

G-SIG FORUM #55

...from the **German Special Interest Group**. G-SIG is an effort of the St. Louis Genealogical Society (www.stlgs.org/) and the German American Heritage Society, St. Louis, Mo. (www.gahs-stlouis.org).

This forum is for genealogical, educational, and historical information with fresh insights and ideas on German traditions and ancestry. Gerald Perschbacher is *FORUM* compiler and coordinator.

You may submit a notice or request for information in condensed form for the *EXCHANGE!* section (limit 50 words). *EXCHANGE!* notices run only once, but you may resubmit, within reason. We reserve the privilege to shorten and edit. Send your *EXCHANGE!* submission to persch3@hotmail.com.



More Reasons They Came by Gerald Perschbacher

There were probably a bunch of reasons why Germans came to America. Common reasons revolved around the desire for a bright future or the fear of crop failures, war, disease, forced military service, and overcrowding. For younger people, it may have been an uncertainty of inheritance. All are valid reasons, of course. You may find in your studies that combinations of these (or other) reasons drew your ancestor to America.

Finding the reasons for your ancestor's arrival may lead you on the path to discovery in more ways than one.

Here's what I mean. A very good reason centers on family and friends. Once someone from a locality ventured to this New World in America, someone else from their circle was bound to follow. Usually the move of people started slowly. One person, perhaps one young family, and as years progressed, brothers and sisters plus their families were moving to America. As members of the senior generation aged in Germany, they sometimes were talked into moving to America just to have the support of family in their Golden Years.

The same may be said of friends. Emigrants trusted those who were related by blood and those associated by friendship. These people were "proven commodities." Risks were less when you knew the people around you. Call it an Old World support system!

As you study various surnames, watch for recurrences. This may be an indication of relationships via marriage. Researchers find this in church books and civic volumes. Herr Schmidt marries a young maiden by the name of Schwartz. The name Hoff suddenly appears in a baptismal record. Then it reappears with different first names. Could it be that the Schwartz family was related to the Hoff family through marriage, thus allowing the name to recur for a generation or more? Or perhaps it was a case of long-term generational friendships.

In Germany, where small-town families proudly trace their genealogical roots at least several generations, there may be a couple hundred years' worth of marriages between Hoff's and the Schwartz clan. Small towns usually are a blend of family associations with a slowly expanding citizenry that sometimes was cut back by plague, drought, or war. But a main stream of offspring often kept the names alive right to the present.

There are unusual reasons why people came to America in the 1800s especially. One of those reasons involved freedom to worship.

We take it for granted now, but newly arrived immigrants may have staked their lives and futures on a land where a person could worship—and believe (or not believe)—without governmental intervention. Freedom of religion was an American principle that attracted entire families, and in more than one particular case, a large group of people.

We'll center this study on a group mainly from Saxony. They settled in the St. Louis area, then quickly moved (in part) to Perry County, Missouri. These were people who prided themselves to be "Old Lutherans." They did not want to be lumped in with other Christian denominations, even though (by imperial decree in what we call old German) the Lutherans and Reformed religions were practically lumped together under the term Evangelical.

Their trip to Missouri took place in 1839. While there was an earlier group of Hessen Lutherans that arrived here in 1833, the Saxons were very well organized. They shared a common treasury from which loans could be granted. Clergy influence supported by a devoted laity made for success in America.

It wasn't just in Saxony that worship forms and belief structures were being forced by officials. In 1848, Bavaria forced Lutherans and Reformed churches into a Union Church. This resulted in the rise of "free Lutheran churches" in that area. These were small but often vocal. The old way of worship was called a "Confessional" approach.

You may have heard of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. It was the church body derived from the Saxon immigrants who toiled through adversities to make their niche in United States history. Books have been written about this devout group of people, initially more than 700 strong, who soon attracted the attention of other newly settled Germans who wanted to call America their homeland.

As you tackle your family history, ask relatives about the reasons they may have heard that brought their line to the muddy Mississippi's banks. If one reason was related to religion, then you may be able to open a whole new vista of study. There are church records of various Protestant bodies that trace their formative years to this part of the

Midwest. You may find references to clergymen or lay leaders from your family listed in key documents being preserved in archives, awaiting your discovery.

I'll change gears at this point and add that much the same may hold true for social organizations or a club (--*verein*). Find out if that organization still exists. If it does, all the better to find something. If it no longer exists, then find out where their papers and files might have been donated. If records are still stashed in corner of a club, someone's basement, or a file cabinet, you may find your ancestor's signature on a page, maybe even unearth a long-forgotten photograph. Ask around. Contact historians, libraries, researchers, and museums.

And don't neglect to keep asking your relatives. Who knows what they may have!



