

27 Feb 1927; ord. teacher; ord. priest, 15 May 193—; m. Tilsit, Ostpreußen, Preußen 11 Feb 1942, Rita Helga Meiszus; artilleryman; k. in battle Ssytschewo, Staraja, Russia 1 Apr 1942 (H. Meiszus Birth Meyer; LDS Ordination Certificate; www.volksbund.de; IGI; AF)

**Nephi Albert Ferdinand Birth** b. Schneidemühl, Posen, Preußen 6 Apr 1925; son of Friedrich Martin Birth and Emma Hedwig Pauline Fritz; bp. 9 May 1934; d. Russia 16 Jul 1944 (H. Meiszus Birth Meyer)

**Friedrich Julius Preuss** b. Norkitten, Insterburg, Ostpreußen, Preußen 28 Jul 1851; son of Gottlieb Preuss and Charlotte Laubichler; bp. 14 Aug 1920; ord. elder 1930; m. 7 Oct 1880, Ottilie Julianne Augusta Vogel; d. Schneidemühl, Pommern, Preußen 18 Apr 1940 (*Sonntagsstern*, no. 17, 26 May 1940 n.p.; IGI)

**Alfred Heinrich Wilhelm Ross** b. Schneidemühl, Posen, Preußen 15 Feb 1913; son of Adolf Wilhelm Ross and Anna Marie Wilhelmine Klingenhage; bp. 27 Mar 1922; m. Stargard, Pommern, Preußen 8 Apr 1938, Ilse Herta Marta Moeser; infantryman; d. near Obergänserndorf, Austria 28 Feb 1945 or Apr 1945; bur. Oberwoelbling, Austria (Anni Bauer Schulz; www.volksbund.de; AF; IGI; PRF)

**Ottilie Julianne Auguste Vogel** b. Bovenwinkel, Danzig, Westpreußen, Preußen 22 Jan 1852; dau. of Alexander Vogel and Julianne Plaeger; m. 7 Oct 1880, Friedrich Julius Preuss; d. old age Schneidemühl, Pommern, Preußen 3 Dec 1939 (*Sonntagsstern*, no. 17, 26 May 1940 n.p.; IGI)

## NOTES

1. East German Mission Quarterly Reports, 1938, no. 8, East German Mission History.
2. Presiding Bishopric, "Financial, Statistical, and Historical Reports of Wards, Stakes, and Missions, 1884–1955," CR 4 12, 257.
3. Hans Kindt, interview by the author, Greendale, Wisconsin, August 19, 2007.
4. Ruth Gärtner Jeske Hadley, interview by the author, Ogden, Utah, March 9, 2007.
5. See the Schneidemühl District chapter for extensive information on Johannes Kindt.
6. Walter Kindt, autobiography (unpublished); private collection.
7. Walter Kindt, interview by the author, Greendale, Wisconsin, August 19, 2007.
8. Edith Gerda Birth Rohloff, *Life Is a Gift from God* (unpublished history, about 2003), 19; private collection. See the chapter on the East German Mission for details about her missionary service and the destruction of the mission office.
9. Werner Birth, interview by the author, Salt Lake City, July 19, 2007.
10. Esther Rieve Vergin, interview by Rachel Gale, Salt Lake City, June 6, 2007.

11. Rohloff, *Life*, 26–27.
12. Ibid., 22.
13. Sigrid Kindt, autobiography (unpublished, about 1952); private collection.
14. Brigitte Birth Foster, interview by the author, Salt Lake City, January 10, 2008.
15. Rohloff, *Life*, 27–28.
16. Ibid., 28–29.
17. Ibid., 33.
18. Ibid., 35.
19. Hans Kindt, *Story* (unpublished personal history); private collection.
20. Rohloff, *Life*, 36.
21. Ibid., 40.

---

## SCHÖNLANKE BRANCH

---

The town of Schönlanke belonged to West Prussia until 1918, when the region was added to the province of Pomerania through the Treaty of Versailles. The Polish border was only six miles away along the Netze River; this was truly the German frontier in the days just prior to World War II.

Waltraud Schimming (born 1926) had a wonderful childhood in Schönlanke. Her mother, Martha Kennert Schimming, provided a very happy household in their apartment at Gartenstrasse 31 at the edge of town. Her father, Hermann, worked in a furniture factory and was an enthusiastic member of the firemen's brass band. Waltraud later wrote about the "dreamy" town of Schönlanke, but admitted that not everything was beautiful there:

One morning in November [9,] 1938, there was tumult in town. The relatively quiet synagogue had been put to the torch. The flames were threatening the very foundation. The target of the attack [were] the Jewish citizens. The men were herded together to the livestock market place and from there driven to the old gymnasium and finally to the railroad station. The ca-

tastrophe went through the town like wildfire. Nobody knew just what to think.<sup>1</sup>

Conditions in the Schimming home may have been idyllic, but this was not the case for everybody in Germany. There was nothing they could do about the persecution of the Jews, and Waltraud learned that people simply preferred not to discuss the matter.

