

12. Henry Niemann, interview by Michael Corley, South Jordan, UT, October 31, 2008.
13. Maria Kreutner Niemann, "An Evening with Maria" (unpublished speech, 1988), transcribed by JoAnn P. Knowles, private collection.
14. Gertrud Frank Menssen, autobiography (unpublished), private collection.
15. Gerd Fricke, interview by the author in German, Hamburg, Germany, August 15, 2006; unless otherwise noted, summarized in English by Judith Sartowski.
16. Lieselotte Pruess Schmidt, interview by the author, Salt Lake City, December 1, 2006.
17. Harald Fricke, autobiography (unpublished, 2003), private collection.
18. Anna Marie Haase Frank, interview by the author, Salt Lake City, October 27, 2006.
19. Irma Brey Glas, interview by Michael Corley, Taylorsville, UT, October 10, 2008.
20. Inge Laabs Vieregge, telephone interview with Jennifer Heckmann in Germany, October 2008.
21. Werner Sommerfeld, interview by the author, Salt Lake City, January 19, 2007.
22. Resa (Theresa) Guertler Frey, interview by Michael Corley, Salt Lake City, March 14, 2008.
23. Fred Zwick, interview by the author, Salt Lake City, June 29, 2007.
24. Otto Berndt, autobiography.
25. Altona Branch general minutes, 93–96, CHL LR 10603 11. From Brother Witt's apartment in Wilhelmsburg to Altona (approximately six miles as the crow flies), his route on that occasion was certainly not direct.
26. Otto Albert Berndt, "The Life and Times of Otto Albert Berndt" (unpublished autobiography), private collection.

ALTONA BRANCH

A suburb on the western outskirts of the metropolis of Hamburg, Altona has existed for centuries. Legend has it that the name means "all too close (to Hamburg)" (*all zu nah* or *al to na* in the local dialect). The Altona Branch was one of three in Germany's largest port city.

The Saints in Altona met in rented rooms at Kleine Westerstrasse 37.¹ They enjoyed the use of a pump organ there, but no other details regarding the rooms and furnishings are available at this writing. Sunday School began at 10:00 a.m., as it

did almost everywhere in Germany, with sacrament meeting at 7:00 p.m. The MIA met on Wednesdays at 7:30 p.m., and the Relief Society met on Mondays at the same hour. When the war began, there was no Primary organization in the Altona Branch.

Following the departure of the American missionaries on August 25, 1939, the branch president in Altona was Wilhelm Stelzig. The branch was relatively strong, with ten elders and twenty holders of the Aaronic Priesthood, but was dominated (like so many branches in Germany) by adult females (57 percent). The average attendance at Sunday meetings during the last months of that year was thirty-five members and friends.

Altona Branch ²	1939
Elders	10
Priests	5
Teachers	1
Deacons	14
Other Adult Males	38
Adult Females	113
Male Children	8
Female Children	10
<i>Total</i>	199

Significant changes were made in the Altona Branch soon after the war began. On November 12, 1939, the sacrament meeting was moved to a time immediately following Sunday School. The reason for this change was not given in the branch records, but the same change had been made in other branches because blackout regulations had made it difficult for the members to get home safely after the late sacrament meeting.³ While the meetings were held consecutively, the sacrament was to be administered only during the Sunday School meeting.

According to the manuscript history of the branch, the members continued to tell friends about the gospel during the war. For example, on

Sunday, March 17, 1940, five persons were baptized. Five weeks later, the following comment was written: “Civil defense problems were discussed in the priesthood meeting.” The question was not whether to continue to hold meetings, but how to do so under blackout conditions and other restrictions.⁴

In the branch conference held on September 8, 1940, President Stelzig reported that the number of tithe payers in the branch had increased from thirty-six to forty-two in the previous twelve months.⁵

Excellent minutes were kept of the worship services and other meetings in the branch, although it is not clear who the clerk was during the war. He recorded the names of the priesthood holders who conducted the meetings and administered the sacrament, as well as all speakers and those who prayed. He also noted the names of the hymns sung and numbers of persons who attended (priesthood holders, women, children, and friends). According to his records, attendance at branch meetings declined somewhat during 1940 and 1941 but hovered above twenty-five through 1942.

Hundreds of thousands of adults from occupied countries were transported to Germany to work in factories after German workers were drafted into the Wehrmacht. Among those were now and then members of the Church from the Netherlands. According to the branch history, “Elder Jan Copier, President of the YMMIA of the Netherlands Mission from Utrecht, visited the branch. He told the Saints, ‘When we do the will of our Heavenly Father, we can expect salvation.’”⁶ Allowing Brother Copier to attend and participate in meetings could have caused difficulty for the Altona Saints because such fraternization with foreigners—not formally a crime—was not condoned in Germany at the time.

In February 1943, the St. Georg Branch in downtown Hamburg was evicted from its spacious and beautiful rooms at Besenbinderhof 13a. This was a tragic loss, but the Altona Branch was quick to take in as many Church members as it could. Given the destruction of major portions of the Hamburg city center, it was not at all easy for the St. Georg

Saints to make their way to Altona. During the air raids and firestorms of July 1943, the building in which the Barmbek Branch met was also destroyed, and they too were invited to go to Altona. With the members of all three Hamburg branches invited to attend, there were still only about fifty persons participating in Sunday meetings.

