
HANOVER DISTRICT

West German Mission



The areas included within the Hanover District of the LDS Church in 1939 were essentially the southeastern portion of the former kingdom of Hanover, the old duchy of Braunschweig (Brunswick) to the east, and the northernmost counties of the former Prussian province of Hessen-Nassau. Surrounding Church districts were the Ruhr on the west, Bremen on the northwest, Hamburg on the north, Frankfurt on the south, and the East German Mission on the east.

Hanover District ¹	1939
Elders	21
Priests	15
Teachers	14
Deacons	25
Other Adult Males	69
Adult Females	242
Male Children	18
Female Children	19
<i>Total</i>	423

The district was based in the city of Hanover, the political, industrial and cultural center of the region. There were a large LDS branch there and



Fig. 1. The Hanover District in north central Germany.

other branches in the cities of Braunschweig (thirty-five miles east), Celle (twenty-two miles northeast), Göttingen (a hundred miles south), Kassel (125 miles south) and Uelzen (sixty miles northeast). A group too small to be a formal branch was holding meetings



Fig. 2. Members of the Hanover Branch met with other Saints for an outing at Langelsheim in the Harz Mountains in 1937. Later district president Willi Wille is at the rear behind Margarete Horn (third from right). Walter Horn of Goslar (third from left) stands next to his daughters Evelyn (left) and Irene. (E. Horn Pruess)

in Goslar (forty miles southeast of Hanover). The branches of the Hanover District were spread across a larger territory than any other district in the West German Mission when World War II approached.

The president of the district in August 1939 was Willi Wille of the Hanover Branch. His only counselor at the time was Hans Bahe of the same branch. Four members of the distant Kassel Branch were district leaders: Konrad Göttig (Sunday School), Maria Schade (Primary), Fritz Diederich (Young Men), and Anny Kersten of Melsungen, ten miles south of Kassel (Young Women). Hermann W. Pohlsander of the Celle Branch was the genealogical specialist and Marie Wernecke of the Uelzen Branch was the president of the Relief Society.²

Evidence of enthusiastic activity in the district can be seen in the reports filed by the West

German Mission office in Frankfurt in early 1939. For example, a district conference was held in the Künstler Haus in Hanover on March 4–6 (Saturday through Monday), a total of 710 persons attended, and one friend and five children were baptized.³ The Monday gatherings were most likely social events such as theater performances, dances, hikes through the local woods or visits at cultural or historical sites (as was the custom throughout Germany).

On Friday, March 31, 1939, the annual Gold and Green Ball was hosted by the Hanover Branch in their rooms at Gellertstrasse 10. Eighty-five members of the district attended the event, as did mission president M. Douglas Wood from Frankfurt.⁴

By 1941, Hermann Walter Pohlsander (born 1897) was serving as the substitute president of the Hanover District. It is not known what happened to

Willi Wille (born 1909), but he was likely drafted into the military. Within a year, Pohlsander was the district president and as such was called to a meeting in the mission home in Frankfurt where the question of succession to mission supervisor Christian Heck was discussed. Pohlsander was of the opinion that it was inappropriate for district presidents to release mission supervisor Heck, who had been drafted by the Wehrmacht and was thus no longer able to carry out his duties. He was able to convince only one other district president, Otto Berndt of Hamburg, of his position, and Berndt joined him in voting against the other ten district presidents of the West German Mission who selected Anton Huck as the new mission supervisor. However, before they left, the two dissenting voters expressed their support for Huck in order to maintain good feelings in the mission at a time when many Germans no longer believed that Hitler could win the war.⁵



Fig. 3. District president Hermann Walter Pohlsander. (H. Pohlsander)

From the general minutes of both the Hanover and Celle Branches, it is clear that district conferences were held in Hanover twice each year throughout most of the war. Because the rooms rented by the host branch were too small, larger facilities were used for conferences. For example, on August 29–30, 1942 (Saturday and Sunday), the conference was held in the Haus der Väter in Hanover. According to the minutes of the Hanover Branch, the leaders of the West German Mission presided and Paul Langheinrich, second counselor to the supervisor of the East German Mission, was also in attendance.⁶

The district conference held on March 5, 1944, was a fine affair—this time only one day of meetings. Visitors included mission supervisor Anton

Huck from Frankfurt and district presidents Pohlsander (Hanover) and Hegemeister (Bielefeld). Rooms at Volgersweg 54 (close to the original Gellertstrasse 10 rooms) were rented for the meetings, and 177 persons (twenty of whom were called “friends”) attended from as far away as Goslar, Kassel, and Frankfurt. The theme of the conference was “The Apostasy and the Restoration of the True Gospel.”

The last wartime district conference took place on September 17, 1944. Despite the increasing destruction of the city and the fact that many members had left town (soldiers and mothers with small children), the attendance was still 132 persons, including Anton Huck from the mission office. “Seek ye first for the Kingdom of God” was the theme for the members, who were apparently determined to keep the Church alive in Hanover. Their leaders were definitely trying to do so.⁷

Still functioning as district president when the war ended on May 8, 1945, Hermann Walter Pohlsander and his wife had fled Celle for the safety of the suburb of Garssen. Pohlsander was an accountant for the city, and this may have allowed him to avoid service in the German army. As a postscript of the war, he wrote short descriptions of the status of many of the branches in the Hanover District as of August 1945. Things looked rather bleak, and several branches had lost their meeting places, but hopes were bright for a new start for the Church on the north German heath.⁸

NOTES

1. Presiding Bishopric, “Financial, Statistical, and Historical Reports of Wards, Stakes, and Missions, 1884–1955,” 257, CR 4 12.
2. West German Mission manuscript history, CHL MS 1004 2.
3. West German Mission quarterly reports, 1939, no. 11, CHL LR 10045 2.
4. West German Mission quarterly reports.
5. Otto Berndt, autobiography (1963), CHL MS 8316, C 14.
6. Hanover Branch general minutes, 126, CHL LR 3594 11.
7. *Ibid.*, 168–69.
8. See the individual sections for the branches of this district on the pages below.

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 Klingenhausen; 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.

GÖTTINGEN BRANCH

Famous for its outstanding university, the city of Göttingen lies near the southern border of the old kingdom of Hanover, approximately one hundred miles south of the city of Hanover. The railroad from Hanover to Frankfurt connected the two cities and made it easy for members of the Church in Göttingen to attend district conferences in Hanover.

One of the smallest branches in Germany when the war began in 1939, Göttingen had a single elder, and most of the members were older women. According to the mission directory of August 1939, the only meeting held in the branch was Sunday School, which took place at 10:00 a.m.¹ The location of the meeting hall was Schildweg 5 in a Hinterhaus. The term “cottage meeting” was used, suggesting that the address was that of a member of the branch.

Göttingen Branch ²	1939
Elders	1
Priests	0
Teachers	0
Deacons	1
Other Adult Males	4
Adult Females	11
Male Children	0
Female Children	1
<i>Total</i>	18

The branch president, Bruno Regenscheit, is the only person named among the leaders of the Göttingen Branch. Nothing else is known about this small group of Latter-day Saints as of this writing because no eyewitnesses or documents can be located.

No members of the Göttingen Branch are known to have died in World War II.

NOTES

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

GOSLAR GROUP

When World War II began in September 1939, the only members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints living in Goslar were the family of Walter Horn. With his wife, Rosilie, and three daughters, Walter had moved to Goslar from Weimar, where the family had been faithful members of the branch. The family was motivated to move because Nazi Party leaders in Weimar were putting pressure on Brother Horn to join the Party. It occurred to him that he might escape that pressure by moving to Goslar, where he found other employment. According to his daughter, Evelyn (born 1932), the tactic worked: “Once we got to Goslar, the party there did not come looking for my father.”¹

Evelyn’s earliest memories in Goslar include seeing Jewish residents with the garish yellow Star of David on their coats. She recalled telling her girlfriend that it was not nice to make the people wear that star because it made them nervous when people saw it. When she told that to her mother, Sister Horn panicked and said, “Don’t you ever dare say this to anybody or else they will pick up your father and take him away!” After that, Evelyn worried every time there was a knock at the door that somebody was coming to arrest her father.

The Horns held church meetings in their home. Walter and Rosilie taught their children the gospel, and they sang the hymns of Zion. “We rented a pump organ and eventually owned it,” recalled



Fig. 1. Walter Horn (left rear, with shirt and tie) was probably considered conservative when he participated in this company outing to the Baltic Sea in 1943. (E. Horn Pruess)

Evelyn. “When we held our testimony meeting, we just went around the table, and everybody gave their testimony—young and old.” Brother Horn taught his family from several different church books, such as *The Voice of Warning* by Parley P. Pratt. As the district president of the Sunday School, Brother Horn was an expert in Church literature.

The Horns were joined early in the war by Sister Kramer and her daughter, Hilda, so the group of Saints grew from five to seven. The family sometimes traveled from Goslar to Hanover (forty miles away) to conferences and other church activities. Evelyn was baptized in a public bathhouse in Hanover along with several other persons from the district.

Walter Horn was employed by the Greifwerke, a company that made stationery items for the government. As a small man, he was classified as unfit for military service, something neither he nor his family

ever regretted. In many ways, the war seemed far away from this historic city at the foot of the Harz Mountains, but Evelyn Horn knew that there was a war going on. The military hospitals established in local hotels offered clear evidence of that. As she recalled:

We were encouraged in school to take our families and visit the soldiers. So on Sunday afternoons we would go and visit the soldiers, and then later on they made it even a school thing that we had to just go with recorders or violin or whatever and sing for them or play music. I remember that one time I just couldn’t stand to see those people suffer, and I was just sick. . . . There was one man who had just been dragged out from under a burning tank, and you couldn’t see anything [because he was all wrapped up], and it smelled awful in there.

