

## NOTES

1. Presiding Bishopric, "Financial, Statistical, and Historical Reports of Wards, Stakes, and Missions, 1884–1955," CR 4 12, 257.
2. East German Mission Quarterly Reports, 1938, no. 29–31, East German Mission History.
3. Ibid., 1938, no. 49.

---



---

## LEIPZIG CENTER BRANCH

---



---

When World War II began, Leipzig had been the capital of the German book market for several centuries. The international book fair took place there every year, and the world looked to Leipzig for new books. In this metropolis of about six hundred thousand people, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints had two branches: Center and West.

Leipzig Center Branch <sup>1</sup>	1939
Elders	16
Priests	11
Teachers	7
Deacons	14
Other Adult Males	52
Adult Females	206
Male Children	13
Female Children	9
<i>Total</i>	328

The Leipzig Center Branch met in rented rooms at Moritzstrasse 10 in the second Hinterhaus—just two blocks from the New City Hall and thus near the commercial center of this bustling city. According to the branch history, the rooms there were on the second floor and included a large meeting hall, a cloakroom, and a kitchen where the members who lived farther away could enjoy their noon meal between Sunday meetings. There was also a Relief

Society room where the sisters met on Monday evenings for discussions and craft circles.<sup>2</sup>

Elfriede Waldammer Werner (born 1918) later indicated that the branch had both a piano and a pump organ. "Sometimes there were more than eighty people in the meetings. There were many children and teenagers."<sup>3</sup> With 328 members at the end of the year 1939, this was the fifth-largest branch in the mission and the sixth-largest in all of Germany.

All of the programs of the Church were functioning in the Leipzig Center Branch when the war began in 1939. According to Elfriede Werner:

Sometimes, we were at church nearly every day. We were always there Sundays, Mondays, and Wednesdays. On Sunday mornings, we went to church for Sunday School, went home again for lunch, and then came back to the church for sacrament meeting.

According to Sister Werner, politics had no place in the branch. "When we had our meetings, we didn't talk about anything but the gospel. We also didn't pray for Adolf Hitler."

The history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Leipzig includes the following about the war years:

When the Second World War broke out, most of the brethren were drafted into the army. The lack of leadership led to the combining of the two Leipzig branches in 1941. Brother Johannes Hurst was the branch president at that time. The members gathered for meetings in rented rooms at Moritzstrasse 10. In the early hours of 4 December 1943, the rooms were hit by bombs during an air raid over Leipzig and burned out. The branch was "bombed out" as they used to say in those days. Thereafter, the meetings took place in the home of Sister Herz on Schletterstrasse, then in the rooms of another church on Josephstrasse.<sup>4</sup>

Just before the rooms at Moritzstrasse were destroyed, Elfriede Schiele, longtime secretary of the Relief Society, considered taking the



*Fig. 1. A celebration in the Moritzstrasse. (Leipzig Branch History)*

records home with her for safekeeping. Then she wondered what the other sisters would say about that and did nothing. After the destruction of the church, she regretted not heeding those promptings.<sup>5</sup>

Herbert Werner was thirty-one, married, and the father of two when he was drafted in 1942. That same year he was wounded in action in the Soviet Union and taken to Charkov for treatment. From there he was put on a train heading home, with a cast on his leg. Unbeknownst to the doctor, there was still a piece of shrapnel in his leg. Herbert's son, Eberhard, later described what happened:

He was in great pain during the train ride and even passed out a few times. He asked for help, but the doctor told him to not exaggerate his pain. A friend who knew that Herbert was not exaggerating went over to check him out and smelled something very bad inside the cast. At the next train station, the doctor took Herbert off the train and into a restroom where he amputated the leg. The conditions of the operation were poor, and the doctor predicted that his patient would not live another hour, but he

survived and never had trouble with the stump of his leg again.

