

G-SIG FORUM #94

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.gaahs-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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Search Tools for German Research

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

Did you ever FamilySearch Family Tree?

In 2011 a private website called LDS New FamilySearch was up and running (not to be confused with the improved FamilySearch that was released in 2010 to the general public). New FamilySearch was an attempt to build one family tree that allows all family trees to be connected (a true one-world-tree). Access was restricted to LDS church members and a few guests. It was originally seeded with the LDS Ancestry Files and the LDS Pedigree Resource Files (patron submitted family trees). The LDS International Genealogical Data (IGI) file data was also added. The functions allowed anyone to merge any data in any family or to add data to any family. There was a rumor that New FamilySearch was going to be available to the general public.

The idea may sound good, but in truth New FamilySearch became a nightmare. One problem was that people were compressing several generations into one requiring days or weeks to untangle the mess by knowing family members. Then a couple days later the same generations were compressed again. A second problem was that people were merging families that resulted on one known case of one family consisting of 15 husbands and 15 wives with 150 children. I had an unknown family member added to my family that I had no way to remove.

The FamilySearch programming staff members started to get errors because of the massive records being created, so they set out to solve the record problem. The FamilySearch programming staff created a new record technique and decided then to add the new system to the improved FamilySearch (available to the general public) and call it Family Tree. Family Tree is only available if you are a registered member of the FamilySearch website (available to the general public at no cost). This is the same registration that gives access to renting microfilms and other general public features (some images).

Even with the major problems, Family Tree (and New FamilySearch) can be a useful tool by giving leads to help break down those "brick walls." Please be sure you document any leads that you get from LDS Family Tree.

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TIP: Keep your research notes at least three years. Once they are destroyed, you may need them! Hold onto them until you are certain!

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Incomplete Data By Fred Held

This tract is not really German specific, but is considered an important genealogical issue by the author.

Rhetorical question: Do you search the online family trees looking for family connections? If so, how do you think those data got there? Answer: they were published by someone, maybe a cousin. They may not be complete, nor may they be correct (in your opinion), but the data contains important leads, and maybe a newfound cousin.

Often I hear researchers make a comment like, "I'll publish when I get my family tree correct." I have news for you, you will never get it correct. On the 16th of April, 2003, in *RootsWeb Review*, Scott Troutman said it the way I feel, "*Information not shared is the same as information lost. And, the failure to share what you know is the same as perpetuating ignorance.*" In other words, if you don't publish your data in a public place you are reducing your ability to find your cousins and additional data.

There are a number of ways to publish your family data. The first thought is usually in a book. Or you can publish on a CD or DVD. However, when you do paper, CD, or DVD you lose the ability to update conveniently. You can publish a personal webpage, where you control what is displayed and how it is displayed, and can update when you want. Another is to use an internet facility, such as RootsWeb WorldConnect, where you maintain some control of your data. There are issues in publishing in any form, such as what can be copyrighted. There are additional issues about publishing on the web, such as how do I get my family tree into HTML, the code for web formatted pages. For a more in depth discussion on these issues and more view my video on this subject at tinyurl.com/69nwvb7.

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ShtetlSeeker By Fred Held

Many times the first clue of the home village of our German ancestors is a village given in an obituary or some other obscure source. Try as you might, there is no modern listing for a village spelled that way or any similar way anywhere in Germany today. Part of the problem is the family only knew the village name passed to them orally and wrote as they heard it. The problem may also be the result of modern practice of old smaller villages being absorbed into larger cities, or the village now being part of a consolidation village to reduce the administrative overhead. In either of these cases, they may no longer be shown on a modern map.

There is a powerful tool available on the Jewish Genealogy website called ShtetlSeeker ("Village finder" in Yiddish) that helps <http://www.jewishgen.org/Communities/LocTown.asp>

ShtetlSeeker's database includes all these old village names for almost all of **Western Europe** (Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, and Switzerland), **Eastern Europe** (Austria, Belarus, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Ukraine), **Southeast Europe** (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Greece, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia), **Scandinavia** (Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden), **North Africa** (Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia), **Middle East** (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, and Yemen), and **Central Asia** (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan).

It is an easy click to select only villages in Germany. The resulting hits will show the distance from the capital of the country where the village resides. The user may, optionally, select central point from a country and group of cities in that country that this distance is to be measured. There is another tool to aid the search, the selection method: *Phonetically Like* (Default), *Sounds Like* (D-M Soundex), *Is Exactly*, *Starts With*, and *Contains*.

The hits are a table of all the villages, farms, hills, lakes, etc., that fit the criteria. The items in the table are feature type, latitude/longitude location, 4 possible map sources for display (Expeditamaps, MapQuest, MULTimap, or Google Maps), country, and the distance from the reference point. One last item on each line is a small target that, when clicked, will present the same table items for all features within 10 miles (default, but changeable), in order of their distance from the selected feature.

