

# G-SIG FORUM #58

...from the German Special Interest Group. G-SIG is an effort of the St. Louis Genealogical Society ([www.stlgs.org/](http://www.stlgs.org/)) and the German American Heritage Society, St. Louis, Mo. ([gahs-stl@att.net](mailto:gahs-stl@att.net)).

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](mailto:persch3@hotmail.com).

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## ***Auswanderungen aus dem Odenwaldkreis***

Provides interesting reading. No, I'll take that a few notches higher—it is enlightening reading! BAND 1 (volume 1) was compiled by Ella Geig in Germany in 1988 and updated in 1992. This is part of a series of books (in German) on the Odenwald (Oden's Forest) "district," an area running from north of Breuberg, westward to Reichelsheim, and southward to Rothenberg. More generally speaking, this area is west of Amorbach, south of Hanau, east of Darmstadt, and north of Eberbach. (Here is a chance to brush up on your map work!).

"Auswanderungen" means "travelers from..." or emigrants. Band 1 traces immigrations back to the early 1700s with German settlers in Turkey, Serbia, and Hungary (to name a few). Quotes from old manuscripts and entry books are incorporated in the text. Surnames are provided, with notes on taxation, positions as soldiers, and financial obligations between settlers.

The next section shifts to Nova Scotia, Canada, in the mid-1700s. Yes, Germans were there, too. A group of 21 Germans made the trip over the Atlantic in 1752. Basically four families, they boarded the ship *Phoenix*, captained by John Spurrier of Rotterdam. The ship set out for Portsmouth in England, then crossed the ocean, arriving in early November.

Now, let's pause to read between the lines.

All these movements took place prior to the great immigration of Germans to the New World (America). Most of those later immigrants settled in America from 1840 and into the early 1900s. But here are examples, compiled

by German researchers in recent years, that show earlier groups of immigrants heading for new freedoms.

Notice the reference to 21 people. Four families were mentioned. Chances are very good that ALL those people were related by blood or marriage. There were four families (four couples = 8) plus their children. You may find this to be an interestingly small group, but that's the way the initial moves to America took place. It wasn't a steady stream or a large flow, initially. It was, well, a trickle. People came in small, compact groups.

Four families—probably brothers and/or sisters, their spouses, and “younger's.” Why travel with family? You could trust them. They had a share in the overall success of the voyage. You could be comfortable with them. You were as close to them culturally as possible -- a support group in every sense.

If my understanding of that trend in the 1830s is an indication of earlier movements, then these four families included adults in their 30s and 40s, with perhaps a younger couple. Children often ranged from 1 year to 12 years of age. It was not a comfortable trip. Travelers were told to bring their own food and drinking water! Ships were not comfortably equipped for passengers. Space was created in cargo holds that might bring tobacco or dried meal on the return trip. Was the ship home to bugs? Probably. Add a few rats and some mice, too. Dark and damp? Likely. Smelling like fish and salt water? You bet!

If you couldn't “hack it,” you should have stayed in Germany! Then again...your future was limited back there. It was bleak amid over-crowding and lack of peace, with crop failures and oppression by noblemen.

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**As Emigrants Departed** German territories in the 1700s and early 1800s, many had little idea where they might settle. Some had heard of good land in the west, which meant all points near and beyond the Mississippi River. Their introduction to that “promised land” probably came via a circular printed in German by travel agents representing shipping companies or New World interests. William Penn, after whom Pennsylvania was named, eagerly sought disgruntled Germans living up, down, and near the Rhine River in order to have them skip over the Atlantic to settle his territory.

That's what hundreds of people did, many in small groups. It wasn't easy to become acclimated to the area, but they persevered while encountering diseases common to the continent but hardly heard of in Europe! Yes, history books tell of European settlers who brought diseases from their lands to unknowingly inflict upon the indigenous tribes of America. Equally dangerous, however, were the indigenous diseases for which those Europeans had no cure! Reliance on Indian herbs and treatments became an important element in their settlement.



