

## Roger P. Minert Interview

Interview given on May 6, 2014.

**Devan Jensen:** *What can you tell readers about the early converts in Austria?*

**Roger Minert:** We have a very fascinating story regarding Johann Huber, the first branch president in Austria, a man who was in actuality the tenth Austrian baptized in the Church. The first one was back in 1883, of the nine who preceded Johann Huber, only one was actually baptized on Austrian territory.<sup>1</sup> The other eight were baptized in the city of Munich, Germany, which was for most of them only a two-hour railroad trip. So we<sup>2</sup> are talking about really a church that's imported from Germany into Austria by means of these individuals. Of the first nine who were baptized, only one remained in Austria, all the rest stayed in Germany or went to the United States. So the setting is the province of upper Austria, which is north-central Austria today, and it's a rural area, hilly, not really mountainous, beautiful territory, totally Catholic. The time is 1899, very close to the height of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire that stretches across enormous territories of eastern Europe. Johann Huber is born in 1861. By 1899 he has taken over his mother's farm, run by his father etc., has served three years in the Austrian army, and he's thirty-eight years old, a very successful farmer – so it's a large farm, large enough that he could easily employ ten to twelve persons full time, running everything from the plow to taking care of the stalls, harvesting, plants planting, etc., taking care of all the animals. It's a full-scale estate farm there.

Johann Huber is a lifetime Catholic, but by 1899 he has become involved in a liberal political party, the Catholic party of course is conservative, and he goes on the campaign trail for them and a man who is then trying to be elected against a atheistic-Catholic candidate. Well during this heated campaign, the assistant pastor of the local Catholic Church attacks Johann Huber during his sermon right there in church, and he says, "Here we have Johann Huber. He's Who's trying to undermine the Catholic Church by supporting the-a liberal political party. He would want us all to be Germans."<sup>3</sup> etc. Well, Johann Huber wrote a letter to the editor and said, "I wasn't able to stand up right there in church and defend myself.<sup>4</sup> We can't respond in church.<sup>5</sup> This is one man attacking me and I have no defense. So I'm writing to you to appeal for some help." Johann Huber was an angry man at that point. He's obviously not a perfect individual, and he has some very distinct natural man tendencies such as pride, so he writes to the newspaper and says, "I'm not going to put up with this. I demand that I receive an<sup>6</sup> apology from the very same pulpit from which the attack was launched." That never occurred, so Huber said "I will never go to church again."

Now precisely that time, the late summer of 1899, the fourth person ever baptized as an Austrian returns actually from Salt Lake City as a missionary, sent from Munich to his home town which is just about a mile and a half from Johann Huber's farm. So-And somehow or another Johann Huber meets this young man and becomes acquainted with the restored gospel.

This is a ~~very~~ marvelous thing, ~~not only is he in a very delieoos bellicose mood towards the Catholic Church that has offended him, they should never offend a native member as he was, but he's looking at some of the teachings of the Church, such as infinite infant baptism, confession, and indulgences~~ ~~things that bothered Martin Luther. In fact he refers to Martin Luther in many of his writings.~~ So here comes Martin Ganglmayer from the neighboring town, nine years his junior, and says “~~let Let~~ me tell you about the restored gospel, Joseph Smith, the Book of Mormon, ~~the~~ priesthood, ~~and~~ temples.” and Johann Huber is a willing audience. So by the late fall of 1899 Martin Ganglmayer is assigned to a different city on the mission and Johann Huber is left to mull these matters over. He apparently has the Book of Mormon and number of tracks from the church, studies them, and becomes converted. So he makes a connection with the Munich branch, once again just a few hours away by train; but a very strong branch ~~more~~ than one hundred members at the time. He gets to know them well, he visits there apparently on several occasions, and by the spring of 1900 he's ready to be baptized. That can't happen in his little Austrian town of Rottembach, so he wisely goes to Munich and gets baptized there by an elder/missionary. He returns to Rottembach and finds himself in a position where he's the only Mormon member close, ~~until~~ a couple of years later when another one moves in to work on his farm.

