

# G-SIG FORUM #90

From the German Special Interest Group: G-SIG is an effort of the St. Louis Genealogical Society ([www.stlgs.org](http://www.stlgs.org)) and the German American Heritage Society, St. Louis, Mo. (check the site at [www.gahs-stlouis.org](http://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.

+++++

## German-Americans Take Pride

Dr. Uwe Siemon-Netto has researched the impact of German settlers in North America. In 2008 he produced a document that offered fresh insights on the earliest well-educated German to come to our shores.

Siemon-Netto is convinced that Dr. Johannes Fleischer, Jr., became the first German to arrive in North America. At age 26, Fleischer held two advanced degrees in medicine and philosophy. "His late father had been 'superintendent' or regional (Lutheran) bishop of Breslau, which is now part of Poland. Moreover, Fleischer was English-speaking and America's first immigrant with a university education."

Fleischer was unlike other colonists at Jamestown, Va. How? Fleischer had not come to seek a fortune but "to study the healing potential of 'exotic' American plants, a goal he never accomplished." Fleischer arrived on our shores on April 20, 1608, via the tiny vessel *Phoenix*. Adverse health matters brought death soon after.

A National Park Service marker now is in place at the Jamestown site, honoring "Herr Doktor."

Siemon-Netto notes the conclusion of historian Joachim "Yogi" Reppmann that "all over the country, a new German-American pride is resurfacing after it had vanished for three generations since the end of World War I. Memorials celebrating German contributions to German history are springing up around the country."

As Reppmann hitchhiked across America, he learned the sentiment of the people relating to Germans. He explained that "folks are scrambling to find German roots almost as a kind of apotheosis of German virtues. Genealogical research is *en vogue* among Americans with German family background; everybody seems to want to trace his family history...."

One of the ways this has been manifested in the Midwest is the establishment of the German Special Interest Group in St. Louis where serious

lineage research jumped from three individuals to a 500 families in less than three years, noted Siemon-Netto.

+++++

## Those Elusive Surnames

G-SIG's Karl Daubel was sidetracked with a purpose when he firmed up his main points in a communication to G-SIG Clusters. While concentrating on a G-SIG project, he "got distracted. I went looking for West Prussia events in the 1700 - 1770. There is an isolated family surname near what is known today as Sulechów, Poland. My quest is to understand out how a surname from Westphalia turns up there.

"Then I found this site about Emigration. Here is the link.

German Genealogy - German Emigration Records

[http://www.genealoger.com/german/ger\\_emigration\\_records.htm](http://www.genealoger.com/german/ger_emigration_records.htm)

"Warning: it is a LONG page. Many reasons for emigration are listed. Life was a difficult struggle. It has many links. Hope they are not broken ones." As G-SIG FORUM compiler, I checked the site. Here is a summary of the main reasons for departing Germany for America: escaping compulsory military conscription (more than half of young German men of military age emigrated illegally)...economic depression and over-population...only three religions were allowed in German lands: Catholic, Lutheran and Reformed..."industrialization in the mid 1800s created many new jobs, but also caused the decline of the cottage industries which had kept many families from starving"...rising grain prices created financial hardship...communities got rid of the chronically underprivileged people ...improved transportation with the removal of tolls on the Rhine, Main and Neckar rivers...industrialization wiped out home industries...land prices were increasing...some farms became too small to support a family...bad crops and instability from 1830-1845 affected the wine business...heavy taxes...re-settled family or friends wrote encouragingly about life in America...political refugees...reports of cheap land.

GP

+++++

## Did YOUR Ancestor See St. Louis this Way?

By Dr. Gerald Perschbacher (LL.D.)

German Hermann Steines was an early immigrant in St. Louis and soon moved along the Missouri River west of town. His letter writing to Germany

began soon after he arrived in America in 1833. These capture the setting for society and provide interesting "verbal snapshots" of life in the Midwest. (Decades ago, researcher William G. Bek translated the letters with added observations and commentary for *Missouri Historical Review*).

