

By the end of the war, the auxiliary organizations were no longer holding meetings during the week, but the two Sunday meetings continued to take place, as Rolf Richter later wrote in his branch history. Relief Society, Primary, and MIA began anew in the summer of 1945.

IN MEMORIAM

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

Rudolf Karl Hintz b. 23 Apr 1925; d. wounds 1945 (I. Hampel Kupitz)

Minna Karchner k. air raid Aschersleben, Sachsen 1944 or 1945 (I. Hampel Kupitz)

NOTES

1. Presiding Bishopric, "Financial, Statistical, and Historical Reports of Wards, Stakes, and Missions, 1884–1955," CR 4 12, 257.
2. Irene Hampel Kupitz, interview by the author, Taylorsville, Utah, March 3, 2006.
3. Rolf Richter, "Geschichte der Gemeinde Aschersleben" (unpublished history); private collection; trans. the author.
4. Rolf Richter, interview by the author in German, Aschersleben, Germany, May 31, 2007; summarized in English by Judith Sartowski.
5. Angelika Adam, "Seit Zehn Jahren Ehrenbürger," *Ascherslebener Zeitung*, April 16, 2005.
6. Ibid.

DESSAU BRANCH

Famous as the birthplace of the Bauhaus school of architecture, the city of Dessau is located in the old province of Saxony-Anhalt and was the capital city. In 1939, there were approximately seventy thousand people living in Dessau, about thirty-six miles north of Leipzig.

The East German Mission history contains a single entry regarding the small branch in Dessau, dated May 15, 1938: Walter Gerstner

was appointed president of the Dessau Branch, with Franz Ackermann as first counselor.¹

The directory of meetinghouse addresses for the mission indicated in late 1938 that the Dessau Branch held meetings at Georgenstrasse 11A.

Dessau Branch ²	1939
Elders	2
Priests	1
Teachers	2
Deacons	5
Other Adult Males	8
Adult Females	25
Male Children	2
Female Children	4
<i>Total</i>	49

A native of Plauen and a member of the Latter-day Saint branch there, Irmgard Fassmann came to Dessau in 1941 as a new office employee at the Junkers Aircraft Company factory. She looked for the branch and only found it when she hummed a Church hymn melody while riding the bus and thereby came to the attention of Brother Gerstner.³

Irmgard was surprised to see only about a dozen members at the meetings. She later wrote this description of the members in Dessau:

The church was just three rooms, and they were located at the back of an older building. The members were mostly older people, but at least we had three priesthood holders, Bro. Gerstner, Bro. Ackermann, and Bro. Quente. Gerstners was [*sic*] a very nice family with three little children. Bro. Quente was here as a visiting soldier, and Bro. Ackermann was a native. Soon after I came there all three men were sent to war.

Franz Ackermann was ordained a teacher in the Aaronic Priesthood in 1938. He entered the service of the Reich and was in uniform for the duration of the war. His service was outstanding, and he was promoted to first lieutenant by January 1945.

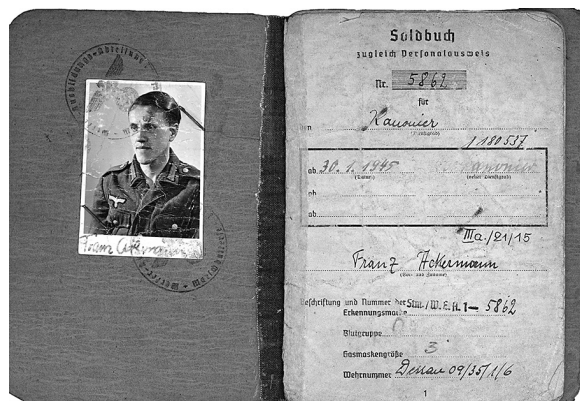


Fig. 1. Franz Ackermann's military service record. (G. Ackermann)

Irmgard Fassmann was likely a welcome addition to the Dessau Branch. While Franz Ackermann was still at home, the two went to the meetinghouse on Saturdays and cleaned the rooms, brought in firewood, and generally kept things in good shape for Sundays. Irmgard had many assignments, including Sunday School superintendent, chorister, Sunday School teacher, and speaker in sacrament meeting.

At the Junkers Aircraft Company, Irmgard became acquainted with a nice young man named Heiner Pakendorf. He wanted to marry her, but she made it clear that membership in the Church was a requirement for marriage. He began to study the gospel, and they became engaged and planned to marry during his next furlough. Tragically, Heiner was killed in Ukraine before the couple had that chance.

Irmgard also met Gaby Feurich at the office, and the two became inseparable friends. Eventually, Gaby learned about Irmgard's faith and was converted to the Church. Irmgard had waited for several months to invite Gaby to church "because there were just a few of us. I wanted to take Gaby one day with me to a [district] conference in Leipzig." Apparently, Gaby was not concerned about the small number of Saints in the Dessau Branch.

The Junkers factory attracted the attention of the Allied air forces and local residents began



Fig. 2. Franz Ackermann's physical description from his military record. (G. Ackermann)

to spend significant amounts of time in air-raid shelters as of about 1943. Irmgard found her lifestyle drastically changed and learned to dread the sirens. One evening, she and Gaby were at the Gerstner home for MIA when the sirens sounded. Before they even reached the basement shelter, they heard the airplanes and the bombs. They prayed, waited, and heard the all-clear siren two hours later. She later described the night:

What [Gaby and I] saw was so awful. The whole city was burning. . . . We couldn't go home [through] the streets, we had to go far around the city. . . . It was just burning everywhere, it looked so sad. It took us three hours to get to the house I lived in. There the neighbors' house was burning and flames leapt toward the house where I had my room. We both ran upstairs to my room on the third floor, the house was full of smoke, so we put scarves on our faces, . . . grabbed some clothes and a few items, and

ran out again. . . . Gaby's apartment was still all right.

