

G-SIG FORUM #77

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 plus ideas on German traditions and ancestry. Gerald Perschbacher is *FORUM* compiler and coordinator.

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DNA Matching -- the Only REAL Answer?

By Gerald Perschbacher

You've heard about it...seen it promoted on TV...might even know someone who had it done. I'm talking about DNA testing.

DNA is short for *deoxyribonucleic acid*. Being a nucleic acid, it is at the center of cell structure and carries messages for growth and development. This genetic material controls much of the makeup of living cells and many viruses. Experts say it consists of two long strands of "nucleotides" that are bound or linked together in what appears to be a living ladder that twists in spiral fashion.

DNA proves that the planet on which we live is, indeed, a small world. One DNA matching service proudly announces its high degree of accuracy. Another says that it can match people to 360 different populations present in the world today.

Example: Experts state that all people living today can be traced to an ancestor who came from what is now Africa. Further assertions are made that all European people of Jewish descent can be traced to one of four Jewish women. Still, for many people, all that is hard to comprehend.

Most people in America today who have at least a high school education -- which included classes in science and biology -- probably learned about fruit flies that were raised in small test-tube environments, then examined for physical traits: certain formation of wings, color of eyes, and other factors. Traits were tallied and percentages were calculated based on the controlled population in the test tube. Call it genetics!

We see it played out in generations of families. "You have the nose of your father but the feet of your mother," an aunt might observe at a swim party. Perhaps you have seen how a physical characteristic was conveyed from your parents, to you, then to your children and now to their children. Sometimes the gene is recessive. I have seen how red hair from a mother skipped her two boys but showed up in her two grandsons.

Equally interesting are the thought patterns of people. "You're just like your father!" someone might note. It's not a physical characteristic being highlighted, but a

way of thinking. Truly, we are a combination of the generations that preceded us right down to a good number of our manners, likes and dislikes, and ways to solve problems or contend with stress. These innate traits can be adjusted by learned behavior, but I would venture to say that foundational mannerisms cannot be totally erased...only channeled, enhanced, restricted, or otherwise controlled.

Looking at past generations, it would be interesting to see whatever became of the genes passed down to succeeding generations of a dictator (such as Napoleon) or statesman (such as Cromwell) or inventor (such as Edison). Were there commonalities in the ways these people thought and acted that constituted the surfacing of shared genes?

Are there "propensities" in your lineage? In other words, were there military professionals? Artists? Carpenters? Schooner captains? Miners? Farmers? Doctors? Pastors or priests? Teachers? If you see a propensity for certain jobs popping up in your studies over numerous generations, you might be seeing a genetic propensity that was (and is) at work.

If you engage DNA testing for you and your family, don't simply settle for knowing what region or group of people (or tribe) from which you were derived. Consider the common traits you might hold with others in that "gene pool" (broad as it may be!) and narrow that down to your present generations. It may result in intriguing observations!

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From a GERMAN Perspective...

Our subjects in *G-SIG FORUM* center on Germanic heritage and genealogy. When I verified by reason of physical traits and heritage that my dominant ancestry was of a particular Germanic group, the realization opened up new vistas of understanding in my ancestral search. Since then, I have studied the history of that regional pool of people, the early years of which are referenced with good details in the writings and reports of Roman officials dating even prior to the Birth of Christ.

Could you actually trace your ancestry to tribal members and clans who struggled against other tribes and threw axes and spears as Roman legions? Perhaps. But you would never know with absolute certainty. It would be an educated conclusion based on the weight of good indicators.

If your ancestry leans toward the Saxons, good for you! There was a great deal written about those tribal groups under the eastern banner we call Saxony. That was the ancestral group that ultimately took over the rule of the Holy Roman Empire from the Franks, one of the largest and oldest Germanic tribes in history (which, I am quick to add, included the Hessen as a sub-tribe that was liberally referenced over 2,000 years). If your roots take you to the Swabian side, to the Burgundian line, or to other groups in the Germanic family, track down all you can about those tribes. You may be able to read about them back to the year 300 A.D. or even earlier!

DNA. Even if you make a genetic connection to a tribal group, you will only go so far in your understanding. The application of genetics has no written history to convey about human groups, so to speak. DNA only tracks commonality of traits through lines of descent. To put meat on the bones of that discovery, you need historical research. **GP**

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Know the Times!

I cannot stress enough: **KNOW THE TIMES** in which a particular ancestor lived. Why? You might uncover some surprising answers to questions that seem to block your research.

Several people say they hit a brick wall. The ancestor they were tracing seemed to fall into a chasm, never to be found. Problem is, the researcher may be looking only where he or she **THOUGHT** the ancestor should be.