**Back to the Book --** Nearly half of Band 1 lists emigrants by town and year. Here are some pertinent observations.

Not all those Germans immediately thought of leaving for America. There is an entry that Johann Nikolaus Dorsch married Anna Margareta Eichmann in 1766. They traveled to Russia that same year. You can probably guess that these relocated Germans settled in sparse areas of western Russia to assist with farming. Sophie Auguste Friederike vonAnhalt-Zerbst (a German from Pomerania), ascended to the vacant imperial throne in Russia and adopted the name Catherine II (later known as Catherine the Great). In 1762 and in 1763 she published and distributed invitations for Germans to settle her lands. There can hardly be a doubt that this was the case with this couple.

The sixth entry later shows Johann Michael Eichmann and wife Anna Barbara Voelker of Russia being married in 1766 (the year they came to America). Building on what I stated earlier, the entries probably show a sister-brother relationship.

There was a notable entry in between those listings but taking place years later in 1850. This was for Adam Eichmann (yes, another Eichmann—the earlier ones from 1766 possibly were related). Adam was 37 years old. His wife (surname Olt) was 35. They had children aged 9, 6, and 3. Those were mighty tender years for a family to run its watery course over the Atlantic and then encroach on the interior of a continent they had only read about or “heard tell” by others. However, it was not as risky as traveling in 1766. Medical advancements and more support among a growing population made that 1850 trip much safer.

In conclusion, we’ll note that the book relies on original primary documents from archives, churches, and newspapers of the era.



### **Elihu H. Shepard...**

...authored a handy, small book called *The Early History of St. Louis and Missouri*, published by Southwestern Book and Publishing Company, St. Louis, in 1870. It’s a real eye-opener on early St. Louis history, and we will restrict our study to events involving and impacting German immigrants.

Germans were not among the initial settlers of St. Louis. It had its roots in French territory. So, what was life like in those days of the settlement’s dawning civilization? The first marriage was on April 20, 1766, between Toussaint Hanen and Marie Bangenon. That same year the first mortgage was recorded by two merchants who dealt in animal pelts.

There was intrigue, as you might expect in a settlement along the raw edge of westward expansion. In August of 1767, word reached St. Louis that Spanish forces were nearing the settlement in order to take control under a secret treaty of 1762. Troops came, and the anxiety of settlers intensified. The troops remained until August of the succeeding year, then departed. None the less, settlers were apprehensive about safety and remained concerned.

Pontiac, the great Ottawa Indian chieftain, came to town in 1769. Known as the organizer of diverse tribes, he had been a formidable foe in his younger years. By the time of his visit, he was a national personality. Pontiac crossed the river at Cahokia for a visit. "He drank deeply, until his faculties were stupefied, when he wandered in the underwood about the village where he was tomahawked by a Kaskaskis Indian who had been hired by an English trader names Williamson." The killer's price was a barrel of whisky!

In 1783 an encounter with Delaware Indians resulted in the scalping of a member of a prominent French family named Duchonquette. The St. Louisan was attacked near Chouteau's pond. However, his brother witnessed the encounter from a distance and, in pursuit with other settlers, overtook the Indian and dispatched him to the next world.

In all the research I have done thus far on the first Germans in St. Louis, I cannot find reference to the name of the first one or when he (or she) came. In 1804 the population of St. Louis was reported by number of houses (183 to be exact). In the entire Missouri Territory in 1804 (quite a few years prior to statehood) there were 10,340 inhabitants. Of those, 1,300 were of slave origin. By 1810, the settlement's population was 1,400.

In April of 1825 Marquis de Lafayette arrived for a visit. Old and edging toward frailty, he was making a grand visit to the young nation as a salute to the 50 years that had ensued following his involvement in the War of Independence. Still, no Germans were mentioned.

We surmise that the earliest Germans in St. Louis came gradually, probably migrating from Eastern states. The city attracted travelers, whether they were stopping for a few days before then wended their ways easterly for home, or whether they used the city as a springboard into the largely unknown West. Author Shephard notes on page 89 that "there were less than a dozen German families in the city of St. Louis" in 1828. No reference is made to whether these settlers came from the same point of origin overseas or whether they struggled for newfound freedom as they were absorbed into St. Louis. No surnames are listed in print. However, the first appearance of a German name was of Alex Buckner. We can further surmise that these early German settlers must have had knowledge of English or French if they were to survive economically. From other sources we can piece together some factors for 1833. It was the Year of the German, so to speak, for the German settlers range up to a couple hundred by year's end!

