

G-SIG FORUM #95

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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Goals & Satisfaction

By Gerald Perschbacher (LL.D.)

What do you want out of your research on German genealogy, history, and culture? What type of results would make you happy? It doesn't take a conscientious person very long to investigate those questions. As a result, an astute assessor will settle on two words: GOALS and SATISFACTION.

Granted, this isn't meant to be a corporate assessment exercise, nor are there focus groups, surveys, or in-depth investigations. But the simple truth of the matter is summed up in those two words, GOALS and SATISFACTION.

If you haven't set goals for yourself, you may want to do it, and soon. Goals lead people toward conclusions. The steps toward a goal-in-sight keep a researcher on the straight and narrow road without meandering hither and yon. A goal, once reached, often brings satisfaction.

Measurable, is the word. And when the right "measuring" is done, it can bring a fine degree of warm, fuzzy, and satisfying feelings as you pour over the pathway leading to success.

OK, let's talk in simple terms.

(1) SET A GOAL. It can be large or small. You may say your MAJOR goal is to "find out everything you can about all your ancestors on your maternal and paternal sides, and go as far back as possible." Hmm. Sound TOO large? Agreed. This may be the consummate ULTIMATE PURPOSE, but "purpose" and "goal" are different. A GOAL is something within reach with practical steps taken to achieve it, and you can measure the amount of time, cost, energy, etc., that it takes to accomplish the goal. A PURPOSE can be the all-consuming drive and determination that keeps you striving and sweating without swerving from the path.

Studying "things Germanic" in history, culture, and genealogy can equate to an endless task if your driving PURPOSE is energetic and enduring. That's OK, as long as you set reachable GOALS that fit the PURPOSE.

Example: Your purpose is wide as the sky. You want to know ALL you can about your ancestry as far back as history exists. Now slice a sliver off of that PURPOSE and make it a GOAL: to find one ancestor and track down all you can on him or her. Draft a list of sources that can be tapped online, in books, at libraries, in special collections (private and public), and through elderly members of your family plus those of your blood who (though young) may have become family historians. Keep your eyes open for ancillary information about other relatives and secondary events (such as cholera epidemics, wars, or economic depressions that may have impinged on the ancestor). But DO NOT allow those ancillary snippets of information to distract you from your GOAL.

(2) PURSUE YOUR GOAL. The veracity with which you pursue it is up to you. Schedule time to do it, otherwise life and opportunities will slip away and you will allow huge time warps of weeks, months, even years, to obstruct your progress.

(3) SET A PLAN & TIMEFRAME. For progress to be tracked, outline what you want to do. Example: For an entire month concentrate on Uncle Jake's life and his close family, his accomplishments and career, when he came to America, his point of departure from Germany, where his children went and what they did once they left home, and how all this relates to you. Was he your direct line's favorite uncle during his life? Were other relatives named after him? Was he their baptismal sponsor? What characteristics might he have had in common with you? Did he become "de-Germanized" easily or did he hold to the old culture and language until his dying day? I think you get the picture. This is similar to doing a school paper on a certain person. It is also akin to an investigative report you might see on television.

Itemize, compile, and legibly record the major gems of your findings in one concise document. File it as the main list of factual information on Uncle Jake while keeping as many secondary notes and documents in a sub file, as you deem fit. You can always discard later, but until you get a full picture of other "collateral" relatives, you may wish to hold on to the secondary stuff. By the way, "collateral" in the sense I am using it means siblings, cousins, uncles/aunts, and anyone you can imagine who was a blood relation and who lived at the same time. Figuratively, you can discover tons of potential applications and insights through the experiences of collateral relatives. Example: Uncle Jake never told what he encountered on his move to America and the Midwest, but you discover that his sister wrote a letter to Germans back home only a week after she and Jake plus six other family members arrived in port. Another sister wrote a letter five months later after the group arrived in Belleville, Illinois, near St. Louis. Copies of those letters were kept by relatives in Germany and were handed down to current times as family keepsakes. Those letters indirectly tell of what Jake encountered and may even reference incidents in his life alone. This is collateral information that has a direct bearing on Uncle Jake and your line!

(4) KEEP ON SCHEDULE. After you finished your "month with Uncle Jake," go to another descendant and go the same. You may find some months are highly profitable in the number of findings you uncover while other months seem dry, even boring. Nevertheless, strive to complete your goal, then set out for the next monthly challenge.

You can think beyond a month. I use the month merely as a suggestion, but you can extend that to two, three, four or more months. The point is simple: keep your mind agile and your interest active and you will likely find MORE things than expected, form GREATER realizations, and make well documented CONCLUSIONS.

