

13 Sep 1929; m. 28 May 1910, Margarethe Katherina Stettner; 2 children; d. suicide, Göppingen, Donaukreis, Württemberg, 29 Jun 1946 (FHL microfilm 68807, book 2, no. 399; FHL microfilm no. 271407; 1930 and 1935 censuses; IGI)

Paulina Wittlinger b. Holzheim, Donaukreis, Württemberg, 6 Sep 1871; dau. of Johannes Wittlinger and Katharine Hörmann or Hermann; bp. 14 Jul 1929; conf. 14 Jul 1929; m. — Lang; d. old age 7 Nov 1946 (FHL microfilm 68807, book 2, no. 381; FHL microfilm no. 271383; 1930 and 1935 censuses; IGI; PRF)

NOTES

1. Göppingen city archive.
2. Presiding Bishopric, "Financial, Statistical, and Historical Reports of Wards, Stakes, and Missions, 1884–1955," 257, CR 4 12.
3. West German Mission branch directory, 1939, CHLLR 10045 11.
4. Göppingen Branch general minutes, vol. 15, CHLLR 3235 11.
5. Ruth Schaaf Baur, telephone interview with the author in German, April 13, 2009; unless otherwise noted, summarized in English by Judith Sartowski. The city of Ulm was thirty miles southwest of Göppingen.
6. Werner Weixler, interview by the author, Salt Lake City, March 23, 2007.
7. Friedrich, Dorothea Gertrud, and Heinz Weixler, interview by the author in German, Salt Lake City, March 16, 2007.
8. Göppingen Branch general minutes, 214.
9. Magdalena Ceol, telephone interview with the author in German, April 28, 2009.
10. Göppingen Branch general minutes, 226.
11. *Ibid.*, 235.
12. Friedrich Weixler was one of many Germans who listened to BBC radio broadcasts, which was strictly illegal. Werner recalled how his mother scolded her husband for endangering himself and the family.
13. Elfriede Schaaf, telephone interview with the author in German, April 13, 2009.
14. Göppingen Branch general minutes, 240. Magdalena told of being baptized in an indoor pool in Stuttgart.
15. Göppingen city archive.

HEILBRONN BRANCH

The city of Heilbronn on the Neckar River has been an important cultural center for centuries. Located twenty-five miles north of Stuttgart near the borders of the states of Baden and Hessen,

the city once had a flourishing Jewish community and was the center of business for miles around.

| Heilbronn Branch ¹ | 1939 |
|-------------------------------|------|
| Elders | 3 |
| Priests | 2 |
| Teachers | 0 |
| Deacons | 3 |
| Other Adult Males | 7 |
| Adult Females | 30 |
| Male Children | 3 |
| Female Children | 6 |
| <i>Total</i> | 54 |

As war approached in Europe in the late summer of 1939, the branch of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Heilbronn numbered fifty-four persons. The great majority were twelve or older, and eight men and boys held the priesthood. Most branch leadership positions were filled in those days, with Emil Geist serving as the president. His only counselor at the time was Josef Schurr. President Geist was also the leader of the Sunday School, while Richard Geist guided the activities of the YMMIA and Rosa Christmann the YWMIA. Käthe Geist was the president of the Relief Society and Otto Christmann promoted *Der Stern* magazine subscriptions. There was no Primary president or genealogical instructor in the branch at that time.²

The Sunday School was held at 10:00 a.m. in 1939, and sacrament meeting convened in the evening at 7:00 p.m. The MIA members met on Tuesday evenings at 8:00 p.m., and the Relief Society on Fridays at 8:00 p.m. All meetings were held in rented rooms in a building at Goethestrasse 41. Heinz Mahler (born 1931) recalled the nice furnishings in the room in a Hinterhaus, including a rostrum, a pump organ, and a banner hanging over the podium with the words "The Glory of God Is

Intelligence.” There were several classrooms and even a kitchen.³ Heinz recalled walking a few miles to the meeting house; many other branch members also had a long walk there.

Helga Hock (born 1934) added the following detail:

We met in the upper rooms of the Hinterhaus. There was one large room for sacrament meeting and several smaller rooms for Sunday School. We had pictures on the wall of Joseph Smith and other prophets of the Church. We also had a picture of the temple. . . . We sat on chairs in our rooms and took those with us [when we moved out of the building]. On a typical Sunday, there were about twenty-five to thirty members in attendance.⁴

Heinz Mahler recalled clearly the outbreak of war in 1939: “Soldiers marched through the town to the railroad station, and people walked with them; the kids walked along with them, they had flowers in their rifles. It was a big, spectacular parade.” He also recalled the victory parade at the end of the campaign against France in June 1940: “There was a regiment of white horses from Heilbronn. We stood in the window of the city hall where my aunt worked, and we could see the big parade.” Spirits were very high in Germany at the time.

