

G-SIG FORUM #79

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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Nancy's Discovery!

When Nancy Von Behren wondered about the next step in her genealogical search, she took advice from G-SIG's Kathy Wurth (in America) and Matthias Uthoff (in Germany). Their suggestion truly was international.

Simply stated, Kathy and Matthias offered Nancy a website to investigate and research to her heart's content. She jumped right in, eager as can be, by going to: <http://www.lagis-hessen.de/en/subjects/index/sn/hetrina>.

Nancy is facilitator of G-SIG's Hessen Cluster. Now, a little word of explanation. The Americanized term to use for Germans coming from the territories of Hesse is *Hessians*. In German, it is *Hessen*. Either way, it's the same basic reference. I'll use the *Hessen* term to make this sound "more German."

Being facilitator, Nancy wanted to find out about the Hessen troops who came to America in the Revolutionary War to fight for the British. Considered mercenaries by the rebel Americans, these troops saw themselves differently. They were fighting for their homeland. It was one way the down-and-out economy of the Hessen people could receive some much needed income. Their service in the military also brought tax relief to their families at home.

How did these Germans end up serving under the British King? It so happened that King George III of England had strong Germanic roots and was of the royal House of Hanover. So he went to his "brethren" (especially eastward along the Rhine) and solicited their participation...for a price. The Hessen troops were among the first to be committed. They were ruled from Kassel and Hanau, which some researchers consider the "northern Hessen people," versus the southern group led by Hessen-Darmstadt. Those "southerners" stayed away from the British cause in that war. Surprisingly, some troops from Hessen-Darmstadt were signed on to fight for the French on the side of the Americans! Antagonism between Hessen folk? Yes.

Nancy submitted her pathway of discovery to this *Forum* so that you could also benefit from her experiences. She calls her search "Revolutionary War German Jakob Schaumburg vs. American Gideon Terry."

When Nancy triggered into the website, she realized it was the official Marburg Archive site for Hessen soldiers who came to America. Marburg is the northernmost point of major Hessen archives. Other archives of particular note beyond the Revolutionary War are housed in Giessen and in Darmstadt.

"My husband Larry's third great-grandfather Jakob Schaumburg came up as I searched. Jakob was born about 1743-1744, was a private from the town of Vollmarschausen (right outside of Kassel in Hesse)," says Nancy. The site spoke the facts, all true. "Jakob died in 1795 in the same village" and he was in the Rall Regiment. "His commanding officer was...Johann Rall who died in the Battle of Trenton, when George Washington defeated him the day after Christmas, Dec. 26, 1776. Washington had crossed the Delaware River to do this...."

The next commander was von Woellwarth. "In the book *The Hessians*, by Edward J. Lowell (written in 1844), it states that von Woellwarth was in the Battle of Brandywine (Sept. 11, 1777), in Pennsylvania near Delaware." But was Jakob Schaumburg ACTUALLY at Brandywine with this commander? "If he was in that battle, then Jakob fought my great-grandfather, Gideon Terry, of the 7th Virginia." That's right! Gideon fought at Brandywine, according to his Federal pension papers which Nancy obtained. (This allowed Nancy to gain the privilege of being in the Daughters of the American Revolution Society -- <http://www.dar.org/>.)

"Gideon went to the Battle of Germantown and spent some of the winter in Valley Forge," Nancy explained. "We may never prove where Jakob walked in America, only that an archive record brings him to America and his commanding officer was there in the Brandywine battle."

When I see that as a diehard researcher, it's pretty compelling evidence.

Nancy vows to continue her search to squeeze out as many facts as possible to verify whatever she can. That's what adds an intriguing aspect to uncovering the ancestral past.

Husband Larry joins Nancy in this exciting series of discoveries -- and the two of them offer heartfelt thanks to Kathy, Matthias, and the helpful site! GP

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Hitting Marburg Head-On by Gerald Perschbacher

I always wanted to see Marburg. So preliminary to my fourth research trip to Germany, I made contact with the state archives located there. Dr. Carsten Lind was my connection. He welcomed my visit.

