

G-SIG FORUM #73

...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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What If...? Regarding Duden's Book

By Gerald Perschbacher

Author Jim Merkel (stlmerkel@att.net) has been doing a lot of research on German heritage (sound familiar?) and came up with a very good "teaser."

"Let's pretend our friend Mr. Duden never existed or wrote about someplace else. Let's pretend that, therefore, St. Louis wasn't a major destination for Germans but just a backwater. Therefore, none of the major leaders came here to stir things up. Instead of 50,000 Germans here in 1860, there are 10,000. What happens here in April and May 1861? What are the consequences?"

Confused? Let me fill in the blanks.

Gottfried Duden (pronounced DOO-din) was a Prussian German who came to Missouri in 1824 as a gentleman farmer (sometimes called Latin Farmer, a term applied to educated men who learned Latin as the language of intelligence and official status). As a lawyer, Duden was fond of details, facts, and written reports.

Duden and his friend Ludwig Eversmann bought 50 acres or so of land slightly west of St. Louis. Since our concentration is on Duden, we'll stick to him as the subject.

Duden took to writing about his experiences and communicated his achievements to an interested readership in Germany. I

should add that the terms Prussia and Germany were becoming interchangeable in the minds of many people at that time. This was due to Prussia's growing influence as it expanded its military and aimed to extend its trade influence into the Rheinland and even as far south as Bavaria.

Duden didn't do much work of clearing land and farming. He hired others to do that. Duden liked to sit on a hill overlooking his land and write about the virtues of America. He became quite accomplished through his experiences along the then-pioneer territory of what was considered practically the edge of civilization (as defined by Europeans).

Despite his New World successes, Duden longed for more and returned to Germany in 1827. Two years later, Duden's *Report on a Journey to the Western States of North America* (in German: *Bericht über eine Reise nach den westlichen Staaten Nordamerika's*) was printed and became a strong seller. In it, he indicated the route to take to St. Louis, the quality of farm land in that region, and tips for survival. The book influenced many Germans on their move to America.

To find out more about Duden, you may do a web search or check this site:

<http://www.teachushistory.org/nineteenth-century-immigration/resources/duden-recommends-immigrating>

With all this in mind, I pondered a response to Jim Merkel's question. Historians note that a large number of Germans came to Missouri due to Duden's book. Those Germans were instrumental (along with a good number of Irish) to make St. Louis a major metropolitan center, thus becoming the Gateway to the West. But if large numbers of Germans didn't come, and if St. Louis remained small, how would that part of the Midwest have been shaped?

Advance that thought to the year 1861, and the question takes on higher significance. Thanks to the German element in St. Louis, the Union Cause was elevated to a feverish pitch in the dawning days of the Civil War (early called the War of the Rebellion). German American men formed into army units and went to battle against Southern sympathizers and those attracted to the cry of States' Rights rather than Federal principles. The battles and skirmishes of 1861 significantly directed the course Missouri took -- as a neutralized state, for a time on the side of the South, but as a simmering border state generally leaning toward the North.

The question is good: what REALLY could have happened if Germans did not come to St. Louis in large numbers? Could this have the crucial first year of the Civil War in a way that may have affected the ultimate outcome?

Here is my slant on the topic. See what you think --

A valid assumption, but not necessarily the most accurate conclusion. Regardless of Duden's book, St. Louis was already the Gateway to the West even before he came. I say this by reason of trade. Indicative of this important status is the fact that the Lewis and Clark Expedition departed from St. Louis in May of 1804. As a result of the trip, Clark was appointed as head magistrate for Indian affairs and he was based in St. Louis long before the settlement of the first wave of Germans in the area. If anything, Duden's book merely added to the emphasis already placed on St. Louis.

Land was cheaper in this area and major tracts remained unsold in the 1830s-40s. The area held hope for new settlers who wanted a break from the past and gain the freedom to live as they wished. There was a keen attraction for Germans who had tired of their European Fatherland's regulatory strangling and overpopulation.