Once you find possible hits, search the LDS Family History Library catalog for what records are available for your village. The German researcher needs to know that the FHL catalog index does not always contain all the villages recorded on the microfilm in the index. If your village of interest is not listed, the ShtetlSeeker results can help you search the nearby village catalog entries for the one that may contain the records for your village.

Another obvious use of this last feature is the possibility of finding all the nearby villages that your family may have links. Please note that when you use the small target to see the nearby villages within 10 miles, there will be 100 villages or more (identified as populated place or part of populated place) in that circle, as well as many other features: farms, shtetls, hills, valleys, ditches, ridges, streams, lakes, forests, castles, ruins, railroad stations, airfields, areas, and regions. This points out the problem that if your ancestor identified their home by the name of the nearest city, the administrative center (i.e., "county seat"), or the region, you may have a difficult time identifying the actual village. This was my experience when my family stories indicated we were from Stuttgart, when in fact they were from a small village about 15 miles west of Stuttgart.

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TIPS . . . go to <http://www.eogen.com/heritagequestonline> to find a wealth of information from the **U.S. Federal Census records** from 1790 through 1930. (No index for 1830, 1840, 1850, nor 1880 census; for the 1930 census, only five states are indexed: Connecticut, Delaware, Maryland, Texas, and Virginia.) The online collection includes indexes created by HeritageQuest. In addition to the ability to search by name, the census records can be searched by place of birth, age, ethnicity, and other variables.

More than **25,000 fully searchable family and local history books**. If anyone has ever published a book about your family name or a book about the history of your town or county, there is an excellent chance that you can search that book on HeritageQuest Online. There are numerous other "non-history" books available that also have genealogy value, such as town and city directories, government reports made years ago, biographies, lectures, and much more.

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One more TIP: Lost names? Lost children? Check it out at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Der_Rattenf%C3%A4nger_von_Hameln

Thinking about Those Lost Kids of Hamelien...

Remembers the fable about the Pied Piper and how he led children to a new land?

Pat von zur Muehlen (patvonzurm@msn.com) put on her thinking cap and wondered about the age-old story. "I read about all the theories about the missing children. What impressed me about the hypothesis that Professor Jurgen Udolph developed is that good old fashioned genealogical surname research was done to provide the evidence. And this relates to the G-SIG Prussia Cluster which sometimes deals with Poland because areas of Germany that were once Prussia are now in Poland. Professor Udolph's surname research leads him to believe that the children from Hamelien (or in German Hameln) ultimately settled in a town in Poland called Starogrod. The history of this town tells us that it was once part of West Prussia." What? The story wasn't a fable? Perhaps not, according to G-SIG's Pat.

"Since March 31, 1440 Starogord (sic) was a member of the Prussian Confederation. It took an active part in the 1454 uprising against the Teutonic that led to the Thirteen Years' War (1454-1466)." Pat goes on to say that the Peace of Thorn was signed in 1466 and that year the city became part of the province. It remained under Polish rule until the 1772, when it became part of the Kingdom of Prussia.

"Until 1920 Stargard (sic) belonged to the administrative district of Danzig in the Province of West Prussia ." Check this: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Starogard_Gda%C5%84ski

"Another interesting point is that a battle was involved. Battles are often the impetus for emigration. In this case the battle drew Germans toward the area, rather than impelled them to flee the area. Though, no doubt, some on the losing side fled the area. But the Battle of Bornhoeved broke the hold of the Danish on Eastern Europe and opened up the area for German colonization. Apparently, many youngsters from Hamelin were among those colonists -- and their descendants are still there. Their surnames are in the modern telephone books of the region -- the same as or very similar to names that were found in Hamelin centuries before!"

Sometimes history fashions legends.

Now a special note. "Herders" were people who received an income by gathering up domestic animals and leading them to the spent crop fields and forests to forage for food.

Animal owners paid the herder for the work. Be the animals geese, pigs, or any other favorite type of the locality, the herder got them there and back after they had eaten their fill. Seems like this fable combined a couple factors into an enjoyable tale that still has a pertinent message for children and parents of today.

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TIPS... Looking for an ancestral marriage entry registered by the City of St. Louis?

Then go to this site: <http://search.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=5413>

Browse here for more: <http://www.stlouiscityrecorder.org/archives/archivesmarriage.html>

Widen your research by checking the State of Missouri Death Certificates:

<http://www.sos.mo.gov/archives/resources/deathcertificates/#searchdeat>

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Get Youth Involved in Research

by Dr. Gerald Perschbacher (LL.D)

On one of my trips to Germany, I encouraged my daughter Debbie to come along. She was around 20 years old, as I recall. The timing was right and she has never forgotten the experience which, I hope, she will share with her three young daughters as they grow.