The appointed day was one of travel. Catching a bus around 7 a.m. and then connecting with a train, my German friend Eicke and my son Philip joined me in the trek. First stop was at Giessen to visit two archives and uncover documents relating to an ancestor who attended the university in the 1840s to become a pastor. Once the whirlwind discoveries were copied and experts were interviewed, we hit the rails northward to Marburg.

"Impressive!" That was the first thought that hit my mind as the towering castle loomed high above the stately, somewhat hilly city. This had been Philipp's castle. Philipp the Landgrave of Hesse was the dominant near-father figure among the Hessen people. He lived in the 1500s and was a staunch supporter of Dr. Martin Luther and the Reformation. I recall reading a reliable source that said Philipp's army was perhaps the most powerful among the German states in the early 1500s. When Philipp sneezed, neighboring states reeled in that breeze. (See: <http://encyclopedia2.thefreedictionary.com/Philip+I,+Landgrave+of+Hesse>)

In his waning years, battles along with the cost for war and political pressures caught up with him. He ended up a broken man with a land that was edging toward pauperism in many communities. Upon his passing, the land was divided among his sons in the usual German tradition of inheritance. Each segment struggled on its own and (at times) against its former citizens in adjoining Hessen segments. The 1600s brought another plight of war, with recurring plagues sweeping the countryside and nearly wiping out entire communities. It was not unusual for complete families to succumb.

During the meeting with Dr. Lind, we discussed university enrollment, specific family names common to my ancestral village, and the use of Hessen troops in the Revolutionary War in America. Dr. Lind bowed to the expertise of a colleague who was at another site in Marburg. His name is Dr. Holger Gräf (who appeared in the television genealogical series *Who Do You Think You Are?* on NBC (<http://www.nbc.com/who-do-you-think-you-are/video/rob-lowe/1398785/>)).

Having more than one location for an archive allows researchers to have more conducive access to documents rather than having to wait for an overly busy staff at one location to assist with needs. Personally, I think it is wise since storm or man-made destruction may affect one collection but not the other since they are housed separately.

German printing presses turned out a series of monographs and listings of soldiers, by name, rank, unit, place or origin, and more. It is a fantastic listing which can be helpful to anyone interested in searching the Revolutionary War.

Later, I made contact with Dr. Gräf and we communicated on the subject. He is a very knowledgeable man.

The point of all this is to encourage you. That's right. It doesn't matter what part of Germany holds your ancestral roots. It seems each territory (and

sometimes, certain clusters of communities) maintains a records center. Often it includes an archive. Track down the archives you think might relate to your lineage. In fact, track down TWO archives -- one containing civil records, land transactions, taxation, positions in the community, and protocol minutes of meetings and events) -- the other containing church files (*Kirchenbuch*) including dates and names relating to births, marriages, deaths, and "*nach Amerika*" (emigration to the New World).

Also, investigate the possibility that some genealogical lists were put into print in recent years, thus allowing researchers to obtain their own copy for ongoing benefits. Usually such books cost 10-20 Euros, which isn't very expensive. Some of the fancier books may range to 70 Euros. Still, the information they contain is highly valuable for such as us!

No researcher can expect facts to wiggle out of the ground and flip into their hands. Finding nuggets of information about our lineage is much like an old prospector in the California Gold Rush of 1848-1850. It takes a lot of panning through a stream of potentially relevant information to find enough sparkling nuggets to claim a rich find. But it can be done in many cases!

This takes perseverance, creativity, and making the proper connections to help in the process.

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Defining Your Ancestral Location

Several people with a similar (or identical) surname to the one you are searching may tell you diverse information. Use Saxony, for example. Person #1 tells you their family is Saxon in origin and came from Lower Saxony (Niedersachsen). Person #2 has the same surname but says the family came from Westphalia. Person #3 makes similar claims but says the family was derived from Anhalt.

Which do you believe? Truth be known, you can believe them all. This is because German territories shifted over the years and the area of old Saxony now covers the three areas mentioned--Niedersachsen, Westphalia, and Anhalt.

