

Sunday, October 9, 1938: On Saturday, October 8, and today the Weimar District conference was held in Gera under the direction of District President Elmer R. Tueller [US missionary]. The advance group of missionaries having just returned on October 4 [from Copenhagen], it was possible for President and Sister M. Douglas Wood and Elders Osmond L. Harline and J. Richard Barnes to be in attendance at this conference which was well attended and a most wonderful spirit prevailing.⁴

A similar report was filed five months later when the Saints of the Weimar District gathered in Erfurt for a conference: “Sunday, March 12, 1939: Weimar District conference in Erfurt. 515 attended. The meetings of this conference were especially interesting and the Saints received them in one of the most humble, eager and enthusiastic receptions of any conference for a long time.”⁵ The attendance of 515 is the equivalent of every member of every branch and one friend for every two members (153 percent of the official district membership). Because 100 percent attendance among members is not probable, the percentage of friends was high.

In the months just before the German invasion of Poland, most of the leaders of the Weimar District actually lived in Erfurt. American missionary Darrell Robins was the district president, and his counselors were Willy Brachmann and Karl Krummrich, both from Erfurt. Brother Brachmann was also responsible for the Sunday School, and Brother Krummrich for the YMMIA. Elly Schneider of Gera was the leader of the YWMIA, and Elsa Maiwald, also of Gera, guided the Primary organization. Elisabeth Köcher of the Weimar Branch was the president of the Relief Society.⁶

Willi Brachmann of Erfurt was asked to serve as district president after Elder Robins left Germany in August 1939. According to his own statement, Brachmann served in that capacity until the last months of the war. He did not explain why his tenure in that calling ceased at that time.⁷

Although the city of Weimar was the seat of the Church district, conferences were often held in

Erfurt. According to Ursula Schlevogt (born 1926), district gatherings were held in the Hinterhaus at Johannesstrasse 136 until too many of the leading men were drafted into military service.⁸

NOTES

1. West German Mission quarterly report, 1938, no. 4, CHL LR 10045 2.
2. Erfurt city archive.
3. Presiding Bishopric, “Financial, Statistical, and Historical Reports of Wards, Stakes, and Missions, 1884–1955,” 257, CR 4 12.
4. Weimar District quarterly report, 1938, no. 36, LR 9986, QR 1938:36.
5. West German Mission quarterly report, 1939, no.11, CHL LR 10045 2.
6. West German Mission branch directory, 1939, no. 11, CHL LR 10045.
7. Willi Brachmann to Walter E. Scoville, February 3, 1947, Walter E. Scoville, papers, CHL MS 18613.
8. Ursula Schlevogt Herold, interview by the author in German, Weimar, Germany, August 17, 2008; summarized in English by Judith Sartowski.

ERFURT BRANCH

Formerly a district capital in the Prussian province of Saxony, the city of Erfurt was the largest (165,615 inhabitants) and most important city in the region in 1939. Although no records regarding the population of the Erfurt Branch in that year have survived, the branch directory lists leaders for every organization but the Primary. It would appear that the branch had at least seventy-five members.

Karl Müller was the branch president, and his only counselor was Karl Krummrich. Willi Brachmann directed the Sunday School, Alexander Ludwig the YMMIA, and Ella Possner the YWMIA. Erna Brachmann was the Relief Society president, and Louis Trefflich was responsible for both *Der Stern* magazine and genealogical instruction in the branch.

Meetings of the Erfurt Branch were held in rented rooms in a Hinterhaus at Johannesstrasse 136. The

first meeting on Sunday was Sunday School at 10:00 a.m., and later a genealogy class began at 6:00 p.m. and sacrament meeting at 7:30 p.m. MIA met on Tuesdays at 8:00 p.m., and both the priesthood and Relief Society meetings took place on Thursdays at 8:00 p.m.

The daughter of the branch president, Margot Krummrich (born 1935), described the meeting rooms:

There was a large room on the main floor. On the [rostrum] stood the pump organ and the piano. The pulpit was also in the front. There were some pictures of Christ in the main room. There were also classrooms. During the war, we might have had four to ten people in the meetings. It was actually a large branch, but most of the members could not attend.¹

Just before the war began, Margot was hospitalized with diphtheria. At the point when she was almost paralyzed, a most remarkable thing occurred: her father wanted to give her a priesthood blessing but was not allowed to be in her room. He then stood outside the room and pronounced the blessing. She was healed by the next day.