(5) BE FLEXIBLE. If a rare "informational opportunity" pops up, mine it like a vein of gold. This could mean setting aside your progress on Uncle Jake if what you are "mining" is, indeed, worthy of the diversion. But keep it under control, otherwise you may never return to Jake. Take the secondary information (even ancillary facts) and file them away even if you have not "dug the mine" completely. Like miners of old and like archaeologist of today, retain the findings with clear markings of your progress up to that point, then record how to pick up the sites and sources (websites, books by titles, library codes) at a future date that is not too distant. You may discover fresh insights when you come back to the mine, and even decide to dig through some of the previous "slag heaps" of discarded information, sifting the words for more worth.

(6) REALIZE THAT GOALS MAY SEEM ENDLESS. I suppose they should be endless. That means even after you set aside your in-depth expose' of Uncle Jake, you don't forget him. You may slip back to his informational arms like a good little niece or nephew, applying bits of information from his file that then relate to others in your line. A jot and note here and there may be entered into his file. Then suddenly, you may stumble over a HUGE amount of information about his success with a railroad company as head auditor over a department of 30 people during a peak time in that company's history and in the advance of railroading. In effect, don't forget your ancestral trails.

This leads to a strong encouragement if your files are extensive and decisive:
UNDERSTAND THAT SUCH FILES ARE NOT FOR YOU ALONE BUT FOR YOUR DESCENDANTS AND EVEN DISTANT REALTIVES. In select cases, the information may have a far wider application to the advance of a community, a business, an ethnic group, or a larger society. To assure the safety of the material, make plans for preservation. Don't rely on an executor to make that call. Too often family members are shaken by the fact that, during a time of mourning or stress following someone's passing, the precious family files were recycled in "the bin," lost forever. When the veil of distraction is lifted, they mourn a second time for what was lost informationally.

I am a firm believer that family files should stick with the family, but under the care and application of a sincerely interested relative. Or, if the files are given to another custodian such as a large collection, that it be signed over with a stipulation that safeguards the contents -- and perhaps even allows for the material to be considered "on loan" for a given time in case the family reconsiders and wants it returned.

There are more points that could be added, but we'll hold those for a later date.

The sum of this article is right to the point: if you do your work judiciously, are adamant about scheduling, strive for completeness, reaffirm accuracy, and stick to your PURPOSE and GOALS, there is little doubt that SATISFACTION is assured. It will be satisfaction for you, for your family, and for generations yet to come.

If you are the only one in your family that is doing the research, then you are building bridges to the past and to the future. And THAT may be the BEST satisfaction of all.

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You are NOT Alone!

By Gerald Perschbacher (LL.D.)

Every good organization is literally a support group. You may be in a rose club where you meet others of similar bent who propagate rare lines and foster new ones. You may belong to a card club that plays the type of games you like in a cordial, close-knit setting. Perhaps you enjoy collecting model cars and are active in a group with similar intent. Much the same may be claimed by vintage car clubs, fan clubs, cooking clubs...and genealogical groups.

G-SIG centers on the advancement of Germanic culture, traditions, and genealogy. Those are specialized desires, so it is natural for a "support group" mentality to prevail

G-SIG has done it in highly successful ways along three lines.

(1) The **G-SIG FORUM** which you are reading. This e-publication is "cement" that holds the German Special Interest Group together, near and far. How? By providing a forum of ideas from you and others (*hint: take the opportunity to share your successes and challenges*); by spanning great distances to keep people informed; by being a regular line of communication with fresh insights and ideas that can work for you and others; and by making sure you do not feel you are alone in your research.

(2) **G-SIG holds GATHERINGS.** These are spaced throughout the year with one event being the annual CLUSTER FAIR with a notable speaker. It does not cost anything for people to be involved in G-SIG. There are no membership dues since G-SIG has no members but claims "participants." GATHERINGS provide a venue for people just like you to settle down in a crowd of people and share your commonality of interest. I have never seen or heard of anyone at a GATHERING who did not leave the event without carrying several fine ideas on research plus the feeling of not being alone in their interest!

(3) **Which leads us to the concept of CLUSTERS.** This remains one of the initial three big pushes for G-SIG. It may be the best of all when it comes to individualized success in research based on the close-knit support of others. CLUSTER participants have a distinctly regional or localized interest to select portions of Germany (or areas of German concentration such as Alsace, Switzerland, etc.). CLUSTERS may be large or small, but all are intense in their interest and supportive of individuals.

G-SIG makes sure you are not alone in your "forward march" through ancestry. And G-SIG is always ready to welcome newcomers into the group. If you know of someone who needs such wholesome means of support, invite them to be active in G-SIG.

