
BRAUNSCHWEIG BRANCH

A city of cultural and political importance for centuries, Braunschweig was also home to a branch of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 1939. There were officially seventy-one Saints registered when World War II approached, but only nine were priesthood holders, and the official list of branch officers bears but one name: Willi Wille (district president) as the acting branch president.

| Braunschweig Branch ¹ | 1939 |
|----------------------------------|------|
| Elders | 2 |
| Priests | 3 |
| Teachers | 0 |
| Deacons | 4 |
| Other Adult Males | 13 |
| Adult Females | 39 |
| Male Children | 6 |
| Female Children | 4 |
| <i>Total</i> | 71 |

The directory of the West German Mission indicates that a home worship service was held each Sunday at 10:30 a.m. at Gördelingerstrasse 18 (third floor).² It is not known precisely who lived at that address (presumably a member of the Church), and no eyewitnesses from the branch can be found as of this writing.

IN MEMORIAM

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

Gustav Braun b. Schneiderin, Gerdauen, Ostpreußen, 9 Sep 1865; son of Gottfried Braun and Louise Groneberg; bp. 19 Aug 1924; conf. 19 Aug 1924; ord. deacon 21 Jun 1925; ord. teacher 11 Aug 1926; ord. priest 29 Apr 1928; ord. elder 24 Oct 1937; m. Amalie Wilhelmine Holzstein 26 Dec 1898; d. Braunschweig 11 Jan 1945. (FHL microfilm 68809, no. 4; IGI)

Elizabeth Glorius b. Lenterode, Heiligenstadt, Sachsen, 27 Dec 1882; dau. of Fieligg Glorius and Elizabeth Müller; bp. 26 Jul 1921; conf. 26 Jul 1921; d. pulmonary tuberculosis 15 Feb 1943 (FHL microfilm 68809, no. 24; IGI)

Paul Albert Gottlieb Janitschke b. Nowawes, Teltow, Brandenburg, 3 May 1869; son of Heinrich Janitschke and Emilie Bertholt; bp. 11 Aug 1928; conf. 11 Aug 1928; ord. deacon 11 Nov 1928; m. Antone Knebel 21 Jul 1917; d. dropsy 24 Jul 1943 (FHL microfilm 68809, no. 30)

Elli Lotz b. Braunschweig, 19 May 1919; dau. of Sophie Berta Sprenger; adopted by Conrad Lotz; bp. 26 Jun 1930; conf. 26 Jun 1930; m. Walter Veit 28 Mar 1939; d. childbed fever 4 Sep 1939 (FHL microfilm 68809, no. 39)

Anna Wilhelmine Wagner b. Steinkunzendorf, Reichenbach, Schlesien, 16 Aug 1866; dau. of August Wagner and Johanne Christiane Neumann; bp. 4 Aug 1914; conf. 4 Aug 1914; d. 5 Jun 1941 (FHL Microfilm 68809, no. 32)

NOTES

1. Presiding Bishopric, "Financial, Statistical, and Historical Reports of Wards, Stakes, and Missions, 1884–1955," 257, CHL CR 4 12.
2. West German Mission manuscript history, CHL MS 1004 2.

CELLE BRANCH

Located twenty-two miles northeast of the city of Hanover, Celle was a beautiful and historic Lower Saxon city in 1939. The branch of the Church there was one of the smallest in the West German Mission and for years consisted of one family and a few friends.

