinschaft Christlicher Kirchen" (ACK): Ecumenical links etc.], in Jura the gradual language shift from German to French even in worship services, greater openness to allowing men and women to perform all church functions, etc.) Founding of the European Mennonite Bible School in Basel/Liestal (later " Bienenberg Theological Seminary " and now "Bildungszentrum Bienenberg") in cooperation with North American Mennonites (1950ff); influence of the North Americans' "Rediscovery of the Anabaptist Vision" . Important influences from contacts with Mennonites worldwide at World Conferences (since 1925), exchange programs (trainees), charity and development projects, peace and justice issues etc.
1974ff	Mennonites and the "Evangelical Anabaptists Congregations" (<i>Evangelische Täufer-Gemeinden [ETG]</i>) begin to meet regularly for consultation and cooperation – sometimes together with Baptists in the context of "Täufertreffen"
1975ff	Numerous further signs of closer cooperation (including explicit "steps of reconciliation") between Reformed and Mennonites in Bern, in Switzerland and worldwide: For example the statement (<i>Gutachten</i>) of the Bern Synod Council (1975); first Mennonite certified to offer formal catechetical instruction in the Bern State Church (1980); memorial church services in Zürich (1983; 2004), Bern (1988, 2005, 2009); Schwarzenegg 1993 etc.; dialogues at worldwide and national level 1983ff—regional dialogues had begun earlier; interdenominational "reconciliation meetings" (Winterthur 2003 and others). Cf. also the "Täuferjahr2007".
2018	Current Mennonite congregations in the cantons of Bern and Jura (formerly Bern) totaling approximately 2300 members are: Bern, Langnau, Biel-Brügg, Sonnenberg ; Moron-Kleintal , Bassecourt/Vallée de Delémont , Vallon de St. Imier , Tavannes , La Chaux-d'Abel and Courgenay (Ajoie) . [Additional congregations in La Chaux-de-Fonds, Basel, Muttenz] Of the 1.7 million members of Mennonite congregations worldwide, perhaps 150,000 have roots in Bern. Current "Evangelical Anabaptists Congregations" (<i>Evangelische Täufer-Gemeinden [ETG]</i>) in the cantons of Bern and Jura: Langnau-Giebel, Bern, Diessbach, Chaindon; [1984—ETG Federation (<i>Bund ETG</i>) founded by approximately 30 congregations in Switzerland and Germany with about 2300 members]