

G-SIG FORUM #78

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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Special Single Theme Edition: **The Impact of Germans in America**

By Gerald Perschbacher

A German did not discover America, but a German named it.

Martin Waldseemueller, a cartographer, wrote an article in a trade magazine in 1507. In it he acknowledged the discovery of a fourth continent (added to the list of Europe, Asia, and Africa). He deemed it suitable to name the discovered continent after the man who found it -- Amerigo Vespucci.

Who? What happened to Christopher Columbus?

The cartographer was one of several scientists whom the Duke of Lorraine asked to gather and evaluate news for their professions. Such "facts" could be employed to upgrade maps accordingly. Unfortunately, Waldseemueller did not have ALL the facts but knew that Vespucci had made four trips to the new continent. They only had news of the first journey of Columbus during which he discovered some islands. So through an error the name stuck. And a German was the man who promoted it.

The "glue" that made that news stick for the long term was the German printing press, moveable type and all, and a passion among Germans to make the most out of Gutenberg's invention. They flooded the market. In fact, they absolutely MADE the communication market with news like this as the lead.

What did it take to make an impact on America? According to record, the first known Germans to land on the shores of the New World carried the surnames Unger, Keffer, and Volday. They were among the crew headed by Captain Smith of Jamestown fame who set up the settlement in 1607. Nineteen years later in 1626 it was a man of German descent named Peter (Minnewit) Minuit of Wesel, who was appointed as governor of the Dutch colonies in

America. He went one step further and bought Manhattan Island from the Indians for the paltry amount of \$24 in trinkets.

These men were among the earliest German immigrants in America. Soon they were followed by more. Germans preferred New York, Maryland, and Virginia initially. When Pennsylvania was founded in 1681, it wasn't long before the English nobleman and Quaker William Penn promoted that state as a place of religious refuge. It was enticing for Germans to hear that their way of worship would be tolerated in that state -- whereas they felt persecuted in German territories. With that realization, the initial floodgate of German emigration was opened.

William Penn widely publicized the option for Germans up and down the Rhine River. This portion of German territories had been swept by war, sprinkled with plagues, and fired with destruction of towns and castles in the mad political swings that involved German states, France, Spain, and Sweden. Many heads of households considered the option to move. It was not an easy step. Debts had to be paid. Household goods needed to be sold to raise capital for the sea voyage plus food and necessities en transit. Family members were valued for what they were worth to the community that was losing them. Once the final bill was tallied for cash and effort, only a percentage of Rhineland Germans accepted Penn's invitation.

Among them were three Mennonite families from the town of Krekfeld. They jumped at the offer and took quick advantage. Their landing on Oct. 6, 1683, in Philadelphia, later was adopted as German Day in America.

The organizer of that group of settlers was Franconian Franz Daniel Pastorius (1651-1720) who was soon elected mayor of what became Germantown, Pennsylvania. A highly educated man, Pastorius attended universities in Altdorf, Jena, Basel, Nuremburg, and Strassburg and was a lawyer in Frankfurt-am-Main. His American venture was financed in 1683 by the Frankfurt Land Company in Germany. On that company's behalf, Pastorius purchased 15,000 acres for the new settlement in Pennsylvania.

Germans were making an impact on Colonial America. More Protestant Germans headed to America in 1707, this time hoping to settle in New York. But they missed. Such was the fortunate of immigrants in those days! Due to the whim of the winds, they landed instead in Philadelphia.

Important German families were established in America. In 1733, New Jersey became the home of German Johann Peter Rockefeller, founder of one of the most influential families in America.

How many Germans came to America in its colonial period? When the War of Independence began in 1775, there were 250,000 Germans that speckled the map from Georgia to Maine. This statistic is interesting since no German state

had a colony in the new World! Desperate people needed relief. Such was the need for those Germans to emigrate. The Old World hardly held any hope for them.

Added to the count of a quarter million Germans were thousands of troops who came to the New World, but most did not intend to stay. They were mercenaries. Through cash and benefits, their services were conveyed to King George of England who had family ties to the Hessen people. Still, there were Germans who sided with the colonists. Among them was Baron von Steuben, a retired cavalry officer from Prussia. Realizing his ability, General George Washington appointed Steuben as inspector general of the whole colonial army!

