

G-SIG FORUM #56

...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.



When German\$ Came to America

by Gerald Perschbacher

“I am rejoiced to find you are still anxious to come to this place, which I think is the very best place for you,” wrote James L. Cowan in July of 1847. His epistle, written to a friend in North Carolina, resonates with reasons why settlers came to the Midwest – specifically St. Louis and environs. This includes many Germans, who were truly discovering the virtues (and the challenges) of life in eastern Missouri and southern Illinois. By the way, Cowan’s correspondence appeared in an edition of *Missouri Historical Review* for July of 1943 (State Historical Society of Missouri, shs.umsystem.edu/). I will make reference to excerpts, printed here as they appeared originally, spellings included (sic).

St. Louis was a boom town in 1847. The onrush of travelers heading west swelled its ranks now and then, until wagon trains, boat rides, or (as time progressed) rail passage could be obtained. Supplies were secured for the trip. Since St. Louis was about the farthest point of civilization with East-Coast flair, it

was logical to stock up at this river city rather than carrying it all the way from the original point of departure.

German; who came to America in the 1840s and 1850s made St. Louis a favorite destination. The climate and terrain were similar to German territories. Contingents of Germans in the 1830s were the vanguard for the movement. They “discovered” all sorts of virtues for settlement in and around St. Louis. These included cheap land and plenty of it, fertile soil with phenomenal depth, waterways and natural irrigation, and mild winters (generally speaking). Humidity was another factor that seems not to have been mentioned much as a deterrent by Germans in this area who encouraged others in the Fatherland to follow them to the U.S.A.

Germans were interested in job opportunities and the cost of living. Cowan explained that it cost about \$60 to come to St. Louis from the East, and that it would cost about \$200 or \$300 per year to live in the St. Louis area.

German; moving in this region found an interesting fact in the 1840s. Land that had been cultivated was becoming “farmed out.” It had yielded crops year after year with little crop rotation if any, and no return to the soil in necessary nutrients such as natural fertilizer. Early farmers simply farmed the land until it could no longer yield an expected bounty. Then they sold off and moved elsewhere to repeat that cycle. As Germans settled in, they brought Old World thinking about nourishing the land for the future. Many progressive farming techniques in the 1800s in this area were derived from Germans.

Cowan noted in 1847 that there were 11 newspapers printed in St. Louis, “some two or three of which are German.” Also, he listed one French, one for Native Americans, and one of Democratic bent. Comments in the German papers were sometimes antagonistic, highly critical of Germans and current events, and occasionally religious (while opposite opinions were strongly anti-church). St. Louis had become a microcosm of conservative and radical thinking rampant in Germany at that time.

According to Cowan’s sources, “This place now numbers in population considerable over 50,000, the increase is about 6,000 per annum.” This influx necessitated construction. Annually, about 2,000 buildings were being added. The climate he noted as “rather changeable...diseases, principally chills and fever, Bilious Fever, some congestive –Diorhea in the winter among children.”

He said the river “seldom closes at all, [and] when it does, [it] lasts from four to six weeks.” Substantial progress had been made with steamboat traffic since it started coming to St. Louis via the Mississippi River in 1811. The number of steam “Packets” (cargo-laden steam paddle wheelers), totaled nearly 80 in 1847 just from St. Louis northward. A similar number of boats were operating from St. Louis southward. Each one needed wood supplies to keep their boilers fired. Local farmers took to their forested land near waterways to chop trees and provide the necessary wood. It was a good business and provided a worthwhile usage for trees being cleared for farming.

Cowan’s words were typical of reports Germans were receiving: “Farmers all make fortunes, common cropping is 100 bushels corn per acre, 60 bushels wheat,” and other common yields were 500 of Onions, 500 of potatoes, “and other articles in proportion.”

As he wrote, Cowan noticed, “Our church bells are beginning to call for sinners, which reminds me of the number of churches, about 30, some very splendid, Catholics rather most numerous, though all denominations get a pretty good share of patronage....”

To the German mind, this area of America was ripe with opportunity. There were not nearly as many restrictions on where and how to live as there were in Germany. There was no nobility with which to contend. Freedom was a strong attraction. Success or failure depended largely on the hard work and determination which a German settler put into his or her efforts. Not so in Germany. Cowan hinted at the “hard work” principle when he said, “All I ask is health and ordinary degree of luck, to make money.”

Many German settlers liked St. Louis in the later 1840s. A large influx of Germans was increasing each month. Some stayed. Others lingered for months, maybe even a year or two to make money, using St. Louis as a staging point until they purchased land in the countryside or moved away to settle in less populated places. Having thousands of Germans in St. Louis allowed newcomers to openly converse in their native tongue. They were familiar with aspects of German cultural that were perpetuated in the Midwest. Interestingly, some of those practices, including word usages, were retained more strictly in this part of America than in Germany itself! Even recently, Germans have told American visitors that “those German words haven’t been used like that in Germany for more than a hundred years!”

