

G-SIG FORUM #81

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. ++++++

Germans Want to Know, Too!

Americans with German ancestry aren't the only ones trying to uncover their past. Many present-day Germans have similar questions. They wonder what happened to long-past relatives once they came to our shores.

Stephen Mayfield (mayfish@bellsouth.net) found out about this firsthand. He lives in Mandeville, Louisiana, and is a long-distance participant in G-SIG. Naturally, he cannot attend our gatherings, but he keeps in touch by e-mail. That's also how he became acquainted with the "German connection."

"I am descended from ancestors that emigrated from the Bergkirchen, Westfalen, area, near Minden," he said. "I have found a website on the immigrants from Westfalen to America. They are trying to find what happened to their relatives... when they went to America and elsewhere."

The connection was made when Stephen met Manfred Brune (living in Germany) whose past relative had belonged to the same church in Bergkirchen where Stephen's ancestor had belonged. "I found his family here in America and he has made a trip to see his American relatives."

To show his interest in the subject, Herr Brune traced his past relative's travel to America, practically walking in his steps as he "came to Evansville, Indiana, then went to Chicago, and then to the Perry Co., Illinois, area." Many of the descendants of that relative still live in that county.

Herr Brune made other trips, and sometimes he was able to find information for Stephen. How could that be? Truth be told, German immigrants often traveled in groups (sometimes only a few families) since there was safety in numbers. They pooled their resources to make the travel less expensive. In the

case of young families, it made the trip more tolerable. Mothers could take turns watching children or banding together to overcome obstacles along the way.

"I have a book on the Bergkirchen Evangelical Church Records, 1670-1770, and I can look up information for anyone," he noted.

Now, a word of caution. Seldom are books the same. One village may have done an outstandingly professional job on compiling its church or civic files into a book, while the village only two kilometers away prepared a far less admirable book from their records. Sometimes a village had one researcher cover the material for a book on one century, then another person for the succeeding century. Unless the process of compilation was coordinated, the results were poorly done or, at best, amateurish in compilation.

Then there was the challenge of the original writers who made the entries. Their information was not always consistent. Handwriting was not always clear.

As for Stephen's book, "It is very informative but sometimes hard to understand the order of the record. Too many times the family took the wife's surname or the surname of the farm and it is hard to know what the next generation surname was used. Many families from this church went to...St. Louis and Illinois areas."

Some final thoughts. If you are fortunate enough to obtain a copy of the "family book" from your ancestral village, you are a step ahead of a good number of researchers. But don't set your ideals too high. Since "to err is human," you can expect errors to be in the original entries, perpetuated when published or translated.

Setting the bar higher, I encourage you to obtain the published "family books" of neighboring villages. It should not be too surprising for you to find ancestors among present owners. After all, if villagers didn't marry into a family inside their village, they commonly went outside to villages nearby.

You may have some present-day cousins you never knew!

To help in that search, you Stephen's advice and look at the options at www.amerikanetz.de.

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Right on, Rodney!

"Please find attached the information regarding the marriage and baptism records I am looking for." That's how the e-mail began. It came from a true friend

who was beginning to get into genealogical research for his wife. "Sometime between the birth of John on December 31, 1849, and the recording of the 1850 census, the family moved from St. Louis (or St. Louis County) to St. Donatus, Iowa."

The name in question was Dietrich Heinrich Schumacher, born in October of 1810 "in Brunswieg, Germany." A quick and easy "copy and paste" for a web search, and -- lo and behold! -- the name BRAUNSCHWEIG popped plentifully on the screen. That was the good news. Then came the challenge. The city had a population of more than 250,000 which made it a considerably large city by German standards, even today.

That raised a caution in my mind. "Schumacher" is not an unusual or uncommon surname. In a large city over the years at any given time, there were probably a good handful of people with the name since it related to shoemaking, the common task of a cobbler. What also came to mind was that large cities over the centuries were the target of attacks and bombardments. With each one, church and civic files could have been destroyed or damaged.

Braunschweig is in lower Saxony, north of the Harz Mountains. In the 13th-17th centuries it was part of the powerful Hanseatic League. In other words, the city was prominent in trade. Then another thought struck. Could it be that Herr Schumacher did not ORIGINATE in "Brunswieg" but went there to secure his papers (and permission) for emigration to America?

Perhaps. But it was too early to tell. Still, obtaining permission for passage usually was granted from an official source delegated by the ruling family. The city had been a garrison town and an important site from which such permission may have been granted.

Back to the name Schumacher. The person under consideration died on the 19th of September in 1882 in St. Donatus, Jackson County, Iowa, with burial in the Lutheran Cemetery in St. Donatus.

He married Louisa Ronge in 1846 in Missouri; she was born in April of 1827. Death came on the 29th of December in 1895 with burial on the first day of the new year, 1896, in Zion English Cemetery, Acton Township, Walsh County, North Dakota. Daughter Rebecca Maria was born in St. Louis County on the 14th of January, 1847.

Rodney was gathering as much information as possible to forward to a relative who was doing the main research. With each step of discover, Rodney was gaining increased degrees of satisfaction.

To augment the progress, I told him the following. (NOTE: If you change a few main variables, you might use the ideas as a template for making your own contacts in Germany.)