**Here are some highlights that reveal life in those pioneering days.**

"In Germany many a wrong is committed under the cloak of science, but the protection which the German state gives to science and learning encourages the real genius and inspires him to pursue right paths. Here little or no protection is given the priests of learning."

This is not to say there was NO appreciation of science in ALL of America. But these words reflect the social situation in and around St. Louis. This impresses us with the frontier spirit that prevailed when Germans first came to St. Louis in good numbers in the 1830s.

Steines applauded America for laws that bestowed equal rights to all citizens. "They permit every advocate of the law, every divine, every scientist to make his own clothes and carry on trade, and in like manner they permit every shoemaker or merchant to preach the Gospel, practice medicine or law, to teach school, or do whatever his heart may desire."

In practice and theory, all people WERE equal in early America. "This new Republic permits no special privileges or prerogatives. Since the higher callings, here as in Germany, are more remunerative and more comfortable than many of the trades, a great number of quacks are found in all the higher professions in America."

**Yes, if your ancestor was in the Midwest** during the period from 1839 to 1860, "quackery" was a significant issue. Why? Many times those who purchased elixirs were degraded as simpletons. Usually those who sold elixirs were charlatans. They listened to doctors talk and adopted enough vocabulary to sound like medical experts themselves.

So here is an alert: Perhaps one of your friends had an ancestor who was in St. Louis in 1850. That descendant came across an advertisement that shows their ancestor selling "bottled health." So the descendant concludes the ancestor was a well-educated man, perhaps even a medical doctor. Upon request, you do a little searching and discover there was no documented evidence of that ancestor having earned a college education in Germany or America.

The belief of the person's status of doctor was sustained for years, and now you find the truth. Taking the words of Steines to heart, you realize that the person's ancestor was probably more of a charlatan than an educated doctor of medicine. This leads you to a dilemma. In a nice way, how can you debunk the

thinking of the person without bringing on an argument? Simply put, just let the Steines record speak on its own. The person will either accept or reject it.

Steines added: "In the medical profession conditions are...bad. The people do not question the preparation of a physician but only enquire as to his success as a practitioner. For this reason young men aspiring to be doctors of medicine do not feel it necessary to acquire thorough training at the medical schools."

**Steines turned his thoughts toward religion.** "In theology the situation is very bad. Pietism takes the place of reasonable Christianity. Except in the Presbyterian, the Episcopal, and the Unitarian churches, the clergy is self-taught. A countless number of sects is found, that do not believe in the confirmation of the children. Repentance, conversion and faith are the common themes of their sermons. Baptism is often postponed to a mature age, while in some churches it is entirely neglected. If a person is convinced that this or that church is the genuine and true one, he appears before the church council and expresses his conviction, hears the articles of faith read and if he affirms that he is willing to accept these teachings his name is inscribed in the church record and he is called a member of such and such a church."

**There are stories of pseudo** religious individuals who met other German immigrants aboard ships bound for America. I'll share one with you that began in 1833. Due to his bent toward religiosity, passengers on one ship elevated fellow passenger Christian Rudolph Korndoerfer to the roll of pastor. He preached and conducted worship plus other duties for the German settlers in St. Louis until 1835. Then, for whatever reasons, he bowed out of the job. The people discovered that Korndoerfer had no formal religious training out of the ordinary. Was he, too, a charlatan? Or was he a good-natured German who accepted the job thrust upon him because he wanted to help others?

Examining the records, I conclude that there may have been a little "charlatan" motive involved, but that the real reason he became a pastor was due to his need for a job he could do well and enjoy. And if he wanted to succeed financially as a pastor, he had to do all he could to help the church flourish.

Why? As Steines said, "Since the members must defray the expenses of the pastor and of the church, it behooves the pastor to convert as many as possible to his particular faith. Religious newspapers and tracts find their way to the remotest parts of the Union."

