

G-SIG FORUM #71

...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. (www.gahs-stlouis.org). This forum is for genealogical, educational, and historical information with fresh insights and ideas on German traditions and ancestry.

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He Once was Lost...but Now is Found

Dig around in history, and you never know what will turn up. Literally.

Take the following example that recently came to light from the Historical Society in Washington, Mo. (museum@washmohistorical.org). One of the individuals active with the society was elated over a special discovery that seemed to jump from the pages of historical lore.

Working at cleaning brush away at what evidently was a special grave site, individuals associated with the society struck on the surprise. One person probed the shallow ground for any hard surface under the more recent top soil. It's an old process whereby a strong, narrow, metal rod or its equivalent is jabbed into the ground and jiggled when a hard sub-surface is found. Then gentle digging reveals the discovery. It takes time and patience to hit this type of "Pay dirt." But it happened. The probe hit a buried tombstone.

It wasn't just any tombstone. It dated to the Civil War. And, from the remarkably good condition of the engraving, it had been underground for a long time.

How did this marker get buried? Stones topple with age, human action, an earthquake, a fallen limb or tree, sinking ground, even erosion. Then more topsoil plus natural debris or ground-level growth overtake the fallen

stone. Years, decades, even centuries later, the stone may rest under a foot or so of newer soil.

The tombstone was for Henry Boeger who died on Oct. 3, 1864. The inscription was in German. Translated, it read: "Felled at the hands of the rebels." Historians realized this was likely to have occurred in the aftermath of Confederate Gen. Price's raid in Franklin County. Here was a rarity -- as one person explained, "One of the few well documented victims of Civil War atrocities from Franklin County...."

Historian Herman Gottlieb Kiel researched the life and untimely death of Boeger. As we might expect, Boeger was German, born in Hessen-Darmstadt in 1819. He had a Swiss wife and the couple delivered five children. Boeger lived in Union, Mo., where he ran a grocery store.

Boeger's place in history was marked by his membership on the town council and the fact that his actions alienated some Southern sympathizers. In fact, just being German agitated some Southerners because German Americans accounted for nearly 25 percent of the Union army during the Civil War. Anti-German sentiment may have contributed to his murder in actions that swirled around Price's skirmish near the site on Oct. 1, 1864.

The German element led to acts of revenge as relatives of murdered civilians vowed to rid their area of the accursed Union-sympathizing Germans!

So when you "find" your long-lost ancestor whether through a paper trail or a fallen headstone, study the events that circulated around the time of that passing. In so doing, you may find that your ancestors were close to important history either locally or nationally.



More Digging!

Have you "gone the course" of probing for fallen stones? It takes energy, concentration, and time. I had the opportunity to probe the ground of the private cemetery where my great-great grandfather was buried. Although his headstone stood proudly and his location was clearly known, there were other graves that had been forgotten. Out came my probing rod. After about a half hour, BINGO! A STRIKE!

Others noticed the act. A small group of onlookers paused in clearing the cemetery and watched the progress. Once the stone was struck, I probed around

to make sure it WAS a headstone and not a plain rock. Sure enough, my probing revealed an outline that matched a headstone.

Gentle shoveling unearthed a very old stone. It wasn't huge, and the inscription was clear. There were little if any signs of weathering on the stone, so it may have toppled when relatively new and remained face-down since the 1850s.

More probing was done that day. No more headstones were found. Could those stones have fallen and been carried away? If so, why? It's not a tough question. Relatives may have carted a headstone away if it were broken and needed replacing. Perhaps they never completed the job. Or perhaps there was an error in the inscription and the survivors either wanted it corrected or replaced. It's not beyond the realm of possibility that the family wanted to keep a fallen headstone in their home as a reminder of the dearly departed.

Regardless, I probed and found no more headstones that day. But after searching paper files, it became clear that young children were buried near the unearthed stone. We concluded that the children did not merit the expense of a headstone or that the family was not able to fund more.

There was satisfaction in discovering a buried headstone with clear identification. Here was the final resting place of someone from the past. Now they were rediscovered. What they experienced, saw, and surmounted may be opened with key information and dates from the engraving -- coupled with persistent research through the files of societies, libraries, and family archives.

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Building a Library

More and more libraries seem to be thinning their shelves. Some are concentrating on Internet sourcing and electronic documents on CDs and DVDs rather than the books of old.

OK. Nothing wrong with that. I heavily use electronic resources, too. But there seems to be something extra-special in opening books to select pages, setting them alongside sheets of paper with new findings, and absorbing the details about "things Germanic."

Back to the thinning shelves. I wonder where those books are heading? A large charity sale? Another library? The dumpster...? (Heaven forbid!)

Not all old books of historical or genealogical significance have been scanned electronically, nor are they available even in segment form online. So if

you strike a fancy over a certain reference work or history book being set out for sale at your library, get it. You can always discard later or trade with another researcher. But the opportunity to obtain the book may only come once.

