

G-SIG FORUM #61

...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.



First Germans in St. Louis? By Gerald Perschbacher

Who was that very first German with a St. Louis connection? Was it Henry von Phul? If that is an unfamiliar name, little wonder, since there is no one by that surname listed in the current St. Louis phone directory. But if you do some checking, you will find there is a street in North St. Louis by that name and that there was an infamous murder connected with the moniker. (*Play around online for more details on that!*)

I'll mention right away that, according to author James Neal Primm In his book ***Lion of the Valley***, there are several earlier German settlers mentioned – John Helderbrand, Abram and David Musick, and John Coons (settlers during the Spanish period); and a little later, Christopher Schewe, Christian Wilt, Frederick Weber, Henry Geyer, Charles Wahrendorff, and Henry von Phul. However, among these original St. Louis Germans, von Phul stands tallest.

The von Phul family originated in Germany, came to the eastern seaboard of America in the 1700s, and eventually moved into the Midwest. Up east, the name was privileged to the Pennsylvania environs of the Susquehanna River, Lancaster, and Philadelphia. Some of the following information was offered by Ulf Meyer of Germany who lives in the Rhineland. He should know the facts, since the von Phul family is in his ancestry.

Henry Von Phul's father was Dietrich Von Phul, who was a knight of the High Ducal Order of Hunters in Württemberg, Germany. He also was captain of the guards at a ducal court.

Henry von Phul was born on August 14, 1784. When he was 17 in 1801, his family moved to Lexington, Kentucky, where he learned the dry goods business. His branch of the family moved westward, spending time in Lexington, Kentucky. In 1811, his name reached St. Louis, where he established a fur company. That's when St. Louis was THE Midwestern inland center of the fur trade which was a bustling business supplying companies and customers in the more heavily settled Eastern portion of the burgeoning country.

Von Phul joined the Missouri Rangers in that pre-state territory and served as an aide to Daniel Boone's son, Nathan, who later claimed Gottfried Duden as his neighbor. Could it have been that Nathan Boone was a source of inspiration for settlement in the area via the writings (and books) of Duden in the 1820s and Boone's earlier personal comments to Henry von Phul?

By the 1830s, Duden's best-selling works became a driving force in the German emigration from the Rhineland to the Midwest. If we could find that von Phul had sent letters to Germany or stated such an influence in print, we would have verification that HIS influence upon emigration was earlier!

It would not be too presumptuous for us to conclude that Henry von Phul recalled memories with Nathan Boone, who also had been a Kentuckian. In fact, it is not beyond possibility that his father, Daniel Boone (who died in 1820), may have occasioned a trip to St. Louis and could have conversed with Henry.

Henry married Rosalie Saugrain on June 10 of 1816. She was the daughter of Dr. Antoine Saugrain, a respected French physicist. Despite fire and other problems, Henry's business grew. So did his family—the couple had 15 children!

Henry von Phul was in St. Louis when the first river steam boat plied the Mississippi River in August of 1817. It was the Zebulon M. Pike, smaller than the typical keelboat. Its small engine was helped in its task, as needed, by crews pushing long poles into the river bottom to assist in propelling the slow-moving boat along its six-week trip from Louisville.

Also in 1817, Henry von Phul was involved in raising funds to supply the first unit of St. Louis fire-fighters and provide a building for their use. Among contributors was Auguste Chouteau.

Now let's check what Dr. Frederick A. Hodes records in his impressive book, ***Rising on the River: St. Louis 1822 to 1850, Explosive Growth from Town to City*** (The Patrice Press, Tooele, Utah, 2009 books@patricepress.com). An early city directory showed #27 North Front Street as the business location of Von Phul and McGill, merchants. By 1835 the business was located at #122 Market

Street. Clearly, Herr von Phul was fluent in English, and perhaps his partner knew some German, otherwise their association would have been hard pressed.

Dr. Hode's book is second in a series, and it includes massive amounts of information gleaned from old sources that have long languished until the light of his research. Here are some points he brings out about Henry von Phul.