Trials and blessings occurred during the war just as they did during peacetime. For example, the branch history includes this report under the date July 4, 1943: “Sister Ingeborg Suppan had suddenly lost her sight. She received a priesthood blessing on June 28 and reported today the complete restoration of her sight.”⁷

District president Otto Berndt presided over a meeting on August 29, 1943, and for all practical purposes united the three Hamburg branches into one. According to the meeting minutes, there were fifty persons present. Hugo Witt recalled, “At the conclusion of the meeting, we all knelt to pray for our soldiers.”⁸

The following events are reported in the branch general minutes for the final fifteen months of the war:

March 26, 1944: district conference in our rooms.

April 9, 1944: meetings canceled due to air-raid alarms.

Summer 1944: For several weeks, our rooms were confiscated by the NSDAP and used as a collection point for sewing materials. Therefore we could not hold meetings.

December 10, 1944: Advent program held with 66 attendees.⁹

Many meetings held during this period ended with a prayer for the LDS men in the German military, with all members on their knees.

With all three branches meeting in the Altona rooms, it must have been a great trial for the Saints in Hamburg when the rooms were temporarily confiscated by the city government to be used as a collection point of a rag drive in late November 1943.¹⁰

Fortunately, the interruption appears to have lasted only a week or two. The same action was taken again in June 1944.¹¹

The records of the Altona Branch Relief Society include the following statement at the close of 1944: "We can describe the general condition of the society as excellent. All registered sisters are 100% active. The activity of the visiting teachers has had to be neglected due to the prevailing difficulties. The sisters live too far from each other and public transportation is impossible."¹² The records show an average attendance of twenty sisters at the meetings that year. As in other branches throughout Germany, the sisters in Altona continued to carry out their duties, often in the absence of their husbands. The challenges became more daunting with each new day.

On January 28, 1945, Herbert Baarz became the new branch president. The status of his predecessor is unclear.¹³ The attendance at meetings had increased to seventy or eighty persons. This may seem to be a small number comprising members of the three Hamburg branches, but by that time, several hundred local Latter-day Saints had been killed, were serving in the military, or had left town with their children to find safer places to live.

The meetings of the Altona Branch were canceled on Sunday, April 8, 1945, due to air raid alarms. The next three Sundays were a time of great uncertainty as the British army approached and invaded the city of Hamburg. The following comments were made by the branch clerk:

April 15, 22 and 29: I was not able to attend when English troops invaded the area and prevented me from going to Hamburg [from Wilhelmsburg]. In the last major air raid over Hamburg, our one remaining meeting house at Klein Westernstrasse 37 was severely damaged so that meetings could not be held there until August 25. From April to August, meetings were held in the homes of members with an average attendance of seventy persons.¹⁴

The terror of the war had ended in this huge city, but many other problems remained or emerged out

of the rubble of the once-proud Elbe River port. The city was in ruins, transportation and utilities out of order, food and water supplies interrupted. With housing at an all-time low, it was terribly difficult to find places to live or materials to repair the meeting rooms of the Altona Branch. According to the branch general minutes, the first sacrament meeting held in the repaired rooms at Kleine Westerstrasse 37 took place on August 25, 1945, when eighty-nine members and friends assembled for the first time in months.¹⁵ A week later, an American soldier, Col. Clarence Nesley, located the meeting place. As a missionary before the war, he had once served as the district president in Hamburg. While his feelings on that occasion were likely very sad, his visit did indeed herald a time when the Saints would enjoy the communion with Saints from other lands and a connection with the Church leadership in faraway Salt Lake City.

In the summer of 1945, the Altona Branch was alive and well. Members strewn all over Europe began to return, and LDS refugees from the East German Mission would soon swell their ranks. Though damaged, the meetinghouse still stood, and the Saints began to meet and rebuild their branch with dedication.

IN MEMORIAM

The following members of the Altona Branch did not survive World War II:

Karl Friedrich Ferdinand Sennewald Bornholdt b. Hamburg 24 Mar 1865; son of Detlef Bornholdt and Telsche Sass; bp. 6 Sep 1931; conf. 6 Sep 1931; m. 29 Aug 1891, Anna Franziska Schlueter; bur. 25 May 1941 (CHL MS 10603, 8; FS)

Herbert Hermann Hans Moritz Kahl b. Lichtenwerda, Sachsen, 17 Mar 1915; son of Hermann Kahl and Martha Meta Barichs; bp. 30 Sep 1927; lieutenant; d. 14 Jan 1943; bur. Cassino, Italy (www.volksbund.de; FHL microfilm 271376, 1930 and 1935 censuses)

Kurt Heinz Kahl b. Lichtenwerda, Sachsen, 28 Jan 1917; son of Hermann Kahl and Martha Meta Barichs; bp. 30 Sep 1927; d. 28 Dec 1943; bur. Cassino, Italy (www.volksbund.de; FHL microfilm 271376, 1930 and 1935 censuses)