TIP: One of our G-SIG participants surprised me. I won't mention names, but she made a general announcement in another group's newsletter that she would loan her precious book if someone wanted to check for ancestors from a certain town. That book was printed in Germany within the past 15 years. I knew my ancestor would be listed, since he had been its pastor and made the official church book entries. After a casual e-mail contact, the loaner was so kind, she scanned a good number of pages from the book and sent them electronically. It was a great help.

Being an incurable researcher and wondering what more secrets that book contained about other families, I contacted a friend in Germany. He knew about the book. In fact, he had encouraged the compiler to have it printed! This resulted in the very book that our G-SIG participant was offering for a short-term loan.

My friend in Germany offered to contact the author on my behalf. I was told that the book was still in print. For a modest number of Euros, the author would send a copy. I jumped at the opportunity. Knowing my friend is trustworthy, I knew his friends over there had to be of the same ilk. I was correct in my conclusion.

But the book isn't on my shelf. It's on my desk, being used heartily to discover things I never imagined. And it all started with a little announcement, an offer of a loan, some scans, and a bit of ingenuity!



The G-SIG Formula... is a relatively simple thing. It is composed of three parts: one part "*FORUM*" (which is what you are reading), one part "CLUSTER" (which is a special group that bands together for common research and insights), and one part "GATHERING" (which originally took place quarterly but is now bi-monthly). What makes this formula work is a catalyst—YOU! Sure, there is a G-SIG Steering Committee and there are some marvelously dedicated leaders, but the success of G-SIG rests on the people it attracts. If you are willing to volunteer to help at (or with) a GATHERING or CLUSTER, contact Group Leader John Wittenberg for ideas! (johnwittenberg@cjthomas.com)



A CROSSROADS...

...that's what the German people have been through much of known European history. This not only related to travel due to the central location of the people. It also related to trade and finance. The German people have been numerous, rebounding from the horrors and losses of wars, great and small. They have been resourceful, being in the forefront of innovation and invention. They have been a market for the goods of northern, southern, eastern, and western Europe. The German people have found markets for their products in nearly all of Europe and many places overseas. Since the era of the Romans, the German people have been a pivotal group in the crossroads of the continent and of history. In 2010 they continued this trend by being a financial bulwark as financial weaknesses plagued member nations in what has been called the Euro Zone.



German Advances!

Germany formed its modern identity as a unified land in the late 1800s. Take the following quiz on some steps along that road!

HOW DID GERMANY GET INTO THE ARMAMENT BUSINESS? In 1810, when Friedrich Krupp founded his little iron forging shop in Essen, he soon was making armaments with son Alfred. That was in 1837. In the next decade, the company became a major supplier to countries around the world. The expansion of Krupp factories in the Ruhr valley became the central arsenal for Prussia. Alfred is credited with making the first cannon from pure steel.

WHAT PERSON HAD THE STRONGEST INFLUENCE ON GERMANY'S UNIFICATION? When Prince Otto Edward Leopold von Bismarck became the "Iron Chancellor," he became the dominant force in Prussian and German history in the latter part of the 19th century. A supporter of royalty, he believed unification was the only path to follow. To him, war was a diplomatic tool and a political weapon.

HOW IMPORTANT WAS TRANSPORTATION? By 1858, locomotives were proving to be a strong influence for trade and travel. The rise of rail traffic bolstered the economy and added to industrial success. This became more successful than river trade.

WHAT WAS THE FIRST MILITARY TEST OF PRUSSIAN POWER? It involved a war with Denmark from February to October of 1864. Fighting tactics were similar to that of America's Civil War. What precipitated the encounter was Denmark's claim on Schleswig, which was German.

WHAT THREE OBSTACLES HINDERED GERMAN UNIFICATION? First, there was the wide gap between Protestant and Catholic sectors (a divisiveness that had plagued German provinces for centuries). Second, France and Austria were against German unification for obvious reasons. There was less competition if there was no Germany, territories could be taken or controlled militarily and economically, and France or Austria could fight wars in German states instead of their own land. Third, there was a significant anti-Prussian sentiment. This became prevalent as Prussia's trade agreements absorbed more and more territories.

WHAT WAS THE GREATEST VICTORY OF PRUSSIA AS IT UNIFIED GERMAN STATES?

It was the battle of Sedan in the Franco-Prussian War. When the armistice with France was signed in late January of 1871, it came in the wake of Prussian victory on the battlefield of Sedan. In that single battle, more than 100,000 prisoners were taken. Among them was French Emperor Napoleon III.

WHAT HAPPENED TO ALSACE AND LORRAINE? Those provinces, long under German control, were swung away from French domination when Prussia beat France in 1871. Those same territories returned to France in the settlement of the First World War.

WHO WAS THE FIRST EMPEROR OF UNIFIED GERMANY? It was Wilhelm I. He was crowned as emperor in the Palace of Versailles on January 18, 1871. Bismarck favored the act.