The old German was listed as a vestryman when the Episcopal Church was formed in St. Louis, 1819. He was noted as a "leading commercial and political leader." Eventually he made his residence at #31 Chestnut (by 1835). He had lived in "a row of two-story brick buildings" near the postmaster. In 1827 von Phul was listed as city auditor, which reflects his business acumen and a degree of solid education. That same year he was one of the first nine city aldermen (elected with 104 votes, which implies he had a respected following in a city that was yet to be known as heavily "German"). He became one of three men holding ownership in the steam river boat *Oceana* built in Cincinnati (before 1838).

Von Phul was on the Board of Commissioners (five men) who were involved in raising \$10,000 in a lottery to benefit the new hospital being built in 1833. He was one of 18 trustees of Kemper College, which opened in 1838 on 125 acres southwest of town (near Kingshighway & Arsenal). The institution became a losing proposition in a city that was experiencing growing pains and was known as a "final stop" for Westward travel (besides, there were other competing institutions in and near St. Louis). A Sheriff's Sale sold the property for \$1,200 (its initial cost had been \$18,000).

Prior to 1840, Henry von Phul served on the school board and as a director of the Bank of Missouri (even serving on board of the branch bank of the United States). He was supervisor of the Union Insurance Company in 1832. Later he was active in the advance of railroading.

The distinguished life of Henry von Phul ended on Sept. 8, 1874, in St. Louis. His family, associates, and the city mourned his passing for 30 days, a high tribute to an honorable personage.

Von Phul had lived an interesting life. He had bartered with American Indians, watched as Indian mounds were leveled in the advance of the cityscape, served in defense of the land and its settlers, knew what it was like during the War of 1812, had seen the introduction of steam travel on river and rail, and – according to his obituary -- he watched a town of about 1,400 inhabitants mature into a city. With nine decades of living and due to many years of community service, he had made his mark on the Midwest. At his passing, he was one of the eldest citizens in St. Louis.

Yes, there are other Germans listed in obscure records slightly preceding von Phul in St. Louis. But with 15 children, is there any doubt his family was most likely the largest among those early Germans?

Thanks to his influence, Germans who came in subsequent years had a friend, mentor, and beacon as they integrated into their new society.

(For more on Henry von Phul and his wife, consult the Dictionary of Missouri (biography) by Lawrence O. Christensen.)

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Interested in emigration from Northwestern Germany to the United States? Then check out www.german-immigrants.com. Martin Koers says this is a project of Heureka -- the Historian's Office located at Deegfelder Weg 105, D- 48531 Nordhorn / Germany (Tel.: +49 (0)5921 - 726 499 or use the Fax at: +49 (0)3212 - 102 2712). E-mail may be addressed to: info@german-immigrants.com].

Herr Koers adds: "In the 19th century, more than 20,000 people emigrated from the region Emsland / Grafschaft (county) Bentheim, situated in the Northwestern part of Germany, near to the Dutch border, to the United States of America.

"In the beginning, a close contact between the 'Old' and the 'New World' was established, mostly by writing letters. Over the years and decades, the relationship broke more and more. The Website www.german-immigrants.com would like to revive this connection and will provide data and tools to enable interested people on both sides of the 'salt-water curtain' doing research and taking up contact again -- or for the first time. A free-of-charge database with records on currently more than 15,000 German immigrants is the centerpiece of this site."

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German Incarceration in America

It happened. That's according to information being gathered by Dr. Albert Jabs, a G-SIG participant and a professor in the Southeast (ajjabs@aol.com). "Justice deferred is justice denied," he states. Recently he talked with Ruth (last name withheld), who was a German Internee. In 1943 at the age of 14, Ruth, along with her sister (both of whom were American citizens), their father (a naturalized citizen) and their mother were suddenly taken out of their home in Albany, New York, and sent to Ellis Island, then to Crystal City, Texas.

What has helped to trigger this study for Jabs are recent "adjustments" made to Americans of Japanese ancestry who were incarcerated during the war -- merely on the basis of nationality.