He doesn't make any real attempt to spread this new gospel, because he comes very quickly under a renewed attack by the Catholic Church ~~and~~ and this time it's not political, it's religious. Somebody finds out that he was baptized in Munich and ~~a~~ the rumor goes around that he was baptized by an Apostle of this new Church, a church that espouses polygamy and other obviously other socially and religiously divergent beliefs. So Johann Huber ~~then~~ stands up and says “yes Yes, as a matter of fact I am a baptized Latter-day Saint.” and he begins writing letters to the editor and to the church basically saying, “Leave me alone. I'm not hurting anybody.” And the church comes after him and says, “You can't do this. This is a terrible thing, this is socially bad, this is religiously bad, it's bad in every way,” and a pastor who has just arrived in town in 1901 sets about to change this, to fix the problem. So he said “I We want you back in church.” and he says “No, ~~he~~ never apologized, ~~and~~ And now I know the truth, I know the mistakes the Catholic Priests priests are making, the sins they are committing.” So bit by bit he converts some other laborers on his farm and some distant relatives, and begins holding meetings in the granary ~~in~~ of his farm. His farm essentially is a pentagonal building with a court-yard in the middle, a big gate to enter, and they go in up to the granary and they have worshipping services, ~~and~~ once in a while a missionary will come by to help them, otherwise they sing the songs of Zion and preach of the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith. So the neighbors are curious, but there's no ruckus about this; sometimes they hear what they call “the singing of psalms” as they go by his house.

By 1902 the German mission, based in Bazal at the time, feels that the group is large ~~enough~~ enough ~~about~~ 10 ten people people ~~that~~ they actually establish on May 2<sup>nd</sup>, the Rottembach branch of the LDS churh Church, and Johann Huber becomes the branch president. Now still not a lot of brew-ha-ha in the community until that very year where a daughter is born

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to Johann Huber and he refuses to take the child in for infant baptism. He says “Infant baptism is wrong, and besidesBesides, I’m not a Catholic anymore,” he actually was, but what he was saying is that “I a’m a Mormon.” The Catholic Church says “youYou’re still a Catholic.” He withdraws from the church, thinking that he will be off, but heit isn’t because the mother is still Catholic and the Austrian law requires that if there are two different religions, especially if one of which in this case is not recommendedrecognized by the state, that the mother’s religion shall prevails and the child must be baptized Catholic. Huber fights this for eight full months, for nine whole months he says “I will not do it.” Finally the court is involved and they threaten to levy very heavy fines. He says “okOkay that’s fine, but I won’t permit the pastor to come, he’s a rotten guy, I’ll let his assistant come to my home and baptize the child in my home.” So he loses the fight there, heHe has officially withdrawn from the Catholic Church, but that doesn’t take the heat off, and his wife doesn’t leave the church.

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The next year, the entire 1903 is a fight with a ninenineyearyear-old boy of the Huber family who doesn’t attend confession. Johann Huber says “confessionConfession is not part of the school curriculum, so I will not permit my son to go to the church and be forced to confess.” Besides, he sis a Latter-day Saint, once again the law says “noNo he’s not allowed to be a Latter-day Saint until his mother joins that Church or he’s fourteen years of age, but he’s only nine.” So that goes on for ten months. Court appearances, the police are involved; the principale of the school backs the church, and Johann Huber writes longs—long letters with enormous monologues and diatribes about “the Catholic Church is wrong, there’s no such thing as confession in the Bible, I’ll pay you 1,000 krone if you can show me it’s there, if Christ and his apostlesApostles ever taught it, you can’t do it,” and they never do, they never do collect the money. So in this case he wins, because the courts come back and say, “It is true that confession is not a school district or principle matter, and therefore this young man is not required to attend confession, but he must attend religious instruction, which is part of the school system in Austria.” Johann Huber allows that. So he’s won the second battle. After that things quieted down a little bit, hehe gets his wife to leave the church in order to get the Catholic Priest off his back for forever. So she officially withdraws her name, with county permission, as was required in those days, and she becomes a Lutheran; but she never attends the Lutheran Church that’swhichis twenty miles away.

But now the Catholic Priest has no claim to these souls whatever. So now the Catholic Priest switchsswitches his approach and attacks Huber with accusations of Huber being a missionary trying to gain converts. Austrian law makes it very clear that such is illegal; you’re not allowed to try to convince anyone to leave his religion and join yours. So, Huber defends himself, and actually he’s not truthful here because he does try to make converts, heHe goes to pubs and holds big “lectures,” basically “soap box preaching” in the pub where people are sitting around doing nothing but looking for something fun to experience, heHe goes to the big markets, he goes to circuses, any place where there are crowds, and he preaches to them. He handsout Mormon literature, officially printed by the mission office in BezelBazel, (in Berlin

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later), and so he is in fact breaking the law, they They back him down and he promises to he'll never do that it again. About every year there'll be one more baptism, usually of a person who works on his farm and is allowed to participate in the events and, supposedly voluntarily, and becomes part of the Church.