Branch president Hermann Walter Pohlsander (born 1897) was a dedicated member of the Church, as apparently were the members of his immediate family, namely his wife, Bertha, his

daughters, Ingrid and Alheit (Heiti), and his sons, Hans-Achim and Herm-Gerdt. In accordance with the practice in the West German Mission, Brother Pohlsander kept careful minutes of all meetings, which of course were held in the family home at Mühlenstrasse 11a in Celle. The minutes indicate that Brother Pohlsander conducted each meeting and blessed the sacrament. Hans-Achim passed the sacrament, and Heiti played the pump organ. The parents alternated in giving the lessons, and prayers were given by various family members. The minutes also indicate the numbers of the hymns sung during those meetings. The names of members of the Ross family (refugees from the Schneidemühl Branch of the East German Mission) appear beginning in 1940. The branch president also wrote the names of all visitors from other branches, the district, and the mission. These visitors brought joy and variety to the Sunday activities of these isolated Saints.

| Celle Branch¹ | 1939 |
|---------------------------------|-------------|
| Elders | 1 |
| Priests | 1 |
| Teachers | 0 |
| Deacons | 0 |
| Other Adult Males | 2 |
| Adult Females | 7 |
| Male Children | 3 |
| Female Children | 1 |
| <i>Total</i> | 15 |

In October 1939, Hermann Walter Pohlsander was called to be a counselor to Willi Wille, the president of the Hanover District. He was set apart by mission supervisor Friedrich Biehl on November 5, 1939. The calling required him to travel frequently and at times attend conferences in cities well beyond the boundaries of the district. Even on such Sundays, he dutifully noted in his minutes why no services were held in his home in Celle.

“We held the meetings of the Church in our home in the Mühlenstraße 11a,” recalled Hans Achim Pohlsander (born 1927).² “It was located in the city center. We lived on the second floor while the landlord lived on the ground floor. We had a pump organ in our living room, but we didn’t hear any complaints from the neighbors about the noise.” Hans recalled that the landlord was the local Nazi Party leader and worked in the same office as Hans’s father, but the two men kept out of each other’s way when it came to politics.

Hans’s sister Ingrid (born 1923) recalled moving the furniture around every Sunday to accommodate the branch members, most of whom were members of her family. The branch population actually increased during the war, as she explained: “Members from eastern Germany came as refugees and met with us.”³

Regarding the possibility of disturbing the neighbors with their singing, Ingrid said: “They didn’t seem to mind, even when we played the pump organ. And we children never made noise anyway. My father was a very stern, strict man. He demanded obedience. Often, he wouldn’t have to look at us or say anything—we got the message. If we misbehaved, he would take us up into the attic. But that was [the typical German father] at the time—strict obedience and strict punishment.”



Fig. 1. The Pohlsander family of Celle. From left: Heiti, Bertha, Hans-Achim, Herm-Gerdt, Hermann Walter, Ingrid. (I. Pohlsander Perkins)

In Ingrid's recollection, the branch meetings were very simple: her father presided and conducted and blessed the sacrament, which her brother Hans passed to those present. The family met in private each Sunday evening as well. "Then my father would teach us the gospel," she explained. "My basic knowledge of the gospel came from those meetings."

Hans recalled the following about the attendees at church meetings in his home:

Our family attended the meetings, and a few other individuals joined us. I also remember a Sister Schütte who came from Bremen. She came to live in Celle to escape the air raids on her city. She was single. We got to give talks quite regularly and we participated actively in all the meetings. Richard Müller from Danzig was a soldier in an officer training course. Toward the end of the war he became a POW of the British and was released and stayed with us for a little while until he could find better accommodations.

President Pohlsander also recorded comments on events, such as the invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939.⁴ On the same page, he wrote of the visit of Elder Joseph Fielding Smith and mission president M. Douglas Wood with their wives in Hanover on August 24. One of the saddest reports was the illness and death of young Herm-Gerdt (born 1933). His father made this entry on February 20, 1940:

After four physicians and two healing practitioners failed, and despite repeated blessings and the fasting and prayers of his parents, his brothers and sisters and other members of the Church, all hopes of a recovery vanished. I gave him a blessing this afternoon, February 20, 1940, that our Father in Heaven would allow him a peaceful death. And so, our dear, good little Herm-Gerdt peacefully passed away this evening at 8 p.m. after [months of] serious suffering and struggling.⁵

