

1943, shows that the address had changed to Vincentstrasse 267. Again, there is no available description of the rooms.

Prenzlau Branch¹	1939
Elders	2
Priests	0
Teachers	1
Deacons	0
Other Adult Males	7
Adult Females	20
Male Children	3
Female Children	6
<i>Total</i>	39

The history of the East German Mission includes the following three entries regarding the branch in Prenzlau:

Saturday, 19 March 1938: Fifty-one persons attended a program in Prenzlau, commemorating the organization of the Relief Society.²

Wednesday, 16 November 1938: A meeting was held with Pres. Rees and the German and American missionaries of the Stargard and Prenzlau Branches; 146 members and friends were in attendance.³

Sunday, 11 December 1938: A branch conference was held, including a genealogy lecture by district president Erich Berndt; attendance was five adults and sixty-two children.⁴

Smaller branches in the East German Mission were usually visited by members of the district presidency and by traveling elders. There is every reason to believe that Prenzlau was not neglected. It is also very probable that some of the members regularly took the short train ride to Stettin to attend semiannual district conferences during the war.

The Prenzlau Branch survived World War II. No members are known to have lost their lives during the war.

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. 14, East German Mission History.
3. *Ibid.*, no. 47.
4. *Ibid.*, no. 49.

STARGARD BRANCH

The city of Stargard was located nineteen miles east of Stettin in the province of Pomerania and had a population of about twenty-five thousand in 1939. The railroad line from Kreuz to Stettin made travel between Stargard and Stettin very convenient, so members from the small branch could attend district conferences in Stettin.

Stargard Branch¹	1939
Elders	1
Priests	1
Teachers	1
Deacons	1
Other Adult Males	8
Adult Females	21
Male Children	2
Female Children	1
<i>Total</i>	36

The history of the East German Mission includes several notes on the Stargard Branch. The following are of interest:

Sunday, October 16, 1938: Wilhelm Pobanz was appointed first counselor to the branch president and Philipp Bauer Jr. second counselor.²

Tuesday, November 15, 1938: A special meeting was held with Pres. Alfred C. Rees. The Stettin Branch choir of eighteen members attended and furnished music.³

Wednesday, November 16, 1938: A meeting was held with Pres. Rees and the German and American missionaries of the Stargard and Prenzlau Branches; 146 members and friends were in attendance.⁴

Tuesday, November 29, 1938: A special meeting was held in Stargard, with district president Erich Berndt in attendance. The renovation of the branch hall was discussed with the branch presidency.⁵

December 19–24, 1938: Renovation work was done in the Stargard Branch hall.⁶

At the onset of the war, sisters Christel (born 1923) and Edith Wilms (born 1925) each served a *Pflichtjahr* for the government. Christel worked in the office of an attorney, then for a book editor. Edith was assigned to work in a children's home because a woman she knew was the owner. She later had this to say about the owner:

She only took tall girls with blond hair—all others would not be Aryan enough. She fired everybody else, and I was there to take care of everything—cleaning, cooking, doing laundry, and taking care of the children.⁷

Sister Wilms was not politically involved and did not encourage Christel and Edith to participate in Hitler Youth activities. The girls recalled their mother's attitude toward the Nazi Party as follows:

Our mother did not like to salute the flag whenever it passed us. Every Sunday, on our way to church, [Party members] would pass us with the flag, but our mother would go into the nearest building and tell us that her nylons were torn or she had to fix something really quick. During the last years, we realized that she just did not want to salute.

Elders Lloyd Gunther of Pleasant Grove, Utah, and Burton Watson of Idaho were the last American missionaries in Stargard before World War II. Lloyd later recalled that Otto Bork came from Stettin to lead the Stargard

Branch and that perhaps ten to fifteen persons attended the meetings on Sundays. Lloyd recalled: "I remember baptizing a child of the Zühlsdorf family. We did it in a pond after dark, in order to keep the ceremony secret from the public."⁸ The missionaries boarded with a Jewish family and enjoyed a very pleasant relationship with them. "We even left our bicycles with them when we left town, fully expecting to return." The elders were instructed to leave for Denmark on August 24 and never saw Stargard again.

