

G-SIG FORUM #59

...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. (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.

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FRANKFURT AND ITS UNIQUE MINORITY

It isn't easy being a "foreigner." That's one reason I enjoy visiting Germany—with my obvious Germanic appearance, I fit right in. I've even had people stop me on the street to talk or ask for directions...little did they know (until I responded).

Even though I look the part of a German, it becomes clear in a matter of moments that I am American through and through (well, maybe German American with a lot of "Old Country" ways ingrained). Still, I speak like an American and, yes, tend to act like one (there's good and bad in that !).

Imagine what it was like for the Jewish population abiding in Frankfurt-on-the-Main (*am Main*) over the centuries. What set them apart were customs, language, and (to a point) appearances (although, after many years, a number of Jewish and German families intermingled).

In Frankfurt's case, it was made an Imperial City long ago. As a royal city, Frankfurt was first administered by a governor. Then, in 1220, it was granted self-ruling rights and the privileges of building and maintain protective outer walls. It was allowed to conduct market trade. This was a special honor bestowed by the Emperor (Kaiser) of the Holy Roman Empire. Resultantly, Frankfurt was to pay homage to the Emperor above all others. Local rule was their own doing, but with guidance as determined by the Emperor. Occasionally

this was granted to a nearby nobleman who was considered the protector of the city and was empowered to collect (and enforce the payment of) taxes for the Emperor. Matters of internal strife between groups of people was often to be determined by the city's leadership.

Customary ways of living for the Jews in Frankfurt involved NOT forgetting their heritage, which rested especially on faith and religious practices. This included kosher food, worship, holy festivals, and general lifestyle. Of course, Jews living in Frankfurt a century ago or even longer contended with what Americans would call outrageous rules and laws. While ruling noble families in Germany set the pace for treatment of people in their territories, sometimes life was made harsh or easy on Jews, depending on the era and the attitudes of leaders.

Case in point: When the Black Plague hit Germany in the 1300s (and in later waves of lesser plagues) a "scapegoat" mentality surfaced. It's an ancient religious principle and logical to many people under stress, that if there is a severe problem arising from disaster or plague, then SOMEONE must be held responsible. Some see it as God's displeasure over foreigners. Maybe there was some disease or "bad luck" that entered a community due to outsiders and someone had to be the cause. Since Jews were separated from general German society to a certain extent, relatively gentle and kind, hard working Jewish people were castigated.

Chastening took varying forms. Sometimes the "guilty" were beaten. Sometimes they were removed from the city or burned as if a form of witchcraft were involved (burning at the stake was the most common means of ridding the community of a Satanic presence). The idea of removal wasn't restricted to Europe. Ridding a society of its "difficulties" even was practiced by Jews (read the Old Testament, Ezra chapter 9:9-44).

In the year 1462, Frankfurt mandated that its Jews had to live on the *Judengasse* (Jewish street or sector). While narrow streets were not uncommon to old cities of Germany, in the Jewish area it was particularly crowded with limited outside space, so the street was even narrower than the norm. There often was a small entryway with a door. For the Jews, this hindered angry horsemen from easily sweeping down the street in a fit of rage. The area was walled off (which provided a degree of protection for those who dwelled inside those walls) and likewise assured the majority of Frankfurt's population that the Jews were "in their place." If you even have the opportunity to visit an old *Judengasse* in Germany, you will experience the compactness of multi-levels of buildings, their closeness to each other, and the narrow passages that rarely appear between structures.

The difficulty facing this unique minority in Frankfurt was the inability to fight back. If there was any indication of insurgency while being persecuted, then the tendency was to burn out the *Judengasse* or at least destroy and pillage the homes in retribution.

Truly, life was not easy for Jews in Frankfurt. When times were rough, they were pressured. Generally, they adapted. When there were rules on Jews not being land owners, they adapted by renting space and becoming craftsmen or trademen. As they accumulated wealth and could not invest it in land or many belongings (remember—they had very limited living space for extravagant home trappings), they began loaning money to non-Jews living in Frankfurt. Some historians credit this process with the rise of banking and financial institutions in Europe from the 1500s through the 1800s.

Some researchers have asserted that Frankfurt Jews were identified by the color of their house. This meant that if a family moved, their indicator name probably changed. The Rothschild and Schwarzschild families of Frankfurt may have come up with their surname through this process.

Here is a little list of some other Jewish family names from Frankfurt: Beer, Kann, Bing, Kirchheim, Cramer, Landua, Flersheim, Maas, Fuld, Gans, Ochs, Oppenheimer, Getz, Rinskopf, Schames, Scheuer, and Rapp. The list could be extended to include even more, but this gives an idea of some old names.

Let's realize that not all Jews WANTED a surname. They didn't mind being called *Ben--___* ("Son of _____") and then use their father's first name. But Germans wanted surnames once that practice prevailed by the 1500s. So, in communities where Jews had no last names, magistrates gave them one. It might have been derived from the color of hair or skin tone (Schwarz or Weiss) or a location. A propensity developed toward certain word endings. This is reflected in an American saying: "Where the *-heimers* are, the *-steiners* will follow." Also, Jews were given names reflecting their trade or livelihood.

The number of Jews has increased and diminished in Frankfurt over its more than 1,200 years as a town and city. In 1241 nearly 150 of 200 Jews living there were killed in an uprising. The Emperor issued a decree protecting the Jews thereafter and penalties were aimed at anyone who perpetrated evil against them. Sadly, rules change as do Emperors and civilian populations.