When you approach German history, do not think of territories as being solidly fixed as are the borders of states in America. Indeed, there were major shifts in borders as wars, land inheritance, and plagues made an impact and as shifting populations ebbed and flowed as a result. Being in central Europe, Germany had more than its share of historical shifts in populations. This may be why Germans tried to become self sufficient in olden days. That trait would allow

for major borders to be shut to trade while small territories could flourish as self-reliant units.

Initially Saxon people were little more than blood-related clans and tribes. They caused severe difficulties for Holy Roman Emperor Karl der Grosse (Charles the Great, known in France as Charlemagne). For nearly 30 consecutive years he went to war in the springtime, often against Saxons. He gained control of "marches" (frontier lands) and set up his officials to manage the Saxon tribes. Then, over the winter, the Saxons usually reversed his actions and killed the officials. The Emperor and his army returned the next year to reclaim the land.

The Saxons had a rough and tumble history in those ancient days around the year 800 A.D. But generations later they were an integral part of the Empire. They eventually rose to top leadership roles and even claimed the title of Emperor for their own!

Let's step sideways and look at the word PRUSSIA. It's an interesting word, and I cannot recall the number of times I have explained this in conversations. Simply put, some historians say that Prussia was an army in search of a nation. That may smack of some truth in the military years of the late 1800s and early 1900s, but I see it a bit differently.

The Prussians were a group of people in the area we now call Poland. Bound by common blood and heritage, they were squeezed by German expansion from the west and Slavic pressures from the east. Prussians, as a people group, vanished through sporadic integration, assimilation, and annihilation. What remained were tales of war with Germans and an ideal of militarism fixed into the minds of conquerors. The word Prussia was connected to the land more than the people. As Germans lived on that land, they became "Prussian," much like a person moving from St. Louis to New York City would be known as a New Yorker. It had nothing to do with blood connections and genetics. Hence, no German is truly a "Prussian" according to those standards.

Then the Germanized Prussia expanded westward through trade union agreements and commercialization. The unification of rail lines also assisted in this progress. Resisting until the unification movement and war with France in 1870-1871 were Bavarians, Hessen-Darmstadt, the Kingdom of Württemberg, and areas nearby. However, the term Prussia was used in many immigration records to simplify the country of origin. Eventually the word Germany supplanted it.

So be wary of the term Prussia. It may mean your ancestors came from the Rhineland, from Anhalt, even Niedersachsen, Bavaria, and other provinces. It is very important that you find the TOWN or VILLAGE of origin (or even point of departure) to narrow down the area from which your family came. It's much like saying you they came from the U.S.A. when it is better to narrow it to central

Illinois and the town of Altamont to open avenues of concentrated investigation of ancestral records in towns and churches.

Let's center on one more term I used: point of departure. This may be taken several ways. (1) It could be the literal village or city in which your family lived for countless generations and from which your ancestor left Germany. (2) It might be the port or main city through which departing emigrants were funneled. (3) It possibly is the administrative town that granted travel permission for emigrants who had resided in a select region. So perhaps your family came from Hanover, and perhaps they merely passed through it for legal permission or logistically for their departure. Don't take it at face value. Dig a bit and discover the significance of that point of origin that may appear in old travel documents.

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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.

HAVE FUN ONLINE by playing around with the names of regions that connect with your family: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saxony_\(disambiguation\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saxony_(disambiguation)) is one place to review if you like to track the history of Saxony and how it changed in direction. Discover Saxony in its modern form by looking at <http://www.sachsen.de/en/index.html>. You can also visit the informative site at <http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/world/A0860948.html>.

AS FOR PRUSSIA, you might choose to explore <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prussia>. The Franco-Prussian War is treated at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franco-Prussian_War.

For a nice series of visuals showing Prussia over the years, go to: <http://www.google.com/search?q=prussia&hl=en&prmd=imvns&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ei=nrkFUIyUC5Ki8QT-7NiKCA&sqi=2&ved=0CH4QsAQ&biw=935&bih=492>.

There are outstanding maps of Prussia at <http://www.rollintl.com/roll/prussia.htm> which are highly recommended.

If you don't have good internet capabilities, visit a major library and request to see old atlas books and maps of Prussia or any other territory of interest.

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