When World War II began, the members of the Stargard Branch were holding their meetings in the first *Hinterhaus* at Radestrassen 31. The Wilms sisters later described the setting in these words:

In the front, there was an apartment building. . . . We walked through the gate to the back yard and then into the *Hinterhaus* and up the stairs. Brother Willhelm Pobanz lived on the side of the building; he was the branch president. There was one large room that we also divided with curtains so that we could hold more than one class at the same time. In the Radestrassen, we did not have a sign for the Church. For Sunday School, we had our *Deseret* hymnbook, but for our sacrament meetings, we used only the black hymnbook.

As was the tradition in most branches, Sunday School was held at 10:00 A.M. and sacrament meeting in the evening. The average attendance in those days may have been twenty people, including for the most part the women and children of the Möser, Drews, Günzel, Hänsel, Wilms, and Würfel families. As is evident from the table above, the largest category of members in the Stargard Branch was that of adult females—nearly 60 percent.

As a widow, Sister Wilms was permitted to stay at home while she sewed military clothing. She also sewed small items for neighbors and traded services for additional food rations to support herself and her two daughters.



Fig. 1. A celebration of the Stargard Branch in 1939. (M. Wilms Deppe)

Philipp Bauer (born 1915) was drafted into the Wehrmacht early in 1938. Fortunately, he was assigned to a unit stationed in Stargard and did not have to leave town until September, when the Germany army marched into Czechoslovakia. This was the second of Hitler's so-called bloodless conquests (after Austria in March 1938). Philipp later wrote of the reception the German troops received upon crossing the border near Breslau:

We slept on German soil that night and drove into [Czechoslovakia] the next morning. In our unit not one single shot was fired. As we drove through the northern part, the people were German and were real friendly toward our soldiers. In Slovakia it was different. People didn't like us, but they didn't have any choice and tolerated us. Occasionally there was shooting.⁹

One year after the conquest of the German-language region of Czechoslovakia (the Sudetenland), Philipp Bauer's unit crossed the Polish border on the first day of the

war—September 1, 1939. For the first time, he saw death and destruction. That night, his unit came under fire, and the terror of combat lasted for hours. He would later recall:

I didn't think anybody would come out alive. I was scared, scared to death. I thought this would be my end. I prayed to the Lord like I prayed never before. I promised Him if I would come out alive of this terrible shooting, I would serve Him and do whatever He asked me all my life. I never forgot this incident.¹⁰

Philipp had met and fallen in love with Elfriede Ross of the Schneidemühl Branch just before the war began. This relationship flourished, and he applied for permission to marry her while still in uniform. Permission was granted while he was stationed in Heckholzhausen in the Rhineland, far from home. His leave was for only three days, so he hurried to Schneidemühl for the ceremony on November 29, 1939. They then parted, not

knowing when they would be together again (with a war against France looming).¹¹

Due to an injury to his foot sustained in a soccer game, Philipp Bauer was in an army hospital when Germany attacked France on May 10, 1940. His division suffered heavy casualties. By the time he was released, the short campaign against France was over.¹² Elfriede had been able to visit him for several weeks during his hospitalization. He believed that the Lord had provided for the injury that kept him out of combat in France.¹³

For the next year, Philipp had noncombat duties but then was shipped to the Soviet Union. After a short tour of duty at the front, he was transferred to the city of Orel behind the lines, away from the fighting. His father had requested this, based on the law that the only son in the family did not have to serve in a combat zone. Philipp's elder brother, Otto (born 1918), had been killed in the Soviet Union in December 1941. In Orel, Philipp lived a much more comfortable and safe life than at the front. He also had time to study the Book of Mormon and the New Testament.¹⁴

By June 1942, Philipp and Elfriede Bauer had two children—a son, Eckhard, and a daughter, Renate. Except for 1944, Brother Bauer was always able to go home for Christmas. While at the front, his assignment was usually that of a messenger on a motorcycle. “It was dangerous, especially in Russia. But I liked challenging jobs,” he explained.¹⁵

The family of Johann and Frieda Zunkowski had moved from Driesen to Stettin in late 1940. Soon thereafter, Brother Zunkowski—an employee at a large aircraft factory in Stettin—was asked to serve as the branch president in Stargard. His son, Bernard, recalled that “every Sunday he traveled by train [to Stargard], early in the morning; he came home late at night, while our family went to the branch in Stettin.”¹⁶