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## Watch Cindy Trace...!

Cindy Jacob ([cjjacob@earthlink.net](mailto:cjjacob@earthlink.net)) traced her direct line in two Württemberg villages (Ölbronn and Knittlingen near Maulbronn) “and found that my eighth great-grandfathers were the ‘*Richter*’ or sometimes ‘*Bürgermeister*’ in the late 1600s. I know that the translations of these words are ‘Judge’ and ‘Mayor,’ however, I’d like to get a deeper understanding of what functions that would include in that timeframe. Would they be appointed by the Duke? Can you help me...put some meat on the bones of those two words...judge and mayor?”

**This is what I said:** *Schultheiss* was an appointed position by the ruling noble house of a territory. *Bürgermeister* was a later version by election of the town folk (with the permission of the noble family). *Bürgermeisters* became more common by the early 1800s.

A *Richter* was someone with an official appointment, which often equated to judges. Usually these positions were restricted to prominent families in the town (by reason of wealth, income, or land holdings). These were elected jobs, but the electors were only a handful of main families (not noble). I have seen the election results for top positions (even for *Bürgermeister*) and for a town of about 500 + people it took only a dozen or so votes to make the selection! The noble ruling family had to approve of the choices. Large towns usually had two types of juries (with judges)-- one dealing with civil matters, the other with long term incarceration or even execution.

Now, some additional commentary: Towns of 1,000 people or less were usually dominated by five or six powerful families. We’re not talking about nobility but of regular, down to earth families that were wealthy enough or respected well enough to take on responsibilities in leadership. These people were honored and respected by villagers and noble families above them. These families swung their most respected and capable members into all sorts of leadership roles. The jobs changed due to term limits or restrictions enforced by traditions or local laws. Noble families did not make all the laws, but they had to approve every law, even when it was formed by the people in the town.

There are some exceptions to the amount of power held by town leaders. If a city was large and was protected by Imperial Law, then it answered directly to the Emperor (such as in the case of Strasbourg, Worms, and Frankfurt on the Main). So its town leaders were VERY powerful. Still, the Emperor may have assigned cities like Strasbourg to the guidance and direction of a particular noble family which had a vested interest in land near that city.



No easy answers to the amount of importance town leaders held, except to study the exact era, the particular territory, and local customs to discover what previously had been forgotten!

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## ***Exchange!*** G-SIG Comments, ideas, and requests

+ **AAA Auto Club of Missouri** is a marvelous source for free maps of Germany (if you are a member of AAA). You may ask for a couple copies at the front desk of any such facility and just present your membership card.

+ **Go to [www.higginsonbooks.com](http://www.higginsonbooks.com)** and you may find all sorts of reprinted books from the "old days." The one by Elihu Shephard mentioned in this *FORUM* is handled by the company, which deals with on-demand printing of old books. They do a great job of printing on acid-free paper with an exceptionally nice binding. You may also contact them at: Higginson Book Company, 148 Washington St., P.O. Box 778, Salem, Massachusetts 01970. Their prices are very attractive. Example: a \$500 original first edition book from the 1800s can be obtained in reprint form for around \$50!

+ **Elizabeth Jarvis ([jarvisindy@earthlink.net](mailto:jarvisindy@earthlink.net))** is looking for her ancestor Louis Knapp, a physician pharmacist who lived in St. Louis in 1900-1904, and may have been there earlier. I do not believe he was at all related to the publisher, George Knapp. I am interested in finding out what life was like for a German speaking family during that period. Technically he was probably first generation, as his family started in Detroit.

+ **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](mailto:lmclaughlin@polsinelli.com) or Kathy at [kathyinwashington@hotmail.com](mailto:kathyinwashington@hotmail.com).

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