So the whole storm blows over by 1910; just after Johann Huber's wife, about whom he we know nothing really regarding her beliefs, she dies in 1908, she's barely 41 forty-one years old, it's very sad, leaving him with nine children. He then appeals to the mission president in Berlin and says, "I need help! Can you get me a wife somewhere?" And the word goes out to many big branches, and we have about 20 twenty very large branches during the time, and sure enough, a convert lady of one year, in Berlin, says "well Well, I can maybe fill the role of wife for this huge family," she She is a former Lutheran, big big city Berliner who goes than then to a Catholic community in rural territory where she can not possibly understand the German spoken there, nor they her, and that's an interesting thing, but she will outlive him by 5 five years. So in 1910 the storm has blown over, the Catholic Priest priest who has attacked Huber for 9 nine years retires, at the new priest comes in and figures "This isn't worth fighting, You've only got 20 twenty people in the church and none of them, except the Huber family, are natives of our Italian town, our Our Catholic parish is not going to be destroyed by this movement of radicals fanatics, fanatics are what they call them, really.

So everything stops and Huber than lives then for 31 thirty-one more years as a respected and honored member of his community of nearly 1,200 people, and when he dies in 1941 after falling from a tree, 80 eighty years old he climbs into an apple tree to harvest the apples, falls to the ground, and suffers some significant internal injuries that take his life two days later. The entire town gathers at the home, which is was the way things were done when people died with funerals in those days, and with their band leading them, and flower girls, etc., they march the 400 four hundred yards to the church, where he is buried on the outskirts of the cemetery, he is not a Catholic, so the by Catholic law says he's not allowed to be buried in the cemetery, so just beyond the line, about 3 three feet, his grave is put there next to his wife who's also just beyond the line because she's a Protestant officially, never did join the Church in her life. So his grave remained there for many years. Five years later his second wife, this Berlin Lutheran lady dies, and the family, since then, has emerged to send its descendants into many, many branches in Austria and the United States.

So from this 1902 first branch in Austria start three more branches: Autsburg, Belz, and Lentz are founded by people who leave the Rottembach branch and move into these nearby cities. Two of the Huber daughters marry convert men in Vienna and part of the family moves there to help found what is now a really very solid church in Vienna; they are all over the branches and wards there. So it all started on a single farm, a well-to-do farmer, who took on the Church, the police, the schools, the courts, the newspapers, and weathered an eleven-year storm for the opportunity of worshipping as he saw fit.

That is the story of this remarkable man whose language was not perfect, whose writing was severely flawed; but who obviously could hold his own ~~on in~~ a debate, ~~and who~~ would give probably a very fine sermon if not interrupted. ~~h~~His letters where sometimes seven or eight or nine pages long, including endless records of the scriptures, mostly the New Testament, that he knew very ~~u~~—very well, so he could fight his opponents in terms of religious questions with their own literature.

**Devan Jensen:** *So just then to recap, it sounds like he was a little fiery, he had somewhat of a temper, but he could hold his own in a debate, he was passionate about the restored gospel, he basically became a founding pioneer member of the Church, even despite great opposition from his former ~~Church~~ church and from neighbors and schools, he stayed firm. That's the story that emerges from this.*

**Roger Minert:** If you consider what would have happened to the ~~church~~ Church had he given in, had he had said “~~Ok~~ Okay, I quit, I can’t ~~not~~ fight all you guys,” that would have destroyed the Church everywhere, but in the city of Vienna, where the growth of the Church ~~in beginning in~~ 1909, ~~which in other words is~~ seven years after Rottembach, was so slow and ~~that~~ Vienna branch benefited greatly from the Heirchman brothers bringing two Huber ~~daughters~~ over with their large progeny, so the Church in all of Austria would have been set back anywhere from one to three decades as development; because of the radiation of the Church out of the Rottembach farm to other localities, it would have been an ~~enormous~~ loss to the Church. So this man’s ~~preco~~~~o~~~~ep~~~~perspicacity~~ regarding his new faith allowed the Church to grow in central Austria and in Vienna. Now of course he is doing all of this for the glory of God. ~~t~~This is not a man seeking to be famous. He’s defending Jesus Christ; he’s defending modern revelation and prophets, against the world that has no interest and can never accept those concepts. ~~So B~~because he did so we ~~h~~ave~~d~~ the Church in many different places now; not to mention the contribution of his ~~descen~~ndents in America, some of whom ~~a few~~ have returned to Europe as missionaries. So it’s a tremendously ~~far far~~-reaching influence of one man.