Here's another realization. St. Louis had been under Spanish rule, then French, and eventually English. Independence followed. Many Germans at that time related to French as a second language. That's because it became the "civilized tongue" for business and literary endeavors. Since St. Louis was a significant French settlement before 1830, this was an added attraction.

The Duden book popularized the attractiveness of St. Louis to weary Germans who were desperate for change. It remains to be known exactly how many "Emigration Societies" and "travel planners" in the 1830s-40s were pushing St. Louis in old Germany, although indicators show that St. Louis was on their map as a destination. But so were other areas in Ohio and Indiana, along the National Road (basically what is today I-70). Settlements along that major road were easily reached and supplied. When the inland waterways of the Mississippi River and tributaries were augmented by entry via the Port of New Orleans in the early 1830s, these factors speeded the desire to make St. Louis a destination. By that time the steam boat made its contribution by fighting the strong current, thus providing relatively good transport up river.

Furthermore, it also remains to be known how many agents along the American East Coast in cities like the major port of Baltimore directed emigrant Germans inland to St. Louis. If some agents were in the business of selling wagons, food, and other goods for a long trip, they would have enticed travelers to head to the farthest, safest spot in the then-West: St. Louis. Indeed,

the city was on the edge of Western Civilization as Eastern Americans had come to understand it.

The Duden book helped emigrants decide their St. Louis destination ahead of time and provided verbal directions on travel. The book also laid out what to expect in climate, soil productivity, and other important factors for settlement and success. Many descendants of those Germans remain in this area.

A; for the turn of events; regarding the early stormy days of the Civil War in Missouri during the Spring of 1861, indeed, the German population MAY have been lower than it was had the Germans not settled *en masse* around St. Louis. But I hasten to add that most of the German settlers who followed the instructions of Duden did not intend to settle in a city but in the countryside. This ruralism is exemplified in the speedy movement of early German settlers from the city of St. Louis to farmland within a 100 mile radius around the city. Example: St. Louis became a hub for trade and a market for flour mills in western Illinois where small communities such as a Darmstadt prided its growth on the production of flour to be sold on the open market in St. Louis.

Interestingly, a good portion of Illinois Germans served in St. Louis and other points in Missouri under General Lyon and Col. Sigel in 1861. A high number came from St. Clair County, Illinois. They felt obligated to stabilize their “Greater Community” by arming to defend the Union Cause in St. Louis.

Perhaps their numbers would not have been so significant except for settlement per the encouragement of Duden decades earlier. Having studied the matter, I personally conclude that the German element would have nonetheless been significant. Maybe not as large, but still a major factor in the early days of the Civil War. I think St. Louis would have remained in Union hands by their actions.

Would there have been only 10,000 Germans in St. Louis in 1861? I believe that figure is far too low. Perhaps 25,000 or maybe 30,000 would be a closer guesstimate. Still, history reveals its ebbs and eddies, and no one can say conclusively.

By the way, since the days of early civilizations exemplified by the Mound-building Indians, the St. Louis area was attractive for settlement. Tens of thousands of those “original Americans” liked the land around St. Louis within 50 miles east and west of the Mississippi. Why? Various rivers (notable the Illinois and Missouri) converged on the Mississippi, offering water routes north, south, east, and west. In the minds of some historians, that ancient culture realized the

natural significance of the St. Louis area for settlement. Duden was much later in that realization.

We should also recall that the riverfront of St. Louis originally was a high bluff but that through years of cutting away the outcrops to fashion foundations and make blocks to construct buildings or to simply lower the terrain, St. Louis eventually became an important inland port – and remains one of the largest and busiest in the U.S.A. up to the present. Early settlers realized the location's potential even in the 1700s before many Germans "came over."

History may have been different without the encouragement of Duden's book. But that does not mean history would have radically changed once we assess other attractions that made St. Louis the westward gateway.