**Steines also tested the religious inclinations** of those early settlers. "The Unitarians, who look at Christianity from a rational standpoint, are by all the others condemned to eternal damnation. It is often very interesting to read their religious quarrels in the church papers. Even the atheists have their own paper. Thus you see that extremes face extremes here. Everything seems to be in a struggle. To me it all appears chaotic."

# RootsWeb Mail Lists

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

A part of the RootsWeb group of resources is its support of mailing lists and message boards, two different ways of posting queries and getting information about the families. These systems are not "German specific" but are useful for research anywhere in the world.

Mail lists are an email-centered system. The researcher joins the list group, then every email message sent to the list is echoed to all members on+- the list. The researcher has the option of selecting one of two ways messages may be received: **list** -- immediately echoed when sent and **digest** -- accumulated and sent once a day. All messages sent to the mail list are archived. The list members all have some interest in the mail list subject.

The RootsWeb Mailing Lists are divided into several groups, but the most important ones to researchers are surname-oriented and regional-oriented. The regional mail lists may be for a country or a specific city. By clicking on the "Mail Lists" tab on any RootsWeb webpage, the researcher can quickly find if the surname or region under study already has a mail list.

**<http://lists.rootsweb.ancestry.com/>**

If you find one doesn't exist for your subject, the researcher may apply for one to be created. The researcher requesting a new one will automatically be the list moderator.

If a list exists, the researcher has a couple things to do. First, search the message archive to see if the particular family or region is already discussed, regardless of when. If there is a message of interest, try sending a message directly to the original poster. If the message the researcher is replying to is several years old, the original poster may have a stale email address.

Finding no relative messages previously posted, the researcher can post a new query.

It is recommended that the subject line be a special format: **Given name SURNAME: Date: Place**. Messages with subjects like "Help" or "Family Genealogy" often are ignored by experienced researchers. Do not post queries like "looking for Muellers in Bavaria." The researcher's query should post sufficient information that the specific family might be found: full names, dates, places, religion, spouses, parents, and children. It is also recommended that the first time the surname is used it should be in ALL CAPS. Regional queries should be restricted to that region. If a response is made, it is probably from researchers who are willing to help.

The moderator of a mail list may choose to “gateway” messages from an associated message board. This gives message board posters two audiences. To respond to "gatewayed" messages you do not post to the list, but rather use the link that is supplied with the message and post a reply on the message board. Replying by posting to the mail list may never get to the original poster on the message board because they may not be members of the mail list.

+++++

## The Debate Over Years

Since the publication you are reading is a "forum" of ideas and suggestions, consider the debate that swirls and eddies around the subject of the year designations B.C. and A.D. versus B.C.E. and C. E.

If interested, here are websites you may wish to explore on the subject:

<http://www.digonsite.com/drDIG/general/53.html>

<http://www.studentsfriend.com/feed/topic11.html>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Common\\_Era](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Common_Era)

[http://www.grammar-monster.com/lessons/abbreviations AD BC BCE CE.htm](http://www.grammar-monster.com/lessons/abbreviations_AD_BC_BCE_CE.htm)

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/columnists/borisjohnson/8788464/BC-or-BCE-The-BBCs-edict-on-how-we-date-events-is-AD-absolute-drivel.html>

In an apparent age of Revisionism, history is being re-interpreted in many ways. Sometimes this is motivated for the sake of selling books, CDs, or DVDs. Other times it is simple and well intentioned as an appeal to logic. Occasionally it is fed by a cause or by personal determination.

Revising the year dating system of Western Civilization may be seen as discarding historical principles and practices that have led to our current time. Perhaps it would be worthwhile to consult a professional historian on the virtues of consistency in light of that.

Ultimately, in an open and free society, we can be grateful that this is not a matter for states or the Federal government to determine.

+++++

Not yet on the e-mail list for the G-SIG FORUM? Write to [germansig@stlgs.org](mailto: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](mailto: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.