According to the centennial history of the Heilbronn Branch, Emil Geist was too old to be drafted and thus was able to stay in town and direct the activities of the branch during the entire war. In 1941, the contract for the rental of the meeting rooms was canceled, and a new location needed to be found. Eveline Christmann Mohr described the situation:

My father [Otto Christmann] was one of the first men to be drafted. We had moved into our new home with its art studio in the spring [of 1939] and he had to leave his 30-year-old wife and their three little children. So we rearranged the studio to make room for the branch meetings. There were [on average] about twenty people in attendance. Our house was spared the damage of the air raids.⁵

Eveline’s brother, Alex (born 1932) recalled that the studio was a former garage, but once outfitted for meetings, “it looked like a real church building. We had one large room and two smaller rooms with a podium and chairs. It was a smaller branch, but we liked our group.”⁶

Alex described wartime life and feelings in these words:

During the first few years of the war, it seemed that our daily schedules were not interrupted very much. We went to school, did our homework, helped in the house, and played outside. During the last two years, it got more difficult because of the constant air raids. It was hard for me to realize that everything was being destroyed and people were dying. I became very angry at the people who caused so many to suffer. I was angry and disappointed at the British and the Americans for leaving so much chaos behind. But war is war—what else could I expect?



Fig. 1. The Christmann home on Viktor Scheffel Strasse, in which branch meetings were held from 1941 through the end of the war. (100 Jahre Gemeinde Heilbronn)

Emil Geist was the brother of Martha Mahler and uncle of Heinz, who recalled how his uncle was once summoned to the police office along with the branch records. President Geist insisted that he was not allowed to show the records to anybody but Church officials, which made the police that much more suspicious. Then Heinz’s father, Ludwig Mahler (a former longtime member of the Nazi Party’s SA organization) went to the aid of his brother-in-law. He promised the police that Emil Geist was telling the truth and that the only

information in the records books was that of donations made by members to the Church. President Geist was released without penalty.

Helga Hock explained that her father was quite opposed to National Socialist politics. She recalled the following:

There were also some brethren who came to Church in their uniforms. It made my father very angry because he didn't understand what that had to do with the Church. Those brethren also made sure that we knew that they supported Hitler. They also prayed for the Führer. My father was not interested in politics at all. He had served in World War I and had lost all of his brothers in that war. He said that one war in his life was enough for him, and he knew that when Hitler became the chancellor, another war would be the result.

Little Gisela Mahler (born 1937) recalled the political forces influencing her young life: "We had to hang out a swastika flag from the window. And when we were out in public we had to raise our arms and say 'Heil Hitler.' And even in school we had to greet the teacher with 'Heil Hitler, teacher so-and-so.'"7

A huge air raid struck Heilbronn on September 10, 1944. According to Heinz Mahler, "Nobody was prepared for that. We didn't take it seriously because it hadn't happened before. Lots of people didn't even go to the shelters." The building in which the Mahlers lived was hit by incendiary bombs and began to burn. Down in the basement, the smoke was so thick that little Gisela (age seven) passed out. Heinz first thought that she was dead, but he lifted her up and carried her out of the basement. In escaping the building, he had to jump over a small pool of phosphorus that had not yet ignited. Still carrying his little sister, he was finally able to get out in the open. A soldier helped revive Gisela. Their father located them a few minutes later at a prearranged meeting place. Heinz then noticed that there were several holes burned in his clothing by cinders falling from the sky.

That air raid cost the family their earthly belongings, but they were all still alive. However, Heinz lost a dear friend, as he recalled:

When I was about twelve or thirteen, I loved to build model ships. A neighbor girl would come over to the house and help me; she would cut out the pieces and I would glue them together. She was a good friend. I once gave her a string bracelet that she tied around her wrist. After the terrible air raid of September 10, 1944, I was worried about her, so I ran down the street toward her house, seeing lots of smoke in that direction. Apparently her neighborhood had been hit. When I got there, I saw a long row of bodies laid out on the sidewalk, covered up by tarps. At the end of the row I saw an arm uncovered, and I recognized the bracelet on the wrist. I was absolutely crushed when I realized that she had been killed.