On many occasions, Evelyn and her sisters saw soldiers who were well enough to walk around



Fig. 2. Winter 1943: the Horn girls (from left, Annegret, Irene, and Evelyn) with their mother, Rosilie, grandmother Anna Gluth (whose home had been bombed in Hanover), and visiting Luftwaffe soldier Hans Beyer. (E. Horn Pruess)

town, but even that was a frightening sight. She recalled seeing soldiers who had severe facial injuries. Skin was grafted from an arm to the face, and a soldier would walk around town with his arm tied to his face. “I’ve always been happy-go-lucky, but I thought, ‘Oh these poor guys!’ It was terrible. Sometimes, one side of the face was already healed, and it was all just red and the other side still [looked terrible].”

For the three Horn girls, growing up in wartime meant restrictions in the types of entertainment available. However, their parents knew how to entertain their daughters. According to Evelyn, “we were a family of readers. We read a lot. When we couldn’t get new books, my mother went through all of our books and picked out the ones we could read. I read lots of books that were written for adults.”

The air raids that made life unbearable in larger cities were not a problem in Goslar, but on

occasion enemy planes flew by Goslar on the way to other targets, and that set off the local sirens. When the sirens wailed, the Horns went down into their dank basement and listened to the radio until the all-clear was sounded. “They never bombed us, so eventually, nobody worried if people didn’t all come to the basement,” claimed Evelyn Horn. Nevertheless, the Horns always took a briefcase with their most important personal and genealogical records.

The war ended in Goslar in mid-April 1945 with the arrival of the American army. The city’s mayor asked that the residents hang white sheets out of their windows. Evelyn recalled the day:

All of a sudden, somebody came running down the street yelling, “They’re here! They’re here!” . . . We all ran down to the end of the street and waved to them, and they threw chocolate and all kinds of stuff around. . . . They were smiling

and waving, and people were waving [back], and it was liberation. . . . The next morning we had a surprise: there were all kinds of pamphlets glued and stapled on the buildings [with curfew restrictions] in German.

The Horn family spent the war years in relative peace, and the war came to an end for them in an equally peaceful way. In the following months, LDS refugees from the East German Mission moved into the area around Goslar, and soon group leader Walter Horn found himself branch president.

District president Hermann Walter Pohlsander wrote the following in his report to the West German Mission office in August 1945:

The dependent branch of Goslar, which is connected with the Braunschweig Branch, has only 7 members, consisting of the Horn family in Goslar and Sisters Kraemer Sr. and Jr. in Oker. The meetings are held in the home of Elder Walther Horn. The branch is small but very fine. At this time there are also members of the East German Mission [refugees] in Oker.²

No known members of the Goslar group died during World War II.

NOTES

1. Evelyn Horn Pruess, interview by the author, Salt Lake City, December 1, 2006.
2. Goslar Group general minutes, CHL LR 3260 2.

HANOVER BRANCH

Formerly the capital of the Prussian province of the same name, the city of Hanover was home to 470,950 people as World War II approached in the late summer of 1939.¹ One of the largest branches in the West German Mission was meeting at the time in rented rooms at Gellertstrasse 10. Doris Fraatz (born 1927) had this recollection of the facility:

The rooms were used as a dance school during the week. Brother and Sister Wille lived in the same building. Willy Wille was our district president at that time. It was quite a large building. Downstairs in the dance school were benches and a wardrobe. We used those rooms also. The large room of the dance school was the room in which we held our meetings. We put up single chairs for everybody to sit on. There was also a podium in the front of the room. . . . Classes also met in the living room or the bedrooms of the Wille apartment. The dance studio was on the main floor of the building. I think we even had a central heating system at that time. . . . I remember that we would meet outside in the backyard for classes in the summer. We also had a restroom inside. For Primary meetings, we met in a different home sometimes because the dance studio was closed for us during the week. There might have been one hundred and fifty people in attendance on a typical Sunday.²

Doris added these comments about goings-on in the meetings:

In Primary they would ask us if we knew of any poems that we could recite, and if we could, we had to do it during sacrament meeting. All the young children sat on one side of the room, based on their age either in the very front or the following rows. I remember that my mother always looked around to make sure that we were behaving. Whenever we were fidgety, my mother would wave, and as soon as she did that, we knew what she meant—we had to sit still.

Hanover Branch ³	1939
Elders	12
Priests	9
Teachers	8
Deacons	12
Other Adult Males	43
Adult Females	128
Male Children	3
Female Children	11
<i>Total</i>	226



Fig. 1. The Hanover Branch Sunday School children in the summer of 1938. Several of the children were not members. (H. Reschke)

The mission directory compiled in the summer of 1939 shows a full complement of leaders. The branch president was an American missionary (Edward J. Wirthlin), but all other leaders were local Saints.⁴ Apparently, all Church programs were in operation in this branch. As was common all over the mission, well over half the branch membership were females over twelve years of age.

The schedule of meetings suggests that the Hanover Branch members saw each other several times each week. The Sunday School met at 10:00 a.m., and sacrament meeting began at 7:00 p.m. Because of the central location of the meeting rooms, most members went home for dinner between Sunday meetings, then returned in the evening. Mutual was held on Tuesdays at 8:00 p.m., Primary on Wednesdays at 4:00 p.m., and Relief Society on Thursdays at 8:00 p.m.

Doris Fraatz recalled walking the two miles from her home on Wörthstrasse to the church. After Sunday School, the family went home for dinner, then returned for sacrament meeting in the evening. This meant about eight miles (about two hours) of walking each Sunday, which was quite common for members of the Church in that large city.⁵

Following the evacuation of the American missionaries from Germany on August 25, 1939, Hans Bahe was called to be the president of the Hanover Branch with Stanislaus Kubiak and Richard Krafft as his counselors.⁶ A few weeks later, mission

supervisor Friedrich Biehl visited the branch along with three district presidents.⁷ The life of the branch continued without substantial disturbances through 1939, and sacrament meeting attendance averaged forty-two persons. The average declined to about thirty-six attendees for 1940 and thirty-four in 1941.

Doris Fraatz completed public schooling at age fourteen and could have continued, but the advanced school was too far from home. In Hanover, she worked under the *Pflichtjahr* program, serving the nation for one year. As she recalled, "The family I worked for owned a radio store, and they had two children. I was very fortunate to be able to work for them. They also did not live very far away from us, so I was able to go home after work. [At that time] I was the Sunday School teacher for the eight-year-old children in our branch." When the service year ended, she found employment with the local Continental Tire Company, a job that would last until the last few weeks of the war.

Max Reschke was not a follower of Adolf Hitler. His daughter, Annegret (born 1936), recalled once seeing Hitler drive by in a parade and hearing her father say, "I will never support that man!" Having been wounded during World War I, Max was fortunate to be exempt from the draft during the next war. He was also a director in a pharmaceutical company, an industry quite indispensable to the war effort. The family was pleased to have their father in town during the entire war.⁸ Brother Reschke's life was, however, not without challenges; he spent some time in a Gestapo camp for hiding a Jewish friend in his home.⁹

President Bahe was drafted by the Wehrmacht in January 1942, which necessitated a change in branch leadership. The new presidency consisted of Richard Krafft, Stanislaus Kubiak, and Karl Blombach.¹⁰

With more than two hundred members, the Hanover Branch was in a position to offer support for smaller branches nearby. On several occasions

before the war and whenever possible during the first few years of the war, Saints from Hanover traveled to rural areas to enjoy walks, picnics, and other activities. For example, on the Monday after Easter in 1942, thirty members of the Hanover Relief Society traveled west to Stadthagen (Bielefeld District) to present a program commemorating the centennial of the Relief Society.¹¹

The Hanover Branch was confronted with bad news in April 1942, when their rental contract at Gellertstrasse 10 was canceled. Fortunately the branch leaders were able to find a new place to meet about one mile to the northwest, namely in the Fischer Gesellschaftshaus at Weissekreuzstrasse 10. That building was less than one mile from the center of town and thus a good location for most of the members.¹² However, the Fischer building was likely no longer available that fall, because the general minutes report meetings being held in the homes of various members around town. Attendance dropped to about twenty-five persons in those months.



Fig. 2. The branch performed *Snow White* in 1938. (H. Reschke)

Being a child during the war was not always easy. Nevertheless, German children were like their counterparts in other nations at war when it came to

making their own lives more enjoyable. The following is from the recollections of Annegret Reschke: “Toys, the kind one would buy in a store, were rare because few were available. Yet our imaginations knew no bounds. We would fashion dollhouses out of old boxes, and paper dolls were cut from old magazines. Our childhood was different but happy nonetheless, because we were children—resilient and optimistic.”¹³

Life became more difficult for Annegret when school began. When she was asked to introduce herself and identify her religious affiliation on the first day, she decided to mention the name “Mormons” instead of the full name of her church. Unfortunately, the term *Mormonen* sounded to the other children like *Mongolen* (Mongolians), and a wave of mockery met Annegret’s ears. At that moment, a very kind teacher stepped forward to correct the misunderstanding. As Annegret recalled, “She asked me to come to the front of the room and sit in her chair. Then she directed each child to come forward, shake my hand, and apologize for calling me a *Mongole*. I have never forgotten her kindness.”¹⁴

Anton Huck, first counselor to mission supervisor Christian Heck, visited the branch in May 1942. Such visitors were welcome throughout the mission, but on this occasion it may have been requested by the branch president. The branch general minutes indicate that President Huck called three sisters to repentance. He was assisted in this difficult task by district president Hermann Walter Pohlsander and branch president Richard Krafft. The minutes do not report the results of the encounter, but the recorder ended his account of the affair with this sentence: “May the heavens be merciful to these three unteachable and errant sisters!”¹⁵

Throughout Germany, LDS branches had hosted a wide variety of cultural programs since the early 1930s. Many such programs could no longer be offered once the war started, but the minutes of the Hanover Branch include reports of two *Wunschkonzerte* (“concerts by request”). On November 28, 1942, a concert was presented in

Haus der Väter and attended by 116 persons (“including several children”). The report does not indicate what was presented, but the review was enthusiastic: “The Spirit of the Lord was in attendance to a great degree and the attending friends expressed their gratitude many times.” Visitors came from as far away as Goslar (the Horn family).¹⁶

The Saints in Hanover must have felt like vagabonds when they were required to move again in December 1942. The new location for their meetings was Markstrasse 64, just one block from the city hall. Elder Pohlsander presided over the first meeting at that location and offered a dedicatory prayer for the facility. Two weeks later, the branch held a Christmas celebration that was enjoyed by thirty persons.¹⁷ Despite the many changes of venue for meetings in 1942 and the holding of some meetings in families’ apartments, attendance in sacrament meetings averaged thirty-five persons.