WHAT PREVIOUS TITLE HAD WILHELM I HELD? He was King of Prussia before he became the first Emperor of Germany. He died in 1888. The successor was his only son, Friedrich, who was not a lover of Bismarck and his tactics. But Friedrich died within the first month he was emperor. That anti-military mindset changed when Wilhelm II became emperor (he adored military tactics). Still, Bismarck was ousted by the newcomer who saw the old Iron Chancellor as a potential stumbling block and sideshow to imperial importance.

WHEN DID THE ELECTRIC POWER COME TO GERMANY? It was in 1884 when Potsdamer Platz in Berlin was ablaze with electric lights, thus becoming the first massive use of such lighting in the country. Reportedly, the first electric elevator was used in Mannheim in 1880.

HOW WELL WERE WORKERS TREATED IN GERMANY? By the early 1880s, the German government established a plan for national health insurance for workers. Perhaps this was a reaction to the social movements of the mid-1800s. Germany was among the first nations to establish such a system

WHAT WAS THE FAVORITE TYPE OF CLOTHING WHICH EMPEROR WILHELM II WORE? A military uniform was his standard apparel. It was rare to see him in anything else. For formal occasions, he wore a dress uniform. Why did he prefer a uniform? First, he enjoyed it. Second, the uniform reflected power and a commanding presence. This was good for the unity and morale of the relatively new nation. Also, Prussian militarism was running high. Interestingly, this mentality continued far into the 20th century. When the Second World War ended, the areas that became West Germany were domestically demilitarized (and France, England, and the United States took over defensive duties on German soil). Under Soviet domination, East Germany remained militaristic until its collapse, finally marking a break with Prussian militarism. It was often stated that Prussia was an army in search of a country!

WHAT'S THE POINT OF KNOWING ALL THESE FACTS? Unless you know pertinent points from history, you may never appreciate the impact history made on your lineage. Learn what you can about the era when your family resided in Germany. Discover the events of daily life. If you continue to research German history while enlarging your ancestral scope, you could capture a bit of the feelings and circumstances they faced!



Exchange! G-SIG Comments, ideas, and requests

+ **Venne in America** by Udo Thörner traces the 19th century mass emigration to America of tenants and small cottage farmers from a rural village in the area around Osnabrueck. Contact Kathy Wurth (kathyinwashington@hotmail.com) for details.

+ **Have you tried** the Germany Vital Records Index? There may be helpful information to advance your research by tapping the free online source at FamilySearch: Germany Vital Records Index. This article describes a collection of records available for free online use at FamilySearch: https://wiki.familysearch.org/en/Germany_Vital_Records_Index

+ **Ann Morrison** recently spearheaded a special DVD student project at St. Louis Community College (Meramec), resulting in interviews with 15 people of German heritage who were adversely treated by anti-German people in the aftermath of the Second World War. The DVD is longer than a hour and is titled, *The Forgotten Genocide*. For details on the subject, go online at www.annsfilms.com.

+ **In relation to the lead article about the Saxons** who came to Missouri for religious freedom, you may be interested in the 826 page book, *At Home in the House of My Fathers* compiled and translated by Matthew C. Harrison and published by Lutheran Legacy, 1403 Mockingbird Lane, Bridgeport, TX 76426 (www.lutheranlegacy.org). The book carries many translated documents from the 1800s that reflect some of the thinking of immigrants.

+ **When it comes to G-SIG Clusters**, Nancy Von Behren is active in promoting the Hessian (Hessen) bunch currently connected with the Westfalen/Westphalia Cluster. Given the fact that about a third of the Germans who settled in and around St. Louis came from the Hessen areas of Germany, there is growing interest in banding together to share common challenges and discoveries. Find out more by contacting Nancy by e-mail at nvonbehren@msn.com.

+ **Maximize your potential** -- connect with a **G-SIG Cluster**. Each Cluster brings together a small bunch of people with common interests, varied abilities, and successful tactics. Contact: Lisa at lmclaughlin@polsinelli.com or Kathy at kathyinwashington@hotmail.com.

+++++

Want a printed copy of *G-SIG FORUM* by mail? Send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to: St. Louis Genealogical Society, Attn. Ed Schmidt; #4 Sunnen Dr., Suite 140; St. Louis, MO 63143. Not yet on the e-mail list for the G-SIG FORUM? Write to germansig@stlgs.org. (All copyright privileges for this FORUM are reserved by the compiler; no item is to be duplicated or distributed without permission.)

Have great ideas for the *G-SIG FORUM*? Submit your material to: persch3@hotmail.com or mail it to: StLGS, Attn: G-SIG, #4 Sunnen Dr., Suite 140, St. Louis, MO 63143.

+++++