

G-SIG FORUM #62

...from the German Special Interest Group. G-SIG is an effort of the St. Louis Genealogical Society (www.stlgs.org/) & 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 **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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To School! To School!

If you were a German youngster in St. Louis during the 1860s, you might expect an average formal education of three years. That was about all. An extended formal education usually reflected the wealth and social status of a family. Most St. Louisans were far from being wealthy, and a good number were downright poor. They simply could not afford much schooling. Those are reasons why a high number of children entered the work force by the time they were 10 years old. While they did not have the stamina of an adult, they could start handling work like one – at least, certain jobs.

Specialized jobs, occasionally had to be done by children. For example, the small hand of a 10-year-old could fit in places an adult hand could not reach. If there was machinery or linen work that needed that “small touch,” children often were employed.

G-SIG's Pat von zur Muehlen studied the subject a while ago. She discovered that Susan Elizabeth Blow addressed the problem of needing more education by offering instructions to children earlier. By applying theories promoted by Friedrich Froebel, Blow opened the United States' first successful public kindergarten in 1873 at the Des Peres School in St. Louis. This highly energetic woman taught children in the morning and educated a batch of teachers in the afternoon. How successful was she? By 1883 every St. Louis public school had a kindergarten. This was phenomenal! The city became a model for the whole country.

Interestingly, she was the oldest among six children and was raised amid the comfort and culture of a wealthy German setting. She dedicated her life to the advancement of early education and became

know as the mother of the modern kindergarten. She took the idea “on the road,” so to speak, and was responsible in establishing the concept in this land. Equally interesting is that her grandfather Captain Peter Blow had been owner of the slave Dred Scott! The idea of devoting special time toward the instructing of very young children may have arisen from her experiences. She had been privately tutored much of her early life. Later, she tutored her siblings.

There’s more about early education, but we shift to a different person for this section. Pat reports that Margarethe Meyer was born in Hamburg in 1833 to a prominent family. Loved ones encouraged her to pursue the arts. She had the opportunity to further her education. It wasn’t long before she discovered the idea of kindergarten as promoted by Friedrich Froebel. In 1849 Margarethe and her sister Bertha met Froebel. The next two years were intense for Bertha as she opened a series of kindergartens in Germany. In 1851, Bertha and her husband went international and opened the England Infant Garden in Tavistock Place. That’s where Margarethe taught before moving to Watertown, Wisconsin, with her husband -- Carl Schurz.

Does that name sound familiar? It should. This was the Carl Schurz who became perhaps the most respected and honored German immigrant in 19th century America. He served presidents, entered the publishing field, was an organizer, and made his mark on the Midwest, especially the general St. Louis area which he called his new home.

Pat continues by asserting that when Meyer came to America, she carried Froebel's ideas with her. Margarethe employed Froebel's philosophy while caring for her daughter and four neighbor children. They sang, played educational games that also strengthened their social skills, and prepared for the continuation of their education. This resulted in Margarethe opening the first kindergarten in the United States. Similar to other kindergartens in America, the language of choice was –GERMAN.

See: <http://www.froebelweb.org/images/schurz.html>

Pat concludes: “It seems that the first kindergarten in the U.S.A. (in Wisconsin) is credited to Mrs. Schurz. It is private. The first public kindergarten is credited to Susan Blow. It is in St. Louis.” GP

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Interested in obtaining a CD with the first 60 editions of ***G-SIG FORUM?*** Handy for reference or great to share with other researchers. For details, contact Pat von zur Muehlen at: patvonzurm@msn.com.

George is Learning... by Gerald Perschbacher

When G-SIG's George Ball (gwb35@sbcglobal.net) was in the History Museum's Library and Research Center, he browsed through old St. Louis telephone directories and found his ancestor, Christian Mehl, listed as a shoemaker beginning in 1848. "There were several different addresses," says George. "For example, in 1852, his 'res' (residence) was at 181 S. Fifth and 'bn' at Convent and Rutger. In 1854-5 it was a 'shoe store' at 278 S. 5th. In 1867 it was 1249 S. 3rd with 'res' the same. Also that year son Edward Mehl is shown as a 'trunkmaker' at the same address. I went as far forward as 1873 and then had to leave. But that year of 1873 showed Christian and now another son Adolph were BOTH shoemakers at the 1249 S. 3rd location." George wondered about the job of shoemaker.

Having researched the subject, I shared the following.

Yes, it could be true that George's ancestors were the makers of shoes. However, it could depend on the purpose for listing that job. In the 1830s and later, Germans were to list a craft or "job" when they came to America. They had to do the same when they left Germany. Some just said "day laborer" when they left the Old World but took on a specific job when they came here. Shoe making was in demand in St. Louis since pioneers would make it their last stop in the "civilized world" until they headed West. Extra shoes were always a wise purchase. Generally, those shoes were made on order, per person. Now, here's the catch: Some German farmers listed their winter time occupation as shoemaker, which really meant they spent the cold months working with leather (which they may have been obtained from their cattle). It was a natural thing for farmers to make shoes, from what I have discovered.

So the ancestor George mentions as the first shoemaker in St. Louis may have actually done that, may have just listed that as his part-time job, or may have been a farmer who was a seasonal shoemaker. Perhaps the job seemed proper to list as his means of being productive in society. What it also may show us is that he had a farming background during which he learned leatherworking.