Fig. 3. The M-Men and Gleaners of the Hanover Branch. (H. Reschke)

During the summer of 1943, Doris Fraatz and her family spent substantial time at their tiny garden property at the outskirts of town. On one occasion, the air-raid sirens began to wail and there was not time to reach the bunkers. According to Doris, “While lying on the floor of our little cabin, I heard

my father cry out, ‘They got me!’ I remember my mother repeatedly asking: ‘Papa, are you still alive?’ The cigarette factory nearby was burning—we could see it and hear it. My father had gotten a piece of shrapnel in his chest. It went through the cabin walls, but what was a blessing—my father wore suspenders that day.”

As the Allied air war increased in intensity, the city of Hanover became a favorite target. The first mention of air raids in the branch general minutes is a positive note written after the attack on July 26, 1943: “The city of Hanover was punished by an air raid, but our meeting rooms at Marktstrasse 64 were spared any damage.”¹⁸ Unfortunately, time ran out for the building just three months later, as we read:

October 10, 1943: No Sunday School or sacrament meeting was held today because our meetinghouse was totally destroyed in an air raid during the night of October 8–9. . . . So far none of the members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has been killed. However, some have lost everything and others have suffered lesser damages. The Lord, our Heavenly Father, has been merciful to His children. So far, he has sent His protecting angel to watch over us. The Lord has heard the prayers of His children.¹⁹

Hans Bahe was one of the many LDS men who had to leave a wife and little children to answer the call of the Wehrmacht. His wife, Margaretha, cared for her two daughters, Erika (born 1937) and Sylvia (born 1938), in a Hanover that was beginning to unravel. Sylvia recalled that they became so accustomed to the air raids that her mother could hear the planes approaching even before the alarms sounded. “We didn’t even get undressed [to go to bed] anymore. We just stayed in our clothes, so we were the first ones to get to the shelter downstairs in our basement.”²⁰ Eventually, the Bahe apartment was partially burned, and Sister Bahe and her daughters were taken to the town of Holtensen near Göttingen. They would be isolated from the Church for the rest of the war.

It may be that the spirit of the Saints in Hanover was suffering slightly in November 1943,

because the general minutes indicate that President Pohlsander felt it necessary to encourage them to stop criticizing and judging. “He told the members to use their agency for good and to merit eternal exaltation.” At the same time, some members were doing very well, such as Sister Helena Grahn, whose husband, Albert, had been a friend of the Church for years. He spoke in a testimony meeting, thanking God for saving him and his family from the air raids and expressing the desire to be baptized as soon as possible.²¹



Fig. 4. A branch picnic in the summer of 1939. (H. Reschke)

The bad news increased with the air raids of late 1943. The following lost everything in the final days of November: the Kubiak, Wille, and Böker families, as well as Sister Grahn and Sister Barthelt. The Liebig family and Sister Stockhausen suffered damage to their homes.²² Despite the challenges of the time, the average sacrament meeting attendance remained at about thirty-four persons for the year 1943.

A new home was found for the branch at Volgersweg 54 in downtown Hanover. The building had been rented for a district conference on March 5, 1944, and by April an ongoing contract had been negotiated. The spirit of permanence was again felt as evidenced by the fact that district president Pohlsander pronounced a dedicatory prayer in the presence of thirty-eight persons. In a unique entry, the clerk indicated that President Pohlsander took the opportunity that day to convey greetings from the leadership of the East and West German

Missions, as well as from Denmark and Switzerland. He also spoke of a message received from Christian Heck, the former West German Mission supervisor, then serving on the Eastern Front.²³

The following recollection of Doris Fraatz seems to best fit the rooms at Volgersweg:

I remember that we also met in a cheap restaurant for a while as a branch. The smell was terrible, and the brethren had to go before the meetings to clean up so that we could hold the meetings there. It smelled like beer every time. This restaurant was in the city center, and we went there after we lost our rooms in the Gellertstrasse.

At age seventeen in 1944, Doris might have been hoping for a more exciting social life, but this was not the case, as she recounted:

We could not really have fun as children or teenagers in the war. The bombings were constant. Dancing and dating were not our regular interests, but the districts and branches made sure that the young people had something they could do together. . . . All the young boys were gone and had to serve in the war. What social life I had was connected with the Church.

In the village of Holtensen near Göttingen, Margaretha Bahe and her daughters lived in a few spare rooms on a farm. According to her eldest daughter, Erika, Sister Bahe worked in a dairy; she printed the wrapping papers for butter. The farmers resented the presence of the city folks and did not do any more for them than necessary. Margaretha had no way to get to church meetings in Göttingen (just a few miles away), so she held a Sunday School with her little girls each week. As Erika recalled, “We pretty much followed the pattern of the Church, except that we didn’t have the sacrament or the priesthood. We read from the Book of Mormon, and we sang the hymns. We were a very musical family.”²⁴

Everyday life for the residents of Germany’s larger cities was becoming increasingly challenging. Between air-raid alarms, they were struggling to attend school and get in a full workday, as well as collect enough food to eat from various small stores.

Horst Reschke recalled clearly some of the problems with food:

[Storing food] was called hoarding and was forbidden. But we became adept at scrounging for food and fuel. We would follow a horse-drawn wagon loaded with sugar beets. The cobblestone road bounced some of the sugar beets off the wagon. We took them home to boil and make syrup to be used instead of sugar. We also swept up horse manure as fertilizer in our garden. A family member who worked for the potato authority provided improved access to that precious commodity. My mother became an expert in the many ways in which potatoes could be served, including fried in Postum when fat was lacking.²⁵



Fig. 5. *The Hanover Branch when the war began.* (H. Reschke)

Horst's sister Annegret added these comments regarding food:

We would send the first person to the bakery at 4:00 a.m. He would wait until the next person came. If you weren't in line by 8:00 a.m., you got bread that wasn't even made out of flour.²⁶ Bread was supposed to be rationed, but it wasn't. They followed the rules when it came to meat though. We rarely ever got butter. For milk, we had to go to a different place, and it was like skim milk. In one air raid, the water line was damaged, so we didn't have water supply for a number of weeks. Every day, there would be a big water truck where we filled up our buckets. We were very frugal with how we washed our hands or flushed the toilet. This went on until they fixed the water line. The ration cards would not guarantee us anything.²⁷

By the fall of 1944, the schools in Hanover were in such bad condition that the three Reschke children were sent to different cities to schools still functioning: Horst to Hildesheim (eighteen miles away), Dieter to Ronnenberg (six miles), and Annegret to Sarstedt (fourteen miles). All three were on their way just after 6:00 a.m. each school day. The trip was difficult enough (especially after a night interrupted by air-raid alarms or attacks) but was made even worse when the commuter trains they rode were attacked by British and American dive-bombers (who by then enjoyed total air superiority over Germany). On one occasion, an attack came and the driver ordered everyone to get out and go to a shelter down the hill a few yards. As the last one out, Annegret found that the shelter door was slammed shut just before she got there. When she desperately pounded on the door, the shelter official opened it—not to let her in, but to let her best friend, Inge, out. “Now there we were, two frightened, little girls, exposed to the enemy. Instinctively, we scrambled back up the embankment and into the streetcar to at least have some cover.”²⁸ On the floor, they rolled from side to side depending on the direction from which the planes attacked. They survived the experience unscathed.



Fig. 6. *The Hanover Branch Sunday School. The slogan reads, “Bring a friend to Sunday School!”* (H. Reschke)

Not only was she living in a strange village without her husband, but Margaretha Bahe also gave birth in Holtensen to her third daughter, Ilona, in 1944. It was a difficult exile, and the approaching Christmas could have been a dismal experience for

the Bahe family. Erika recalled that her mother was determined to observe some of the customs of the season and one day walked to the city of Göttingen on her errand of mercy:

She went from store to store trying to procure some ingredients to make cookies, and everybody would shake their heads and say, "No, we can't help you." And then finally she turned back and passed a Catholic church, and she had taken the stroller with the idea that if she got too tired, she could lean on it when she walked and hopefully find some foodstuff. She rested right at the side of the church, and she started to sob and prayed, "[Lord], I'm not even going to have the makings for cookies to celebrate your birth." And within minutes, a priest came out of the church, and he looked at her and said, "My child, why are you crying?" And she told him her plight, and he said, "Wait just a minute." He disappeared for what seemed like an eternity, and finally he came back with a box, and in that box he had some sacrament wafers. He said, "I don't know what you can do with them, but I'd like you to have them." And so he gave her the box, and she put it in the stroller and walked home. Somewhere along the way, somebody else stopped to talk to her. It was obvious she had been crying, and she told that person what had happened, and he said, "Wait just a minute." And he went into a store and came back with two pounds of powdered sugar. Mom just cried and cried, and she said, "The Lord has heard my prayer." So anyway, she had some money, and she gave that money to the person who had given her the powdered sugar, and she walked home faster and faster. She could hardly wait. When she got home, she opened the box and discovered the sacrament wafers. She took the powdered sugar and melted it with a little bit of milk, and then she took hundreds of those real thin sacrament wafers and put sugar between each one. That was our Christmas.