Finding a place to bury the little boy was a challenge because the local cemetery belonged to the Lutheran Church. Brother Pohlsander was fortunate to be granted permission to bury Herm-Gerdt

next to a grandmother and a great-grandmother in the cemetery in Celle-Neuenhausen. Members of the Hanover Branch joined the Celle Saints in celebrating the boy's short life.⁶

The general minutes include the following items of interest in the Celle Branch during the first few years of the war:

June 16, 1940: Alheit Elsabein Pohlsander was baptized in a public bath in Hanover.⁷

August 9, 1940: Johannes Kaufmann and Gertrude Ross were married.

September 29, 1940: Philipp Lühning returned to activity in the Church after six years.

March 23, 1941: a bomb landed in the street in front of the Pohlsander home; no damage was done.

November 9, 1941: Fritz Todebusch of Dortmund visited the meeting.

May 24, 1942: mission supervisor Christian Heck visited the branch. [He came again on April 26, 1943.]

December 19, 1943: Albert Gahn was baptized in the bathhouse in Celle.



Fig. 2. The home of the Hermann Walter Pohlsander family at Mühlenstrasse 11a in Celle. The living room that was used for church meetings was on the second floor to the left. The girls' bedroom was the top window. (I. Pohlsander Perkins)

At the close of 1942, Brother Pohlsander added this comment to the minutes of the meetings:

The old year is now ending. All of the difficulties we faced when the year began have been resolved and many of the wishes and hopes we had then have since been fulfilled. May all of the Saints master the year 1943 and may the blessing of our Father in Heaven be with all of us and may His kingdom come with power!⁸

Young Hans Pohlsander had been a member of the Jungvolk since the age of ten and was advanced into the Hitler Youth at age fourteen. He remained associated with the group until the last month of the war. The activities were not particularly exciting, but at least they did not interfere with church meetings. For a young man in such a small group of Saints, church meetings held in other towns were especially interesting, as he recalled:

During the war, we went to district conferences in Hanover. They were usually held in a school building, which I can't recall exactly. The district conferences were nice occasions to get together. On several occasions, I went with my father when he visited branches of the district. I went with him to Goslar on at least one occasion and Braunschweig also. The meeting facility was bombed out in Braunschweig. I knew Walter Horn and his family from Goslar.

Ingrid also recalled the district conferences—including the time when she and Heiti were asked to speak. Despite that nerve-racking experience, “We always had a great time at district conferences,” explained Ingrid. “It was an adventure, but I didn't really get to know the youth of other branches very well because we were [geographically] isolated.”

The two sisters were fortunate to avoid involvement with the League of German Maidens. Ingrid explained that because their family was so large, she and Heiti were justified in staying home to help their mother, who likewise was not required to leave the home for employment. According to Ingrid, Brother Pohlsander made a comfortable living as an accountant for the city. The family enjoyed indoor plumbing and a small water heater that facilitated the Saturday evening bath. “We enjoyed a very nice lifestyle.”

The landlord, Herr Hornbostel, lived with his family on the ground floor. Also a city employee but a member of the Nazi Party, he differed significantly from Brother Pohlsander on political questions, recalled Ingrid.

But they kept out of each other's way. I don't know how my father avoided the pressure of joining the party. At least twice, he was called in by the Gestapo and questioned [about the Church], but nothing came of it. He and my mother would discuss political issues of the day with us children, but we knew we could not repeat outside what was said in our home. When we joined the Hornbostels in the basement during air raids, we had to be very careful not to criticize the government.

Regarding the activities of youth during the war, Ingrid recalled:

Whenever we wanted to do something fun, we would go to the park and feed the ducks. It wasn't a time to have fun or to attend parties—it was a time to stay alive. I didn't go on any dates during the war. We were the only Mormons in the city, and I didn't want to date other people, not even other Christians. I didn't even wonder if my father would approve of it, because it never came to that.

