

G-SIG FORUM #87

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. (check the site at www.gahs-stlouis.org). This forum is for genealogical, educational, and historical information with fresh insights plus ideas on German traditions and ancestry. Dr. Gerald Perschbacher (LL.D.) is *FORUM* compiler and coordinator.

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Hitting the Books Online

G-SIG's Karl Daubel struck on what could amount to a literary goldmine of resources online. Here is his explanation:

This is something different. I have been doing some research on OLD books, 19th Century, hoping to find more things to help our genealogy and heritage efforts. I am looking for FREE downloads for our G-SIG participants.

I have been looking at city directories, business directories, items on the history of St. Louis and Missouri counties, immigration stories etc. Did you know that these can be downloaded in PDF format?

It's true! These are available on Google Books. Just open up **Google** and click on "**More**" then "**Books.**" When that opens, enter a subject or title of interest. Look for the "**Search Tools**" button, since this will bring up additional choices or search parameters. Under "**Any Books**" choose "**free Google ebooks.**" Under "**Any Documents**" choose Books. Under "**Any Time**" choose a time period or enter a custom time. Under "**Sorted by Relevance**" there is no need for a choice. If you choose "**Sorted by Date**" recent dates are listed first.

Watch for more details from G-SIG!

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Playing with German Maps

by Gerald Perschbacher LL.D.)

An outstanding collection of German maps may be explored at this site:

<http://www.library.wisc.edu/etext/ravenstein/mapdl.html>

So what?

If that is your response, then maybe you should cut off a hand and see how well you do. I'm speaking figuratively, of course, because it's good to press the

simple point that maps are a high priority for many researchers -- as good as your favorite hand! NOT using maps from bygone years may place you at risk in your research and understanding of genealogical/historical findings.

Here are the benefits of using old German maps:

1) German territories had changeable borders; maps from a given era show us those borders;

2) Maps provide spatial relationships between towns (if you wonder why your great-great-grandparents came from two towns, maybe it is because those towns were linked by noble ownership, by roads, or by close proximity);

3) Some maps show terrain (some even indicate the types of trees that grew in given areas -- this is true of modern German hiking maps that are extreme detailed with elevation lines and the like);

4) Maps provide a glimpse into past ideas held by our ancestors (this is true for coastlines, river routes, and defensive sites); by gleaning these intricacies from maps we gain a closer understanding of societal life in a prior era;

5) Maps are fun! Some are downright artistic, well worth framing, and a joy to study.

But, to be honest, there are drawbacks, too:

a) Some maps are difficult to read due to type styles and use of old German words;

b) Maps can seem confusing since town names may have changed over the centuries (take Alsace, for instance, which went from German site names to French, altering some names almost beyond recognition while others are very close to older usage; example -- the town of Bouxwiller had been named Buchsweiler -- which you may be able to recognize if you think about French/German phonetics);

c) Maps may be brittle or be ready to tear at folds (especially the old ones, but that could be remedied by taking pictures with a good digital camera or otherwise photocopying the original in order to make a working copy);

d) Old maps aren't easy to find; and when you find a good original it may be costly (so borrow it if you can or use your camera -- with permission, of course).

If you are studying your ancestor from the time of Napoleon, then a map of Germany could be very revealing. Napoleon divided the Rheinland into territories at the whim of his advisors. He appointed relatives or other confidants as leaders. With Napoleon's permission, sections were transferred or bartered between territories. Now, I've got to be honest and say that this took place as a normal

process throughout much of Germany history up to the time of Napoleon (circa 1800) but it was radically advanced during his rulership.

If your ancestor lived in one of those territories, you may be able to tell exactly which one it was by studying a map.

Maps are wonderful for exhibits and for trading. Even sharp photocopies can be in demand. Individuals attending genealogical or historical presentations may enhance their understanding by examining a close-up of a map. As for trading...here is a tale.

On one of my oversea trips I took about 20 sharp, photocopied maps (11 by 17 inches) of Germany. I had intended to use the maps in some manner, but was not sure how. Then I met the collector of rare books. He had a reference work that was from the 1990s but contained information back to the 1300s. The original source material for that book had been destroyed during the Second World War. In effect, that limited-edition book is the only known source for that information.

My new acquaintance had a copy. I asked if it could be duplicated. He said yes. I did not think to ask the price and wondered about the expense for several days before he called to tell me the book was ready to be picked up at his home.

I shuddered to think of its price. When I arrived, there it was, nicely bound and an exact, high-quality reprint. I thanked him profusely then took out the maps and showed them to him. He liked them! I told him they were a gift. He then reciprocated. He was going to ask me to pay 20 Euros, but since I gave the maps he dropped it to 10 Euros! I discovered that only three copies of that book were listed among all public libraries in America. In effect, I returned with the fourth copy, and a man in Germany was happy with a set of very nice maps sheets!

So, where can YOU find nice maps of Germany? Check estate sales and book fairs. People who visited Germany may have returned with some excellent maps. If you are at the right place at the right time, those maps may become yours.

If you go to Germany, look for maps in stores. Generally, the prices of current maps are fixed by government edict so you will probably do as well to check with a small mom-and-pop store as you will a large facility. Regional maps and hiking maps are available. I like the hiking maps since they provide the greatest intricate details which can be applied to the terrain of the past -- thus assisting your study!

Check used book stores (antiquarian shops) for old school atlases, too.

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Germans in Eastern Europe

Got a problem trying to track your ancestry in Eastern Europe? Indeed, it can be challenging. But there are bright lights, too.