Jabs says that Ruth and as many as 11,000 Americans of German ancestry were relocated without legal recourse (about half the total of Americans of Japanese ancestry who were sent to camps), facing loss of status and reputations, among other negatives.

There is another little-known aspect of “after-war” happenings that involve Germans. It involved Reinhard, a person I met a few months ago. He had made men’s business suits in the eastern portion of Germany—but after the Second World War, his old home site became part of Poland. He and his family were forced to leave. They took what they could (and what the Poles allowed them to take). Realizing there was little future for him and his wife, and recognizing the severe level of destruction that had been inflicted on many large German cities, the couple opted for America.

Today they live in a nice American home in a secluded little area on the edge of a modest-size town in Missouri. They speak German, exhibit heavy accents, and are happy with the way life has turned out for them.

They continue a time-honored occurrence, since many Germans came to America for a better future. It really didn’t matter which decade their move took place. America was still the Land of Opportunity – and remains so today.

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Translating

Some good points have surfaced among our G-SIG participants. Pat von zur Muhlen (patvonzurm@msn.com) notes that it only takes a little checking around within G-SIG to find some people who can help with translating old German documents. Of course, it may be necessary to offer reimbursement for their services.

On a lesser level, Pat says words, phrases, letters, Web pages, etc., could be translated for free. “Ask someone in Special Collections at the St. Louis County Library Headquarters, ask any library, historical society, genealogical society, network among members of these organizations, check **Yahoo** or other online groups devoted to German language study, ask a local college if advanced language students could help or the class instructors. Use reference books such as Ernest Thode’s **German English Genealogical Dictionary**. This book is in libraries and also may be read in Google books. Use online German dictionaries or machine translations tools such as Google Translate.”

Occasionally, someone may be able to offer translation insights via the **Yahoo Group of G-SIG**.

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The YAHOO GROUP is for YOU! -- How can someone ask for help from a significant number of fellow-searchers? Get into the G-SIG Yahoo Group. Here’s how: Go to www.yahoo.com . Click on Groups, search for **germanspecialinterest** (all one word), click on “Join This Group” and follow the prompts to sign up. Then you may post messages, ask questions, send in a neat Website link, or connect with a fellow researcher. If you need more guidance on using this resource, contact Karen Ridgeway at deutschgene@yahoo.com or drop a quick note to Kathy Wurth who also has been sharing keen insights (kathyinwashington@hotmail.com).

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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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Exchange! G-SIG Comments, ideas, and requests

+ **G-SIG's Fred Obermoeller** (fobermoeller@aol.com) has some interesting information about his early St. Louis ancestor. "I found a Charles (or Carl) Obermuller who was in St. Louis in 1832 as a fur trader for Pierre Chouteau." Documentation came via the Missouri Historical Society. He reminds us that "Charles is for French, Carl is for German." Fred would like to discover when Carl came to St. Louis.

+ **We'll give another plug** for Jim Merkel's book, *Hoosiers and Scrubby Dutch*, reflecting on the old days in the solid South St. Louis residential area of yore. I've been reading the snippets from the past, and it's hard to put the book down once you start. Nostalgic? Yes! Fun reading? You bet. Interesting with some special discoveries? Certainly! It's a trip back to the era when men swept fresh grass clippings out of their portions of street curbs and women scrubbed their marble and limestone front steps every week. Check with Left Bank Books at <http://www.left-bank.com/event/jim-merkel-hoosiers-and-scrubby-dutch>; you may also call (314) 367-6731 (West End) or (314) 436-3049 (downtown St. Louis).

+ **Diane Walsh** <rengen@compu-type.net> is exploring options for help in translating documents from German into English.

+ **Dr. Don Heinrich Tolzmann** is a noted author, editor, and retired professor of German-American studies regarding St. Louis and the Midwest. An expert on German heritage in Southern Illinois and Missouri, his books are worth careful study. If you have the opportunity to examine some of his books at a library, make good use of the time. What you discover may open fresh ideas.

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