

confiscated; throngs of refugees pouring into the region needed housing, and the city government appropriated space wherever possible.²

No members of the Schwarzenberg Branch are known to have lost their lives in World War II.

NOTES

1. Presiding Bishopric, "Financial, Statistical, and Historical Reports of Wards, Stakes, and Missions, 1884–1955," CR 4 12, 257.
2. "Die Geschichte der Gemeinde Zwickau in Kurzfassung" (unpublished history); private collection.

WERDAU BRANCH

The city of Werdau, with its twenty-three thousand inhabitants, was home to a branch of the Latter-day Saints in 1939. The city is just six miles west of Zwickau.

Werdau Branch ¹	1939
Elders	4
Priests	3
Teachers	5
Deacons	5
Other Adult Males	10
Adult Females	52
Male Children	6
Female Children	5
<i>Total</i>	90

The Werdau Branch met throughout the war in rented rooms at Reichenbacherstrasse 22, rooms that were officially opened for Church use on March 5, 1939. On that occasion, seventy-six members of this and other branches in the district met for the celebration under the leadership of district president Walter Fassmann.²

Hannelore Ehrler (born 1930) recalled that the church location was right next to the railroad station and that the building had previously been used as a house of ill repute. As she explained years later, "We cleaned it up nicely, and to us it was our meetinghouse." Regarding the number of persons who attended, she said "When there were thirty, we thought we had a wonderful meeting."³

Marianne Suhrmann (born 1926) later described the Church facility as follows:

The rooms were on the ground floor in the main building. We had a really nice and large main room, and one or two classrooms. We had about 100 to 120 persons in attendance on a typical Sunday. Sunday School was at 10:00 A.M. and sacrament meeting at 4:00 P.M. [My family] walked about [two miles] one way to church. During the week, we had Beehives (Sister Sellner was our leader); all young women were Beehive Girls; the older ones were Golden Gleaners.⁴

The history of the East German Mission sheds significant light on the condition of the Werdau Branch when World War II approached:

Sunday, August 28, 1938: A very successful branch conference was held.⁵

Sunday, September 11, 1938: Recreation committees were formed in thirteen branches throughout the mission, including Werdau.⁶

Sunday, October 16, 1938: Members of the Zwickau, Werdau, and Wilkau[-Hasslau] branches made a trip by bus to Aschberg. A special meeting was held in Schwarzenberg in the morning and one in Plauen in the evening. Fifty percent of the members participated.⁷

Friday, March 3, 1939: A social was held in the Meerane Branch, Zwickau District. It was attended by members and friends of the Zwickau, Werdau, and Planitz branches. The sum of RM 10.00 was collected for the Meerane Branch Welfare Association.⁸

Marianne's mother, Johanna Suhrmann, was the local Relief Society president. The branch president was Alfred Klopfer (father of mission supervisor Herbert Klopfer), and his counselors were Brother Fritzsching and Erich Sellner.

Marianne Suhrmann's experience in the Hitler Youth was not exemplary, as she explained:

I was inducted into the Jungvolk, then at fourteen into the BDM. I was a real troublemaker. Whenever they did something religious, I was not allowed to stay there with them. I was considered a troublemaker, so they punished me by taking away my neckerchief knot. And sometimes I had to stay away from the meetings for a month as a penalty, but they never kicked me out totally. They wanted to maintain a hold on all of us.

Her reputation was known in school as well. "They knew that I was a Mormon, and they sent me out when they had the religion class."

In early 1943, Herbert Klopfer, the supervisor of the East German Mission, and a soldier in active duty since 1940, moved his wife and his two sons from the mission home in Berlin back to Werdau, his hometown. There they lived with his parents. Sister Erna Klopfer and her sons were safe in this small town, far from the terror of air raids over Berlin. Her parents (Brother and Sister Hein) joined them by the end of the war, as did Herbert's sister, Maria. Brother Klopfer was able to visit the family here several times before the year 1943 came to a close.

Hannelore Ehrler was not interested in the Hitler Youth program. "They did a lot of marching with music. I wanted to sing to music, not march to it." As in many German cities in those days, public school ended at 1:00 P.M. on Wednesdays and the Jungvolk met that afternoon as well as on Saturdays. Fortunately for



Fig. 1. A modern view of the building in which the Werdau Branch held its meetings throughout World War II: Reichenbacherstrasse (now August Bebel Strasse) 22. (G. Brokatzky)

Hannelore, a piano teacher suggested that she take lessons from him on Wednesdays. She accepted his offer and had a fine excuse for missing Jungvolk meetings. "But on Saturdays, I had to go," she recalled. At the age of fourteen, she was sworn in as a member of the League of German Girls, but just a few weeks after that, the war ended.