Germans in service to the King of England? You may wonder, "How could that be?!" It was a simple matter of marriage and politics. As noble families joined in matrimony, their inheritance followed. So the King of England had become head of the House of Hanover. Support from Germans in that area was expected -- and received. But in the Hessen city of Kassel, a major movement favored the colonies. This was against the trend that saw an initial 30,000 Hessen troops activated for service with the British!

It was not slavery, mind you. It was servitude. Soldiers were promised to be paid well. Their families were to receive financial benefits and the lifting of their tax burden if a household provided a son for soldiering. Not all areas of Germany benefited well, but needy families took what they could obtain. German principalities and regions found out that providing armies for the desperate British was a means of financial survival, even among the once-very-wealthy noble families that still wished to live in luxury.

By the count of some historians, about 12,000 German soldiers broke ranks and stayed in America. Even before they decided to stay, other Germans took their stand for independence. Among them was a woman--Molly Pitcher, daughter of a German named Hass. Her new name was descriptive since she carried pitchers of water to fallen colonial soldiers. The stuff of legends was soon formed when Molly watched her husband fall from the heat amid a summer battle in 1778. She rushed to take his place by the cannon. German womanhood came to the forefront!

German writers romanticized the war. Poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe who lived until 1832 immortalized the glories of the new nation by saying it was "a magnificent country and a magnet for the eyes of the whole world."

What impact were Germans making on America? The Age of Liberty had dawned, with Germans on both sides of the skirmish. Some would say that the movement toward liberty in America would eventually spread to Europe. For many it could not come soon enough!

Germany was a patchwork of small countries, most based on the concept of fiefdom and noble inheritance that lingered beyond their prime far past the years of Medieval history.

A wise man said that "America entered history as a myth and became its own legend" -- a good saying for a land called The New Canaan and greeted as the first beams from the modern Dawn of Democracy.

In the span of a century, from 1820 to 1920, 6 million Germans emigrated to the United States. It was their land -- their adopted land, their CHOSEN land -- and they made the choice in adopting it. The land, in turn, welcomed them, for the most part. Those Germans were mainly industrious, honest, reliable, reasonably educated, and proud to pull their own weight.

They were helpful and cooperative, but they liked to cling in groups. Ridding their tongues of the old German dialects was not easy. In some cities they melded well with English-speaking citizens. Still, they honored their traditions and age-old ideals. In other areas, German settlements and farms dominated the land, so their language and dialects vied with English to be the tongue of choice for the fledgling nation.

If the German tongue was to be encouraged, then printers needed to serve it up. A myriad of small publishing houses, newspapers, and printing companies sprang to action. English publications on American soil had their first competitors!

The initial printing of German literature in the colonies came between 1728 and 1737 through the efforts of Andrew Bradford and Benjamin Franklin in Philadelphia. They wanted small jobs since it kept them solvent -- and German readership was on the rise. That meant more business for the future! So Bradford printed a German almanac from 1730-1732, and Franklin offered a German newspaper in 1732. Neither publication lasted very long.

Here is a little-known piece of history. The first Bible in German was printed in America, thanks to help from an unusual source: a lawyer-turned-printer in Frankfurt-am-Main. His name was Dr. Heinrich Ehrenfried Luther.

He was a patron and sponsor of Johann Christopher Sauer of Germantown. Sauer, born in 1695, had lived in Ladenburg on the Neckar River. It wasn't long before he moved to Hessen territory for religious tolerance. In 1734 he settled in America! Eventually his son, "junior," would join him in the family business

Originally trained as a tailor and qualified as a German clock maker, the elder Sauer entered the business of selling books and patent medicines. In 1735 he pursued a career in printing, imploring officials in Halle, Germany, to provide support for his venture as a mission outreach to Germans in the New World who had few pastors and few Bibles or religious publications. That lack of religious education was troubling to Sauer, whose father was a Protestant minister. Thanks to the religious author Christoph Schuetz of Frankfurt, support started coming.

Benjamin Franklin was leery about the operation. Since he controlled the processing and selling of precious paper, no one knew what the future held for German printing in America. It was at Franklin's mercy.

Remember I mentioned the name Dr. Heinrich Ehrenfried Luther? He was a descendant of Protestant Reformer Martin Luther. In fact, it was Martin Luther's German translation of the Bible that Printer Sauer was first to offer off his press in America! This descendant of Martin Luther became one of the greatest friends to the advance of German readers in America.