<b>Schönlanke Branch<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>1939</b>
Elders	1
Priests	2
Teachers	2
Deacons	4
Other Adult Males	4
Adult Females	9
Male Children	2
Female Children	0
<i>Total</i>	24

Though there was no persecution of the Church by the German government in the Schneidemühl District in the late 1930s, other forces seemed determined to interrupt the functions of the Church. In the mission history, we read the following under the date November 21, 1938:

From this day until December 15<sup>th</sup>, all meetings were forbidden in the Schönlanke and Kreuz Branches, Schneidemühl District. This measure was taken on account of a foot and mouth epidemic, which prevailed in this section of Germany.<sup>3</sup>

The disease continued to disrupt daily activities for several months. On January 31, 1939, the following entry was made in the mission history:

The continuation of the flu and grippe epidemic in the Schönlanke Branch, Schneidemühl District, made it necessary to discontinue all public Church meetings. However, several cottage meetings were held in the homes of members.<sup>4</sup>

The branch president for the duration of the war was Karl Bayer. When World War II began, the Schönlanke Branch was meeting in rented rooms at Friedrichstrasse 40. Hyrum Hardel (born 1924) recalled the appearance of the rooms:

The branch met in a former carpenter's workshop on the first floor. We had a large room with an oven in it to heat the room, and then there were also smaller classrooms in the back for the smaller meetings. The rooms were in a Hinterhaus. There were about sixty members who were in attendance, and we held our Sunday School in the morning, went home, and then went back to church for sacrament meeting in the evening.<sup>5</sup>

Hyrum recalled other meetings that took place during the week, such as MIA. According to him, there was a pump organ in the room, and music was a part of each get-together. He also remembered that a sign was displayed forbidding Jews to enter the rooms ("Juden verboten"). He offered this explanation: "The sign did not state that this idea came from the Church. It was a general sign that one could find anywhere."

Regarding politics, he said, "We had members of the branch who were members of the Nazi Party. One brother had the Party emblem on his jacket but he did not talk about the Party when he was at church—not in his talks nor with anybody else." In what was definitely a rare occurrence in the East German Mission during the war, Hyrum recalled, "We also had to hang up a picture of Adolf Hitler on the side wall of the room." On the other hand, "we did not talk about Hitler in our meetings or generally at church."

Being named after the brother of the Prophet Joseph Smith, Hyrum found that people had trouble pronouncing his name. His religion teacher in school simply called him Heinrich. However, his religion did not

cause him any problems in school or in the neighborhood.

Martha Schimming had enjoyed contacts with Latter-day Saints since 1923 but had not been baptized. In May 1942, she heeded promptings to join the Church. Her daughter, Waltraud (then sixteen), went along to witness the baptism in a local lake but later admitted that she did not comprehend the act of immersion.<sup>6</sup> However, thanks to a young man in the branch, Hans Boelter, Waltraud eventually became interested in the Church and was baptized later that year. She described the event in these words:

On November 1, 1942, I was baptized by Brother [Karl] Bayer in a lake in the woods. It was raining and a slight mist arose from the water. After the prayer, I didn't feel any cold at all. Brother Johannes Kindt gave me the gift of the Holy Ghost.<sup>7</sup>

Waltraud later noticed that Jews were allowed to attend meetings in the Schönlanke Branch (despite the “Juden verboten” sign); nobody ever tried to stop them. In her recollection,

There was always somebody standing near the front door to give a signal if the Gestapo came. They were not allowed to interrupt our meetings and were always gone by the time we finished because our meetings lasted so long.<sup>8</sup>

Under the government's *Pflichtjahr* programs, Hyrum Hardel worked on a farm for a year then began an apprenticeship as an automobile mechanic. In 1942, he was serving in the *Reichsarbeitsdienst* and from there was drafted directly into the army. His basic training took place in Stettin. While there, he learned an important lesson regarding Latter-day Saints as fallible human beings:

I was able to attend the Stettin branch when I was stationed close to there as a soldier. One experience I had, I will never forget. I was waiting

at the bus stop after the meeting was over, and I saw an elderly man approaching me; he had blessed the sacrament just earlier and I recognized him. As he came closer, he got out his pipe and started smoking. He did not recognize me.

Following basic training, Hyrum was invited to enter the Officer Candidate School. This was an attractive option because it would allow him to delay his departure to the Eastern Front. At one point, he was sent to Berlin for weapons training for seven months. While there, he had an interesting and disturbing experience: “We were allowed to listen to a case in court. One man was on trial because, while drunk, he had called Hitler a ‘litterbug.’ He was sentenced to death that very day.”

Due to army politics, Hyrum never made it past the rank of noncommissioned officer, although he showed excellent military skills. Eventually, he was sent to Russia and experienced combat on the Eastern Front. On one occasion, a bullet narrowly missed him when he ducked at the last instant. Another time, he was hit in the thigh. Fortunately, he recovered from that wound.

