
HINDENBURG DISTRICT

East German Mission



The Hindenburg District of the East German Mission of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was the smallest district in the mission in both area and population. It was situated at the farthest eastern-central extent of Germany in 1939. There were only seventy-two members in three branches and one group in the district.

The city of Hindenburg was located at the eastern end of the territory. All of the branches were within just a few miles of the German borders with Poland and Czechoslovakia. The distance from Hindenburg to the office of the East German Mission in Berlin was 240 miles—a good day’s journey by railroad in those days.

The Hindenburg District was organized just prior to World War II. The history of the East German Mission includes these details:

Sunday, 10 July 1938: A special meeting was held in the Hindenburg Branch to organize the new Hindenburg District. Brother Martin Werner Hoppe, president of the Breslau District, presided. The branches of Hindenburg, Gleiwitz, and Ratibor were taken from the Breslau District and organized into the new Hindenburg District. Elder Ray D. Zollinger [a young missionary from the United States] was sustained president of the new district.¹



Fig. 1. The branches of the Hindenburg District.

On October 16, 1938, the first conference of the new district was held in the rooms of the Hindenburg Branch under the leadership of mission president Alfred C. Rees.²

In addition to the branch in the city of Hindenburg, there was a branch in Ratibor, twenty-four miles southwest of Hindenburg, and another in Gleiwitz, ten miles west. The name Gleiwitz is still associated with infamy because it was at the German-Polish border near Gleiwitz that Hitler’s government staged an “attack” by Polish troops on a radio station.³ The trumped-up affair was used as the justification

for the invasion of Poland by German troops beginning on Friday, September 1, 1939.

Hindenburg District ⁴	1939	1940	1941	1942
Elders	3	3		
Priests	4	4		
Teachers	1	1		
Deacons	3	3		
Other Adult Males	9	9		
Adult Females	41	43		
Male Children	6	7		
Female Children	5	5		
Total	72	75	79	79

No information regarding the Hindenburg District is found in the journal of the East German Mission after 1939. When a letter was sent by East German Mission leaders to all district presidents on August 12, 1941, no district president in Hindenburg was included among the addressees. It is possible that nobody was called to succeed Elder Zollinger, who was evacuated from Germany with the other American missionaries on August 25, 1939.

All of the Hindenburg District territory was ceded to Poland following World War II. After the Polish government forced the evacuation of German citizens from the region in late 1946, all traces of the presence of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints there were lost.

NOTES

1. East German Mission Quarterly Reports, 1938, no. 29, East German Mission History.
2. East German Mission Quarterly Reports, 1938, nos. 41–42.
3. It was later determined that the “Polish soldiers” were actually criminals from German prisons attired in Polish uniforms. All dead soldiers [prisoners] shown to the media had been executed by the SS and placed in positions that simulated combat.
4. Presiding Bishopric, “Financial, Statistical, and Historical Reports of Wards, Stakes, and Missions, 1884–1955,” CR 4 12, 257.

DEUTSCH RASSELWITZ GROUP

Bertold Patermann joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 1932, thanks to an enthusiastic man with whom Brother Patermann worked on the railroad. After his first wife died, Bertold married Kornelia Schiller, and she helped bring up his children in the new faith. The Patermanns formed the nucleus of the Church in the small town of Deutsch Rasselwitz in Silesia, just a few miles from the Czech border. The population of the town was about three thousand when World War II began.

“Later my father converted a neighbor lady and her daughter, who lived in the same house. That was our branch for a long time,” recalled Angela Patermann.¹

During the late 1930s, American missionaries were common visitors in the Patermann home. The town was predominately Catholic, but the neighbors did not seem to care about the tiny group of religious outsiders. “They didn’t cause trouble because they thought we were nuts,” according to Angela Patermann. There was no persecution of any kind.

The Patermann home at Neustädterstrasse 150 hosted all Church meetings in Deutsch Rasselwitz until 1939. Brother Patermann, a priest in the Aaronic Priesthood, conducted a sacrament meeting on Sundays. For larger meetings, such as district conferences, the small group took the train to Ratibor (eighteen miles to the southeast) or Hindenburg (thirty-five miles due east).

Just before the war started, Bertold Patermann was transferred to Berlin in connection with his employment with the railroad, which was a government entity in Germany in