In one case a person had dutifully tracked their ancestor through all sorts of bits of evidence. Often that included city directories. Don't forget one thing regarding those directories: the cover (or title) year usually was intended for release **IN** that year. Let's say you are reading a city directory for 1870. The information likely was gathered in late 1869. That means that someone who died right after the information was gathered may not have been alive in 1870. Yet, their name and address might still be listed!

Census summaries are not always accurate. There are all types of stories about census takers who (perhaps due to fatigue, hearing difficulties, weak spelling skills, or a host of other excuses) did not record the names properly or haphazardly entered the country of origin (if the person was an immigrant).

Ships' records may be just as faulty when it comes to listing the ages and names of children upon entry to the U.S.A. In visually scanning a list of 21 people who arrived on the same boat in the 1800s, I noticed a 10-year-old son was listed as Johannes, named after the father. The boy was eldest among the offspring. There was a 1-year-old in the brood. He was listed as "Johanniter." A researcher may take that to be the child's name, but it wasn't. The entry merely indicated that this was the child **OF** the father whose name was Johannes. If we understand the history of the era we are studying and the pitfalls of inaccurate entry work, we will make much more progress in our efforts. To complete my example, the little boy was named Christopher!

Knowing history can fill gaps in our thinking. Several people have almost pulled their hair trying to find out who an ancestor was missed being listed in a particular census or city directory but was listed in the year(s) before or after. Several things may have come into play, if you know history.

In 1849 the cholera epidemic hit its peak in St. Louis, Mo. The general public believed that contact with infected individuals -- living or dead -- augmented its spread. Hence, some people moved out of town for a year or so. They may have lived with relatives or friend. They may have taken on jobs as farm hands. That meant they may not have been available for listing in a city directory, or they may have missed the census report for St. Louis.

Cholera wasn't restarted to St. Louis or even the Midwest. As people trekked westward or in any direction, the malady sometimes was carried with them.

That same year gold was discovered in northern California. Initially that Gold Rush was a magnet for Californians who quickly moved to the gold fields to find their luck. These were called "Forty-Eighters." Then in 1849 people came from considerable distances (the Midwest, East, Southeast, and even select nations around the globe). They were named "Forth-Niners." By mid-1850, the rushing slowed and the huge Good Rush settled down to a more leisurely pace. If an ancestor cannot be found where expected in 1848, 1849, or 1850 it may be due to these two situations: cholera and gold.

Also realize that California had an 1850 census but it was flawed. With the huge influx of gold seekers, the new state's population rose by tens of thousands. Census takers were overwhelmed with the amount of work. Atop that, a good number of them moved from one gold field to another. Census takers never caught up. In occasional cases, double entries may have been made. So in 1852 a better census was taken as the population settled down and a multitude of speculators departed.

Interestingly, many of the people who escaped the cholera epidemic decided to return to St. Louis when danger subsided. As for the Gold Rush, most speculators were men who returned to their homes poorer -- or wealthier, which placed them in a very small percentage!

Other reasons may have pulled an ancestor away, only to return later. In the 1800s it was not unusual for relatives and friends to become "live-in health providers." In one family, as late as the 1960s, Great Aunt Johanna lived at different locations. It was basically her job. If someone was undergoing a prolonged recovery from illness, they contacted the little gal to live in their household. She did it for a minor income. At times she lived with families for half a year, perhaps longer. Aunt Johanna had little she brought with her. She liked to dabble in paint and for a time was asked to be featured as the new "Grandma Moses" while exhibiting her creative strokes of the brush as she sat behind a large store window at Stix, Baer & Fuller's downtown location. She declined--since she wanted to help people more than paint.

Would a person like Johanna consistently be listed in city directories? If she were, would a person conclude that she moved around every year? Well, she did -- but not in the conventional sense. It was a matter of meeting the needs of the ill and recovering.

In another case, if a brother or cousin was a farmer and broke a leg, he was laid up for weeks. It would be months before he regained his pace. Meantime, someone moved into a back room and did the tilling, planting, or reaping. Did such an ancestor fall into an "informational ditch" only to resurface later? Perhaps.

Know the history of the era. It may be profitable for tracking your ancestors. Plus, you may find enjoyment in discovering the events and circumstances of history which your ancestral line experienced!

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Hardly a Civil War

Students of the American Civil War confess that the conflagration was hardly "civil" in the sense of "granting respect" and was "civil" in that it involved people from all walks of society.

G-SIG's John Maurath says that the **FIRST REGIMENT, UNITED STATES RESERVE CORPS, MISSOURI VOLUNTEERS**, (from *Dyer's Compendium*) **was organized in the First Ward of St. Louis, south of Soulard street**, under President Lincoln's Order of April 30, 1861. The unit was mustered in for home service at the St. Louis Arsenal under Colonel Henry ALMSTEDT on May 7.