I suggest you (or your wife's family) investigate this web site (it is the likely ancestral town): <http://www.braunschweig.de/english/>. Under the contact area, select a destination and write a short note that says something like this: "Hello. I am writing from America. I am looking for information about my ancestor, Dietrich Heinrich Schumacher. We believe he was born in your town in October 1810. If someone from your town can contact us, we can provide information on Herr Schumacher's family that lived in America."

Then use Google Translate to come up with this:

"Hallo. Ich bin aus Amerika schreiben. Ich suche Informationen über meine Vorfahren, Dietrich Heinrich Schumacher suchen. Wir glauben, dass er in Ihrer Stadt im Oktober 1810 geboren wurde. Wenn jemand aus Ihrer Stadt uns kontaktieren können, können wir Informationen über Herr Schumacher Familie, die in Amerika gelebt. "

Copy and paste the English and the German messages into a single e-mail and send that to the contact.

Then wait a week or so. If there is no response, do it again to another contact. German historians like to help if they can receive some information about their families that settled in America.

PS—If this is not the correct ancestral town, then do some web searching and send the message to other contacts at those sites.

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G-SIG's Karen Ridgeway loves German maps. She's found a marvelous site at: <http://www.pinebrookmaps.com/servlet/the-Europe-Antique-Maps-cln-Germany/Categories>. Play around with the maps by clicking on an image. You should be able to enlarge and move from left to right, top to bottom. Try it for fun!

The Significant Impact of Germans

If you don't know the name Kurt F. Reinhardt, you should become familiar with it. In 1896 he was born in Munich. While in Germany, he obtained a doctorate in comparative literature, philosophy, and history in 1922. He came to America in 1928. From 1930 until 1962, he taught at Stanford University. At the time of his death in 1983, he had gained an international reputation on the subject of Germany. You can read details about his life and accomplishments at:

<http://histsoc.stanford.edu/pdfmem/ReinhardtK.pdf>

His two-volume work, *Germany: 2000 Years, The Rise and Fall of the Holy Empire* is regarded as the "standard work" on the subject, in English. I agree. It is the compilation of a wide range of sources. If there were any two books you might want to read on the subject, these would be the best choice. Yes, the volumes are still available. You can obtain a limited preview at:

http://books.google.com/books?id=wX_-lWHTq78C&pg=PA429&source=gbs_toc_r&cad=4#v=onepage&q&f=false

In review, I'll reference some gems for thought. The author noted in his opening statement of the *Introduction*: "**The Heirs of Rome.** Germany, placed by nature and historic fate in the center of Europe, is intrinsically linked up and interwoven with what is generally known as the European Tradition." He went on to say that Germany "not only constituted a factor but represented a major exponent of that tradition. Europe, in turn, taken as a cultural, social, and intellectual whole, has been determined in its physiognomy to a large extent by the destinies, the character, the creative efforts, and the cultural achievements of those Germanic tribes which were the heirs of the civilization of the ancient world."

Words like that will make a German American sit up proudly! Sad thing is, many Americans don't realize they have German genes and ancestry. They may not even know that their name was altered in some dim month of a 20th century war they were not around to see. Some who are named Smith may originally have had the name Schmidt but its spelling took an altered course to avoid anti-German sentiment. All that is passed now. Germany is a friend of America, an ally in the fight against economic woes. What remains to be discovered are those strands of German heritage that, unknowingly to many, still remain strong.

The author elaborated in *Volume One*: "Perhaps more than in any other European nation the course of cultural movements and political events in Germany is inspired and directed by ideas and ideologies" (*Introduction, page xxvi*)

Here is a quote to cherish: "...Mystical idealism permeates German thought and German life, and a profoundly personal interiority imparts to the German language and diction its heavily laden and richly ornamented texture" (*xxvi-xxvii*).

As for Germany, "even the Celts were not the original inhabitants of this region. They were preceded by three much more primitive types of Illyrian, Celtic, and Germanic culture. Ancient Thuringia, occupying a central position, must have acted as a unifying and coordinating focus, the result being the creation of a Celtic cultural center in the southwestern part of what is today the territory of Germany."

He added, "In the second millennium B.C. these aboriginal populations were seized by a typically Indo-Germanic *wanderlust* which carried them into Russia and Greece. Bastarnians and Cimbers began to grow restless and started upon their migrations, sometime during the first millennium B.C. ...The Thuringians were the main carriers of a steadily gaining Germanization in the North....At the same time, they were an important factor in the creation of the highly developed 'Lusatian Culture' of the middle Bronze Age (c. 1200 B.C.)....By 500 B.C. the greater part of northern Europe was inhabited by Germanic tribes...."

Want to know your earliest Germanic roots? There they are! By genetic inheritance, they likely trace to YOU!

"The Germanic tribes had ceased to be full-fledged barbarians when they finally made their appearance in the history of Europe. They represented a peasant culture of at least a thousand years' duration and of a definite physiognomy in its agriculture, its craftsmanship, and its standard of living." The author added that first reference to Germanic peoples in historic times was given by Pytheas of Massilia, a contemporary of Alexander the Great (356-323 B.C.). Julius Caesar knew them firsthand due to military contact (100-44 B.C.). (*More to come!*)

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