By 1944, Hyrum was an instructor for army training courses in the Baltic States. When the Soviets invaded the area, he was able to board a ship to Danzig then found a train to southern Germany. Along the way, he was wounded again and ended up in a convent hospital in Reiningen near Nördlingen, Bavaria. It was there that he experienced the end of the war. Once he recovered and could walk again, he was imprisoned by the Americans and spent two years working in their POW system. For most of that time, he was on a farm near Neu Ulm on the Danube River.

Ruth Schimming (born 1933) recalled that life in Schönlanke was peaceful: “We did not feel much of the war because we were so far away [from large cities]. The first refugees came before Christmas 1944, and then came

the trucks.” Martha Schimming worked in a military hospital at the time and wanted very much to stay in Schönlanke. In January 1945, she suffered from a severe kidney ailment, and her daughter, Waltraud, recalled that Karl Bayer from Schneidemühl came to give Sister Schimming a blessing. She was not yet fully recovered when retreating German soldiers convinced her to take her daughters and flee. It was January 28, and the invaders were at the gates of the town. According to Ruth, “My mother did not think twice; she took her linen bag where she kept her bible and her tithing, and we left with a blanket wrapped around us.”<sup>9</sup>

Years later, Waltraud described the desperate setting:

The only possessions we had were the clothes on our backs. Everywhere we looked we saw hopelessness. Young and old passed us, pulling little carts and strollers. People were screaming for their lives, and babies were crying. Destruction was everywhere. Entire villages were on fire. The roar of artillery was heard over the trees. . . . All around us, the attitude was “Every man for himself!”<sup>10</sup>

Ruth recalled that they walked nearly twenty miles to Arnsfelde. On the way, German soldiers passed them on the road; later, Soviet tanks were going by. The women first took them for German tanks but then saw the Soviet markings. As Ruth explained, “The people [tank crew] must have been blind, because they didn’t see us.”

In Arnsfelde, they found a hospital train at the station, and Waltraud begged long enough to get her mother a place on the train. Ruth was allowed to go with her, but Waltraud was left behind. Fortunately, she joined up with them later in Deutsch Krone, about seven miles to the north. From there they found rail transportation to the province of Mecklenburg, north of Berlin. However, as Ruth recollected, “The people there were not very nice to us at all. We

stayed for a few weeks, but then we decided to go to Sondershausen, where the family of my mother’s brother still lived.” They arrived in Sondershausen just in time to witness the last air raid. Days later, the war was over.

In Sondershausen, Martha Schimming found work in the city hall. The family located a branch of the Church in nearby Erfurt. Eventually, Hermann Schimming found his wife and children there, and they began a new life together.

All ethnic Germans in the Schönlanke community were expelled by the new Polish government by the fall of 1946. It is likely that no members of the Schönlanke Branch were still living there by that time. The town soon became known as Trzcianka, Poland.

In 1947, Hyrum Hardel was released as a POW and made his way to Hamburg, where he had located his parents through correspondence. Driven from their home in Schönlanke at the end of the war, they never returned. Although they had lost their home and most of their possessions, the family considered themselves immensely blessed; the parents and all seven children had survived World War II.

## IN MEMORIAM

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

**Johannes Werner Boelter** b. Schönlanke, Posen, Preußen 14 Apr 1925; son of Friedrich Wilhelm Boelter and Bertha Auguste Kersten; bp. 3 Oct 1933; k. in battle Russia 13 or 14 Apr 1944 (Froelke; Waltraud Hansen book, 45–46; IGI; AF; PRF)

**Rosalie Elisabeth Jaster** b. Altnippnow, Posen, Preußen 13 or 23 Jan 1861; dau. of Johann Jaster and Cecilie Stelter; bp. 24 or 29 Nov 1919; m. Wilhelm Kaiser; 5 children; d. Schönlanke, Pommern, Preußen 1940 (IGI, AF, PRF)

## NOTES

1. Waltraud Schimming Hansen, *Die Erde liegt unter den Füßen der Mütter* (Berlin: Frieling, 2001), 35; trans. the author.



2. Presiding Bishopric, "Financial, Statistical, and Historical Reports of Wards, Stakes, and Missions, 1884–1955," CR 4 12, 257.
3. East German Mission Quarterly Reports, 1938, no. 47, East German Mission History.
4. Ibid., 1939, no. 53.
5. Hyrum Hardel, interview by the author in German, Hamburg, Germany, August 13, 2006; unless otherwise noted, summarized in English by Judith Sartowski.
6. Hansen, *Die Erde liegt unter den Füßen der Mütter*, 43.
7. Ibid., 47.
8. Ibid.
9. Ruth Schimming Froelke, interview by Marion Wolfert in German, Salt Lake City, February 2006.
10. Hansen, *Die Erde liegt unter den Füßen der Mütter*, 50–51.



Fig. 1. Millions of Germans were evicted from provinces ceded to Poland by 1947. Most were allowed to take with them only what they could carry. Many traveled more than 500 miles. (Deutsches Bundesarchiv, Bild 146-1985-021-09)



*Fig. 2. Children of the Schneidemühl Branch. (W. Kindt)*