It had 1,200 men in 12 Companies. Its armory was Jaeger's Garden on Sidney and Tenth streets. Those were the early days of the war, and civilian locations took on military importance practically over night. The Turnverien in St. Louis became a site for marching and drilling fledgling troops, many of whom were German immigrants.

On May 10 six Companies marched to Camp Jackson and six were posted on Sidney street, guarding the avenues to the arsenal. On May 18 a cavalry company from the same ward

joined, which did valuable scouting service. When the volunteers moved from St. Louis, part of the Regiment held the arsenal, protected the railroad to Rolla, and garrisoned, for a short time, Jefferson City. Four Companies occupied Turner Hall during the absence of the Third Reserve, and six Companies followed Fremont to Birds Point until ordered to St. Louis to be mustered out on August 20. With the exception of 6 per cent Bohemian, the Regiment was almost entirely German.

Was one of your ancestors among the number? Why not "dig" and see!

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Preparation Could Mean EVERYTHING --

Planning a trip to your family's old "stomping grounds" whether in America or Europe? With a little advance planning, you could reap solid results in research.

Simple tips: (1) Several weeks before you arrive, find whether there are historical societies/archives. (2) Make contact well in advance of your trip. (3) Keep your initial comments short and concise. (4) Have a good idea what you are seeking. (5) Come prepared (have documentation on those you wish to trace -- provide basic information such as birth date, date of passing, marriage information, list of children, etc.). (6) Cultivate a positive rapport with a contact at the organization/institution.

Set out on new paths of discovery. If you verify the type of work done by your ancestor, then search to see if files exist on that subject. Example: If your ancestor was a carpenter, start there with the early files. If your ancestor belonged to certain societies, seek their records and, by so doing, you may hit pay dirt.

If your ancestor was highly educated, search the matriculation lists of students over the years and by university. Some lists can be accessed online without charge. Make contact with the archives of that institution for further options!

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Back to the Revolution

You may have a family connection to the Revolutionary War and don't know it. If you did, you would enjoy the benefits of being counted among the the Sons of the American Revolution (www.sar.org/) or the Daughters of the American Revolution (<http://www.dar.org/>). These organizations are the leading lineage societies that perpetuate the ideals of the war for independence. You may have seen informative displays at genealogical conferences. As historical, educational, and patriotic, non-profit corporations, each seeks to maintain and expand the meaning of patriotism, along with respect for national symbols, the value of American citizenship, and the unifying force of "*e pluribus unum*" that was created from the people of many nations -- one nation and one people.

On the opposite side of that conflict, the following information came from Germany, home for many of the mercenary troops (such as the Hessen) who sided with the British in that conflict. If you wonder whether a particular ancestor of yours was among their number, go to:

<http://lagis.online.uni-marburg.de/de/subjects/index/sn/hetrina>.

If you can read a German article (or can use a translating command), check:

<http://mobil.wiwo.de/ticker/6442328>

Questions may be submitted to: Hessen-L@genealogy.net

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TIP: Use divergent surname spellings in conjunction with towns or cities and you may be surprised. One person entered a surname in several different spellings and added the names of different towns. Surprise! Three ancestors popped up! These were from the 1600s and 1700s. Each had an earned doctorate and held high positions in a major German Imperial City. That discovery led to more contacts and a wealth of information has been mined by the simple task of coupling surnames to cities.

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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.

+ **One place a researcher can check is a blog** which reportedly has a lot of articles with good tips that might be interesting for you. In particular, you may visit the article "Good old friends" which can be accessed at www.rootseekers.com/blog/?p=364). It is about overcoming brick walls. So reports Ursula C. Krause in Germany.

+ **Historian Wilhelm Kaufmann** (1847-1920) stated in his work, *The Germans in the American Civil War*, that **there were 31,000 Germans from Missouri serving in the Union Army**. The author notes this to be an extraordinary claim, considering **there were 91,000 Germans in Missouri at the time**. He explains that some of this number is German refugees who came out of the South during the conflict. Also Germans from northern States, especially Illinois crossed over and enlisted in Missouri units. To learn more, just remember that old and new books plus CDs, and DVDs about the Civil War are plentiful.

+ **One author wrote that a particular surname** being researched came in several variable spellings. Baxter was also listed as Backser, Bagster, Bacaster, Bacster, Beksater, Bacchuster and Bastar. And a simple name like Meyer could have been spelled (in Germany) as Mayer, Meier, Meir, and even Maier. So when you do a web search online or shuffle through books, be cognizant of variants and run a search on them.

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