How did he do it? Simple. He owned a type foundry in Frankfurt and donated a set of type to Sauer. Surprisingly, this pleased the creative and innovative spirit of Ben Franklin so much that in 1766 he paid a visit to Dr. Heinrich Ehrenfried Luther in Frankfurt -- and also met the soon-to-be legendary Hanoverian Prime Minister Gerlach Adolf Freiherr von Muenchhausen -- a man who fostered the growth of education on the university level. As a result of their encouragement and a good prospect for the future, more Germans found extra encouragement to emigrate.

The Sauer family caught the vision for a successful German Almanac, while Ben Franklin caught the vision for his English Poor Richard's Almanac. English and German printing was here to stay in America!

Germans also entered America through the South. The first German to arrive in the Lower Mississippi region was a man simply recorded as "Hans." History declares him to have been "a German, a buccaneer, and artilleryman" who was under the command and employ of the French explorer LaSalle in the 1680s. Hans was also with LaSalle when they inadvertently landed on the Texas coast.

Hans nearly was killed by unfriendly Indians. Father Anastasius, a priest with the expedition, reported that Hans, "A German from Wittenberg" was stuck in mud so firmly "that he could scarcely get out." Due to that exploit, LaSalle named the nearby stream the Hans River! That name appeared on a French map in 1720.

Hans had one more claim to fame. He was among a picked group of 17 whom LaSalle led northward to obtain assistance from Canada. A conspiracy arose and LaSalle was murdered. The eyewitness report tells us about Hans: Two days after the murder of LaSalle, Hans "shot the murderer...through the heart with a pistol. (That man) died on the spot, unshaven, unable even to utter the names of Jesus and Mary." Hans wanted to kill another conspirator but was restrained. Realizing he could be tried for murder rather than being forgiven for rendering justice, he left the group and joined an Indian tribe, whom he defended against other hostile Indians. Such was the story of the first German in the South.

But more wished to claim their portion of America. English travel agents up and down the Rhine stirred up a growing interest in moving to the Gulf region. A great famine gripped the Rhineland in 1709-1710 followed by another famine short

years later. As a result, 15,000 Rhinelanders considered the move to America. The Louisiana promoter promised the Germans peace, religious freedom, political freedom, and even wealth. With such superlatives, who WOULDN'T want to go?

A good number of those Germans took the bait. French records indicate as many as 10,000 set out from their homes and towns, not knowing exactly how to get to the New World. Up and down the Palatinate region of Germany, people started to move. Joining them were Germans from Alsace, Lorraine, Baden, Wuerttemberg, Mainz, even Switzerland. It appeared to be the swell of a huge migration.

Although reliable sources from that era say that 9,000 Germans made it to the Arkansas River, including Fort Smith, and that they abandoned their settlements for several reasons, the report does not ring true. The weight of research and history casts this notion into the realm of legend. And of the 10,000 that reportedly left the Fatherland, we believe the actual number was far less. Countless families encountered death or other settlement options along the way from Europe.

Of those who came over by ship, dangers increased. Out of 200 Germans aboard one vessel, only 40 survived to arrive in America. Another travel report states that only 200 out of a contingent of 1200 landed on American shores. Disease, cramped quarters, and bad food -- or lack of it -- cast shadows of death and starvation upon sojourners, young and old.

It may be that no more than 2,000 Germans arrived on Southern shores in the 1700s. Still, then made an impact on society in their own ways. They brought knowledge, skills, and a willingness to survive amid every hardship. Those Germans were tough -- and determined! Those virtues mainstreamed into the American South.

As the 1800s neared and burst forth, a swatch of settlements traced the advance of German immigrants from east coastal metropolises such as Baltimore. "Westward" meant just about any place beyond the Appalachian Mountains. As land and opportunity availed, Germans condensed along the first National Road which now is traced directionally by Interstate 70 for much of the way. Beneficiaries were the territories that soon became states: Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. Germans fanned out to areas north, finding good land and futures in the Upper Midwest -- states like Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. Later, they progressed into the Dakotas and adjoining places.