Germans ran a risk when they traveled. Pirates stalked river ways in early years. There were boat losses, too. By one count, 156 steamboats were lost on the Mississippi River between New Orleans and St. Louis in the 1800s. Many of those losses were attributed to punctures from snags in the river or to exploding boilers that set boats afire.

While newly arrived German immigrants stayed much to themselves, they were able to converse with French individuals who knew German due to the close proximity of their homelands.

One individual could tell some spine-shivering stories. He was F.R. Roueche, writing from St. Louis in 1847. He said, "It is almost impossible to raise children here." Why? There were few schools. Few doctors.

Others noticed that St. Louis, being a frontier town, morals often were lax and laws were not always enforced easily. Worst of all was the risk from disease. One report stated that a third of the children died in infancy. This tempted some newly arrived immigrants to leave families in the eastern states while they made their fortune in St. Louis, then moved back to rejoin their loved ones.

Travel conditions and situations along the westward route Roueche took from Winston-Salem, North Carolina, to St. Louis were not unusual. He and his family endured two nights of cold while camping under the stars. Then came "splendid weather" on the way to Saline. They took a steam boat for Cincinnati, Ohio, a distance of nearly 500 miles by his estimation. He paid \$20 to cover passage for his family plus two horses and two carry alls. There was a change in Cincinnati, where the group boarded the *Talisman*. Total cost: \$31 in 1847, which gave direct passage to St. Louis, a distance Roueche estimated as 800 miles.

The steamer turned up the Mississippi at Cairo, Illinois. But four miles below Cape Girardeau, another steamer collided with the *Talisman*, sinking her in less than five minutes. Casualties mounted to between 75-100 and 16 horses, including those of Roueche. The boat at fault saved Roueche and his family. "The balance were negroes and German emigrants some 75 or a hundred in number," he wrote. "Worst of all for my children, their little dog Punch...was drowned."

It wasn't easy for Germans to come to St. Louis in the 1840s. It was a sign of their strong and sincere determination that they arrived and survived.



Did you know...? The 1849 Cholera Epidemic in St. Louis claimed a tenth of the city's population in that summer, with more raising the total to 12 percent by year's end. Many were newcomers, young and old, which added a social burden and health worry on the community. Families were urged to take their children away from town for that summer!



German\$ in the Civil War

Gordon Seyffert in Kansas City, Missouri, (gordonseyffert@mac.com) is at it again, deep in research and discovery. This time he is working on St. Louis Germans in the Civil War.

"My great grandfather Gustavus A. Seyffert, served briefly in the militia from Moniteau County, then came to St. Louis to live with his sister and his brother-in-law (who was serving as a fireman, I'm told, because it exempted him from military service)...My hunch is that my great-great-grandfather was working for a wagon maker in North St. Louis for the same reason -- because the wagon maker was building for the Union Army, and he wouldn't have to serve further in the military. Certainly he learned the trade during this time, for he moved to Lamar after the war to start a wagon and carriage business there (where the first city marshal was -- Wyatt Earp!).

"I have access to the National Archives (NARA) branch here in Kansas City, and specifically to the records of the Provost Marshals for the First and Second Congressional Districts that included St. Louis....The Provost Marshals were in charge of recruitment and the draft, beginning in 1863."

Gordon says G-SIRers can shed more light on their research in this arena.

"I think the NARA records are a significant trove of information about the war in St. Louis from 1863-65, including the letters that were written to the two Provost Marshals. There is also a collection of archival materials in Jefferson City that would surely be worthwhile as well, although I haven't made it over yet to see what it holds." Gordon Seyffert may be reached at (816) 444-9777.

"I recently became aware of, and then quickly joined just a month ago, a national organization 'for Americans of Germanic descent.' It is the German-American National Congress, or Deutsch Amerikanischer National Kongress (D.A.N.K.). Here is a link to the home page of their web site:

<http://www.dank.org/>



The G-SIG Formula... 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)



Exchange! G-SIG Comments, ideas, and requests

+ **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 an hour and is titled, *The Forgotten Genocide*. For details on the subject, go online at www.annsfilms.com.

+ **From: carolandjoemarlo@yahoo.com**; subject: Offer of Information – “I will make the following offer for anyone with family originating in the town of Miesenheim in the Rhein. “I have a copy of the *Familienbuch Miesenheim (b/Andernach*, compiled by Helmut Schommer. Printed in 1996 in Köln; it carries an assemblage of birth, death, and marriage records for this town (1700-1900). Mr. Schommer also includes data on people from other towns who married into Miesenheim families and cites references to other "familienbuchen" for those towns. I'd be most happy to look up data for anyone who has roots in that area. If they will e-mail me the family names they are researching, I'll be glad to see if such families are listed in this book, and we can go on from there.-- Carol Gebhart Marlo

+ **Maximize your potential** -- connect with a **G-SIG Cluster**. Each 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.



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