Not all books are "keepers." Still others are gems and may remain as such as long as your surname will exist. You've got to nurture an approximation for the worth of books in your research. Then give the better ones top-shelf importance.

Example: Over several years I have aimed to obtain any German book on the history of a town (sometimes labeled as *Heimatbuch* (book of the homeland). Germans have been proud of their printing capability (remember, it was Gutenberg who invented modern printing). When I visit Germany, I seek out books relating to my ancestral region. The books can be very enlightening and have provided unbelievable benefits in ongoing research in ways I had hardly dreamt. Even simple lists of tax payers, town dwellers, army recruits, and town leaders have reaped results in my studies.

If you write notes in your books, do it faintly in pencil. This will allow you to make upgrades or corrections without messing up the page. Better yet, mark on the front inside of the cover and indicate the most important pages for your purposes.

What you collect in the way of books remains your choice. In my case, I appreciate a variety of historical atlases, general histories, specific treatments on an era or location, and photographic evidences of my ancestral places in Old Germany.

County histories have been beneficial. One of my ancestors rode in a local county's volunteer Union cavalry. I knew the name of the regiment, and sure enough, I found it in a county history book printed in the late 1800s and reprinted about 50 years ago. By tracking the movements of his unit as mentioned in the book, I was able to track his accomplishments and challenges.

Make your own books, too, even if only a loose-leaf binder. There are reasonably priced "comb binding" equipment that can be employed to consolidate your research papers, raw data, and conclusions. The nice thing about comb binding is that you can replace pages without destroying the binding.

Build your own library, whether large or small. Make it functional and purposeful for your research. Be accurate and orderly in your selection and filing. In so doing, you may set an example for family and friends.



AT LAST! Answers from an ATLAS!

G-SIG's energetic Karl Dauble (KDAUBEL@aol.com) has made a discovery. Browsing for maps online he came across a digital edition of the *Atlas des Deutschen Reichs, 1833*. It is a resource of the University of Wisconsin-Madison Libraries and is claimed to be for genealogical research.

In reviewing this subject, the Web site says this atlas, by Ludwig Ravenstein, is rarely in libraries of the United States. Memorial Library at the University of Wisconsin-Madison selected the 1883 copy as its first digitization project due to the book's helpful nature.

What's in it? Borrowing from the Web site, the following conveys the book's strengths.

From the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the atlas traces the roots of families with origins in any part of the German empire. Atlas maps also cover present-day Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Hungary, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, the Russian Federation, Slovakia, and Switzerland.

One expert says, "Due to the large scale of its maps (1:850,000) and its thorough gazetteer of place-names, one can locate even small towns and villages on the maps in the Ravenstein atlas. A special feature is the marking of the locations of churches on all of the maps as well as one special map with an accompanying table giving statistics on the religious denominations found throughout the German empire down to the *Regierungsbezirk* and *Kreis* governmental units."

Karl's online source adds, "Place-names and political jurisdictions often change over time. A common challenge in genealogy is identifying the current name and jurisdiction of a family's place of origin in order to figure out where the records of births, deaths, and marriages of an earlier period are now being kept. Comparison of the Ravenstein atlas and a recently published atlas often provides the solution to this problem."

To solve the dilemma, a researcher must find the family's most recent point of origin in the Ravenstein atlas by looking up the place-name in the gazetteer section. From there, it's a simple step to find the place on the map.

As Karl puts it, the researcher needs to watch for natural features on the map, such as a river. Also note the closest larger town. From this point in the

search, it's a simple matter of matching this same location.

At this point, with what the researcher has gleaned, current government directories, genealogical helps, plus reference tools can identify the best governmental office where genealogical records may be studied.

Karl encourages others to try the Web site:

<http://www.library.wisc.edu/etext/ravenstein/home.html#Overview>

Karl concludes with a few caveats:

- + "Many pages of place names requires a quick pdf download.
- + "The listing of places was not as long as I had hoped.
- + "Have fun spending some time looking at this neat site.
- + "Do not forget that if you like a particular pdf page that it can be saved on your computer for future reference.
- + "Reinforce the search method of finding what your home town is: find its location, then compare the town and area over time using different maps.

Dear G-SIG reader: Now it's YOUR turn to try it! Thanks, Karl!



Exchange! G-SIG Comments, ideas, and requests

You may share your discovery or offer ideas for others in this section (limit 150 words). We reserve the privilege to shorten and edit. Send your submission to: persch3@hotmail.com.

+ Bettie (bettieboop1052@sbcglobal.net) asks, "Is anyone is doing any research on the surname HEILIG?" G-SIG participants are encouraged to respond, if they can offer insights. Bettie was given some good advice that is applicable for all G-SIG researchers: Provide a few more details such as first names, date of emigration, area in which they settled, church with which they were affiliated, or name of a spouse or parent. *A suggestion was shared with Bettie:* Check on Ancestry.com, Gen Forum or other online genealogical sites.



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