Toward the end of the war, the home of Annegret Reschke's grandparents was bombed out. She recalled the following:

I remember going with Grandma to search through the debris of their apartment house the morning after the air raid. Although I had seen many bombed-out buildings, I was still stunned to see my grandparents' home reduced to a pile

of rubble. Even though we had gone very early in the day, looters had been there even earlier. Nonetheless, we were elated when we found several of Grandma's leather-covered, velvet-lined boxes of silverware.²⁹



Fig. 7. Anneke Reschke's grandmother rescued this silverware from the ruins of her home. (A. Reschke Rudolph)

Apparently not all members of the Hanover Branch were having positive spiritual experiences as the war neared its end. The minutes of June 26, 1944, include the names of five sisters who officially severed their ties to the Church. The minutes also suggest that branch president Karl Blombach was influenced by the spirit of National Socialism in this statement dated July 23, 1944: "At the beginning of our sacrament meeting, branch president [Karl] Blombach said a prayer thanking the Lord for saving our Führer [Adolf Hitler] from the cowardly assassination attempt carried out against him on July 20."³⁰

By Christmas Eve 1944, Lilly Reschke and the three children had been living for two months a few miles west of Hanover, while Max Reschke stayed in town due to his employment.³¹ As the sacred holiday approached, Brother Reschke picked up his family and took them to the big city. Annegret recalled the event:

Finally the day arrived when my father came to take us home. The snow had fallen and had covered all the ugliness war brings. A true feeling

of Christmas came over us as we rolled toward Hanover. My heart pumped a little faster the closer we came to our home. And, finally, there it was, straight and tall as ever. As we entered, it seemed as though the rooms were a bit darker than I had remembered them, but then it was snowing outside, I reasoned, and everything had a different color. However, after a while we realized that all the glass from the windows was missing. My father had replaced it with boards and cardboard. . . . We kept our warm coats on and huddled close together around the coal stove in the kitchen. . . . Finally, Christmas Eve was here. . . . We did not expect too much in the form of presents or even a Christmas tree, because we knew . . . those things would be out of reach until after the war. . . . At Christmas time the living room at our house was always converted into the Christmas room. Here Father and Mother helped Santa Claus on Christmas Eve.³²

Life in the city of Hanover must have become nearly intolerable when the year 1945 arrived. On December 31, January 7, and January 14, no church meetings could be held due to constant air-raid alarms. Several members of the branch were among those residents whose homes were damaged or destroyed in the attacks. The minutes dated March 25 list the following families recently bombed out: Sieberling, Liebig, Schulz, Kuno, Fraatz, Wille, Wrobel, and Schmidt.³³

Horst Reschke recalled one of the more humorous ways to collect items needed to support daily survival:

During an air raid, . . . my mother and I came upon an elderly couple in the courtyard in the process of gathering propaganda leaflets, floating down from the sky. An American bomber had been kind enough to dump them on our property. The neighbors were aghast that we had caught them in a criminal activity.³⁴ They asked if we would turn them in. I told them no, if they would share the precious leaflets with us, not to enlighten us, but for a much more mundane purpose. Toilet tissues had long been unavailable for purchase. Instead, we let the daily newspaper serve dual purposes. But since the newspaper printing plant had been bombed out, the leaflets, measuring about 8 ½ × 11 inches, cut into four sections, could serve not only cerebral but also posterior functions, courtesy of the 8th U.S. Air Force.³⁵



Fig. 8. Horst Reschke's Hitler Youth Group was housed in this building in Neuhaus/Solling during the war. (H. Reschke)

Horst mentioned some of the survival skills he learned as a young teenager—skills he hoped he would never need to apply again for as long as he lived: “I learned how to dodge bullets from a fighter plane while on a moving train, how to dig people out of a caved-in bomb shelter, and how to put out a fire caused by incendiary bombs. We learned to cope when the water and gas plants and the power stations were permanently eliminated.”³⁶

Only seven members of the branch attended the sacrament meeting held in the Grahn family home on April 8, 1945—just two days before the American army entered the city. Each of the attendees was asked or volunteered to pray: Brother Blombach, Brother Kubiak, Brother Grahn, Brother Thews, Sister Grundlach, Sister Heim, and Sister Sagebiel. It was likely too dangerous to take children through the streets of the devastated city on that Sunday. After the meeting, Brother Grahn was ordained a teacher in the Aaronic Priesthood by Karl Blombach.³⁷

Annegret Reschke recalled the arrival of the

American tanks and soldiers on April 10. While across the street in the home of her best friend, Inge, she heard the roar of the tanks approaching and dared not cross the street to her home. Then her father darted across the street between tanks and took her back into the house. She continued to watch the proceedings from the window of their apartment, including an event that left her confused. Some soldiers built a fire in the gutter and boiled a bucket full of eggs. After several soldiers took and ate perhaps a dozen eggs, the rest of that rare commodity were dumped into the street and destroyed. Max Reschke then explained to his daughter the fact that invading soldiers were not to share food with the civilians.³⁸

At the war's end, Doris Fraatz was very ill with scarlet fever, which might have been to her advantage. She was in a quarantine hospital out of town when the Allies entered Hanover and was thus quite safe—at least in some respects. While she was in the hospital, her father came to visit and brought the news that their apartment had been destroyed. The fires that burned the building to the ground had moved from the roof downward, leaving the family enough time to rescue their church books and several other important items. After finding a new apartment, they moved in with some of the furniture left to them by a grandmother who had recently passed away.

When Doris was well enough to travel, she was put on a bus and sent toward Hanover. Somewhere outside of town, the bus stopped and the very weakened seventeen-year-old was on her own to get through town on foot. Arriving at home after the curfew hour, she was fortunate to find a little girl who accepted her identification and let her into the new apartment house. The homecoming was a bit complicated, as she described in these words:

I told my mother that I was not disinfected yet from the hospital because they did not take the time to wash us [when we left]. She took a bucket and put all of my clothing in it and put me into clean clothes. Although we took careful precautions, my sister still caught scarlet fever from me. She stayed home and was not taken to a hospital.

The clerk of the Hanover Branch dutifully made his notations through the end of the war and thereafter. Although he is not identified, he was probably one of four brethren mentioned as attending the meeting on April 8. He stated that the branch rooms at Volgersweg 54 had been destroyed but gave no date for that loss. On April 15, no meeting could be held because the American occupation forces had announced a curfew, but a meeting took place on the next Sunday, again in the Grahn home.³⁹

Margaretha Bahe was still in Holtensen with her three little girls when the American army approached in April 1945. According to daughter Erika,

We were scared when the American troops came in their jeeps. They sent in all the black troops first. We had never seen a black person. There were six or eight soldiers in the streets with their guns drawn. They came into the town, and that was scary. We had heard on the news that the war had ended. Now the Americans weren't angels either, of course. It was wartime. Their deeds were pretty monstrous. They would knock on doors. They came in, looked around for weapons and anything that could be used for war purposes or what not. And they would confiscate it. The little radio we had was gone. They took it. We had a camera that was my father's, and they took that, and of course that meant the world to us because it was Dad's. They did not hurt us. [But] when they came to the town, they had some large trucks, they gathered up anybody suspicious or German-looking (soldiers) and they lined them up behind the barn in single file and just shot them. We little kids saw that and will never forget it.

Erika's younger sister, Sylvia, did not recall being frightened but remembered instead the kindness the soldiers showed little children: "They got cans of fruitcake and stuff. If they didn't want the candies, they gave them to the little kids."

During the summer of 1945, Sister Bahe and her children were loaded onto a truck and returned to Hanover. According to Sylvia, "The city was destroyed. Everywhere you looked you saw rubble and bombed-out buildings." Erika recalled how her

mother showed her the ruins of their apartment house. They looked for surviving items, but looters had already been there. Eventually, Hans Bahe also returned to Hanover, and life began anew for the family. They immediately sought out the Saints and joined in meetings in various apartments around town.

The war years were essentially the only life young Annegret Reschke could remember. It had seemed to her that the universal motto was “Wait until the war’s over!” This applied to many of her requests but prominently to her baptism that finally took place in September 1945: “I was already nine years old by then, and, in my mind, it was high time for this very important event to take place.”⁴⁰ This new religious phase of her life would coincide with new political and cultural phases in a Germany without Hitler and National Socialism.

Looking back on her experiences in Hanover during the war, Doris Fraatz commented, “My mother and my grandmother had strong testimonies of the Church. We did not doubt what Heavenly Father could do for us—that is when you really start having faith.”

World War II had seriously (and in some cases tragically) interrupted the private lives of the Saints in the Hanover Branch, but they had worked diligently under constantly changing leadership to keep the branch alive and to worship their Father in Heaven on a consistent basis. Relatively few of them were still in the city when the war ended, but they eventually returned and gathered together again to worship and to revive their religious community.



