

G-SIG FORUM #63

...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.



The Civil War and Our Lineage

Germans readily served in the Civil War. That seems like a l-o-n-g time ago (the 1860s) but it is only a mere blink in the course of Germanic history. We won't go into details about all the German aspects of that war, but we will highlight certain points.

First, Germans tended toward democracy and freedom. Many immigrants came to America to avoid the seemingly hopeless quicksand of existence—generations of their ancestors had been mired in rules and regulations determined by noble ruling families, free Imperial cities that were usually controlled by a handful of rich Burghers (local folk who administered the area), and the swinging nature of borders and swapped territories (Alsace and Lorraine being among several). When we realize that about 80% to 90% of German society in the 1700s and early 1800s was NOT in the upper class (many of them not even solidly in the middle class), then we can understand their plight. A middle class had been forming with the rise of cities, but that social stratum was very much in a formative state even in the first half of the 1800s. Families that wanted to get away looked to America as a good destination.

Second, land was desired. Germans immigrants wanted to strike out on their own, win or lose, and face the consequences. You can imagine that many of the German settlers in America were young adults, age 19-35. Not all, of course, and the older ones were still very much young at heart. They didn't expect streets paved with gold or an easy life. They merely wanted a chance to set their own course.

Third, Germans heard a lot of about the glories of American life: Wide open spaces, land at cheap prices, and little governmental control (*on that LAST*

issue, some of us may conclude that our present society is becoming more like the ultra-controlled way of life in old Germany!). They had read about it in fliers and books. Speakers traveled up and down the Rhine River and elsewhere talking to people ready to move. Travel agents were eagerly trying to gain business by sending shiploads of Germans to the shores of America. In some cases, German troops who had served in the Revolutionary War returned to Germany and told nice stories...or horror tales...depending on their experiences. Evidently the horror tales were much fewer, otherwise the stream of emigrants leaving Germany would have turned to a dribble.

Fourth, when a small cluster of Germans occasionally settled in America, they often tried to remain in contact with their family back in Germany. A letter saying they had landed...another saying they had settled in...maybe a note carried back to Germany by some travelers who had to return in order to bring more family members to the New World – whatever the means, there was a degree of written communication between here and there. What this provides today is a potential source of information if some of those letters can be found. Happily, some were found years ago and put in print. In those cases, it's a matter of finding the magazines and books that carry the epistles.

Germans tended to side up with the Union during the Civil War. You've probably heard that this was due to their desire to promote freedom. No argument there. But there was probably a bigger reason: they did not want to see their newly adopted land to become fragmented as were the old German states. If the United States were to be split by a victorious South, it could have resulted in new currencies state by state in the Confederacy (which is what resulted during the war). This would have afflicted trade. Crossing borders could have resulted in added taxation. And with the formation of another country, and the potential for the Confederacy to split into even smaller lands, there was the possibility for more and more military skirmishes.

If I had been among the new German immigrants in the 1860s, I would have done just about anything to keep the U.S.A. from slipping into a situation similar to the one from which I had fled.

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Kircher was an Example By Gerald Perschbacher

How much did Germans contribute to the Civil War? Henry A. Kircher gave more than most. I'll tell you how.

It was April 15, 1861, when President Abe Lincoln activated troops to contend with southern secessionists. The reaction in Belleville, Illinois, was immediate. That city, located in St. Clair County which was strongly German in lineage. After hearing speeches on the issues, the people were determined to “stand by the President, and faithfully support him in keeping the oath he has registered in heaven, to preserve, protect and defend the Constitution...and see

that the laws are faithfully executed.” (You can read about it in the book, *A German in the Yankee Fatherland, The Civil War Letters of Henry A. Bircher*, edited by Earl J. Hess, The Kent State University Press, Kent, OH, copyright 1983.)

In a matter of days 150 men placed their futures on the block and went with August Mersy to Springfield, the Illinois capital. Among them was Kircher, only 19 at the time. War and the thrill of victory always has been an attraction for young men. Henry was born in Beardstown in 1841. His father Joseph had been born in Fulda in Kur-Hessen. It was through one special friend of Joseph that Henry would find his future. Joseph had studied law at the same time and place as Gustave Koerner. Koerner became a heavyweight German American who sided with the Union and settled in Belleville. The love of politics was in his blood, and in 1852 he would become lieutenant governor of Illinois.

Koerner was among the early wave of German settlers. According to the book, two big waves hit St. Clair County. The first came in the 1830s and were generally cultured (hence they were called Latin Farmers since their study of Latin in school set them apart from more common immigrants). The second wave came after the failed revolutions of 1848-49. These latter immigrants were vehemently opposed to slavery, almost to a man (and woman)!

When Mersy led his 150 men to Springfield, they were mainly Germans and generally “Forty-Eighters” who knew what rebellion was. In their minds, this could have been a reverse rebellion of sorts. The Union in the North stood for freedom. The South, for shackles. So those German Americans must have felt that the rebellion already had taken place when the Union was formed. The South was rebelling in the wrong direction!

No rebels, these acclimated Forty-Eighters. They were for Union, unity (*solidarity* is the European phrase), and human rights. After all, if the slaves didn’t enjoy these virtues, could those same precious gifts be taken from newly arrived Germans sometime in the future...?

That Mersy unit, the 9th Illinois, was prone to bickering between the Germans and men who considered themselves “true” Americans. Kircher soon was in the 12th Missouri under Colonel Peter Joseph Osterhaus, a St. Louisan.

