

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 Irmgard Fassmann Messina Schwarz, autobiography (unpublished), 9; private collection.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

the morning, I was picked up in the factory by the criminal police.³

After a day of questioning, Anton was formally charged with making five specific treasonous statements (such as “I shall never take a gun in my hands to defend my country!”) and translating foreign letters. He then took four hours to write a response of eight pages in length. The judge then dismissed the charges and set him free. He had spent eleven days in jail, five of them in solitary confinement. He



Fig. 2. In 1939, there were few young members of the Halberstadt group. (F. Larisch)

thanked the Lord for his release with these words: “Well, . . . my ancient God still lives. He has helped me miraculously, and my accusers crumbled in their lies and deceit.”⁴

His comments about friends of the Church are interesting, such as these made on December 8, 1940: “By now Miss Ahrens has become a faithful attendee of our meetings. She even went to the Fall [District] Conference in Leipzig. . . . She enjoyed it very much.”⁵

Anton was not the only member of the Halberstadt group who was in trouble with the authorities. He recounted the following situation in his entry of March 29, 1941:

Last Saturday two criminal police officers came to Sister Fischer and searched her home. They suspected secret (outlawed) Jehovah’s Witnesses’ activity and confiscated our Church books. . . . At the hearing last Monday she was told, that for the time being we can still meet in her home, as long as we [the Church as an organization] are not forbidden. . . . Sister Fischer willingly gave up the Jehovah’s Witness literature, since she had withdrawn from them already in 1926.⁶



Fig. 3. Members of the Halberstadt Group celebrate Christmas together in 1941. (F. Larisch)

In March 1942, the group attempted to acquire a piano and collected 300 marks for the purpose. However, the mission leaders recommended that they first buy a pump organ. None could be found in Halberstadt, so the money was returned to the donors.⁷

The entry dated June 15, 1942, exudes happiness through its good news:

We received the harmonium [pump organ] from the Magdeburger Branch, which has completely ceased to be. On June 7 we celebrated our dedication service in our new meeting quarters at the home of Sister Kuhne. It was wonderful. We had many visitors from Aschersleben. Eight persons. So altogether we were 15 in attendance. It was like in a small meeting room.⁸

More good news followed on Sunday, August 2, 1942: "I have performed the first baptism here. I baptized Christa Kuhne, 16 years old, in the Goldbach Waterfall in Langenstein [three miles southwest of town]. It was wonderful."⁹

Brother Larisch made the best of his free time away from his family. He read about world religions and philosophy, took night classes in English, French, and Russian ("because we have to take the gospel to that nation"), and prepared several hundred names for temple work. In his diary he commented about Germany's chances of winning the war ("We are fighting on too many fronts"). He also had some distracting physical ailments. Every six months, Anton was granted one or two weeks off to visit his family. As the end of each six-month employment period approached, he was promised a release, but time after time it did not happen. He left Halberstadt in January 1945, but certainly not in the way he had expected. On January 4, he was arrested again and spent the next six weeks in confinement in Halberstadt and Berlin.¹⁰ He survived the experience and returned twenty pounds lighter to Görlitz, found his family in Löbau, and



Fig. 4. Sister Kuhne and her daughter Christa of the Halberstadt group. (F. Larisch)

brought them to Halberstadt, where they arrived on April 8, 1945.

Anton Larisch was made branch president in Halberstadt in July 1945. "So now, after decades, Halberstadt is again a branch."¹¹ For the past five years, the Halberstadt group had been his surrogate family, and his missionary service in that town was likely the reason for the expanded branch. In February 1946, he and his family returned to their home in Görlitz.

No members of the Halberstadt Branch are known to have died during World War II.

NOTES

1. Anton Larisch, diary, November 26, 1939, 2; private collection; trans. Ruth Larisch Hinkel. See Görlitz, Dresden District, for the beginning and ending of the Larisch family story.



Fig. 5. Anton Larisch (with bicycle) and his family left Halberstadt with their few possessions in February 1946. Two missionaries, Elders Draegger (left) and Blietschau (rear), assisted the family. The little boy is Fred Larisch. The typical Leiterwagen was a very sturdy vehicle. (F. Larisch)

2. Ibid., December 16, 1939, 5.
3. Ibid., June 27, 1940, 13.
4. Ibid., July 18, 1940, 14–15.
5. Ibid., December 8, 1940, 18.
6. Ibid., March 29, 1941, 22.
7. Ibid., April 22, 1942, 28.
8. Ibid., June 15, 1942, 30.
9. Ibid., August 2, 1942, 31.
10. Ibid., January 4, 1945, 46.
11. Ibid., August 25, 1945, 48. The diary does not mention any other male members in the Halberstadt group.

HALLE BRANCH

According to the records of the East German Mission, the Halle Branch of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints held its meetings in rented rooms at Rathausstrasse 14 in the Hinterhaus. Whereas the city had nearly two hundred thousand inhabitants when World War II began, only thirty-three were members of the Church.

Halle Branch ¹	1939
Elders	2
Priests	0
Teachers	2
Deacons	3
Other Adult Males	8
Adult Females	18
Male Children	0
Female Children	0
<i>Total</i>	33

The Halle Branch had only a few youth and no children (under twelve) at the end of the year 1939. Nevertheless, there is evidence suggesting that the branch was vibrant and perhaps even growing. For example, the history of the East German Mission shows that when the branch moved into the rooms on Rathausstrasse 14 on July 3, 1938, there was a formal dedication ceremony, on which occasion Alfred C. Rees, the president of the mission, delivered the dedicatory address. More than seventy persons attended.²

The new rooms must have been of ample size for the branch membership because a conference of the Leipzig District was held there later that year. Once again, President Rees presided over the meeting and this time 203 members and friends attended. The conference sessions were held on Saturday and Sunday, December 3–4, 1938, and most of the attendees would have come by train from as far as fifty miles away (Halberstadt and Magdeburg).³

As of this writing, no eyewitnesses or writings of members of the Halle Branch during the war have been located.

IN MEMORIAM

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

Ida Therese Knorre bp. 7 Sep 1935; d. 1 Apr 1941, age 81 (*Sonntagsgruss*, no. 24, 15 Jun 1941, 96)