Fig. 9. Many LDS women had non-LDS husbands who were killed in the war. Heinl Hirsch of Hanover was one of those casualties. (H. Hirsch)

IN MEMORIAM

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

Hans Heinrich Bahe b. Kreutzriehe, Hessen-Nassau, Preussen, 26 Apr 1878; son of Johann Friedrich Bahe and Engel Marie Voelker; bp. 20 Nov 1910; conf. 20 Nov 1910; m. Hannover, Hannover, 24 Sep 1905, Doretta Engelhardt; 2 m. Hannover 3 Jan 1909, Anna Henriette Louise Engelhardt; d. heart attack Hannover 14 Jan 1942 (Celle Branch general minutes, CHL LR 1519 11, 178; NFS)

Friedrich Heinrich Fraatz b. Hannover, Hannover, 22 Jul 1922; son of Heinrich Fraatz and Elise Lina Reichmann; bp. 26 Jan 1933; conf. 26 Jan 1933; ord. deacon 20 Sep 1936; ord. teacher 6 Nov 1938; ord. priest 23 Nov 1941; ord. elder 4 Jul 1943; d. lung disease 24 Nov 1943 (FHL microfilm 68809, no. 51)

Marie Dorothee Gehrke b. Nateln, Uelzen, Hannover, 22 Sep 1861; dau. of Joachim Friedrich Ludwig Gehrke and Dorothee Elizabeth Schulze; bp. 30 Oct 1927; conf. 30 Oct 1927; m. Rosche, Hannover, 8 or 28 Nov 1884, Johann Heinrich Wilhelm Maykus; 5 children; d. old age Schliekau, Hannover, 13 May 1940 (FHL microfilm 68799, no. 14; CHL CR 375 8 2439, no. 483; FHL microfilm 245228, 1930 and 1935 censuses)

Georg Heinrich Gleim b. Reichensachsen, Eschwege, Hessen-Nassau, 12 Apr 1861; son of Conrad Gleim and Elisabeth Otto; bp. 4 Dec 1925; conf. 4 Dec 1925; ord. deacon 3 Jul 1927; ord. teacher 3 Jun 1928; ord. priest 12 Apr 1936; ord. elder 7 May 1939; m. 26 Oct 1900, Anna Wilhelmine Vogt; d. stroke 10 Jul 1942 (FHL microfilm 68809, no. 57)

Kurt Arthur Helfer b. Hannover, Hannover, 25 Aug 1913; son of Kurt Franz Helfer and Erna Lehmann; bp. 27 Jan 1923; conf. 27 Jan 1923; missing (FHL microfilm 68809, no. 74)

Paul Willi Andreas Jochims b. Hannover, Hannover, 21 Aug 1915; son of Andreas Friedrich Paul Franz Jochims and Minna Marie Henriette Julie Schlein; bp. 5 Jun 1931; conf. 5 Jun 1931; d. frostbite and kidney failure, military hospital Krakow, Poland, 16 Jul 1942 (FHL microfilm 68809, no. 208)

Emma Anna Olga Marie Martha Jürges b. Braunschweig, Braunschweig, 11 Jul 1895; dau. of Carl Jürges and Marie H. Everding; bp. 25 Mar 1907; conf. 25 Mar 1907; m. Albert Paul Klug 26 May 1917; d. pancreatitis 23 Oct or 20 Nov 1939 (FHL microfilm 68809, no. 266)

Marie Karger b. Poditau, Schlesien, 15 or 25 Feb 1867; dau. of Franz Karger and Louise Neumann; bp.

13 May 1923; conf. 13 May 1923; m. Habelschwerdt or Altweistvitz, Schlesien, 10 Sep 1888, August Jüschke; 15 children; d. old age Visselhövede, Hannover, 6 Feb 1945, bur. Visselhövede 10 Feb 1945 (FHL microfilm 68799, no. 4; CHL CR 375 8 2439, no. 593)

Eva Marie Margreta Klug b. Braunschweig, Braunschweig, 14 Oct 1923; dau. of Albert Paul Klug and Marie Martha Jürges; bp. 10 Jul 1932; conf. 10 Jul 1932; k. air raid 10 Apr 1944 (FHL microfilm 68809, no. 268)

Elsbeth Anna Krix b. Braunschweig, Braunschweig, 12 Feb 1909; dau. of Kurt Krix and Else Seyer; bp. 5 Sep 1936; conf. 5 Sep 1936; m. Friedrich Wilhelm Liebig 25 Jul 1936; d. tuberculosis 13 Jul 1941 (FHL microfilm 68809, no. 283)

Lina Marie Frieda Kreth b. Hannover, Hannover, 28 Jul 1884; dau. of Wilhelm Kreth and Karoline Dill; bp. 12 Oct 1922; conf. 12 Oct 1922; m. Wilhelm Schlüter (div.); d. stroke 12 Aug 1944 (FHL microfilm no. 68809, no. 163)

Amalia Auguste Johanna Kruhl b. Görlitz, Schlesien, 2 May 1852; dau. of Karl Kruhl and Johanna Kotz; bp. 27 Jan 1923; conf. 27 Jan 1923; m. — Richter; d. old age 11 Mar 1944 (FHL microfilm 68809, no. 144)

August Heinrich Wilhelm Küthmann b. Barsinghausen, Hannover, Hannover, 14 Jun 1874; son of Friedrich Küthmann and Wilhelmine Adening; bp. 2 Sep 1916; conf. 3 Sep 1916; ord. deacon 16 Feb 1919; ord. teacher 10 Apr 1924; ord. priest 5 Oct 1924; ord. elder 11 Mar 1932; m. 12 Jan 1900, Maria Ebers; d. diabetes 28 Jan or 20 Feb 1940 (FHL microfilm 68809, no. 96)

Auguste Hermine Lübke b. Argesdorf, Kloster Wennigsen, Hannover, 26 Dec 1864; dau. of Christian Friedrich Lübke and Dorothea Fündling; bp. 5 Jul 1914; conf. 5 Jul 1914; m. 21 Apr 1887, Wilhelm Heinrich Gleue; d. old age 30 Jul 1944 (FHL microfilm 68809, no. 60)

Marie Auguste Henriette Sophie Lüders b. Barneberg, Neuahaldensleben, Sachsen, 20 Feb 1871; dau. of Christian Lüders and Ernstine Hase; bp. 7 Jul 1918; m. Friedrich Reichmann 9 May 1896; d. heart attack 28 Dec 1942 (FHL microfilm 68809, no. 138; Doris Fraatz Mentzel)

Minna Friederike Ernstine Lüders b. Sommerschenburg, Neuahaldensleben, Sachsen, 20 Feb 1876; dau. of Heinrich Andreas Ernst Lüders and Ernstine Hase; bp. 13 Jul 1916; conf. 13 Jul 1916; m. 15 Apr 1895, Gustav Hermann Reuter; d. stroke 1940 (FHL microfilm 68809, no. 143)

Wilhelm Karl Markmann b. Schora, Jericho, Sachsen, 11 Aug 1867; son of Christian Markmann and

Sophie Fritze; bp. 9 Aug 1919; conf. 9 Aug 1919; ord. teach. 6 Jun 1920; ord. priest 6 Sep 1925; ord. elder 15 Sep 1930; d. old age 27 Jan 1942 (FHL microfilm 68809, no. 103)

Wilhelm Plinke b. Barsinghausen, Hannover, Hannover, 19 Feb 1895; son of Georg Plinke and Dorette Vogel; bp. 4 Jun 1926; conf. 4 Jun 1926; m. 6 Dec 1919, Martha Amalie Sophia Katzenmeyer; d. lung disease 30 Nov 1942 (FHL microfilm 68809, no. 127)

Auguste Pötzold b. Kalk, Köln, Rheinprovinz, 7 Jun 1874; dau. of August Pötzold and Johanna Pöhl; bp. 15 Sep 1914; conf. 15 Sep 1914; m. Ferdinand Klages 6 May 1894; d. arteriosclerosis 2 May 1941 (FHL microfilm 68809, no. 279)

Willi Wilhelm Dietrich Schlüter b. Döhren, Hannover, Hannover, 2 Dec 1909; son of Wilhelm Schlüter and Lina Marie Frieda Kreth; bp. 29 May 1923; conf. 29 May 1923; ord. deacon 8 Sep 1929; m. 22 Jul 1933, Auguste M. W. Dohmeyer; d. injury from air raid 15 Jul 1941 (FHL microfilm 68809, no. 162)

Willhelm Johannes Schrader b. Hannover, Hannover, 22 Sep 1864; son of Carl Friedrich Wilhelm Schrader and Anna Staufebach; bp. 17 Jun 1930; conf. 17 Jun 1930; ord. deacon 7 Jun 1931; ord. priest 19 Jun 1932; m. Gudrun Sophia Leyers; d. old age 29 Jan 1944 (FHL microfilm 68809, no. 169)

Elsa Julia Johanna Schröder b. Grevesmühlen, Mecklenburg-Schwerin, 28 May 1895; dau. of Anna Schröder; bp. 2 Feb 1930; conf. 2 Feb 1930; m. Otto Brachert 27 Oct 1923; m. 15 Oct 1937, Karl Scharnickow; d. consumption 16 Jun 1942 (FHL microfilm 68799, no. 40)

Emilie Ida Alwine Thile b. Klein Bülten, Peine, Hannover, 24 Oct 1871; dau. of Heinrich Thile and Sophie Leinemann; bp. 26 Oct 1920; conf. 26 Oct 1920; m. Karl Heinrich Wilhelm Wehrspohn 9 Aug 1894; d. heart disease 15 Dec 1941 (FHL microfilm 68809, no. 185)

Karl Borwin Warnke b. Hannover, Hannover, 14 Oct 1914; son of Gustav Warnke and Johanne Oppermann; bp. 6 Nov 1923; conf. 6 Nov 1923; d. poor circulation Groß Rosen Concentration Camp, Schlesien, 26 Apr 1942; cremated (FHL microfilm 68809, no. 182)

Christa Karola Klara Wille b. Hannover, Hannover, 2 Dec 1940; dau. of Wilhelm Heinrich Karl Wille and Elisabeth Alma Bahe; d. pneumonia 13 Dec 1940 (FHL microfilm 68809, no. 313)

Ida Henriette Rutha Wolter b. Freienwalde, Pommern, 15 May 1861; dau. of Karl Wolter and Ulrike Schulz; bp. 16 Aug 1903; conf. 16 Aug 1903; k. air raid 9 Oct 1943 (FHL microfilm 68809, no. 204)

Louise Auguste Johanne Wolter b. Freienwalde, Pommern, 31 Dec 1859; dau. of Karl Wolter and Ulrike Schulz; bp. 4 May 1912; conf. 4 May 1912; m. 15 Nov

1899, Julius Kulling; d. old age Hannover, Hannover, 15 Jun 1942 (FHL microfilm 68809 no. 95)

