

G-SIG FORUM #68

...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-stlouis@earthlink.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.



Sigel, Indeed

Franz Sigel was far from being the “winningest man” on earth, but you can’t say he didn’t try...and try...and try.

He was not the most revered military genius of his day, but he was no slouch, either. Sigel certainly ranked among the topmost influential German Americans in political history.

“Franz Sigel sparked more interest among Germans, aroused more controversy among Americans, and perhaps enjoyed more admiration for his role in the Civil War...and few Civil War generals, Union or Confederate, aroused more curiosity in gaining adoration among the soldiers,” said Stephen D. Engle in the preface to his book, *Yankee Dutchman – The Life of Franz Sigel* (Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge, 1993). Good words to review.

Prior to his departure to America on May 1, 1852, Sigel had been associated with Carl Schurz and other “radicals” who, in 1848, instigated and promoted the rising discontent over the lack of freedoms, hindered individualism, and a general lack of democracy. When the upheaval was squelched, armed contingents had orders to hunt down the leaders of that failed rebellion. Truth be told, much of Europe was festering from the wounds of rebellion at that time. For those in the status quo, radicals were an infection that HAD to be removed.

To safeguard his very life and avoid long-term incarceration, Sigel fled to the place thousands of immigrant Germans were fondly calling their new home: America, where the revolution of the late 1700s had brought about an abrupt “forward march” for the cause of humanity and personal rights. It was logical for the Land of the Free to be his new country, since he viewed himself as a revolutionary, not a radical. Some back then argued that this assessment depended on your perspective.

Sigel became an educator in St. Louis and integrated into society. It wasn't hard to do. That's because a high percentage of St. Louisans claimed German heritage. They spoke German and tutored new arrivals in English. They taught Americans ways and practices. However, many well educated German immigrants usually knew more than one language since Europe is compact and commerce demanded fluency. Also, most educated Germans knew Latin, which was the educator's universal language.

His fame spread as he taught the young.

Sigel attracted the attention of German Americans who were fascinated with the news from "back home." It was common for his European exploits to receive press coverage and be relayed by private correspondence. His image grew. A legend was blooming.

Young men who sought action and fame accepted Sigel's invitation to enlist in Missouri infantry units in April of 1861, just scant days after the Confederate bombardment of Fort Sumter. Sigel took command of the 3rd and 5th Missouri Infantry units.

On July 5, his units descended on the enemy around Carthage, Missouri, but the action was short lived. Sigel mistook movements in the forest as a flanking attack. In truth, Confederates leaders told those men to seek shelter in the forest since they had no guns! Jokingly, the near-encounter was claimed to be the only time in military history when an armed force was sent scurrying by a large body of unarmed men. However, the joke turned into good fortune, since Sigel exercised his men on how to effectively retire in an orderly and safe fashion from the field of action.

After the Battle of Wilson's Creek, Sigel gained a reputation as a military leader who knew when to withdraw and live to fight another day. He went on to command forces from Wisconsin and was honored by friend and foe. His list of battle wins may have been short, but his impact stretched far and wide.

Carl Schurz, perhaps the best known politician and activist among the ranks of Germans Americans, singled out Sigel as one of the greatest personalities of the era. In later years Sigel was in demand as speaker, writer, and advocate of democracy and German American ideals.

Fast-forward to the present.

Learn about men like Sigel and Schurz. Discover their era with its ups and downs, and you may have a good glimpse at what your very own ancestors faced in life. The formation of your family, ancestral ideals, and Germanic outlook on life may have been passed along to you as learned traits.

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Meaning of Sigel...

What's in a name? Let's examine Sigel. According to the *Dictionary of German Names*, by Hans Bahlow, the name is related to Siegel and Sigl (a frequent form

that was found in Bavaria). These forms were related to Sieghard and Siegert. Sigel, then, is closely associated with Sieger which came from two words: Sig-her (meaning "victorious warrior"). While Franz Sigel wasn't always victorious in battle, he was victorious in life in many ways! So his name seemed appropriate.