Germans have done a lot of moving around due to war, famine, politics, and changing borders. In the 1700s Frederick the Great of Prussia encouraged Germans to settle in West Prussia. These Germans came from Wuerttemberg and Baden-Durlach. The king wanted farmers to work the land. Catherine the Great of Russia (a German by heritage) was a contemporary of that Prussian king and enticed many Germans to do likewise in the western portions of her kingdom. At times she paid for their transportation, loaned money for them to build houses, and provided the means for them to obtain farming equipment and livestock on a 10-year loan. Some estimates claim as many as 150,000 Germans took her invitation. Many settled in the Volga region, around the Black Sea, and in the Caucasus area.

When war with German blackened Russian skies in the Second World War, those German descendants were still very conservative in their manners. A century of Russian influence did not sway them from their historical and cultural leanings. So Stalin and his crew discouraged those Germans in Russia. You can call it outright persecution and retribution. When the German military line collapsed on the Eastern Front, the German settlers in Russia knew they were about to face severe tactics at the hands of Russians. Population shifts occurred. After the war, those Germans left if they could -- the lucky ones, that is.

Trying to locate ancestral files lands formerly populated by German settlers can be tricky. The book *In Search of Your German Roots* by Angus Baxter may help. Printed by Genealogical Publishing Co., Inc., it was widely popular even in the 1990s and early 2000s. The St. Louis Genealogical Society has offered it (see http://www.stlgs.org/index.php?page=shop.product_details&flypage=flypage.tpl&product_id=152&category_id=1&option=com_virtuemart&Itemid=564&vmcchk=1&Itemid=564). The book contains tips which archival centers may retain files on your German ancestors who once lived outside of German borders in other parts of Europe. There are sections on Jewish listings, too. It is estimated in the book that 750,000 Germans still live in Poland! You will find tips on how to view files preserved on microfilm from Baltic states and eastern territories. Ideas are plentiful on how to trace Germans who were in Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia,

Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Russia and the former USSR, plus Poland. It's a book that should have a place on your shelf!

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Tools for German Research: LDS FamilySearch

By Fred Held, Librarian, St. Louis North Family History Center (Hazelwood)

The Church of Latter Day Saints (the Mormons) has been a great source of genealogical data for many years. The LDS Family History Library in Salt Lake City is by far the largest genealogy library in the world and for years was the destination for anybody serious in doing extended family research. The LDS Family History Centers are branch libraries where some of the FHL microfilmed documents may be viewed.

A few years ago the FHL supported an internet webpage called **FamilySearch**, where they posted several electronic databases containing indices to information. Some of this information was based on solid documentation but some was patron-submitted and of questionable accuracy. This included Ancestral Files and Pedigree Resource Files that contained patron-submitted family trees. Another database was the IGI (International Genealogical Index) that contained both extracted and patron-submitted BMD data. There were also indices of several 1880 era censuses, the Social Security Death Index, and other vital record indices.

Because of inaccuracies in the patron-submitted data, many people felt all the information was unreliable. Actually, much of the data were indices based on documentable data: the censuses, the SSDI, the vital record indices, and part of the IGI (clearly identifiable).

Recently the FamilySearch group started a concerted effort to digitize all the microfilms in the FHL files. They also called for volunteers to help index. At about the same time they started revamping the FamilySearch website and separated all documentable information from the patron-submitted data. In addition, they added many videos and other aids to doing research. The current website (www.FamilySearch.org) contains a great number of documentable databases and images, family trees, the FHL catalog, and access to many digitized books.

A list of the documentable databases can be seen by scrolling down to the bottom of the front page where you will be given the opportunity to "Browse by Location." You may select a region of the world or look at all the databases (over 1,300). If you select "Continental Europe" you will find 275 databases. You may further select "Germany" where you will be shown 33 databases. Many of the

databases have not yet been indexed, but you are given the opportunity to browse the digitized images of those databases.

The "Germany, Births and Baptisms, 1558-1898" database is constantly being updated and currently contained 37,703,414 records by March 26 of 2012. The "Germany, Marriages, 1558-1929" contained 8,521,370. This information was reliably extracted from German church and civil records. Note that strict Germany secrecy laws are applied to the modern end of the data, because many of the actual microfilmed church books contain much later information (sometimes into the 1950s).

When you find one of your ancestors in these databases, there are two additional important pieces of information: the microfilm number where the information was found and a Batch Number. The microfilm number can be used to rent that microfilm (where the index came from) at your local FHC or participating library. The Batch Number can be a powerful tool for further research (the subject of a future "Tools for German Research").

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You Never know what's coming...!

TOM SCHWARZTRAUBER (itshockey@gmail.com) surprised your **FORUM** compiler recently. He paid a visit to Scott Air Force Base to see the renovated "Perschbacher Cemetery." I knew about the location and visited it more than a decade ago. Now it has been spruced up. I consider it my "ancestral burial grounds" since it holds eight Perschbachers (one of my branches that came to America in 1833). There is a flier on the location, too, since it is one of two "pioneer cemeteries" on the base. Nice to know the sites are appreciated. **GP**

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Not yet on the e-mail list for the G-SIG FORUM? Write to germansig@stlgs.org. (All copyright privileges for this FORUM are reserved by the compiler; no item is to be duplicated or distributed without permission.) Do you have great ideas for the G-SIG FORUM? Submit your material to: persch3@hotmail.com. Need a printed copy of FORUM? Send your stamps & request to: Attn: G-SIG, #4 Sunnen Drive, Suite 140, St. Louis, MO 63143.