Heidi Wrobel b. Hannover, Hannover, 19 Jan 1942; dau. of Kurt Waldemar Wrobel and Malfriede Friederike Sophie Wille; d. measles 4 Feb 1943 (FHL microfilm 68809, no. 317)

NOTES

1. Hanover city archive.
2. Doris Fraatz Menzel, interview by the author in German, Salt Lake City, March 21, 2009; summarized in English by Judith Sartowski.
3. Presiding Bishopric, "Financial, Statistical, and Historical Reports of Wards, Stakes, and Missions, 1884–1955," 257, CHL CR 4 12.
4. West German Mission manuscript history, CHL MS 1004 2.
5. Doris recalled a very rare situation: "My mother had a cousin who belonged to the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In fact, I even knew two members of that organization. I remember that when they came to visit us once, they started arguing a little about what we all believed in. One of the cousins had three sons who were ready to be ordained to the priesthood in their church. They also met in their branch in Hanover."
6. Hanover Branch general minutes, CHL LR 3594 11, 87.
7. *Ibid.*, 88.
8. Annegret Reschke Rudolph, telephone interview with the author, April 1, 2009.
9. Horst Reschke, interview by Marion Wolfert, Riverton, UT, March 27, 2006.
10. Hanover Branch general minutes, 117.
11. *Ibid.*, 120.
12. *Ibid.*, 120.
13. Annegret Reschke Rudolph, personal history (unpublished); private collection.
14. *Ibid.*
15. Hanover Branch general minutes, 122.
16. *Ibid.*, 131.
17. *Ibid.*, 135.
18. *Ibid.*, 148.
19. *Ibid.*, 151.
20. Sylvia Bahe Schwemmer, interview by the author, Salt Lake City, August 21, 2009.
21. Hanover general minutes, 153. He kept his word and was baptized on December 19 in Celle "because all of the bathhouses in Hanover have been destroyed in the air raids," according to the branch clerk.
22. *Ibid.*, 153.
23. *Ibid.*, 160. It appears that Elder Pohlsander was a conscientious correspondent and that letters could still be sent to such countries as Denmark and Switzerland from Germany.
24. Erika Bahe Runnels, telephone interview with the author, March 12, 2009.
25. Horst Reschke, "When the War Came We Were Not Prepared" (unpublished manuscript); private collection.
26. Sawdust was a common ingredient in bread in many European countries in those days.
27. Annegret Reschke Rudolph, interview.
28. Annegret Reschke Rudolph, personal history.
29. In most German cities, the crime of looting was punishable by death. Nevertheless, when the damage was so widespread, it was impossible for police to enforce the laws. In addition, it was not always easy to determine the difference between a resident and a looter. Annegret eventually inherited the silverware.
30. Hanover Branch general minutes, 166. Count Claus Schenk von Stauffenberg had left a briefcase with a bomb in the conference room of Hitler's Eastern Front headquarters at Rastenburg, East Prussia. The explosion killed four men but only superficially injured Hitler. All of Germany was shocked by the event, and von Stauffenberg and hundreds of other conspirators were executed. It is not clear precisely when Karl Blombach became the branch president, but he is listed as conducting sacrament meeting on many occasions beginning in August 1943, and the name Richard Krafft is seen in the minutes only on rare occasions after that date.
31. Lilly was the second wife of Max Reschke; they had married in 1942, according to his daughter, Annegret.
32. Annegret Reschke Rudolph, personal history. In those days, it was still the custom in most of Germany that all gifts were given on December 24. Late that afternoon, the parents closed off the living room, set up the tree, and brought out the gifts. When all was prepared, the room was opened to the children and the gifts that the Christ child or Santa Claus had brought were handed out.
33. Hanover general minutes, 175.
34. The leaflets were printed with anti-Nazi messages, and German citizens could be fined for even having such papers in their possession. Toward the end of the war, the leaflets announced the arrival of Allied forces and even included maps showing how the territory of Germany was to be divided up among the conquering armies.
35. Reschke, "When the War Came."
36. Hanover Branch general minutes, 175.
37. *Ibid.*, 176.
38. Annegret Reschke Rudolph, personal history.
39. Hanover Branch general minutes, 176.
40. Annegret Reschke Rudolph, personal history.

KASSEL BRANCH

The northernmost major city of the historical province of Hessen-Nassau, Kassel, lies about one hundred miles south of the city of Hanover. As World War II approached, the city had 211,624 residents, only sixty-five of whom were members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.¹

The church meetings were held in rented rooms on the third floor of an apartment building at a very fine location in town—Frankfurterstrasse 7.² A very traditional schedule was maintained, with Sunday School at 10:00 a.m. and sacrament meeting at 7:00 p.m. The Primary and the Relief Society met on Mondays at 5:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m., respectively. MIA meetings were held on Tuesdays at 8:00 p.m. Leadership meetings were held for the branch presidency, the Sunday School, and priesthood brethren. A genealogy class was held twice each month in connection with the MIA meetings, and choir practice took place on Tuesdays at 9:15 p.m. As in so many branches of the Church in Germany, the members of the Kassel Branch participated in meetings and activities several times each week.

Whereas the branch was dominated by women over the age of twelve, there were also fifteen priesthood holders among the membership. Only five children were included on the branch roster at the time. American missionary Howard Lyman was the branch president one month before the war, with Albert O. Baum as first counselor. It appears from branch records that Wilhelm K. Schade became the branch president when the American missionaries were required to leave for Denmark on August 25, 1939. The president of the Sunday School was Harry A. Niebuhr, and the Primary president was Marie Schade, while Albert O. Baum led the YMMIA, Inge Baum the YWMIA, and Barbara Kerseten Sr. the Relief Society.

Kassel Branch ³	1939
Elders	4
Priests	1
Teachers	4
Deacons	6
Other Adult Males	4
Adult Females	41
Male Children	4
Female Children	1
<i>Total</i>	65



Fig. 1. The Ernst family home in 1938. (J. Ernst)

Justus Ernst (born 1928) described the branch leaders in these terms: “Brother Diederich was a book-binder, Brother Schade an upholsterer, Brother Baum a painter, and Brother Göttig worked for the railroad. None of them really in any way could be considered wealthy or middle class.”⁴ Eleven years old at the time, Justus recalled that the meeting facility consisted of one larger room for the general meetings and two or three other small rooms for

classes. There was a pump organ in the main room, but the only décor he could remember was a picture of Joseph Smith. Average attendance in those days may have been as many as forty persons.

Young Justus had been baptized in the Fulda River in Kassel in 1936 and inducted with his schoolmates into the Jungvolk in 1938. As he recalled:

I think they usually planned their meetings right at the same time as we had church meetings. I was also in the Hitler Youth at age fourteen. . . . There was some indoctrination about race and stuff like that, but I wouldn't call it heavy duty indoctrination. . . . We had some training with weapons—some shooting. As a matter of fact, my father had been in World War I and was very much convinced of the need to be able to shoot right. There was a course taught in a restaurant, and they had just air guns and small funny ones to shoot. And [my father] was interested in seeing that we could shoot.⁵

As part of his Hitler Youth service, Justus was assigned to help whitewash the attic spaces of downtown houses in order to retard fires that might be caused by incendiary bombs such as those already dropped on other German cities.⁶



Fig. 2. The Diederich family of the Kassel Branch in 1940. From left: Anna, Elfriede, Hugo, Margaret, Wilford and Fritz. (J. Ernst)

Hermann Ernst (born 1927) was ordained a deacon in 1941. In those days, teenage boys were not given the Aaronic Priesthood until the branch president identified a need for service in the branch. Hermann

was prepared for that service, as he described in his journal: “I had been quite active. I remember participating in carrying out programs, for example in plays performed by the Primary Association.”⁷ He was also the second counselor to the Sunday School superintendant. Over the next two years, he made several comments in his journal about his willingness to serve and to be entrusted with more responsibilities in the Kassel Branch. During those years, he was working as a carpenter’s apprentice in the shops of the national railroad system.

An unnamed clerk kept good records of the branch meetings and special events beginning in 1942. (It is not clear whether previous records were lost or not written at all.)⁸ The following entries provide interesting details about branch life:

August 6, 1942: Five brethren attended priesthood meeting. The branch president is Wilhelm K. Schade.

August 20, 1942: Nine sisters attended Relief Society.

August 30, 1942: District conference was held in Hanover.

August 1942: Average sacrament meeting attendance for the month was twenty persons.

September 20, 1942: The Relief Society meeting was attended by visitors from the mission office: Sister Louise Heck and her daughters Annaliese and Hannelore, and Sister Hildegard Waibel, mission Relief Society president. Sister [Deiningen] from the mission office was also here.

November 15, 1942: We had a visit by soldier Brother Kleinert from the Freiberg/Sachsen Branch [East German Mission]; he was asked to speak.⁹

The following entry was made in the general branch minutes in late 1942:

From November 29 to December 27, 1942 we were not allowed to meet due to an order issued by the city police. The main reason was a report submitted by the neighbors. The mission leaders intervened and the matter was resolved. We were allowed to begin holding meetings again on December 27, 1942.¹⁰



Fig. 3. Relief Society sisters of the Kassel Branch celebrated the society's centennial in 1942 with a poster reading "Die Liebe höret nimmer auf!" (Charity never faileth!) (J. Ernst)

The general minutes of the Kassel Branch include the following comments in the fourth year of the war:

February 28, 1943: Wilhelm K. Schade said good-bye; he was drafted and stationed in Frankfurt/Main.

April 11, 1943: District conference in Hanover.

April 18, 1943: Sister Dielmann nee Krauss died of pneumonia and heart disease; she was buried in Helsa by Kassel on April 18.

July 18, 1943: District president Walther Pohlsander visited our meetings. He released Brother Schade as branch president due to his draft notice. A new presidency was called: Fritz Diederich, Albert Baum, Franz Ludwig Erich Niemann, with Konrad Göttig as secretary.