Far different than the closely positioned farms in the Old Country, in general, German farms were widely spaced in the New World. They popped up along the Nation Road like wild flowers along an interstate. At places prone to be called "stops" by travelers, parts of a barn or other farm buildings and lean-tos were converted to a small store or bedding areas to offer refuge to travelers -- at a

charge, of course. Extra income allowed the already-settled Germans the chance to improve and expand their surroundings. Almost simultaneously some structures were converted or constructed to be modest hotels. Not all Germans who headed westward had sufficient funds to pay at toll gates or to purchase food and necessities. Those poor Germans offered their arms and backs as hourly workers for several weeks -- or longer -- until fresh funds replenished their coffers. It's easy to imagine that a high number of those Germans gave up the notion of reaching their destination in favor of settling along the way or digressing elsewhere on a whim and a word from others.

What was a main source of information and edification for Germans in the New World? In one word: ALMANACS. Truly, almanacs were used daily for reference, information, entertainment, weather, and farming cycles. As the population grew, so did the press runs. Newly established communities with German backgrounds often set up a publishing company to produce a daily newspaper, advertising fliers for shops and businesses, religious literature, educational items, and almanacs. Beloved almanacs!

Farmers lived by the rising and setting times of the sun and the phases of the moon, so almanacs offered tables of information on both. To invoke heavenly blessings, portions of Sacred Scripture were included (especially for Sundays).

On the practical side, almanacs carried tables of interest on loans, currency exchange rates where necessary, distances between towns, and dates of court sessions, fairs, and other events. Ben Franklin's idea of adding proverbial wisdom was also appreciated.

The final flood of German immigrants was to last several decades and began as a trickle around 1820, became a very, very small stream by 1830, and started being noticed by 1835. In mid-century Germany was being healthily depopulated which allowed for more succeeding generations to be raised over there, while family members were transplanted over here. Milwaukee, St. Louis, Cleveland, and other large Midwestern cities had bustling German populations. In some cities, Irish settlers vied with Germans on the size of their ethnic communities. Some cities, as in St. Louis, had strong readerships with newspapers in English and German, with more than a few competitors in both camps.

The last Indian War fought east of the Mississippi River was the Black Hawk War. It ended in 1832 by enforced treaty and the conveyance of Indian land to the Federal government. That land went up for sale at \$1.25 per acre. Check old county maps for the names and locations of land owners in adjacent Illinois counties by the mid-1800s and you will discover an overwhelming number of German names! Two large groups of German settlers came to the Midwest in the 1830s. The people in these groups numbered in the hundreds. One group called the Giessen Emigration Society originated in Giessen in the Hessen land. They

came in 1834 for the reason of establishing a "New Utopia" along the Missouri River just west of St. Louis. Another group made of "old Lutherans" who strictly adhered to the precepts of Dr. Martin Luther were more than 600 strong when they arrived in 1839. Their cause was based on religious principles. They established what is now called The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod. These "emigration societies" were not alone in the desire to come to the Midwest. Other smaller groups organized on their own or with a bit of European guidance -- then set on their merry way.

By 1835 the St. Louis area was functioning as the Gateway to the West.

The city was the last big stop that displayed the notable touches of civilized nature and refinement before wagon trains and small traveling groups headed toward the Great Plains. Soon after St. Louis, travelers had to defend themselves against the elements, wildlife, and potentially troublesome Indians or dangerous highwaymen.

While St. Louis was a stop for Germans coming along the National Road from the east and coming up the Mississippi River from New Orleans, it was not the final destination for all. Being in a state that accepted slavery as legal, Germans found that anti-moral stand in St. Louis to be offensive. While slaves in the big city were relatively few and mainly were domestic servants, the Courthouse steps were used for slave sales. Germans either spoke their anti-slavery thoughts openly in town or moved to the free state of Illinois and settled in adjacent counties. While Germans had a history of accepting servanthood, even serfdom, those were in the distant past. And seldom did ancient or current German traditions accept slavery as a benefit. The Franks, one of the main ancient German tribes, prided themselves on being free -- which is what some historians say was the derivative meaning for the word Frank.

Being on the frontier edge of civilization, St. Louis was a depot of sorts. Germans liked turning profits through beer production, flour production, furniture making, and machining. What made the greater St. Louis area attractive to Germans was the excitement of the community and its degree of transitory nature with travelers stopping only for a short time. If they were German, then current citizens in the area kept up with changes in the Old Country.