The Junkers factory was severely damaged, but operations were moved into temporary facilities in a nearby forest and production continued through the remainder of the war.

In order to replace the clothing and other household items she had lost, Irmgard took the train home to Plauen. She arrived just in time to experience a terrifying air raid there as well. Along with her parents, she was trapped in a bomb shelter for several hours, because the door was covered with rubble.

According to Max Gerstner Jr., the meeting rooms of the Dessau Branch at Georgenstrasse 11A were destroyed in the spring of 1945—either in air raids or by the American artillery.⁴

When we came out, we saw many dead people on the streets—many houses were burned and exploded. What a terrible sight. When we came to my parents' house only half of the house was still standing, the other half was gone. I looked up to the second floor where we lived, and there was the coat rack with my father's Sunday suit hanging, and his golden pocket watch on a golden chain was hanging down. I [could] still see it there in the hallway.

Back in Dessau, Irmgard experienced the entry of the American army. Just after the war ended, she took a bicycle and started for home. Hoping to avoid having her bicycle stolen, she let the air out of the tires and pushed it all the way to Zwickau, nearly 130 miles due south. She left Monday morning and arrived there safely on Friday. She was next escorted home to Plauen by her uncle, district president Walter Fassmann of Zwickau, along with President Sellner of the Plauen Branch.

Apparently the French authorities felt it very important to determine the political leanings of their POWs. This is evident from the case of Franz Ackermann, as reflected in

CORRESPONDANCE DES PRISONNIERS DE GUERRE

LETTRE RÉPONSE
Rückantwortbrief

Au prisonnier de guerre : Franz Ackermann
An den Kriegsgefangenen

N° Matricule : 1180537
Gefangenenummer

N° du Dépôt : 44
Lager nummer

Désignation du Dépôt : Amboise
Lager-Bezeichnung

FRANCE (FRANKREICH)

FRANCO DE PORT
Gebührenfrei

EXPÉDITEUR - ABSENDER :

Nom et Prénoms :

N° et Adresse :

Landesteil, Provinz, u.s. w. :

Arrondissement :

Rue :

Ort :

Domicile :

Fig. 3. Franz Ackermann wrote this letter to his wife from a French POW camp. (G. Ackermann)

the letters written to him in captivity by his brother, Walter, back in Dessau. For example, on April 22, 1946, Walter wrote the following:

In the third letter you will receive the proof that you were an anti-fascist, i.e., an opponent of the Hitler [Nazi] Party. After all, you constantly gave money to the support of the underground. I visited the SED [Socialist Unity] party offices again today in order to get the papers. Those papers must first be examined by the SED. Then I will send them to you and you must have the camp commandant look at them.⁵

It is not known whether the papers were sent or whether they were used by Franz

Ackermann to secure an early release from the French POW camp.

IN MEMORIAM

Only one member of the Dessau Branch did not survive World War II:

Marie Charlotte Weise b. 28 Oct 1868; dau. of Karl Weise and Louise Berger; m. — Fleischer; d. 12 Jun 1942 (CHL CR 375 8 #2459, 1388–89)

NOTES

1. East German Mission Quarterly Reports, 1938, no. 20, East German Mission History.
2. Presiding Bishopric, "Financial, Statistical, and Historical Reports of Wards, Stakes, and Missions, 1884–1955," CR 4 12, 257.
3. Irmgard Fassmann Messina Schwarz, autobiography (unpublished), 9; private collection.
4. Max Gerstner, telephone interview with the author, June 3, 2006.
5. Walter Ackermann to Franz Ackermann, April 22, 1946; private collection; trans. the author.

HALBERSTADT GROUP

A fledgling group of Latter-day Saints existed in Halberstadt at the beginning of World War II. There is no way to know how many Church members were living there at the time. The only details we have regarding the Latter-day Saints and their friends in Halberstadt come from the diary of Anton Larisch.

About sixty-six miles northwest of Leipzig, Halberstadt was the home of a critical military industry—the Junkers Aircraft Company factory. Brother Larisch was drafted to work in the factory for six months and left his family in Görlitz (Dresden District), where he had served as branch president. Within weeks of arriving for what was to be a six-month term of duty, he was called by Herbert Klopfer, the mission supervisor, to serve as a missionary in Halberstadt



Fig. 1. Anton Larisch at work in the Junkers aircraft factory in Halberstadt. (F. Larisch)

and nearby Aschersleben (twenty-miles to the southeast). Brother Larisch did not question this call, although he was required to work sixty-three hours in seven days each week.¹

The mission records show that the group in Halberstadt met at Gutenbergstrasse 6 when the war began. A description of the rooms is not available. The first few meetings held by Brother Larisch were a disappointment to him, in that only four to eight persons attended.² Nevertheless, he prayed for guidance in his missionary work and purchased copies of the Book of Mormon.

Anton's missionary efforts and his clean lifestyle led to trouble at the aircraft factory. He explained it in his diary on June 27, 1940:

After [my co-workers'] repeated challenges against me to justify . . . to them [my] strange take on life, they finally learned a few things about my religion. Since they are all opposed to religion, they tried to take out their hatred on me. After I assured them that my church is permitted (legal), they tried to entangle me in politics. They fronted [sent as spies] their own people, who would "in passing" ask me questions that indicated that they were interested in (my) religion. My answers were immediately brought to the "windmill," who would [mis]interpret it so completely that they could formulate an accusation against me, and that [went] immediately to the police! So, consequently, on June 19, 1940, at 9:00 o'clock in