Metta Katarina Lassen b. Süder Ballig, Hadersleben, Schleswig-Holstein, 16 Mar 1863; dau. of Thomas Lassen and Margarethe Schmidt; bp. 18 Jan 1931; conf. 18 Jan 1931; m. 12 May 1895, Hans Lorenzen; d. heart attack 27 Feb 1942 (CHL CR 275 8 2438, no. 982)

Erich Richard Lehmann b. Cottbus, Cottbus, Brandenburg, 1 Dec 1913; son of Friedrich Wilhelm Lehmann and Marie Konzack; m. Hamburg 19 Oct 1940, Charlotte or Liselotte Holert; d. 15 Jul 1944 (IGI)

Ernst Günther Meyer b. Westerland, Schleswig-Holstein, 27 Oct 1910; son of Tony Elfrieda Kayser or Kaiser; bp. 16 Apr 1920; conf. 16 Apr 1920; d. Hamburg 4 August 1941 (CHL 10603, 118; FHL microfilm 245232, 1930 and 1935 censuses; FS)

Heinrich Friedrich Peter Hermann Palm b. Ochtmissen, Lüneburg, Hannover, 24 Dec 1874; son of Karl Friedrich Gotthard Palm and Catharine Dorothee Margarethe Albers; bp. 23 Aug 1928; ord. teacher; d. 20 or 21 Jan 1943 (FHL microfilm 245250, 1930 and 1935 censuses; IGI, FS, CHL MS 10603, 81)

Sophie Marie Sellmann b. Stassfurt, Neuendorf, Kloster, Sachsen, 10 Aug 1861; dau. of Gottfried Martin Peter Sellmann and Wilhelmine Henriette Balzer; bp. 6 Sep 1931; conf. 6 Sep 1931; m. Neuendorf, Magdeburg, Sachsen, 22 Jul 1883, Carl Eduard Schulze; bur. Altona, Hamburg, 1941 or 1942 or 1943 (FHL microfilm 245260, 1935 census; CHL MS 10603, 114; FS)

Anna Franziska Schlüter b. Neumünster, Schleswig-Holstein, 11 Nov 1867; dau. of Karsten Schlueter and Elise Behrens; bp. 6 Sep 1931; conf. 6 Sep 1931; m. Altona, Schleswig-Holstein, 29 Aug 1891, Karl Friedrich Ferdinand Sennewald Bornholdt; d. Altona 25 May 1942; bur. 29 May 1942 (CHL MS 10603, 54; FS)

Kurt Fritz Wegener b. Hamburg 11 Mar 1918; son of Carl Friedrich Wegener and Amanda Dohrn; bp. 28 Jan 1930; conf. 28 Jan 1930; ord. deacon 4 Jan 1932; k. in battle 16 Aug 1942 (CHL CR 275 8 2438, no. 898)

NOTES

1. West German Mission branch directory, 1939, CHL LR 10045 11.
2. Presiding Bishopric, "Financial, Statistical, and Historical Reports of Wards, Stakes, and Missions, 1884–1955," 257, CR 4 12.
3. Altona Branch manuscript history, CHL LR 10603, 2.
4. Ibid.
5. Altona Branch historical notes, CHL A 2998 240.
6. Ibid., CHL A 2999 56.
7. Ibid., CHL A 2999 92–93
8. Altona Branch general minutes, 96, CHL LR 10603, 11.
9. Ibid., 113–21.
10. Altona Branch historical notes, CHL A 2999 103.

11. Ibid., A 2999 113, 115.

12. Altona Branch Relief Society minutes, CHL LR 10603, 14.

13. Altona Branch historical notes, CHL A 2999 124.

14. Ibid., 132.

15. Ibid., 133.

BARMBEK BRANCH

The metropolis of Hamburg was Germany's second-largest city in 1939 with 1,711,877 people. The northeastern districts of the harbor city comprised the Barmbek Branch of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (one of three LDS branches in that city). With 178 total members (twenty-six of whom held the priesthood), this was a solid branch.

As the war approached in the late summer of 1939, the Barmbek Branch was under the leadership of Alfred Schmidt, a worker in a cigarette factory in Barmbek. His counselors were Friedrich Mahler and Jonni Schacht. All leadership positions in the branch were filled at the time, with the exception of the Primary organization. Sunday School took place at 10:00 a.m. and sacrament meeting at 7:00 p.m. The Relief Society met on Mondays at 7:30 p.m. and the MIA on Wednesdays at the same time.¹

The meetings of the Barmbek Branch were held in rented rooms at Dehnhaide 141. That street was located near the southwest border of the branch territory, toward the center of Hamburg. Waltraud (Wally) Möhrke (born 1919) recalled this about the meeting rooms: "We had a small Hinterhaus behind a carpentry shop. There was a large room for sacrament meetings and smaller rooms for the various classes."²

Irmgard Schmidt (born 1923) described the church rooms in these words:

We had to walk up steps at the side of the carpentry shop. When we were there during the week, we could hear the woodworking machines running. At the top of the stairs, you were looking straight into the main meeting room where there