The Turnverein... or German Turner movement was organized in Berlin in 1811. Its founder was Friedrich Ludwig Jahn. Devotees were pledged to vigorous physical training, muscular development, and good discipline. Gymnastics and fitness training were key elements. When the first such institution took root in America in 1848, New York City was its home with the goal of developing individuals in mind and body.

Historians credit the Turnveren movement important in the positive Americanization of newly arrived Germans, including Sigel.

The Turners, as they came to be called by the general population, operated in several locations around town and had a special liking for Washington Hall at Second and Elm in downtown St. Louis. They also liked the beer and food that fostered comradeship at Flora Garten near Seventh & Geyer streets. Those sites became recruitment areas one week after Fort Sumter was bombarded by Confederate guns.

In St. Louis's Camp Jackson Affair that took place in the spring of 1861, members of the Turnverein movement drilled in secret, practiced sharpshooting, and quietly marched in meeting halls -- the sound of their marching being muffled by a liberal layer of sawdust so that secessionist factions would not report the pro-Union activity.

When Abraham Lincoln issued a Presidential Order to raise new military units for the defense of the Union, members of the Turnverein movement in St. Louis rallied to the cause and signed on for a three-month hitch in the First, Second, and Third Missouri Infantry. These volunteer units were the early stabilizing force in St. Louis and Eastern Missouri. Many of these same soldiers went by rail to Rolla then marched to Springfield, Missouri. Although some concluded their three-month enlistment before facing a major encounter with the enemy, a good portion remained with the unit and engaged in the Battle of Wilson's Creek on August 10, 1861.

More troops signed on by that time. Still, Sigel commanded the Third and Fifth Missouri Infantry units which were overwhelmingly German in heritage. Sigel's two-pincer battle plan seemed certain for victory, but due to fumbles, surprises, fear, uncertainty, and inexperience, the Union cause weakened and the Confederate force held the field. But Sigel and his Turnverein soldiers plus other German Americans in makeshift Union uniforms learned an immense amount in the encounter. That experience made them better men and fighters.



It Wasn't Easy Being German

Consult any book worth its cover that treats the topic of immigrant Germans in America, and you'll find a dichotomy of opinions that gravitate into two camps: Germans were special, or the Germans were a problem.

When Germans came to America, they often had positive attributes: hard working, honest, some waves of immigrants were highly educated, and industrious. On the down side, criticism focused on stubbornness, abruptness, unwilling to listen, unable to be articulate in English, and simply not able to merge into American society.

Do those complaints sound familiar? They were (and are) much the same for any large immigrant group that landed on American shores. It's merely a clash of cultures, the "we-were-here-before-you" crowd not ready to give space to the "we-new-settlers-want-part-of-the-American-dream" crew.

The criticisms largely are due to lack of verbal communications. If someone doesn't understand what is said, how do they know how to correctly react? When citizens (on both sides of the subject) cut each other a little slack, it's good for the future. That's what happened with Germans, and in the long run their ideals and outlooks advanced the country's cause.



Finding How their Pathways Crossed

Soon after the previous G-SIG FORUM was compiled, I discovered that the truth of the matter is simple. I did not have one ancestor serve in the Civil War. No. I had four of them!

That came as a surprise. Fortunately, all four served on the Union side. What I found equally fascinating is that two of them served in the same unit and a third probably was active in the Union's advance toward Little Rock, Arkansas. Back up—make that three of the four who were at or near Little Rock.

They probably didn't know it. Well, two of them might have since they served in the same unit. But the third – Adam Perschbacher—had been serving a unit in St. Charles County, Missouri, albeit he may have been recruited in or around St. Louis, from what some sources indicate.

Imagine, serving in a large front battle and meeting up with relatives on the same field. It reminded me of a story my brother conveyed to me in the 1960s during the Vietnam War. He was in basic training and happened to pass another soldier. It was automatic to look at the name badges soldiers wore. Both young men stopped, turned, and looked again. They each carried the same surname. They chatted a short while and determined that one came from

the North St. Louis branch of the family, the other from the South St. Louis branch. While each branch knew of the other's existence, they never gave it much more thought than that.

Carry this to your research. Imagine the circumstances and people that swirled around your ancestors. Don't picture your ancestor as living in a vacuum. He or she probably crossed paths with a wide range of people in the 1800s and early 1900s. Family units were digressing less and held together as enclaves, at least psychologically if not actually.