The city of Stargard was essentially untouched by the war until nearly the end. However, the town was close to Stettin, and the possibility of an attack by enemy airplanes was real. The Wilms sisters recalled their preparations for such events:

The Church also counseled us that we should store food and have blankets ready. We heeded that counsel—everybody in our family had a blanket to stay warm. Our documents and identification papers were ready, and whenever we went into the basement [for shelter], we took all those things with us and covered ourselves with our blankets. We stored the documents in a suitcase that we always took with us. Nothing else fit in that suitcase (it was only twenty inches by ten inches)—no clothing or food.

The documents consisted of family history papers. Other papers (like our baptism certificate and birth certificate) were in separate bags that we carried individually. When we left the apartment, we were always fully dressed, had a blanket and our individual bags. We did not go to sleep fully dressed—we had enough time to get dressed. . . . Alarms sounded about three to four times a week, and we stayed longer than an hour in our shelter each time.

Christel Wilms recalled how women in Stargard were employed in the summer of 1944 in digging trenches for the defense of the city. It was about that time that she was inducted into the Reichsarbeitsdienst, but her service was interrupted, as she explained:

They only seemed to find fault with me, so I did not have to go. Once, they put me to work in a munitions factory, but then they told me that I did not work in a team very well and did not have to stay. And then I was assigned to work for the railroad in the summer of 1944. I think that Heavenly Father had a plan for me because all these happenings made it so that [our family was] able to leave Stargard together.

The Stargard Branch continued to meet until the Red Army approached the town in January 1945. As the Wilms sisters explained:

The last Church meetings we had were in the apartment of Brother Pobanz. We could also still partake of the sacrament. We did not baptize people anymore but everything else still went on normally. The branch was still like it used to be before—people had not left yet.

By January 1945, Philipp Bauer's unit had retreated as far as Gotenhafen and Danzig on the Baltic Sea in Germany. They were trapped there against the sea as the Soviets moved past in their rush toward Berlin. Philipp was still there when the war ended.

The invaders were only a few miles from Stargard in January 1945, when the order was given that women and children were to be evacuated. The Wilms sisters took their mother and boarded a train headed west. Their brother was required to stay and defend the city, but his children left with their aunts and their grandmother. The train ride took the Wilms party only about 130 miles to the northwest, but the journey lasted nearly a full week. At one point, they stood on a siding near Berlin and Christel left the train to forage for food. When she returned, the train had moved on. Although she wore out the soles of her shoes, she managed to catch up with the train, which was moving at an agonizingly slow pace. A few miles west of Rostock, the train deposited its passengers in the small coastal town of Kühlungsborn on February 8, 1945.

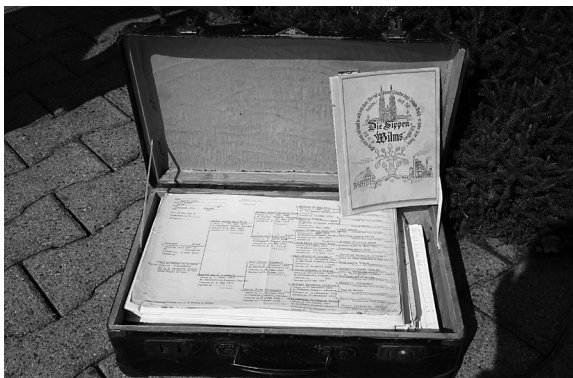


Fig. 2. The small suitcase used to safeguard the Wilms family history documents survives to this day. (M. Wilms Deppe)

In April, Kühlungsborn was invaded by the Red Army, and the women of the Wilms family were in grave danger. They tolerated well the loss of their watches and other property, but the threat of physical abuse provided lasting tension. On one occasion, Christel was out looking for salt. She was told by an enemy soldier that he would give her salt if she would sleep with him. She responded that she did not need the salt after all. On another occasion, she took a job as a cook (for which she was not at all qualified) because she knew that she would be cooking in the town square—out in the open where nobody could harm her.