Hans finished his public schooling at the age of fourteen and was accepted into a secondary school (a Gymnasium). This was a great privilege but came to an end prematurely due to the war. By the fall of 1944, Hans was one of only three remaining students who had not yet been drafted. The school then shut down, and the three remaining students were assigned to work in local businesses to replace workers away at war. “I was an office errand boy in a factory,” recalled Hans.

Enemy air raids did not harass the old city of Celle until the end of the war, as Hans recalled. He and his family did not have access to a concrete bunker when the sirens sounded; thus they took refuge in their basement. “But we didn't feel very safe there,” Hans said. Alarms were a common occurrence, but the only real attack Hans could recall

occurred on about April 4, 1945. It was a devastating attack and took the lives of a family in the Celle Branch. The Kaufmanns had married during the war and had a little boy by 1945. All three were killed in that attack.

President Pohlsander made this entry in the branch minutes:

April 4, 1945: It was Sunday and the sun shone brightly when suddenly, the air raid sirens began to wail around town. A few minutes later, the bombers appeared over Celle. During this terrifying attack—that cannot be described in words—many people were killed and a great deal of property was destroyed. Our dear Kaufmann family was killed in a brutal fashion, namely Sister Gertrud Kaufmann nee Ross, her husband Hermann Kaufmann and their little boy, Tilo, who had celebrated his first birthday just the day before. The funeral took place on the morning of Monday, April 16 [*sic*], 1945, at the forest cemetery. At three p.m., Hermann Walter Pohlsander dedicated the graves. . . . May the earthly remains of this dear Kaufmann family rest in peace until their resurrection.⁹



Fig. 3. These old structures on the Stechbahn in Celle survived the war. (R. Minert, 1979)

One of the ongoing mysteries of World War II is the question of who was aware of the atrocities committed in concentration camps within Germany. The question of what went on there bothered some Latter-day Saints as well. Hans Pohlsander recalled this unforgettable experience:

We recognized that there was something going on in Bergen-Belsen [twelve miles northwest of Celle] very late in the war. They also had a POW camp for Russian soldiers close by, and we knew that they were terribly mistreated. They died of starvation and illness, and we knew that. I didn't see working parties from that camp, but I think my father encountered that. Only later did we find out about the concentration camp. . . . In that [April 4] air raid, another terrible thing happened. In the train yards, there was a train load of concentration camp prisoners on their way to the camp in Bergen-Belsen. In the course of the air raid, they escaped from their train, which resulted in many of them being killed in the air raid. The survivors were hunted down that evening by the police and the SS. Thousands of them were killed. It was a great tragedy. I think I saw two or three [bodies] of the prisoners who were killed.¹⁰

Some of the last war-time entries made by President Pohlsander in the branch minutes are these:

December 3, 1944: Soldier Richard Müller of the Danzig Branch [East German Mission] visited us today [the first of several visits].

February 4, 1945: Elfriede Bauer, a refugee from Schneidemühl, gave her testimony. Her mother is with her.

March 30, 1945: The branch president visited refugees from the Breslau Branch [East German Mission] living in nearby Wietze.¹¹

Just as the Third Reich was crumbling in every regard, the country called upon young Hans Pohlsander; he was drafted into the home guard—a force consisting of old men and boys. Fortunately, his military service lasted barely one month and was uneventful, as he explained:

Two days after the air raid [of April 4], my unit of the Volkssturm left Celle, and for the next four weeks or so, we were constantly withdrawing, always a few miles ahead of the British advance. When Germany capitulated on May 8, we were simply dismissed and told it was over. They told us to find a way home on our own. That happened in northern Germany, near Stade. I was

picked up by a British military patrol and taken to a POW collection point, and once I was there a British officer came around and asked, "Is there anyone around here claiming to be a civilian?" I did. I had already discarded my uniform and was wearing civilian clothing. I was physically underdeveloped and didn't look my age. I showed him my military ID, which didn't have an entry in it after I had been called up. The officer released me. It took me another two weeks to get home because I had to walk back to Celle.