Fig. 2. Members of the Heilbronn Branch in 1944. (100 Jahre Gemeinde Heilbronn)

Helga's grandfather was eighty-four years old and a bit feeble. One day when it came time to hurry to an air-raid shelter, he insisted on staying in the basement of his own apartment house. Other family members got out of the building after it was hit and began to burn, but the old man went the wrong direction; he left the basement through the back exit and found himself trapped by a fence. The next day his burned body could be identified only by the bones in his hand that had been fractured years earlier.

Toward the end of 1944, Helga Hock followed her mother to the town of Weinsberg, three miles east of Heilbronn and presumably a safer place to live. However, there were other dangers lurking, such as the fanaticism of die-hard Nazis. In 1945, Helga's brother was to be drafted into the Volkssturm as he turned sixteen that year. As Helga recalled: "My mother told him that we had paid enough for the war already and that nobody knew what was going to happen. She wouldn't let him go. So we hid him." Of course, such action was considered treason, and the penalty in those final days of the war was usually death. Fortunately, the boy was not discovered. Helga assumed his duties, such as fetching milk, because he could not show himself in public.

On December 4, 1944, the majority of Heilbronn's downtown was destroyed in a catastrophic air raid. The building at Goethestrasse 41, where the branch had met until 1941, was nothing but rubble. At least two branch members died in the attack, and others lost their apartments, but those who lived on the outskirts of town survived in good condition.⁸ Helga Hock lost several of her relatives in that attack—her grandfather, her great-aunt Marie, Marie's daughter Rosa, and the wife of Helga's uncle Karl Christmann and five of their seven children.⁹

As a teenager, Alex Christmann wanted to see the air raids for himself. He recalled one occasion when he went upstairs to look out the attic window instead of going down into the basement shelter:

The airplanes started flying over the city. We were in the northern part of the city then, and they attacked the southern part. . . . I saw the flames and the smoke in the sky. The attacks were about [three to four miles] distant, so it didn't harm us in any way. But what we could do was watch, and that was just as hurtful. We also had members of our branch who lived in that area, but as far as I know, nobody was directly affected. The city center was heavily destroyed, and even some areas outside the center were damaged. We lived

right at the border of the city, and even that area was affected in part. But our street was kept safe for some reason. Nothing happened to us. About two hundred meters away from us, houses had been destroyed and burned out.

The Christmann grandparents died in one raid and several other relatives were killed during the war. Despite the fact that their home on Viktor Scheffel Strasse was not destroyed, Sister Christmann took her children away from Heilbronn. Her parents lived in Grossgartach, just five miles to the west, and the Christmanns lived with them there for perhaps the last year of the war.

Gisela Mahler remembered that her father moved the family out of Heilbronn after they were bombed out for the second time. They first lived in Renzen with their uncle Hermann Frank and his wife, Lydia. Later, Brother Mahler found an apartment in the town of Oberhöfen just a few miles away. The family remained in Oberhöfen for the ensuing five years. Just before the end of the war, Heinz and his little sister Inge had a serious scare, according to Gisela: "My brother had a little wooden wagon, and my sister was in it. Heinz saw an American airplane coming at them very low to the ground—so low that Heinz could see the pilot's face. And he got scared, so he grabbed Inge to protect her. Just then the pilot dipped his wings in a friendly gesture and then flew away."

Heilbronn was one of the few major cities in southern Germany that offered resistance to the invading Americans. The city history shows that defenders held the Americans at bay from April 3 to 12 before the fight came to an end. More than two-thirds of the city lay in ruins, and approximately 7,100 civilians had died in the air raids (officially twenty-seven attacks) and during the final battle. At least 2,741 Heilbronn men had died in the service of their country.

Out in Weinsberg, any hopes of the Hock family seeing the war end in peace were dashed when the town refused to surrender. Helga related the problems that followed:

In Weinsberg, there was a Nazi Party group leader. The Americans told us that if Weinsberg would capitulate, they would not harm us. That group leader told us that we shouldn't capitulate. The people who had already hung out white flags were murdered that day. Then the American deadline passed, and because we didn't capitulate, the Americans came with four planes and completely destroyed the little town of Weinsberg.