Philipp Bauer later wrote about the day he and his comrades surrendered their weapons to their Soviet captors:

How can I describe our feelings? Sure we were happy the war was over, but when we thought what is going to happen to us, loneliness and emptiness filled our hearts. It was all over. Without our rifle, our companion for years, we felt we had given a part of ourselves away. . . . Now we knew the enemy could do whatever they wanted with us.¹⁷

Fortunately, Philipp was a POW for only a few days. Fearing nothing but disaster in the Soviet Union as POWs, he and two comrades decided to escape. When they were herded into a church cemetery one night, they climbed over the wall and ran away. They were able to throw away their uniforms and change into civilian clothing, then pass themselves off as railroad and shipyard laborers. For the next few weeks, they worked their way west, avoiding cities and main roads. On several occasions, they were confronted by conquering soldiers or police but managed to maintain their cover. Their route took them to Dübzow, Philipp's hometown, and he went to the cemetery to visit the grave of his mother. He later described the visit: "Even [as] a hard soldier who has seen many deaths, tears came to my eyes. How I

wished I could have talked to her. I was thirteen years old when she passed away, and I was thirty years now and still missed her.”¹⁸

By June, Philipp arrived in Berlin, where he was taken in by Vera, the widow of his brother, Otto. He stayed there for a few weeks then decided to head west to Celle, where he believed his wife and his children to be. Taking sixty letters to people in the British Occupation Zone, he made his way to the Elbe River, where he gained permission to cross the bridge by conversing with the guard in Russian. Upon arriving in Celle (near Hanover), he located the branch president and was told that his family lived at Bultstrasse 23. Philipp later wrote: “It was a joyous welcome with Elfriede, with our children and her mother. Nobody can really describe the feeling, the happiness and the joy we experienced on July 15, 1945.”¹⁹

In the summer of 1945, the Stargard refugees were told that they must return to their hometown. At the time, Sister Wilms was seriously ill and was not allowed to travel, but she encouraged her daughters to go to Stargard. Christel declined, explaining that in a dream she had seen their apartment burning; she would stay in Kühlungsborn. Her married siblings, one brother and one sister, went back. As the sisters recalled, “They were in Stargard for about two weeks when the Polish went through the streets and wanted all the Germans to leave. They had ten minutes to pack their things and leave the city by foot.” They were likely the last of the Stargard Branch members to leave the city that was by then in territory annexed by Poland.

Christel Wilms summed up their survival in these words: “Our Father in Heaven always had his hand in our lives—in whatever happened. I don’t think that we were ever in serious danger in those years. Even when it was very dark around us, literally, a light always came at some point.”

By the end of the year 1945, all members of the Latter-day Saint branch in Stargard had been evicted from their homes and made the trek west to one of the Allied occupation zones in what remained of Germany. The branch ceased to exist, and the name of the town was changed to Szczeciński.

IN MEMORIAM

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

Ernestine Luise Daehn b. Dobberphul, Pommern, Preußen 19 Dec 1877; dau. of Herrmann Daehn and Regine Wichmann; m. 16 May 1898, Friedrich Sack; 11 children; d. Beelitz, Rostock, Mecklenburg 7 Feb 1945 (LDS Census)

Else Anna Drews b. 2 Dec 1925; dau. of Johann Friedrich Drews and Emma Emilie Kleiner; d. appendicitis Stargard, Pommern, Preußen ca. 1943 (Wilms-Radukowski; FHL Microfilm 25757 Census 1935; IGI; AF)

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. 41, East German Mission History.
3. *Ibid.*, no. 47.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*, no. 50.
7. Christel Wilms Radukowski and Edith Wilms, interview by the author in German, Dortmund, Germany, August 7, 2006; summarized in English by Judith Sartowski.
8. Lloyd Gunther, interview by the author, Brigham City, Utah, October 29, 2006.
9. Philipp Bauer, “This Is My Life” (unpublished history), 15; private collection.
10. *Ibid.*, 16.
11. *Ibid.*, 17–18.
12. The French army was defeated in June 1940, but the exile government in England continued the struggle.
13. Bauer, “This Is My Life,” 18–19.
14. *Ibid.*, 21.
15. *Ibid.*, 22.
16. Bernard Zunkowski, interview by Michael Corley, Salt Lake City, April 24, 2008.
17. Bauer, “This Is My Life,” 24–25.
18. *Ibid.*, 28–30.
19. *Ibid.*, 34.