When Hans arrived at home, he found that his family had been spared tragedy and were in good health. They had taken refuge on a farm near the village of Garssen (two miles north of Celle) just after the bombing of April 4 and were still there when the British invaders entered Celle. In May, the Pohlsanders returned to Celle. They were very happy to find that their home had survived the bombing undamaged and that Brother Pohlsander's treasures had not been discovered: he had buried boxes full of genealogical documents in the backyard, determined to safeguard his collection from enemy soldiers on the lookout for valuables of all kinds.

On the farm, Ingrid saw British soldiers for the first time. She recalled hearing on the radio that the enemy should be feared and resisted, and her family did not even hang out white sheets. What appeared to be black soldiers turned out to be white soldiers with black paint on their faces, she recalled. The soldiers took up quarters in the Hornbostel home, but soon left, complaining that the home was too small for their needs. Ingrid had studied English in a secondary school and was thus able to converse with them on a basic level. "They took my brother's electric train and my sister's pretty doll, but other than that, they didn't destroy anything." While the soldiers were in the home, the family lived with another family in the laundry room at the back of the building.

It is unfortunate that even this small group of Saints could not live through the war without frightful tragedies. Nevertheless, the Pohlsanders, the other surviving Celle Branch members, and

the refugees from the East German Mission (whose numbers increased throughout the summer of 1945) looked forward to a new life free of tyranny.

IN MEMORIAM

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

Johannes Ludwig Kaufmann b. Bischhofshagen, Westfalen, 30 Jun 1912; son of Julius Karl Kaufmann and Anna Marie Gross; m. Celle, Hannover, 9 Aug 1940, Gertrud Margarete Ross; 1 child; k. air raid Celle 4 Apr 1945 (IGI)

Thilo Kaufmann b. Celle, Hannover, 7 Apr 1944; son of Johannes Ludwig Kaufmann and Gertrud Margarethe Ross; k. air raid Celle 4 Apr 1945 (FHL microfilm 68809, no. 32; IGI)

Hermann Gerdt Jan Pohlsander b. Celle, Hannover, 4 Jul 1933; son of Hermann Heinrich Walther Pohlsander and Bertha W. D. S. Schöneberg; d. lymphatic leukemia 20 Feb 1940; bur. Celle-Neuhausen 24 Apr 1945 (FHL microfilm 68809, no. 24; IGI)

Gertrud Margarete Ross b. Schneidemühl, Posen, 20 Sep 1917; dau. of Adolf Wilhelm Ross and Wilhelmine Marie Anna Klingenhagen; bp. 27 Feb 1927; m. Celle, Hannover, 9 Aug 1940, Johannes Ludwig Kaufmann; 1 child; k. air raid Celle 4 Apr 1945 (FHL microfilm 68809, no. 27; IGI)

NOTES

1. Presiding Bishopric, "Financial, Statistical, and Historical Reports of Wards, Stakes, and Missions, 1884–1955," 257, CHL CR 4 12.
2. Hans Pohlsander, telephone interview by the author, December 2, 2009.
3. Ingrid Pohlsander Perkins, interview by the author, Payson, UT, January 20, 2010.
4. Celle Branch general minutes, 149, CHL LR 1519 11.
5. Brother Pohlsander did not identify the illness that took the life of this child, but he said that Herm-Gerdt's red blood cell count was "one million rather than more than 5,000,000." It was likely leukemia. Celle Branch general minutes, 154.
6. Celle Branch general minutes, 156.
7. The entries cited were taken from the Celle Branch general minutes, 160, 162, 164, 168, 175, 181 (also 188), and 193.
8. *Ibid.*, 185.
9. *Ibid.*, 205.
10. The concentration camp Bergen-Belsen is probably best known as the place where Anne Frank died in 1945.
11. Celle Branch general minutes, 201–3.