Thinking back on the behavior of her parents during the war, Helga made the following comment:

My parents had a strong testimony of the gospel. I know that during the war, all of the members came closer to their Heavenly Father—we prayed while waiting for the attacks to be over. For my father, it was always a testimony that the Lord protected us, even though we lost our home. Many of the situations were difficult, but we never lost our testimonies. We felt the Lord's protection.

According to Eveline Christmann, the American soldiers occupied all of the houses on their street with the exception of the Christmann house “because we had ‘an American church’ meeting there. I believe that we enjoyed very special protection there.”¹⁰ When Otto Christmann returned from the war at the end of 1945, he needed his studio again, so the branch meetings were hosted by Josef and Johanna Schurr in their apartment at Liststrasse 3.¹¹

IN MEMORIAM

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

Marie Anna Braun b. Nordrach, Offenburg, Baden, 24 Mar 1870; dau. of Anton Braun and Magdalene Erdrich or Endrich; bp. 27 Aug 1902; conf. 27 Aug 1902; m. 9 Jun 1894, Johann Karl Christmann; 8 children; k. air raid Heilbronn, Neckarkreis, Württemberg, 4 Dec 1944 (FHL microfilm 68807, book 2, no. 246; FHL microfilm 25741; 1930 and 1935 censuses; IGI)

Rosa Christmann b. Heilbronn, Neckarkreis, Württemberg, 13 Sep 1903; dau. of Johann Karl Christmann and Marie Anna Braun; bp. 6 Jun 1925; conf. 6 Jun

1925; k. air raid 4 Dec 1944 (FHL microfilm 68807, book 2, no. 144; FHL microfilm 25741; 1930 and 1935 censuses; IGI)

Margareta Johanna Scholl b. Mannheim, Mannheim, Baden, 13 Nov 1900; dau. of Johann Martin Scholl and Elisabetha Ültzhöfer; bp. 1 May 1920; conf. 2 May 1920; m. Mannheim 30 Aug 1934, Gustav Heinrich Wacker; d. lung disease 13 Sep 1943 (FHL microfilm 68807, book 2, no. 601; FHL microfilm 245291; 1935 census; IGI; AF)

Anna Katharine Schulz b. Zazenhausen, Neckarkreis, Württemberg, 13 Sep 1896; dau. of Karl Schulz and Anna Schmidt; bp. 18 Sep 1930; conf. 18 Sep 1930; m. Heilbronn, Neckarkreis, Württemberg, 27 Dec 1916, Gotthilf Esslinger; d. cachexy 8 Mar 1940 (FHL microfilm 68807, book 2, no. 451; IGI)

Erwin Schulz b. Heilbronn, Neckarkreis, Württemberg, 27 Mar 1917; son of Karl Schulz and Anna Schmidt; bp. 18 Sep 1930; conf. 18 Sep 1930; k. in battle Russia, 2 Apr 1943 (FHL microfilm 68807, book 2, no. 454; FHL microfilm 245260; 1935 census; IGI)

Franz Schuwerk b. Altoberndorf, Schwarzwaldkreis, Württemberg, 4 Oct 1904; son of Josef Schuwerk and Anna Wolf; bp. 23 Jul 1927; conf. 23 Jul 1927; ord. deacon 2 Oct 1932; m. 15 Oct 1932, Anna Behr; d. in hospital in POW camp at Ogulin-Lika, Yugoslavia, 11 Nov 1945 (CHL microfilm 2458, form 42 FP, pt. 37, district list 218–19, district list 1947, 544–45; FHL microfilm 68807, book 2, no. 412; FHL microfilm 245260; 1930 and 1935 censuses; www.volksbund.de; IGI)

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, branch directory, 1939, CHL 10045 11.
3. Heinz Mahler, interview by the author, Salt Lake City, June 13, 2006.
4. Helga Hock Seeber, interview by the author in German, Munich, Germany, August 21, 2008; unless otherwise noted, summarized in English by Judith Sartowski.
5. *100 Jahre Gemeinde Heilbronn* (Heilbronn: Gemeinde Heilbronn, 1999), 13; trans. the author.
6. Alex Christmann, telephone interview with Jennifer Heckmann in German, April 15, 2009.
7. Gisela Mahler Nitz, interview by Michael Corley, Salt Lake City, November 21, 2008.
8. *100 Jahre Gemeinde Heilbronn*, 13.
9. Helga Hock Seeber, autobiographical report (unpublished); private collection.
10. *100 Jahre Gemeinde Heilbronn*, 13.
11. *100 Jahre Gemeinde Heilbronn*, 14.