August 14, 1943: Miss Magdalena Spangenberg and Hugo Diederich were baptized.

August 15, 1943: Brother [Hermann] Schade Jr. is off to the Reichsarbeitsdienst.

August 29, 1943: Fall district conference was held in Hanover.¹¹

The average attendance at sacrament meeting in 1943 was eighteen persons, with seven attending priesthood meeting.

Hermann Ernst wrote in his journal about a trip to Munich with Elder A. O. Baum in July 1943. The two made the long journey by rail and attended church with the Munich Branch. As beautiful as the Bavarian capital city was, Hermann was apparently concentrating on matters of religion rather than culture and history: "The city of Munich didn't impress us too much without its monuments. But we were favorably impressed by the Munich Branch. We even had to talk in the sacrament meeting," he wrote. The

two then traveled into the Alps just south of Munich. The mountains left a lasting impression of the power of God. His assessment of the entire experience reads thus: "Fully satisfied and [with] a stronger testimony of the truth we returned to our home."

The question of religion and church apparently was more than just a passing fancy to Hermann Ernst. On September 2, 1943, then sixteen years old, he went to city hall and asked to have his name removed from the records of the Lutheran Church in which he had been baptized as an infant. He made no other comments in his journal about this question, allowing the assumption that his request was granted. Just days later, he was ordained to the office of teacher in the Aaronic Priesthood.

In October 1943, the war came home to Kassel in a terrible way. There had been a dozen or so minor attacks from the air before that time, but nothing in comparison to the blows dealt the city in that month. The branch clerk made the following sad comments in his record:

October 3–4, 1943: Air-raid attack on Kassel; the Schade and Diederich families lost their homes and some church property; other members lost their windows and doors. A bomb hit the church rooms. October 22, 1943: Another attack on Kassel. Church rooms at Frankfurterstrasse 7 II and all church property were totally destroyed. The apartments of many members were damaged or totally destroyed and the following were killed:

Auguste Mülverstedt, born 12 Sep 1880 in Kassel

Frieda Mülverstedt born 19 March 1904 in Kassel

Katharine Wittrock born 7 Dec 1871 in Eschwege

Sophie-Marie Elisabeth Diederich Sr. born 16 Feb 1886 in Hofgeismar

Sophie Elisabeth Diederich Jr. born 13 April 1914 in Kassel

We are told that the last two were singing "Nearer, My God, to Thee" just before they died.

The attack on Kassel on October 22 left nearly the entire downtown in ruins. The Ernst family

lived across the river to the east in the Bettenhausen suburb and were spared the devastation that occurred just a mile away. Nevertheless, Justus was soon exposed to the real horrors of the war, and he recounted what happened the next morning:

The streetcars didn't go, so I just started walking, and as I came to the inner part of the town there were hundreds of corpses laying on the street. And it was just really something. I had never seen a dead person in my whole life. And all of a sudden there were hundreds of them laying there, women and children and older men, not too many soldiers. The reason for their dying was actually that the fire was so intense, where they had been in the cellars and these shelters, that it had eaten up all the oxygen and they actually suffocated.¹²

According to branch records, the members began to be dispersed. In November 1943, branch president Fritz Diederich lost his home and moved to Vockerode to find new employment; he asked to be released and was replaced by Franz Niemann. Attempts were then made to locate branch members through the city's missing persons office and a newsletter (written by Hermann Ernst) was sent to several families who had left the city.¹³



Fig. 4. Justus Ernst was awarded this certificate after working on the Westwall defense system in France in 1944. (J. Ernst)

In early 1944, the Saints began to meet in the homes of the few member families still in Kassel. The names Schade and Ernst occur frequently in the

branch records in this regard. All the while, a search was conducted for a new meeting place somewhere in town. In February, the branch was allowed to rent space in the Adventists Hall at Querallee 11. Hermann Ernst, the elder brother of Justus, spent a good deal of time helping this come about and reaped the praises of the branch president. The next few entries in the branch records are instructive:

February 20, 1944: Sacrament meeting was held despite air raid alarms. In order to attend the meeting, Sister Baum and Brother Diederich had to get up at 4 a.m. The members are determined to do their duty.

March 5, 1944: District conference in Hannover. Brother Niemann is set apart as branch president. Five sisters and four brethren went. All had to overcome major obstacles.

March 19, 1944: Unfortunately, Hermann Ernst has been transferred to Graudenz. I [the branch president?] will lose a very capable and willing helper. . . . Sister Schade has asked me to locate the graves of our members who were killed on October 22–23 so that the graves can be dedicated and decorated with flowers.

April 20, 1944: Konrad Göttig has been drafted. Because his family is living in Cologne, he asked me to have their records transferred to the Cologne Branch.

April 21, 1944: Branch President Ludwig has been transferred to Westphalia. Brother Pohlsander gave him permission to make Gustav Ernst the temporary branch leader.¹⁴

It is not clear when Ludwig became the branch president, but this is a clear indication that the leadership of the Kassel Branch was changing almost as frequently as the meeting location. Gustav Ernst was not yet a priesthood holder at the time.

May 28, 1944: Sacrament meeting began at 3 p.m. during an air raid alarm.

June 18, 1944: Gustav Ernst is ordained to the Aaronic Priesthood and set apart as branch president.

June 25, 1944: A celebration of the anniversary of the death of Joseph Smith was held. A resident of the building had just celebrated a wedding

with lots of flowers, so the branch hall was already decorated for the Joseph Smith event. Eight members were in attendance.¹⁵

The typical apprenticeship in Germany ended with an examination, and Hermann Ernst passed his in carpentry with excellent marks in March 1944. At seventeen, he was a prime candidate for service to his country, and this began officially with his call to the national labor service. From June 7 to September 9, 1944, he worked in small towns in Lithuania and East Prussia. The literary talents that had inspired him to begin a newsletter for the Kassel Branch a few months earlier sought expression that summer, so he wrote two articles for a local newspaper. The titles were “Workmen on the East River” and “Send out the Watchmen.” He was also a budding poet.

In the summer of 1944, Justus Ernst was sent to the Western Front to work on fortifications. The West Wall was designed to defend Germany against an anticipated invasion by the Allies. He recalled the following about his service as a sixteen-year-old: “I remember working at piling up ammunition. They had lots of piles, big piles of ammunition for good-sized artillery pieces. They were right in the forest and unprotected. They were just stacked up there; I don’t know what they did with them.”

Back in Kassel, it was becoming increasingly difficult to hold Church meetings. On December 24, 1944, the meeting had to be postponed from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m. due to air-raid alarms. Apparently the Querallee rooms were not available when the year 1945 arrived, because the Sunday meetings were held in the Ernst home in Bettenhausen in January and February.

Gustav and Martha Ernst were deeply concerned when their son, Hermann, was drafted into the Wehrmacht in November 1944. Just before receiving that call, Hermann wrote what could be called a summary of his young life:

Thus, I look back on the years of being a citizen on this earth. I came into this world as a child of industrious, honest and god-fearing parents I grew up in common simplicity. I had a hard time

to learn in school. I enjoyed history, geography and similar classes. Nevertheless, I passed all of my classes. Through an incident, brought about by God, I came into the Church of Jesus Christ. My parents and my brother also became members of the same. There I was very teachable. Very soon I was able to participate in plays and programs. I have proved my ability through constant effort and faithfulness to the Church. During my apprenticeship I excelled because of the strength of my character. I was always one of the best at the trade school. My character and my ability were also recognized in the pre-military training camp. The railway gave me a free tuition to be a student at the state school in Graudenz. A high recognition. Thus, I am now a student. I made much progress in the Church. From second counselor in the Sunday School to first counselor in the branch presidency within three years. . . . Thus, my life has been a life of success and work and may it continue to be so. The Lord may be my protector and my shield; my comforter in all my distress. Amen.

This young man with the successful past and hopes for an equally successful future had in reality very little time left on earth. He was killed near Guben, Germany, on February 23, 1945. The Red Army had just launched its attack on the German capital by crossing the Oder and Neisse Rivers southeast of Berlin. Justus recalled what his father had told him about hearing the news of Hermann's death: "Two guys from the [Nazi] party came to tell my parents that he had been killed. Then they offered [my father] 250 Marks to express their sympathy, I suppose. My father told them to keep that money. His son was worth more than 250 Marks."¹⁶

In a final war-time entry in the branch records, we read the following: "On March 14, 1945, our rooms at Querallee 11 were destroyed in an attack. No other damage [loss of life?] was suffered." For the rest of the war and several months thereafter, the Kassel Branch members had no official home for their meetings.

Following his service in the national labor force (January to March 1945), Justus considered volunteering for the Waffen SS—the elite combat troops commanded by Heinrich Himmler. Because many of his friends were being drafted from the

Reichsarbeitsdienst directly into the Wehrmacht, Justus calculated that if he signed up with the Waffen SS he could go home for a while before being called up. "The basic training was supposed to take place in the Netherlands, and I thought that was a nice place to spend time." Fortunately for him, the call never came, and he was still home when the war ended. He described the entry of the American army on April 4–5, 1945:

My parents were in the air-raid bunker—a big old cement box. And I was home, and I would cook some meals for my parents, like potatoes and spinach—just simple stuff, a little meat. And I put it in a bucket and took it down to the bunker. On the way there, I saw some retreating German troops. And it's interesting. The very same street (the Leipzigerstrasse) where the Germans came back from Poland after having a big [victory] parade in 1939, here was the very same street, but a very different army going the other way.¹⁷

That "very different army" consisted at the time mostly of disjointed units bereft of ammunition and food. They moved slowly back, away from the enemy, hoping to avoid combat that would result in death just days before what appeared to be certain defeat and the end of the war.

According to Justus, the conquering Americans were anything but well-disciplined.