When Herbert Werner returned to Leipzig, city officials assigned his family an apartment at Eisenbahnstrasse 157. There he learned to walk with an artificial leg but could no longer participate in the dancing and water sports he and his wife, Elfriede, had enjoyed before. He told her that he was grateful to be alive and that he could live with the condition. He convinced her that she would have to do the same or they would both be unhappy. She spent many hours in the corridor of their apartment building teaching him how to walk.

Elfriede's reaction was natural. Herbert's leg may not have caused him much pain, but he had other physical ailments when he came home:

He came home with lots of illnesses he contracted while he was in the army hospital. It was a drastic change for all of us when he came home. He suffered a lot. . . . He was very brave and he expected us to be brave. . . . He

was home and he was alive and that was all that really mattered. It never affected his testimony.

Elfriede Werner had three children by the time the air raids over Leipzig became frequent. She described the trials of a young mother at such times:

Whenever we had an attack, we went into our basement. Sometimes it took very long and it was hard to be patient. I had three little children to take care of and a husband. I prepared everything and put out clothing before we went to bed so that my children would not have to go into the basement in their night gowns. . . . Sometimes, the children got their clothes mixed up because everything was so hectic. The children knew very well what was going on outside.

As the war went on and attacks on Leipzig increased in frequency, Sister Werner was encouraged to take her family out of town. She first went north to Heiligendamm on the Baltic Sea, then to Ahlbeck to the former home of a wealthy family after the home was converted for use by mothers with little children. Finally, she took her children and her husband and found a place to live in Warmbad Wolkenstein. Those locations were physically safer, but had one distinct disadvantage:

When I was gone from Leipzig, we did not have much contact with the Church. I always had a Bible and Book of Mormon with me whenever I could. Often, I would not take them because I was afraid that somebody would take them away from me or I would lose them—they were so precious to me.

Siegfried Schmidt's father had been the president of the Düsseldorf Branch in the West German Mission before he moved with his family to Leipzig. He was employed by the Rheinmetall Company (a critical war industry) and was thus exempt from military service. Because there was no housing available in Leipzig, the Schmidts found a home in nearby Zehmen. Siegfried (born 1939) recalled the

very long walk from Zehmen to the outskirts of Leipzig, then the ride on the streetcar for twenty minutes. Because the way home was equally long, the family usually could not stay for sacrament meeting in the evening.<sup>6</sup>

When the Schmidt family was bombed out, Siegfried recalled that they escaped their burning apartment building by crawling through a hole broken into the basement of the adjacent building. This was a common practice all over Germany and saved the lives of the Schmidt family members.

The American army entered Zehmen toward the end of April 1945. According to Siegfried, "I did not have a reason not to like them. They gave me a bar of chocolate and a pat on the back." Even when the Soviets replaced the Americans a few weeks later, there were few incidents.

According to the branch history, "six brethren of the Leipzig Branch lost their lives in the war, but in 1945 every family was suffering and in need."<sup>7</sup>

The Leipzig Branch conducted an extensive welfare drive and collected hundreds of items to be shared with members throughout the district who had lost their homes and property. A list dated 1944 shows shoes, clothing, household items, and infant supplies. Branch president Johannes Hurst reported the success of the campaign to district president Arthur Böhme and indicated that persons receiving supplies were also given forty marks in cash.<sup>8</sup>

Walter Schiele (born 1927) was not quite seventeen when he was drafted into the Reichsarbeitsdienst in 1944. By that time, Germany had a greater need for soldiers than for laborers, so Walter was sent to East Prussia to be trained as an antiaircraft gunner. He was then transferred to Belgium, but when the Allied troops landed at Normandy, he was sent home for six days. The call to the German army awaited him there.<sup>9</sup>



Fig. 2. The old city hall in Leipzig. (R. P. Minert, 1992)

After six weeks of training in Böhmisches-Leipa in Czechoslovakia, Walter was sent to Norway for additional training. At the age of seventeen, he then participated in the Battle of the Bulge in Belgium, where he was taken prisoner by the Americans on January 14, 1945. By the end of April, he was in the United States. Over the next year, he lived and worked in POW camps in Missouri, Nebraska, Colorado, and New York. He wrote home many times but never received an answer.