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Playing with a Surname

Don't forget -- the surname you are researching has a significance that may unlock information to assist in your search.

Let's take two simple names: **Meyer and Schmidt**. If you enjoy toying with maps and the computer, go to: www.verwandt.de/karten/ and enter MEYER. In a moment you should see a map in shades of red, green, and yellow. "Meyer" has its heaviest concentration in north-western Germany. Realizing there were major population shifts following the Second World War, the map still shows a marked concentration in one area, just east of the Rhein River (Germans spell it Rhein, not Rhine). At the bottom of the map is information. For Meyer, it said that there were 86,929 telephone book entries with that surname. This represented 231,810 persons in Germany with the same name. These were disbursed in 439 cities and counties. The greatest concentration was in Hamburg with 2,879. The site then listed several other areas of concentration in descending order. Finally, there were a few comments on the prevailing first names for Meyer: Heinrich and Helmut were the most common.

Now enter Maier and see the difference. That simple shift in spelling is heavily concentrated in southern Germany. The greatest concentration is close to the Rhein. The name Maier appears in 36,970 telephone listings and equates to 98,586 people by that surname. Maiers are in 437 cities and counties (Städten und Landkreisen). There are 1,249 by that last name in München. Esslingen is next with 1,043.

Try Myer. You will be surprised. Only two small areas (each is a Kreis or county) shows inhabitants by that surname. In fact, when I pulled it up, only two families are listed by telephone, representing five people.

Try Schmidt, Schmid, and Schmitt. Each one has a different concentration. Could this direct your research? Very possibly, since Germans in recent centuries have not moved around as much as other cultures. Compare the results and you may be looking at areas of concentration you could research for your ancestral village.

One last observation about Meyer, Maier, and Myer. These were likely derived from the same meaning: a farm administrator. In most cases, this does not mean the person was a lord of the land or that he was owner of a large farm. It does not mean your ancestor was wealthy or powerful. What it probably means is that your initial ancestor (who first used the surname) was in charge of working the land. In other words, he had to produce results in crops and livestock. That is what he was charged with accomplishing.

The maps can constantly change along with telephone book entries. But generalities can be made if you seek discoveries, compile information, and apply good reason with whatever reliable facts you already have uncovered.

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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.

+ From bdzesch@att.net: Still looking for Zesch family with ancestors from Berlin and/or Halle on the Saale River. My great grandfather, Robert Zesch, came from Halle (Saale) in 1854 to Texas. He was born in Berlin (his father Carl Zesch was born there on the 15th of May, 1799). Looking for parents and siblings of Carl. His family moved from there on Sept. 12, 1836. He was a "Koniglicher Kreis-Kassenrendant" (taxation officer).

+ "I have researched the church records of the Lutheran Church in (name of town, county, province) in Germany. I have gone back to the early 1700s. Want to research the land records that are located in the Landesarchiv NRW Staatsarchiv ... and have written this archives. They have sent me a reply giving me names and addresses of nearby

researchers...." This report came from a G-SIG participant a while ago but is still timely. You probably will make good German connections by mail and e-mail, if you are polite, patient, plus clear and simple in your request. Persistence may be repaid in informational dividends once you succeed!

+ If you are not in a Cluster, or if distance is a problem for you to attend a Cluster or even the big G-SIG Gatherings, then get into the G-SIG Yahoo Group. Here's how: Go to www.yahoo.com. Click on Groups, carefully 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).

+ Spend time searching options at www.emersonkent.com and your eyes will be opened to all sorts of historical discoveries from outstanding maps to historical facts, dictionary terms, milestones, and pictures. It's all free, too! Honestly, anyone with an interest in lineage and history will enjoy the site.

+ This edition of *G-SIG FORUM* is slightly longer than normal. That's because there was more information to include. You can enhance the flow of information by sending tips and ideas on research.

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