Marianne Suhrmann's half-brother, Rolf Armin Fugmann, was a sailor in the German navy in 1943 when he was on leave at Plöner See (a lake in northern Germany). He drowned in a boating accident, and his body was taken by four other sailors to Werdau for burial. Johanna Suhrmann received a telegram with the tragic news, but Marianne had sensed her brother's death the night after the accident. She described the experience in these words:

On the Sunday when he died, I was in bed that night, and I felt like there was somebody in our house. I heard steps and breathing—three times somebody came close to me. I told my mother, and she searched all over the house and found nobody. Later, when we had learned of Rolf's death, I knew that he had come to say good-bye to me. We were very close.

After two years of training as a telephone operator, Marianne went to work for the railroad office in Werdau. As a young woman,

she was interested in normal social activities such as dancing. On one occasion, she and a friend were on their way to a dance when they met two French workers, who introduced themselves. Marianne soon found herself romantically involved with one of the men and her mother liked him as well. Unfortunately, this led to trouble. Sister Suhrmann gave the Frenchman the key to their garden cottage and invited him to spend the night there. However, a local policeman saw him on the property one night and charged him with espionage. When the investigation revealed his relationship with Marianne, she was fired from her job (based on her “un-German activities”) and was sent to faraway Kühlungsborn on the Baltic Sea. There she became a member of an antiaircraft battery. Luckily for her, an officer came by the next day in search of a telephone operator, and she was spared the hard labor of the antiaircraft battery crew. In February 1945, she was sent home on convalescent leave. Weeks later, she was baptized a member of the Church in an outdoor swimming pool. She was home when the American army arrived in late April 1945.

Marianne welcomed the invaders with a large white flag, but the neighbors worried that fanatic defenders might shoot her for treason in the last hours of a war already lost. Fortunately nothing came of it, and soon Americans were in Sister Suhrmann's store, asking for drinks and food (“and behaving themselves very well,” according to Marianne). The war had done little damage to Werdau, and both the Suhrmann home and the Werdau Branch meeting rooms were undamaged.

As the war drew to a close, the residents of Werdau found their city approached from the east by the Soviets and from the west by the Americans. Hannelore Ehrler recalled hearing the roar of artillery from each side. The Americans entered the city first, and Hannelore went out to greet them, holding

the photographs of two missionaries from her mother's collection.⁹ She was able to communicate to one soldier that she was “a Mormon” and he helped her find his buddy, who was actually related to one of the missionaries in her photographs.

In the first week of July 1945, Marianne and a girlfriend headed for the border of the Soviet and American Occupation Zones. There they were caught by Soviet guards but released the next day without harm and crossed into southern Germany. Marianne returned to Werdau in 1946, very grateful to have escaped ill treatment at the hands of the victors.

On July 1, 1945, the American army moved out of Werdau and the Soviets moved in. Hannelore was one of many young girls who feared being assaulted by the soldiers. She explained the frightening situation:

I had just graduated from public school in April, and 63 percent of my classmates had to go to the hospital with venereal diseases because they had been raped. At that time, I prayed, “Heavenly Father, I cannot be raped!” I had it in my mind that if I got old enough, I wanted to go to Salt Lake City and be married in the temple. We had been told that if you [go to] get married in the temple and you're not morally clean, the temple door won't open. So I needed to be morally clean.

Both Hannelore Ehrler and her mother exercised great caution to protect themselves from assault at the hands of conquerors, and they were blessed with success—though there were several close calls. Looking back on her association with the Werdau Branch during World War II, Hannelore had these comments:

It wasn't a big branch, but we had some pretty good people. We all knew that the Lord was with us, otherwise we wouldn't have made it through. The priesthood holders were very [solid] and did everything they needed to do. If somebody needed a blessing for the sick, they were there, even if they had to ride a bicycle or walk for an hour or two to get there.