However, young Henry Kircher had second thoughts about his enlistment when he was camping in Cairo, Illinois. This was not the idealized type of wartime service he envisioned. What he had done, in effect, was give up his personal freedom and comforts to fight for people he would never know, for a cause for which they themselves were not fighting – or were not able to fight. He said the barracks were so bad that it could not keep out the rain which came as heavy storms since “both rivers (Ohio and Mississippi) attract thunderstorms.” He also was discomforted by a large boil, a toothache, and a severe cold. Due to an accident with a rifle, one soldier was shot and was not expected to survive.

Kircher's best friend, Henry Goedeking, sensed the desire that his friend had for quitting the military service. Goedeking advised to stick with it, otherwise "it might give cause of sneering remarks to some people here [in Belleville], who are hostile against you boys of superior education.

Kircher indeed stayed with his unit, saw action in Missouri, and was on the Chattanooga Campaign when the unexpected happened. He gave. Boy, did he give! He became a casualty.

Sergeant Kircher lost his right arm and part of his left leg. Still, he suited up for a photograph in 1864, on the eve of running for Circuit Court Clerk. Kircher steadied himself with his left hand on a small table. Friend Goedeking was the front man for this election, vowing to take the office on behalf of his friend and to "superintend the office with him."

Kircher won that election by a landslide (4,316 to 2,643 votes). He had no political leanings as such, described in a newspaper article as "a young man, and popular."

But Goedeking was not able to fully live up to his promise. Half a year into the term, he died from a short illness. To Kircher's credit, he continued to serve until 1869, then concentrated on the hardware business.

Old soldiers never seem to die. Soon Kircher was helping a man he had come to admire, who was trying to wade through legal complications and tax issues that piled up during his own service to the Union. That man was William T. Sherman, a Civil War great.

As for Kircher, his losses did not slow his actions. He entered various business opportunities including banking, utilities, and publishing (*Der Stern*). In 1871 he traveled to Germany to visit his father's family at Fulda. He also took a wife, Bertha Engelmann, a German name respected in St. Clair County. He would live until 1908, reaching his 66th year.

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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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Have you discovered some fascinating and helpful resources for your research and edification? Share those findings with others. Drop a note to G-SIG FORUM (see the closing at the bottom of the last page).

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Special Treat—You’ve probably heard of the series of novels I am writing about Western Civilization (especially Germanic)...here is a sampler page from the first half of this series...

Era 3: SINISTER SECRETS, 1368 A.D.

By Gerald Perschbacher (*all rights reserved*)

The castle’s austere inner walls radiated little warmth as a tall, distinguished man of noble stature glided down its corridors that frosty February morning. His long, ornate, heavy woolen outer garb flapped gently as he strode. Each step brought him closer to his mission as a two-man escort accompanied him to the throne room of Kaiser Karl IV-- Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, King of Luxembourg, and heir of Bohemia.

As the men approached a massive, wooden door, its guard opened the portal in stately manner. The tall nobleman paused, his escorts faltered a few seconds. A good number of long paces ahead sat the Emperor, regally gowned. Several attendants were assisting with business matters in the dimly lighted, cavernous chamber. Business of state was common to any king, but especially incumbent on the Emperor, a king among kings. This was not an easy empire to rule, Karl IV had discovered. Still, ruling carried moments of pleasure. This was one of them.

“Philipp von Barbarossa? Is that you?” asked Kaiser Karl.

As the echo of his words faded, the tall nobleman replied, “Yes, my liege, I am at your service,” said Philipp, bowing in gentlemanly fashion. His escorts stationed themselves at the open door.

“Step forward to be seen, Noble Philipp,” invited the Crown. “There is business for you this day. Some very important business, I would venture.”

Karl motioned for present matters to be suspended. Attendants rustled documents together and parted way for Philipp. The nobleman had been summoned for special missions in the past, yet still thought this enthroned figure was hardly the image of power. Karl IV was short, balding, and slightly hunchbacked. Still, he wielded the power of the Empire and the allegiance of its seven Imperial Electors, provincial princes and potential heirs to the throne.

Since a king was not to be approached too closely, then emperors were even more secluded from touch. It was a precaution against weapon or Plague. Even more, the practice enhanced their image as a near-godly figure among mortals of far less status. None of this weighed on this Emperor’s mind that morning. Karl IV merely followed the pattern prone to Kaisers as he conducted the business of empire....



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

+ **Bill Ziegenbein** (billziegenbein@charter.net) writes: "Everyone knows work-arounds for those hard to read and misspelled surnames, but what about the given names? I often come across documents that I have trouble making out the spelling of an unusual or 'un-Americanized' first name or I'm trying to match up material I have that uses a nickname with those I have under the ancestor's formal first name... (are they the same person?)....I grab my old baby-naming book. The one I use has over 25,000 names listed and equally important it gives all the spelling variations, including nicknames. For example, it gives 97 variations for the name Elizabeth. It doesn't solve every mystery, but has come in handy many a time. They are cheap and can be gotten at any book store."

+ **Dr. Gerhard Staerk** (g.staerk@online.de) in Germany heard about Henry von Phul (1784-1874), a St. Louisan in the early 1800s, and made contact with us. He says: "I am doing research on the origin of the von Phul family -- in Germany and the USA -- to whom I am related...." Herr Staerk initially requested photos of the grave marker which were found on the Catholic Cemeteries website at http://www.archstl.org/cemeteries/component?option=com_rsgallery2/Itemid,0/page,slideshow/cattid,61/. If anyone would like to share more information about the historic von Phul, please contact Dr. Staerk.

+ **Karen Ridgeway** has been searching for answers to historical and genealogical questions. This led her to several websites of interest: On Germany formation: [http://wiki-en.genealogy.net/German States 1871-1918](http://wiki-en.genealogy.net/German_States_1871-1918) You may be interested in [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North Rhine-Westphalia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Rhine-Westphalia). (Karen suggests searching with different names and place the word map in each). She also knows of a Family Tree site <http://genealogy.about.com/>

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