Be ready if you ever cross paths with a current distant relative. Jot notes, exchange phone numbers and e-mail addresses, and try to place yourselves in the scope of the family. This may assist your present research or be a plus for future generations yet to do their digging!



Go Online and Visit Websites

I'd be the last person to tell you that books are out of style. That's because it is simply not true. In fact, more books are being published now than ever, thanks to many marvelous desktop-publishing capabilities. Those books, however, may not be printed on a press. Many are accessed electronically.

Still, they are books. There are some old books now online in whole or segments. And beyond that, there is a harvest of information awaiting a trim reaper who goes to work and separates the whole grain from the chaff.

So here are some online references you may wish to investigate to advance your genealogical cause:

www.chrisanddavid.com/wilsonscreek/roles/SOLDIERS3MO.html

Col. Franz Sigel's Official Report (OR) For the Battle of **Wilson's Creek** ...www.civilwarhome.com/sigelwilsoncreek.htm

The Battle of Wilson's Creek, August 10, 1861, by Capt. Otto C. Lademann, **3rd Missouri Infantry**, www.suvcw.org/mollus/warpapers/Wiv4p433.htm

Battle of Oak Hills, Springfield, or **Wilson's Creek**, Mo. ... Franz Sigel, **Third Missouri Infantry** (Union), with congratulatory letter from General Lyon. ... and two companies of the Third Regiment. <http://www.simmons-games.com/research/authors/USWarDept/OR/OR-St-V03-C010R.html>

VICKSBURG, MISSISSIPPI -- Champion's Hill/Baker's **Creek** · Big Black Bridge. Vicksburg Assault 19 May ... **3rd Missouri Infantry** Regiment -- Lieutenant Colonel Theodore Meumann ... 43rd Illinois Infantry Regiment -- Lieutenant Colonel Adolph **Dengler** ...
www.fortunecity.com/victorian/pottery/.../vicksburg_ms_1may63.htm



Take a look at "*Damned Dutch*": *St. Louis Germans in the Civil War Era* by Kay Witkiewicz at <http://www.clas.ufl.edu/jur/2010-summer/papers/paper-witkiewicz.pdf>.



Exchange! G-SIG Comments, ideas, and requests

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.

+ **Higginson Books** (<http://www.higginsonbooks.com/>) Don't miss the opportunity to catch some discounts or obtain copies of old out-of-print books on order. The company offers a wealth of books from the 1800s and early 1900s. *Mention you heard it from G-SIG!*

+ **Paul W. Dueker** says that *The Wall Street Journal* from Monday June 27, 2011, had a special 8 page pull out section on Germany and it wasn't all about economics or business. It contained human interest articles and gave insight into how Germans see themselves presently on the world's stage.

+ **Become familiar** with the following reference works (numbers according to copies in the St. Louis County Library main site):

*** *Beginner's Guide to Germanic Genealogy* by Lois Hemmeter Edwards STLCL # 929.1 E26B

*** *German – English Genealogical Dictionary* by Ernest Thode STLCL # 929.1 T449C

*** *If I Can You Can Decipher Germanic Records* by Edna M. Bentz STLCL # R943 B4791

*** *How to Read & Understand Myers Orts-und Verkehrs-Lexikon des Deutschen Reichs* by Wendy K. Uncapher STLCL # 943 M613

*** *The German Research Companion* by Riemer, Minert, and Anderson STLCL # 929.1 R556G.

*** *Lands of German Empire and Before* by Wendy K. Uncapher STLCL # 943.083 U54L

*** *Maps of the German Empire of 1871* by Jensen Publications STLCL # 943.083 J54M

+ **The Missouri German Consortium** has people such as author Steven Rowen as presenter at select events. For details, check www.mo-germans.com.

+ **Gordon Seyffert**, now in California, advocates the national Archives in Kansas City (<http://www.archives.gov/central-plains/kansas-city/>). Hotels, parking, and Amtrak station are a short walk away. The facility holds many Federal documents for the four-state area on site, with countless others stored and retrievable in a day or so upon request.



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