Although Jews rebounded there by the year 1270, more oppression followed. The city welcomed Jews once more in 1360 since their part in the local economy could not be underestimated.

We can surmise that partially due to the financial actions of some Jewish families and friends, the stock market in Frankfurt was begun in 1585. This was

controlled by the government. From a humble beginning, Frankfurt is now the undisputed financial center of Germany.

And what of that old Jewish neighborhood? Much of Frankfurt was bombed and burned during the Second World War, so many old neighborhoods are only a shadow of their former forms, if they exist at all. But the impact of the Jewish element cannot be underestimated. Nor can it be forgotten that a good number of Germans held no animosity toward the “unique minority” among them.

Gerald Perschbacher



GERMAN HEALTH CARE BEGAN IN 1883

G-SIG's Marlene Olson (genealogy777@yahoo.com) shared findings about German health care, circa 1978. These comments are based on an article in the Aug.21 edition of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* of that year. If your ancestors left Germany since 1883, you may wish to take special note.

Germans weren't paying doctors with cash or checks as late as 1978. They were using an "illness ticket" (in German: *krankenschein*). In West Germany, there was no charge for such tickets since these were part of the national health care plan. The *Post* reported that these covered all factors "from drugs and massages to full hospitalization and convalescent care at health resorts." The news report also noted that nearly 90 percent of West Germans were covered by a health plan that dated to 1883, as established under Chancellor Otto von Bismarck! The plan was especially good for blue-collar workers.

To show how good the plan was, a person could take as much as 78 weeks of sick leave with full pay. Most dental care was included. And medications cost as little as 1 mark (50 cents) by 1978.

The plan involved a confederation of 1,420 insurance funds that collected payroll deductions and sent payments for medical bills. Guided under federal rules, it was a non-profit system.

What was the result? The *Post* reported, "The German system makes it easy for patients to consult physicians. In a recent three-month period, 73 percent of the country's adults consulted doctors, and 62 percent came away with prescriptions."

Maybe that's one reason Germans have been healthy over the years! Perhaps that's why the offspring of German immigrants since 1883 was so good!



CHAIN MIGRATION?

Nancy Von Behren (nvonbehren@msn.com) is coordinating Hessen activity alongside efforts by Karen Ridgeway (stwestland@yahoo.com) for Westphalia (Westfalen). In a set of meeting notes by Nancy, this is what surfaced:

Dan Vornberg asked if **chain migration** was true. "It is known that groups came together for the same town, and that brother and sisters came with or followed the original group. Many came together and others followed, some call it **citizen migration**."

Karen Ridgeway's ancestors were from New Minden, Washington County, Illinois. There were six children (plus) father and mother that migrated. The mother died; he remarried. They wrote to relatives in Germany and told them of the good land and that it was cheap. Another of Karen's great-great grandfathers went to Burlington, Iowa, before the Civil War and raised wheat for the Union Army.

Good report!

Yes, **chain migration** among family and friends was not only possible but at times was prevalent. I have researched several groups and families coming from Germany beginning in the 1830s and up to the 1880s. It was common for family groups to come over (perhaps a couple brothers and their families). It also is true that years later, when other relatives in Germany grew to an age (or financial ability) to come to America, they did. These later travelers often followed the same course of their relatives and soon settled in the same general area, too. While many immigrants were in the 40s or younger, there are cases when chain migration involved older relatives who did not want to live their last years in Old Germany.

The encouragement of friends and extended family (close and distant cousins) also offered exciting stories based on letters from America. Read among friends in Germany, those contacts with the New World enticed others to follow, whether they were relatives or not.

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Nancy Von Behren Met With Success! When Nancy traveled to Waterloo, Monroe County, Illinois, she went to the Monroe County Court House. There she found Jan Wenk (who is involved with G-SIG and also is a leader in the Monroe County Genealogical Society). Jan helped to find a marriage record of her great-grandmother -- this was her second marriage. They found references of a bunch of Langs (the surname of the gentlemen she married). Copied what they could and need to go back for more. There were both parents' names on the license portion and maiden names -- a wonderful find.

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Exchange! G-SIG Comments, ideas, and requests

+ **Annette Callies** and her husband have a write-up and their photograph in the *Dutt & Datt im Heimalblatt* and in the in *Gemeinde Brief* of Gross. They traveled to Germany... did research, and visited ancestral villages. The researcher who helped them has stayed in touch. Now Annette is also working with a researcher in Gottingen.

+ **Jim Etling** found his surname in the Myers Orts books as a town.

+ **Doris Eschbach** has discovered that many Germans (especially in the late 1830s and through the 1850s) got off the ship in New Orleans and traveled up the Mississippi, going to Quincy, Illinois, then up to Iowa to settle.

+ **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 communicate with Kathy at kathyinwashington@hotmail.com.

+ **The Carl Schurz Heritage Award** from GAHS is named for the famous 19th century German immigrant who served as a Civil War general, newspaper publisher, U.S. envoy to Spain for President Abraham Lincoln, U.S. Senator from Missouri, as well as Secretary of the Interior under President Rutherford B. Hayes. Each year GAHS recognizes an individual or organization for their "dedication to the preservation of the history and heritage of our German forebears."

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