Fig. 1. The Johannesstrasse in Erfurt as it looks today. (R. Freitag)

The history of the Erfurt Branch offers only one statement regarding the life of the Latter-day Saints in that city during World War II. Brigitte Loch explained, “During the war the members held meetings in various homes and taught and edified each other.”²

Margot Krummrich had looked forward to being baptized in November 1944, but wartime conditions delayed the event until January 13, 1945. The baptism took place in a small pool in the local hospital. “It was cold,” she recalled, but she was fortunate that her father, who was home on leave, could perform the ceremony.

The American army entered the region in April 1945. According to Margot, there was no fighting when they arrived. Shortly thereafter, the GIs left the region, and the Soviet occupation forces took over. She recalled that the Americans had conducted themselves fairly well among the locals, but the same could not be said of the Soviets later on: “They did not treat the women with any respect.”

“My father was gone from home for about a year and a half, but he returned in May 1945,” recalled Margot. The family had been evacuated to the town of Möbisburg (just five miles south of Erfurt) for a few months, but with Karl’s return, they went home to their apartment at Johannesstrasse 131, just down the street from the branch rooms. The family’s return was timely, because the branch was nearly evicted from the building. Margot explained the odd circumstances:

A family from the Cottbus Branch came to town and needed a place to stay. My father decided that they could live in one of the classrooms. But they wanted all the branch rooms, which we of course couldn’t give them. The family then said that they would take our apartment if we moved somewhere else. We had a beautiful and large apartment. We then lived together for a while but that didn’t work, so we left our apartment and moved into the Church meeting rooms. [The guest family] said that if we didn’t give them our apartment, they would tell the housing authority that the branch rooms weren’t being used and other people could move in. My father was quick to decide that we would move into the branch rooms.³

Thus the church meeting place was preserved, and the members of the branch began again to worship together. Their numbers increased as soldiers returned and evacuated members found their way

back to the city that had since lost many of its residential buildings to air raids.

Two years after the war, branch president Willi Brachmann wrote a letter to former missionary Walter E. Scoville, who was attempting to determine the status of LDS families in branches in which he had served just before the war. The following is an excerpt from that letter:

Well, the war is now over and it really took its toll. Even though we were never in favor of war, we too must pay the price. I lost my only son (Horst) in the last days of the war. He was 17½. Six young men of the Erfurt Branch were killed in battle. Alex Ludwig is still a POW of the French in Africa. Brother Wittmer spent 1½ years in prison. He had been sentenced to five years for helping American POWs to escape. I was assigned to be the president of the Weimar district and I served as such until just before the end of the war. All [*sic*] of our members made it through the war fairly well. After the war, we all began anew to do the work of the Lord.⁴

Brother Brachmann's letter was very optimistic. As a point of fact, the Erfurt Branch alone had lost six men in combat situations, and another eight members died at home.

IN MEMORIAM

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

Horst Brachmann b. Erfurt, Erfurt, Sachsen, 10 May 1927; son of Willi August Walter Brachmann and Erna Amalie Scharf; bp. 22 June 1935; conf. 23 June 1935; k. in battle 25 Mar 1945 (FHL microfilm 25728; 1930 census; FS)

Karl Eichler b. Erfurt, Erfurt, Sachsen, 15 Jul 1907; son of Wilhelm Wärtzburg and Elly Eichler; bp. 26 Jun 1920; conf. 26 Jun 1920; lance corporal; d. wounds at H. V. Pl. Sanko 432 at Friedland, Korfantow, Poland, 8 Feb 1945 (FHL microfilm 68808, no. 61; FHL microfilm 25760; 1935 census; www.volksbund.de; IGI)