Unmarried and well along in her education at the time, she feared she would not feel welcome in Germany, that there would be huge gaps between her way of thinking and the people "over there," and she simply was uncertain about what to expect.

Our hosts were cordial Germans and one of them had a connection to Perschbachers. I discovered this at the conclusion of my first trip which they also hosted. "Gerry, I must tell you," host Eicke said. "The people here said we were not wise in allowing Americans to stay in our house. 'You do not know them,' they said." Then Eicke (pronounced EYE-ka, the word for oak tree) told me how he settled the matter. "My wife's family and yours had a marriage together in the 1700s, so I told them we were related! Then it was alright."

In a matter of a few days, Debbie was in full swing, enjoying Germany at every turn and being captivated by the pleasant welcome and friendship of our friends Eicke and Gertrud, plus the warmth of others in our ancient ancestral village of Schaafheim in Hessen-Darmstadt..

She met Herr Hans Dörr, a retired school teacher and local principal who spends several days a week in local archives, including one in Schaafheim. He remains one of the highly revered researchers in the territory, well known in Dieburg and Darmstadt archives. A man given to making young adults and children smile, he made Debbie comfortable from the start.

With the permission of governing authorities, we gained access to very old books and loose documents on the village. Some items dated to the 1500s. Eicke, Hans, Debbie, and I were granted use of a special meeting room in the Rathaus (City Hall) where we spread out the items and searched for the name PERSCHBACHER.

"Debbie, it looks like this," I coached her. Hit upon hit was made in that two-hour period, and I photographed each one with my trusty Nikon camera -- a couple hundred shots.

Then Debbie, feeling a little defeated since she was not finding much, opened a folded piece of old paper. "Dad...", she said in a tone that was "all business." She went on. "I think I found something."

Indeed, she did! The piece of paper was dated 1608. Hans Dörr came to her side and, with excitement, said, "Ach! I did not know this existed! This is an important piece of paper, written in the hand of your ancestor, Pfarrer Johannes Perschbacher! He was the only Lutheran pastor who survived the Thirty Years' War in this whole region!" Hans added that Johannes became the pastor to the Count of Hanau, an important person whose noble family ruled that area. Hans read the note very carefully. Then he translated.

"I Johann Perschbacher, Schulmeister at Schaafheim, declare with this manuscript that the honourable and well known Cunz Glock, this year's Baumeister (the parish's accountant), has totally paid my salary of 60 Gulden (fl = Florin is the abbreviation for Gulden) on four dates in this country's currency. Therefore I declare him herewith to be quit (of this amount), free and off this amount. Done on 14th March Anno 1608, (signed) Johannes Perschbacher."

Hans explained that pastors worked their way into parish leadership by being a school master/teacher for a few years. With practical experience under their belts, they were then assigned as the pastor of a village. Johannes ended up in Dudenhofen, north of Schaafheim.

Debbie held the paper in her hands as if it were a college diploma--it thrilled her to hold something so old and realize that her ancestor was "speaking" to her in modern times!

That old receipt for the teacher's annual salary was tantamount to a piece of gold in her eyes! Mine, too! Then we muddled through the hand scribbles to see what it said in German: " Ich Johann Perschbacher Schulmeister zu Schafheim bekenne hiemit dißer Handtschrifft, dass mir der Erbar und namhaft Cunz Glock dißes iars Bauwmeister allhie an meiner Dinstbesoltung gänzlich entrichtet und erlegt hat, uf vier termin 60 fl dißer Landes wehrung. Derwegen dann ich ihn derselben hiemit thue quit, ledig und loß Zahlen. Geschehen den 14. Martii Ao. 1608 -- Johannes Perschbacher."

For that moment, time was compressed, and we felt very close to a man who had lived centuries before us.

That was the biggest discovery we found that year in our precious activity in the ancestral archives. But it was far from Debbie's last notable experience in Germany.

There was a youth night held by the church and Debbie was invited by a village girl. "Dad, I don't know if I should go," she said. I replied, "You know some German words, and many of the people around here know English. You will be fine." So she ventured forth, uncertain of what awaited.

She had no reason to worry. She bounded back from the gathering, exuberant in discovering several more distant cousins, some of who carried the Perschbacher surname. "But they told me we weren't related. Then I told them what you learned--all Perschbachers are related." Indeed, that's what I told her, for the researchers in Schaafheim assured me of it.

Do not neglect to take youth on an excursion to Germany. In fact, prepare them by asking them to assist you in research here in America -- perhaps preliminary to an overseas experience. They will be better educated in the process and may have a tale to tell in their old age.

Debbie was glad she went. So was I. And she has the eternal distinction of finding that ancient piece of paper that melded us to our ancestor in a bygone day.

Strange are the many turns and twists of history...!

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TIP: The U.S. Census for 1900 asked many questions about people. Check some adjacent pages for clues about others in town.

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