In 1946, Walter Schiele was sent to England. He and his comrades had been promised a release but were simply transferred to the British POW system. He had read in an American newspaper that a German prisoner did the work of 3.77 Italian prisoners, which explained why the Italians were sent home sooner. "They were smarter than we were; they didn't work as hard," Walter explained.

Walter's sister wrote to the office of European mission president Ezra Taft Benson in 1947 and the letter found its way to Walter. He told his friends, "See, it's good to be a Mormon. This church helps its members." He was given an early release due to the fact that

his father was dying of tuberculosis. During his days in uniform, Walter had met only one other member of the Church—an American guard in a POW camp in Missouri who claimed to be a descendant of Brigham Young. Walter asked him to find a Book of Mormon in German, but the two lost contact soon thereafter.

Looking back on the wartime experience, Elfriede Werner had the following observations:

I never gave in to the thought that we could die. . . . I never doubted Heavenly Father. Not me. I have to say that there were members who doubted Him, but I always replied that it was we who did all of these horrible things and not Heavenly Father. . . . There were some members who did not attend the meetings any more because they did not have a strong testimony and were influenced by the war. It was not simple at all to keep a testimony during a time like that. Even very faithful people found themselves doubting.

## IN MEMORIAM

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

**Fritz Wilhelm Bernau** b. Kriescht, Brandenburg, Preußen 13 Jan 1912; son of Otto Karl Bernau and Bertha Auguste Kirsten; bp. 6 Nov 1920; m. Dresden, Dresden, Sachsen 24 Dec 1934, Margarete Marie Paeschel; 4 children; corporal; d. dysentery POW Russia Apr 1945; bur. Charkow, Ukraine (CHL CR 375 8 #2458, 1458–59; www.volksbund.de; IGI)

**Bruno Rudolf Gotty** b. Oberneuschönberg, Dresden, Sachsen 2 Feb 1913; son of Bruno Joseph Gotty and Martha Elisabeth Fritzsche; bp. 4 Nov 1923; lance corporal; k. in battle Schukowo, Uljanowo, Russia 7 Sep 1942 (*Sonntagsgruss*, no. 1, 3 Jan 1943, 4; E. Werner; www.volksbund.de; AF)

**Hedwig Heweick** b. Greiz, Reuss j.L. 6 May 1866; dau. of Wilhelm Heweick and Minna Lippold; m. — Windisch; d. senility 18 Nov 1939 (CHL CR 375 8 #2458, 1939 data)

**Emma Elisabeth Koetz** b. Borna, Leipzig, Sachsen 28 Jun 1863; dau. of Karl Gottlob Koetz and Christiane Friederike Schumann; bp. 6 Aug 1935; m. Grotzsch, Leipzig, Sachsen 15 Dec 1887, Friedrich Edmund Oskar Graf; 4 children; d. Grotzsch, Leipzig, Sachsen

3 Mar 1940 (*Sonntagsstern*, no. 17, 26 May 1940 n.p.; FHL Microfilm 25776, 1935 Census; IGI)

**Friedrich Richter** b. Grimma, Sachsen 25 Mar 1875; bp. 13 Apr 1921; m. Marie Anna Friedericke Backhaus; d. heart attack Leipzig 25 Mar 1941 (*Sonntagsgruss*, no. 22, 1 Jun 1941, 88; FHL Microfilm 271402, 1930/35 Census; IGI)

**Gertrud Berta Schroedter** b. Gohlis, Leipzig, Sachsen 18 Sep 1908; dau. of Franz Heinrich Gustav Franz Heinrich Schroedter and Martha Jakob; d. stroke Leipzig, Sachsen 15 Mar 1940 (*Sonntagsstern*, no. 17, 26 May 1940, n.p.; IGI; AF)