Emma Therese Pauline Käferhaus b. Allstedt, Weimar, Sachsen-Coburg-Gotha 8 Oct 1874; dau. of Herrmann Käferhaus and Lütowine Reime; bp. 1 May 1924; conf. 1 May 1924; m. 24 Apr 1909, — Markhardt; d. old age 4 Dec 1941 (FHL microfilm

68808, no. 198; FHL microfilm 245226; 1930 and 1935 censuses)

Johannes Friedrich Koch b. Erfurt, Erfurt, Sachsen, 28 Apr 1916; son of Wilhelm Louis Koch and Anna Therese Hopfe; bp. 29 May 1925; conf. 29 May 1925; ord. deacon 7 Apr 1935; m. 19 Oct 1939, Ruth Tiehle; lance corporal; d. wounds in field hospital 161 at Babino 2 Jun 1942; bur. Sologubowka, St. Petersburg, Russia (FHL microfilm 68808, no. 129; FHL microfilm 271380; 1930 and 1935 censuses; www.volksbund.de; IGI)

Hulda Emilie Louise Krummrich b. Alach, Erfurt, Sachsen, 11 Mar 1869; dau. of Johann Friedrich Wilhelm Krummrich and Emilie Luise Eva Engelhardt; bp. 1 May 1924; conf. 1 May 1924; m. Hugo Weigand; 1 child; m. Alach 20 Aug 1893, Heinrich Friedrich Julius Gräfe; six children; d. old age Erfurt, Erfurt, Sachsen, 12 Mar 1945 (FHL microfilm 68808, no. 87; FHL microfilm 25776; 1930 and 1935 censuses; IGI; AF)

Therese Auguste Ortlepp b. Waltershausen, Gotha, Sachsen-Coburg-Gotha, 19 Apr 1862; dau. of Heinrich Wilhelm Ortlepp and Friederike Kutt or Cott; bp. 28 May 1927; conf. 28 May 1927; m. — Franz; d. old age 24 Nov 1942 (FHL microfilm 68808, no. 72; FHL microfilm 25769; 1935 census; IGI)

Adam Johann Reichert b. Erfurt, Erfurt, Sachsen, 27 Nov 1872; son of August Reichert and Mathilde Kühn; bp. 22 Sep 1920; conf. 22 Sep 1920; d. old age 16 Oct 1940 (FHL microfilm 68808, no. 421; FHL microfilm 271400; 1930 census)

Alfred Edmund Schumann b. Zorbau, Querfurt, Sachsen, 13 Mar 1871; son of Herrmann Schumann and Thekla Munkelt; bp. 1 May 1924; conf. 1 May 1924; d. bilious complaints 7 Dec 1941 (FHL microfilm 68808, no. 426; FHL microfilm 245260; 1930 and 1935 censuses)

Heinz Karl Stoll b. Erfurt, Erfurt, Sachsen, 18 Sep 1919; son of Karl Ernst Stoll and Minna Schröter; bp. 14 Jun 1930; conf. 14 Jun 1930; ord. deacon 3 Nov 1935; ord. teacher 23 Apr 1939; d. larynx cancer 9 Feb 1940 (FHL microfilm 68808, no. 365; FHL microfilm 245276; 1930 and 1935 censuses)

Walter Helmuth Stoll b. Erfurt, Erfurt, Sachsen, 1 Nov 1922; son of Karl Ernst Stoll and Minna Schröter; bp. 4 Jul 1931; conf. 5 Jul 1931; k. in battle Eastern Front 30 Jul 1943 (FHL microfilm 68808, no. 261; FHL microfilm 245276; 1930 and 1935 censuses)

Elsa Martha Stüllein b. Klosterfeldsdorf, Thüringen, 20 Jul 1883; dau. of Georg Stüllein and Emilie Braun; bp. 7 Sep 1908; conf. 7 Sep 1908; m. 19 Jan 1911, A. Ludwig; d. uterine cancer 6 Sep 1941 (FHL microfilm 68808, no. 174; FHL microfilm 271389, 1930 census)