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**Devan Jensen:** *So this is a man of faith and a man of courage, a ~~strong~~~~strong~~-willed individual, who just wouldn’t back down.*

**Roger Minert:** Right. It’s interesting how in all of the court cases, he never once was the plaintiff except in one case where he was appealing to have a previous ruling revoked. That’s important because where as he’s not afraid to defend himself, he does ~~not~~ go on the offensive; he does ~~not~~ seek a fight. ~~h~~He’s hoping to be left alone so he can plow and plant and harvest and raise his cows, etc., but they keep coming back after him. ~~S~~o without apologies he holds the ground. He challenges them to prove him wrong and they never do. So with that he just hopes ~~that~~ they’ll go away, and in 1910 they finally do. So eleven years of strife, costing him endless trips to the county office, to the courts to defend himself, letters, ~~...~~ I’m thinking, where does he get the time for all the travel? ~~w~~ell, the travel’s only an hour one way for the most part, but he’s got a farm to run. ~~h~~He pays fines ~~e~~invoked upon by the courts. ~~...~~

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**Devan Jensen:** *What happened again in 1910 that brought peace?*

**Roger Minert:** 1910 is when ~~that~~the Catholic ~~Pastor~~pastor that fought him for nine years goes into retirement, and is probably more than happy to wash his hands of the entire ~~thing~~trip. In the meantime that Catholic ~~Priest~~priest may be accorded the victory of preventing more people from his flock from moving over into this new radical religion. ~~So~~Perhaps he was very, very successful in that he lost only one family in the entire town, but he was a man of ~~delices~~bellicose spirit on occasions and some of the things he wrote don't reflect good Christian attitudes. ~~But~~But the man's under fire, ~~he's~~he's under attack because his bishop over in Lintz, in the ~~C~~cathedral, could be concerned about whether he can defend the faith or not. That's one of his great responsibilities, to defend the Roman Church. And here's Huber whose mere existence represents an attack on the Church even though Huber isn't going door-to-door asking neighbors to join. ~~Just~~just his existence represents a danger to the Catholic Church.

**Devan Jensen:** *Fantastic! Any last thoughts?*

**Roger Minert:** This is a story that has to be told. It amazes me that over the years, even in the two histories put together by Austrian church members in Vienna, this man gets no more than about one page. Until the emergence of eight hundred documents and photographs, we have not properly understood the intense battle he fought and the intense faith that allowed him to do that and ~~to~~be victorious. It's just as if he's another member and he starts a branch in Rottembach and things go on. It's far more than that. ~~But~~Hit's only the emergence of these documents that show the intensity of ~~this~~the fight. The fact that ~~80~~eighty documents deal with his son not attending confession sessions and the eight- or ~~nine~~nine-month-month-battle that ensues, ~~80~~eighty documents on that one document topic, the fact that ~~we have now~~there are a dozens of letters written by his hand, so, ~~first~~first-person witness.

**Devan Jensen:** *You located these documents through ~~researcher~~Researcher?*

**Roger Minert:** I found those and essentially formed major repositories in Austria, none of which were known to either of our Churches before that time. Simply because I think they underestimated his influence, and nobody apparently saw any particular reason to go look for things like that or imagined that they ever existed. This began with the collection of about ~~70~~seventy documents in the possession of his family, ~~his~~the family ~~that~~still owns the farm that he spent his entire life on, ~~of~~eighty-one years. ~~s~~o just one of those things where one document leads to another, ~~and~~one repository suggests another, and we have a collection that has to be rare in LDS history, ~~800~~eight hundred documents and photographs about one man. He was not a Joseph Smith and a Brigham Young. That allows us to tell a story that otherwise would just be superficial, ~~important~~important, but would not have the depth that allows us to see into his soul and to picture his daily struggle against all these entities.