They were really drunk. I can still see it. They had loudspeakers mounted on their tanks, and they played jazz music. One lady must have been very happy to see the Americans, but she was a little disappointed that same night when she was raped by ten different soldiers. My mother went over there to see her, got her out of her house and brought her to ours. She saw a picture of Jesus, and she said, "I've suffered more than he suffered." The first thing the Americans did was come into our apartment—two guys. And they pointed at our radio and said, "Bring it." So, I carried the radio to their quarters. They were living in the next building. They had evacuated the whole next block, and they wanted to show me where they were going to put the radio so I could pick it up when they were leaving. I didn't realize that. My parents were scared stiff to see them take me away. They didn't care about me; they cared about the radio.¹⁸

Like so many German boys his age, Justus had not known any Germany other than the Third Reich. As he recalled, “I really couldn’t compare it to anything else. When all this broke down in 1945, it was really quite a blow to me. I felt quite lost.” He confided to his diary the fact that the war and the government’s antichurch attitude actually had caused him to lose interest in the Church for a while.¹⁹



Figs. 5 and 6. Hermann Ernst (in the uniforms of the Hitler Youth and the Wehrmacht) was killed in February 1945 when the Red Army crossed the Neisse River near Guben. (J. Ernst)

The city of Kassel lost approximately eleven thousand citizens in the military service away from home and in the forty bombing attacks that occurred in the last two years of the war. The entire downtown was destroyed as well as approximately 80 percent of the rest of the city.

Regarding the LDS branch in Kassel, district president Hermann Walter Pohlsander submitted the following report to the mission office in Frankfurt in August 1945:

The branch in Kassel suffered heavy losses. Seven [eight] members among them four [five] faithful sisters were killed. All [sic] the homes of members have been completely destroyed and the members had to find new homes. In spite of this the Saints are trying to return to this completely destroyed city to keep the branch alive. Brother Gustav Ernst, a priest who is 65 years old, is in charge of the branch consisting of 58 members. Of these about 60% have stayed true to the church. There

has been no contact with the Kassel Branch since February 1945, since Kassel is located in the American [Occupation] Zone. The meeting hall, including all the inventory, has been destroyed. The damage has been reported to the city damage office in Kassel [for compensation].²⁰



Fig. 7. Survivors of the Kassel Branch in July 1945. (J. Ernst)

Franz Niemann was released from a British POW camp and returned to Kassel on August 25, 1945. District president Walter Pohlsander released Gustav Ernst as the branch leader and called Brother Niemann to preside again.²¹ Little by little, the dispersed surviving members of the Kassel Branch began to return to rebuild both their city and their church.

IN MEMORIAM

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

Sophie Elisabeth Dietrich b. Kassel, Hessen-Nassau, 13 Apr 1914; dau. of Karl Friedrich Dietrich and Sophie Marie Elisabeth Schuhmacher; bp. 22 May 1937; conf. 22 May 1937; k. in air raid 22 Oct 1943 (FHL microfilm 68809, no. 120; IGI)

Hermann Karl Georg Ernst b. Kassel, Hessen-Nassau, 26 May 1927; son of Gustav Hermann Ernst and Martha Elisabeth Ruppel; bp. 17 Jun 1935; conf. 17 Jun

1935; ord. deacon 16 Nov 1941; ord. teacher 12 Sep 1943; private; k. in battle Guben, Brandenburg, 23 Feb 1945 (CHL CR 375 8 2439, no. 592; FHL microfilm no. 25762, 1930 and 1935 censuses; www.volksbund.de)

Auguste Hahn b. Kassel, Hessen-Nassau, 12 Sep 1880; dau. of Johannes Hahn and Katharina Zeug; bp. 22 May 1937; conf. 22 May 1937; m. — Mülverstedt; k. in air raid 22 Oct 1943 (FHL microfilm 68809, no. 117)

Sophie Koch b. Kassel, Hessen-Nassau, 1 Nov 1861; dau. of Justus Koch and Christiana Rudelbach; bp. 2 Nov 1901; conf. 2 Nov. 1901; m. — Laum (div.); 2m. Heinrich Marks 24 Feb 1916; d. old age 19 Mar 1942 (FHL microfilm 68809, no. 26; FHL microfilm no. 245226, 1930 and 1935 censuses)

Margarethe Gertrude Mosebach b. Stolberg, Hannover, 7 Apr 1925; dau. of Max Mosebach and Marie Friedrichs; bp. 28 Dec 1937; conf. 4 Jan 1938; k. in air raid Kassel, Hessen-Nassau, 22 Oct 1943 (CHL CR 375 8 2439, no. 634; IGI)

Katharine Müller b. Eschwege, Hessen-Nassau, 7 Dec 1871; dau. of Friedrich Müller and Elise Grundherodt; bp. 23 Feb 1930; conf. 23 Feb 1930; m. 28 Jul 1900, Gustav Wittrock; k. in air raid Kassel, Hessen-Nassau, 22 Oct 1943 (FHL microfilm 68809, no. 81)

Frieda Mülverstedt b. Kirchditmold, Hessen-Nassau, 19 Mar 1904; dau. of Max Mülverstedt and Auguste Hahn; bp. 22 May 1937; conf. 22 May 1937; k. in air raid Kassel, Hessen-Nassau, 22 Oct 1943 (FHL microfilm 68809, no. 118; IGI)

Heinrich Ludwig Persch b. Kassel, Hessen-Nassau, 1 May 1879; son of Johann Georg Persch and Theodora Helm; bp. 4 Aug 1932; conf. 4 Aug 1932; d. 12 Oct 1944 (FHL microfilm 68791, no. 388; Frankfurt District book II; IGI)

Sophie Marie Elisabeth Schuhmacher b. Hofgeismar, Hessen-Nassau, 16 Feb 1886; dau. of Johann Christoph Schuhmacher and Marie Sophie Engelbert; bp. 22 May 1937; conf. 22 May 1937; m. — Dietrich; k. air raid Kassel, Hessen-Nassau, 22 Oct 1943 (FHL microfilm 68809, no. 119; IGI)

Katharina S. Stuppi b. Pfeffelbach, Sankt Wendel, Rheinprovinz, 29 Sep 1867; dau. of Jakob Stuppi and Magdalena Spaniol; bp. 11 Apr 1902; conf. 11 Apr 1902; m. Joseph Webank; d. heart attack 1 Sep 1940 (FHL microfilm 68809, no. 124; IGI)

NOTES

1. Kassel City Archive.
2. West German Mission branch directory, 1939, CHL LR 10045 11.
3. Presiding Bishopric, "Financial, Statistical, and Historical Reports of Wards, Stakes, and Missions, 1884–1955," 257, CR 4 12.
4. Justus Ernst, oral history, 1985, CHL OH 728.

5. Justus Ernst, interview by the author, Salt Lake City, January 23, 2009.
6. Justus Ernst, interview.
7. Hermann Ernst, autobiography, unpublished.
8. Kassel Branch general minutes, CHL LR 4336 11.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Justus Ernst, interview.
13. Kassel Branch general minutes.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. Justus Ernst, interview. At the time, 250 Marks was the equivalent of about \$60 (not counting the deflation of the Reichsmark in the last year of the war).
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Uelzen Branch manuscript history and historical papers, 1921–1973, CHL LR 9489 2.
21. Kassel Branch general minutes.

UELZEN BRANCH

Located sixty miles northeast of the city of Hanover, the branch in Uelzen was small and somewhat isolated. According to records kept in the mission office, there was only one elder in the branch as World War II approached. No page is found for Uelzen in the mission directory, and no eyewitnesses can be found as of this writing.

In August 1945 Hermann Walter Pohlsander, surviving president of the Hanover District, wrote the following paragraph to describe the condition of the Uelzen Branch:

The branch has 21 members of whom 7 have proved to be faithful. All the priesthood apostatized already before the war. Living in Uelzen is Sister Marie Warnecke who is well known to all the missionaries and now is quite old. The faithful Sister Marie Hoppe, 72 years old, lives in Borg close to Uelzen. In Lüneburg is the residence of Sister Marie Hoppe and her children. These Saints are cared for spiritually by the Saints in Celle. A small amount of Church property is still there, but is of not much value. Bad

travel conditions make it impossible to visit these Saints at the present time.¹

Uelzen Branch²	1939
Elders	1
Priests	1
Teachers	2
Deacons	2
Other Adult Males	3
Adult Females	16
Male Children	2
Female Children	1
<i>Total</i>	28

IN MEMORIAM

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

Agnes Jüschke b. Habelschwerdt, Breslau, Schlesien, 3 Mar 1889; dau. of August Jüschke and Marie Karger; bp. 25 Jan 1923; conf. 25 Jan 1923; m. Eisleben, Sachsen, 4 Dec 1921, Friedrich Paul Horn; 1 child; d. pneumonia Uelzen, Hannover, 28 Aug 1941 (FHL microfilm 68799, no. 2; IGI)

Hermann Friedrich Wilhelm Schmitz b. Uelzen, Hannover, 15 Jul 1916; son of Josef Schmitz and Alwine Dorothee Elisa Wolter; bp. 12 Mar 1927; conf. 12 Mar 1927; m. 16 Nov 1940, Elfriede Eickelmann; rifleman; d. wounds Szuchimitschi or Suchinitschi, Russia, 9 Jan 1942 (FHL microfilm 68799, no. 26; www.volksbund.de; CHL CR 375 8 2439, no. 934)

Otto Erich Schmitz b. Uelzen, Hannover, 17 Jul 1920; son of Josef Schmitz and Alwine Dorothee Elisa Wolter; bp. 6 Oct 1928; conf. 6 Oct 1928; d. pleurisy 10 May 1942 (FHL microfilm 68799, no. 27; IGI)

NOTES

1. Uelzen Branch manuscript history, CHL LR 9489 2.
2. Presiding Bishopric, "Financial, Statistical, and Historical Reports of Wards, Stakes, and Missions, 1884–1955," 257, CR 4 12.