**Karl Alfred Schulz** b. Leipzig, Leipzig, Sachsen 9 Apr 1914; son of Johann Karl Schulze and Anna Martha Zimmer; bp. 17 Jul 1924; k. in battle Eastern Front 1942 (*Sonntagsgruss*, no. 1, 3 Jan 1943, 4; E. Werner; IGI)

**August Schwob** b. Walddorf, Reinerz, Schlesien, Preußen 7 Apr 1862; son of Franz Schwob and Beate Rieger; bp. 9 Aug 1930; ord. deacon; d. old age Leipzig, Sachsen 24 Sep 1939 (*Stern*, no. 23, 1 Dec. 1939, 372; FHL Microfilm 245260, 1935 Census; IGI)

**Karoline Franziska Swaboda** b. Przlausch, Böhmen, Austria 4 or 6 May 1875; bp. 17 Sep 1921; m. 14 May 1901, Albert Franz Lippold; 1 child; d. Leipzig, Sachsen 7 Mar 1941 (*Sonntagsgruss*, no. 17, 27 Apr 1941, 68; FHL Microfilm 271388, 1935 Census; AF; IGI)

**Emma Lina Troll** b. Beutha, Zwickau, Sachsen 25 Jun or 26 Jul 1858; dau. of Christian F. Troll and Friedricke Schmidt; bp. 22 Apr 1914; m. Beutha 31 Oct 1886, Ernst Otto Sonntag; 8 children; d. Leipzig, Sachsen 24 Apr 1941 (*Sonntagsgruss*, no. 24, 15 Jun 1941, 96; FHL Microfilm 245270, 1935 Census; IGI)

## NOTES

1. Presiding Bishopric, "Financial, Statistical, and Historical Reports of Wards, Stakes, and Missions, 1884–1955," CR 4 12, 257.
2. "Auf Spurensuche, Wo Seit 1920 in Leipzig Die Kirche Jesu Christi der Heiligen der Letzten Tage Ihr Domizil Hatte" (unpublished history); private collection.
3. Elfriede Waldammer Werner, interview by the author in German, Leipzig, Germany, June 1, 2007; unless otherwise noted, summarized in English by Judith Sartowski.
4. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, *Die Gemeinde in Leipzig* (Leipzig, Germany: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1988), 10; trans. the author.
5. *History of the Leipzig Branch* (unpublished), 179; private collection; trans. the author.
6. Siegfried Schmidt, telephone interview with Judith Sartowski in German, February 25, 2008.
7. *Die Gemeinde in Leipzig*, 10.

8. *History of the Leipzig Branch*, 179b.

9. Walter Gerd Schiele, interview by Matthew K. Heiss in German, Leipzig, Germany, October 11, 1991, OH 1144; The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Church History Library, Salt Lake City; trans. the author.

## LEIPZIG WEST BRANCH

The Leipzig West Branch was a relatively young unit of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 1939. The population was far smaller than that of the Leipzig Center Branch. The West Branch met in rented rooms at Angerstrasse 18 in the first Hinterhaus.

Leipzig West Branch <sup>1</sup>	1939
Elders	3
Priests	6
Teachers	0
Deacons	4
Other Adult Males	7
Adult Females	40
Male Children	2
Female Children	2
<i>Total</i>	64

The history of the East German Mission contains two entries regarding this branch, both from October 1938, one year before the war began. On October 19, Johannes Hurst was appointed branch president with Fritz Berndt as his first counselor.<sup>2</sup> Ten days later, a branch conference was held, including a social on Saturday night. The attendance was twenty-four members and forty-five friends.<sup>3</sup>

Very little is known about the members and activities of the Leipzig West Branch. A history of the Leipzig Branch written four decades after the war indicates that the West and Center Branches were merged in 1941. Johannes Hurst was the branch president thereafter, and