IN MEMORIAM

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

Heinz Erich Fritzsching b. Werdau, Zwickau, Sachsen 9 May 1922; son of Arthur Paul Fritzsching and Anna Frieda Günnel; bp. 2 Jul 1930; conf. 2 Jul 1930; ord. deacon 3 Jul 1928; ord. teacher 8 Dec 1940; corporal; k. in battle Gragau, Memel, Ostpreußen 2 or 22 Feb 1945 (FHL Microfilm 68808, no. 14; Kosak; www.volksbund.de; AF; IGI; PRF)

Walter Franz Fritzsching b. Werdau, Zwickau, Sachsen 30 Mar 1919; son of Arthur Paul Fritzsching and Anna Frieda Günnel; bp. 22 Oct 1927; conf. 22 Oct 1927; ord. deacon 11 Aug 1935; ord. teacher Jul 1938; lance corporal; k. in battle Smolensk, Russland 29 Nov 1942 (FHL Microfilm 68808, no. 13; Kosak; www.volksbund.de; IGI; AF; PRF)

Rolf Armin Fugmann b. Werdau, Zwickau, Sachsen 9 Mar 1925; son of Max Fugmann and Johanna Gerstner; bp.; sailor; d. Plöner See, Schleswig-Holstein 22 Aug 1942; bur. Werdau Aug 1942 (Marianne Suhrmann Young)

Franz Heinzl b. Platten, Böhmen, Austria 18 or 19 Jun 1862; son of Franz Eusebius Heinzl and Elisabeth Schippel; bp. 11 Sep 1920; conf. 11 Sep 1920; m. Werdau, Zwickau, Sachsen 28 Dec 1886, Johanna Franziska Petzold; 8 children; d. old age Werdau 20 Jan 1945 (FHL Microfilm 68808, no. 35; IGI; AF)

Minna Auguste Schmutzler b. Stenn, Zwickau, Sachsen 31 Mar 1864; dau. of Johann Gottlieb Schmutzler and Christiane Friederike Grimm; bp. 11 or 17 Apr 1909; m. Zwickau, Zwickau, Sachsen 12 Apr 1887, Bernhardt Albin Edmund Ritter; d. old age Werdau, Zwickau, Sachsen 16 Jan 1941 (*Sonntagsgruss*, no. 6, 9 Feb 1941, 24; FHL Microfilm 271403, 1930/35 Census; FHL Microfilm 68808, no. 64; IGI; AF)

Anna Franziska Sterer b. Werdau, Zwickau, Sachsen 1 Jun 1849; dau. of Georg Franz Sterer and Christiane Wilhelmine Hochmuth; bp. 8 Mar 1911; conf. 8 Mar 1911; m. 20 Jan 1874, Franz Oskar Reiz; d. old age 29 Apr 1942 (FHL Microfilm 68808, no. 61; IGI)

NOTES

1. Presiding Bishopric, "Financial, Statistical, and Historical Reports of Wards, Stakes, and Missions, 1884–1955," CR 4 12, 257.
2. East German Mission History Quarterly Reports, 1939, no. 60, East German Mission History.
3. Hannelore Ehrler Mueller, interview by Michael Corley, North Salt Lake City, Utah, March 21, 2008; transcript or audio version of the interview in the author's collection.

4. Marianne Suhrmann Young, interview by the author, Draper, Utah, June 16, 2008; summarized in English by the author.
5. East German Mission History Quarterly Reports, 1938, no. 35.
6. Ibid., no. 37.
7. Ibid., no. 43.
8. Ibid., 1939, no. 59.
9. Prior to World War II, Latter-day Saint missionaries from the United States usually had photographs of themselves printed on the reverse of post cards. These they handed out freely to German Saints and friends.

WILKAU-HASSLAU BRANCH

Situated on a steep hill above the Zwickauer Mulde River, the town of Wilkau-Hasslau is slightly more than one mile east of Planitz. In this small town, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints consisted for all practical purposes of the Damm family at Eichleite 4 and several older ladies. Friedrich Damm was the branch president during the war.

Wilkau-Hasslau Branch ¹	1939
Elders	1
Priests	0
Teachers	1
Deacons	1
Other Adult Males	6
Adult Females	25
Male Children	1
Female Children	1
<i>Total</i>	35

With nine children, the family of Friedrich and Rose Damm was the core of the small branch, and the meetings were held in their home for several years. With adult women constituting 72 percent of the branch membership, this branch would have benefited from more priesthood holders. As of this writing, three of the nine Damm children were the only persons available as eyewitnesses to the