Truth be told, the earliest Germans in St. Louis made their influence felt by 1820. Prominent among them was Henry Von Puhl, who was one of the city's leading merchants. He headed several enterprises, operated boats up and down the Mississippi, was into banking and finance, and even city politics with a special feeling toward the field of education. He traced his lineage to Wurttemberg.

When the Frankfurt revolts of 1830 and 1848 failed and noble families reasserted power in their territories, rebel Germans were at risk of capture, imprisonment, severe punish, even death. Among them were Carl Schurz, Friedrich Hecker, Heinrich Boernstein, Adolph Dengler, and Franz Sigel. Each of

them held influential positions among rebel forces in Germany and were supportive of military might for causes that were right!

They and others fled to America. Here they re-established themselves. All those mentioned -- and several dozen more "48ers," ended up in St. Louis by 1860.

Let's pause to consider another type of "48ers" -- Californians involved in the Gold Rush near Sacramento. That gold rush began on the property of John Sutter. He was Swiss in a Germanic sort of way. Sutter lived for a while in St. Louis. Then he went West to Mexican territory to begin his "empire" as a businessman and entrepreneur. Before California was granted statehood, Sutter made his mark on the territory. He attracted Germans to work for him. A good number of those Germans came through St. Louis! More followed in 1849 as "49ers" who were considered prospectors from way beyond the formative borders of the new state. Germans may very well have constituted one of the greatest groups of immigrant prospectors -- perhaps even the largest!

Early in 1861, The Civil War erupted. With the encouragement of an Executive Order from newly installed President Abraham Lincoln, the military German 48ers I first mentioned were among the vanguard in raising an army of German-American soldiers to offset the pending slide of Missouri into the Confederacy.

Thanks to them, St. Louis remained in the Union camp, although the Camp Jackson Affair and unrest in the streets made St. Louis a dangerous city for German immigrants. At least, for a time. As days progressed into the summer of 1861, St. Louis calmed but factions did not quiet over the war.

General Nathaniel Lyon led the military Union Cause into the state's heartland along the Missouri River to the state capital, and southwesterly to the Springfield area. Engagements and battles took place at Carthage and Wilson's Creek. These were not decisive for the North but served to keep the South at bay.

I mention those battles since German soldiers were the strength of the units. The German 48er leaders I mentioned a moment ago were involved in the military thrusts that stabilized Missouri and St. Louis. That resulted in maintaining the Mississippi River for the Union. Thus began the step-by-step effort under General Ulysses S. Grant and Sherman to march southward, regaining Federal forts right up to the battles of Shiloh and the siege of Vicksburg. Both were resounding victories for the North. Both were heavily German in the troops employed.

From The Civil War emerged a revamped nation with higher ideals for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for ALL men and ALL women. Industrialization soon arrived and German immigrants joined other new arrivals in manning factories for the grunt work that advanced the American dream. Craftsmen populated automobile plants. When quality results were demanded, Germans were in line for those jobs. Many got them and held them as long as they

wished. Such was their ability. Devout German Catholics came to our shores by the tens of thousands, all wishing to claim part of the living and lasting legend known as America. What followed were years of FREEDOM-PLUS, as the nation matured. There were to be episodes of regret in the process, but the victories in the advance of society were beyond counting in the last half of the 19th century. The 20th century kept the pace going up to the present, epitomized in men such as President Dwight D. Eisenhower and rocket science genius Werner Von Braun.

We could mention the names of inventors, civic leaders, statesmen, women of prominence, educators, religious figures, politicians, and more who have German lineage and kept the ideals of their golden past alive and fresh for the generations that followed. We are their beneficiaries. America as a whole has been graced by their imprint. And for those of us who continue to flex our German principles, we are among the educators of the present younger generation and, through them, to generations yet unborn.

Yes, even today, the German influence exists. There is a quality of life, of morals, of honesty, of religious fervor, of strength and endurance, of "getting things right" and taking pride in accomplishments that all reflect age-old Germanic ideals.

We are the better for it. Our communities are enriched by it. The world is a better place because of it.



References: This edition is derived from the writer's studies plus travels, and taps related research, articles, books, and reliable online sources. Of special note for further study are: *Two Hundred Years of German-American Relations 1776-1976*, Thomas Piltz, general editor; Heinz Moos Verlag, Munich, Germany, 1975; *The Settlement of the German Coast of Louisiana and the Creoles of German Decent*, by J. Hanno Dieler, American Germanic Press, Philadelphia, 1909.



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