When my family arrived in America, my direct ancestor and his cousin both took the occupation of shoemakers in 1833, and they would have been welcomed in St. Louis because of that work based on demand (shoes made to order). However, they apparently did not stay with it for long. Once they had obtained funds, they purchased land and tended to become farmers, which is what they knew how to do in Germany. Did shoemaking make a person wealthy? Hardly, unless they organized a shop and turned out bunches of shoes

and boots, which is doubtful (although not impossible—indicators should be uncovered before making that conclusion for an individual case).

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Who Helped Along the Way? by Gerald Perschbacher

Each of us probably has wondered: *How* did our German ancestors make it across the country to the Midwest? *Did they* receive any assistance along the way? In most cases, the answer to the *first question* is that many either came here by boat via New Orleans or they came from the East Coast across the land (the National Road) or by other river means (such as the Ohio River). If you don't understand the impact of the National Road, look it up to learn more. The answer to the *second question* is simple: They usually were helped by early German settlers.

As German settlers made America their home in the 1700s, many settled in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Indiana. They needed a livelihood in the New World, and many continued what they did in the old German territories.

Let's examine some of these early settlers.

Karl Haas came to the United States via Rotterdam on July 23, 1847. He was born on Sept. 4 in 1815, in the Kingdom of Wuerttemberg. When he landed in America, he was in his 30s. What could he do here?

In Germany he was a waiter at a very nice hotel in Frankfurt-on-the-Main. So, this naturally came to mind as he made his way from New York City to Cincinnati. Settling in, he quickly started a bar and restaurant. The English would call this a PUB. Germans considered this a public eatery and NOT a beer-sloshing place for bar flies and fast-drinking, mean-streaked men plus flighty, flirty women. Karl found a location on Vine Street near Fourteenth Street in Cincinnati. It was reported that his wife was an excellent cook, so the two formed a good team. Of course, both knew how to wash dishes and utensils, plus handle other "scrubby Dutch" chores.

Karl's snuff box became legendary in those days when tobacco was sniffed. The box was always available and full.

We can easily surmise that as new German settlers wandered through the environs, they caught wind of Karl's place and came by for a German-style meal, directions, a drink, a little rest, and perhaps some German conversation. Karl probably was promoted by word of mouth among German regulars. We know Karl was popular among the people, because he ran for public offices – from president to governor, city councilman to constable. This also became a form of publicity for his occupation. He joined many organizations, including a pioneer society for Germans! No doubt he was the friend to many new German settlers who found a bit of the old country when they visited with Karl.

Establishments like this often offered a few hotel rooms or could recommend other sleeping places for families and immigrants who were passing through. Karl might even have allowed some travelers to settle in for a few weeks, earn some money, even work in his establishment. In this manner he could learn about current happenings back in Germany – which would form the heart of new conversations among his regulars.

G.H. Goundie was another notable German. He died at the age of 72 in 1877. Committal was in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. He was appointed as American Consul in Switzerland and reportedly was helpful to the German refugees of the failed revolution of 1848. A gentleman such as this had many contacts who could help newly arrived Germans. He no doubt plowed ground where the task was needed and funneled emigrants to the places best suited for them, if they knew nothing of America.

George H. Bussing could have been a big help to newly arrived Germans. His home likewise was in Cincinnati at the time of his passing in 1877. He had founded and owned the Walnut Street Bank. He knew the meaning of a dollar (or, in German, a silver *Taler*) when he grew up in the Grand duchy of Oldenburg. He arrived in Cincinnati in 1832 as an early part of the first huge wave of Germans. This meant he could assist others as they came. Maybe he convinced them to settle in Cincinnati and place their funds in his bank. Maybe he considered new loans to arrivals. Regardless, he would have been sought by German immigrants as a potential helper. He died a wealthy man.

Constantin Hering was a homeopathic physician who came to Philadelphia in 1832 at age 32. Originally from Oschetz, Saxony, he studied at Wuertzburg and became a teacher of mathematics and natural science in Dresden. He began practice as a physician while in Surinam in South America. His writings were published in several languages. We know he marked his 50th anniversary as a physician but he just seemed to fade away into history after that. Dr. Hering may have been a health advisor to German immigrants making their way across the land. It made sense to stop by, since here was a doctor who knew the father tongue! Germans quite often were fond of homeopathic medicines, so the good doctor may have been quite an incentive to arrivals that they could “make it” in this new homeland.

Friends. Reliable sources. Advisors. Translators. Map providers. These are what new immigrants needed when they set foot on American soil. Countless transplanted Germans who welcomed them along the way were usually honest, patient, and sacrificial in their willingness to give to assist others on the journey. Why? It was a salute to their old homeland and the people left behind. Helping those new arrivals also brought a bit of Old Germany in a nostalgic wave that probably made them glow for days.

The warmth and openness was more pronounced in earlier days, since Germans transplants were fewer than in the late 1800s. That's when a wide ranging variety of German *-vereins* (societies) gained immense popularity as a social support with the same aim.

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

Share 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

+ **One translation resource uncovered** by some of our G-SIG participants is: Leafseeker Consulting, "Recording & Restoring the Past" -- LaDonna Garner, Historic Preservationist, Board Certified Genealogist, www.leafseeker.com, P.O. Box 27 Bloomsdale, MO 63627 (ladonna@leafseeker.com -- (573) 535-9120); consultation services include but are not limited to research assistance, archival documents, cemetery restoration, historic building, and site surveys.

+ **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, Missouri, and points East, 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. Or go to Amazon.com for his books. What you discover may lead to fresh ideas for your research.

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