Louis Hermann Trefflich b. Großhettstedt, Schwarzburg-Rudolstadt, 10 Aug 1870; son of Emma Treffliche; bp. 20 Feb 1934; conf. 20 Feb 1934; ord. deacon 9 Dec 1934; ord. teacher 3 Jan 1937; ord. priest 12 Dec 1937; ord. elder 13 Jul 1941; m. 23 Apr 1923, Friederike Christiane Sander; d. heart attack 7 Mar 1942 (FHL microfilm 68808, no. 431; FHL microfilm 245287; 1935 census)

Walter Paul Voigt b. Erfurt, Erfurt, Sachsen, 12 Nov 1920; son of Paul Karl Voigt and Frieda Verges; bp. 14 Jun 1930; conf. 14 Jun 1930; k. in battle 5 Jul 1944 (FHL microfilm 68808, no. 299; FHL microfilm 245291; 1930 and 1935 censuses)

Willi Carl Georg Voigt b. Erfurt, Erfurt, Sachsen, 28 Feb 1919; son of Paul Karl Voigt and Frieda Verges; bp. 2 Jan 1917; conf. 2 Jan 1917; m. 8 Jun 1942, Dorothea Schöne; k. in battle Eastern Front 28 Dec 1944 (FHL microfilm 68808, no. 297; FHL microfilm 245291; 1930 and 1935 censuses)

NOTES

1. Margot Krummrich Gurney, telephone interview by the author in German, July 10, 2007; summarized in English by Judith Sartowski.
2. *Jahre Gemeinde Erfurt* (2007), 23.
3. The name of the offending family is known, but there is no compelling reason to reveal that name here. Margot expressed no bitterness toward them. The incident simply serves as evidence that even Latter-day Saints can be selfish when under the stress of losing their homes. Margot stated that her family consisted of the parents and seven children at the time; it is not likely that the two branch rooms included a bath, so giving up their apartment to another family would have been a genuine sacrifice.
4. Willi Brachmann to Walter E. Scoville, February 3, 1947, Walter E. Scoville, papers, CHL MS 18613.

GERA BRANCH

The city of Gera is located on the main railroad route from Dresden in eastern Germany to Weimar, Erfurt, Eisenach, and Frankfurt to the west. In 1939, the city had a population of 81,931.¹ No report on the population and constitution of the Gera Branch of the Latter-day Saints was filed in the mission office at the end of 1939, but it can be assumed that the branch numbered fewer than fifty persons.

The branch president in July 1939 was American missionary Harold E. Kratzer. He was serving at the time without counselors. The Sunday School was directed by Hermann Kirst, and the YMMIA by Wilfred Wegener, also an American missionary. The YWMIA was not functioning then, but the Relief Society was led by Emma Zemisch, and the Primary by Else Maiwald. The *Stern* magazine representative was Lottie Sonntag, and the position of genealogical instructor was vacant.²

Sunday School was scheduled for 10:00 a.m., priesthood meeting for 11:30 p.m., and sacrament meeting for 8:00 p.m. The Relief Society members gathered on Tuesdays at 8:00 p.m. Both the Primary and MIA met on Thursdays, the former at 2:30 p.m. and the latter at 8:00 p.m. The meeting schedule shows an “entertainment” program scheduled for Saturdays at 8:00 p.m.

The branch meetings were held in rented rooms at Humboldtstrasse 25 in Gera. As of this writing, no description of the rooms is available. The only eyewitness report related to the Gera Branch comes from Elder Kratzer’s journal. He wrote that in August 1939, Elder Wegener was transferred and replaced by Elder Richard Glade.

On my birthday, August 23, 1939, the Kretchmar family invited my new companion, Elder Glade, and me to dinner. They lived in the outskirts of Gera. The family was more active than the father. He tolerated the missionaries, something was bothering him. He didn’t know how to cope with it. We couldn’t seem to help him. . . . We had a very delicious dinner. Most of all we had an interesting political discussion with Brother Kretchmar. He told us it was just a matter of time before Germany would be at war. He said a boy who has an overabundance of toys would start to play with them sooner or later. Hitler was that boy. When we left the Kretchmars, we were wondering when that would happen. As we stepped out of the door, we saw rows of double blue lights coming over the hill on the local Autobahn. Both lanes of the newly constructed super highways were full of war machines on their way to the Polish front. . . . It was sight to see. Something we had never seen before.³