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Revisit the Facts

On a trip to my ancestral village in Germany, I wanted to review some of the material I had seen a couple years prior. This was not about ancient history and did not relate to my ancestors. It involved recent generations of my family and what they did while remaining in Germany.

You may consider doing similar research. You may have relatives in Germany whom you have never met. Their direct lines have stories to tell. While those are not directly related to you, they are ancillary to your family.

One thing you may discover is the similarity of thinking, physical ability, and interest levels you share with relatives who are generations removed from you, but who carry many of the genes that are part of your makeup.

It's clear to me that some of those German relatives share physical traits and thought patterns very similar to me. Yet, the gene pool was separated about 200 years earlier. This raises an interesting thought. If my direct ancestors had stayed in Germany, what would I have done over those years in that crossroad of Central Europe?

I never met George (but he was about the age of my father). He still lived in the house from which my family reported departed for America. His branch of the family kept the house.

His daughter and grandson inherited it. I met them on my first trip to Germany and we bonded as long-lost relatives even though the connection was through our great-great-grandfathers.

George liked to build. That matched my father's career as a carpenter. George liked to work with gardens and flowers around the community. My father liked to do yard work around church, planting trees and shrubs. George was fairly bald, but dad wasn't, which is one of those interesting aspects of descent. I also discovered there were physical propensities in modest maladies and body form. I noted that my relatives and ancestors came in two "handy-dandy" sizes: six-footers and about 5-foot-8-inches, tall. This also was reflected in ancestral records of four Civil War ancestors in America.

My father was drafted into the Army right before the Second World War. George also had to serve his country. He was not a Nazi member but was in the German army, sent wherever he needed to be. One of those places was along the Siegfried Line along the western border of Germany. At times George was outfitted in white work clothes typical of a "Line" worker. Interesting, since my father, as carpenter, was active in making wooden forms for the pouring of concrete on jobs related to large construction. He also was involved in pouring concrete for and around the Gateway Arch and other large construction jobs in St. Louis.

My German family brought out pictures of George in the service. The uniforms were different than in America, but the smiles were still similar. Imbedded in the photo albums was a handful of newsletters on the history of my relative's military unit. I studied them carefully.

Upon my return to America, I sought books on the subject of the XIXth Corps in which George served. Where did he go and what might he have encountered? I felt as if a "piece" of me (genetically, perhaps) was present wherever he marched. That's the type of feeling you get when genealogy grips your imagination.

"(General Heinz) Guderian's XIX Corps, with its single panzer division -- the 3rd--and its 2nd and 20th Motorized Divisions (which had no tanks) was to be sent as the spearhead of Army Group North (*Generaloberst* Fedor von Bock) and Fourth Army (*General der Artillerie* Guenther von Kluge) against...the strongly defended Polish Corridor...." I paused in disbelief. George had served as support to the panzers in the invasion of Poland in 1939! His was a new unit formed specifically for Guderian, who is credited as the Father of the Blitzkrieg and the founder of modern tank warfare.

There was more enlightenment. XIX Corps also was a significant spearhead in the 1940 invasion of France and was the major factor in the Blitzkrieg that encircled Dunkirk. (Source: pages 105-115, "Guderian, Creator of the Blitzkrieg," by Kenneth Macksey, Stein and Day, Publishers, New York, 1976).

George eventually was captured on the Easter Front. The Russians sent him to a prisoner of war camp in Vilna, Latvia. He was released in 1946, headed home, and helped rebuild his country. He lived into his 90s and was helpful to his church and community.

I don't know if George ever put rifle to shoulder during the war. If he did, I don't know that he ever hit a human target. If he was like my father, he didn't want to. Like my dad, George may have been more valuable as an army carpenter, builder, and fixer-upper.

I tell this story in order to encourage you to trace the accomplishments of your distance relatives who "stayed behind" in the old country. Maybe they served their community in quiet ways or maybe they held positions of honor. Some may even have entered the realm of world history by engaging in significant acts. Those stories are part of your lineage, removed for sure, but still connected. Your present family and future generations may be waiting to know! **GP**

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TIPS... **Play it safe!** Back up your most important electronic files on an extra hard drive, flash drive, or disc. If you have printed files, condense the most important items and makes duplicates. Keep the extra set in a fire-safe place away from the originals in case of disaster.

... <http://ahsgr.org/index.htm?aspxerrorpath=/> is a site to visit online if you have ancestry among **Germans from Russia**. German farmers and workers initially were invited by Catherine the Great and her officials to settle in the Volga area as early as 1763. The earliest settlers involved folks from Hessen, Rheinland Pfalz, Sachsen, Wuerttemberg, and Switzerland. Other areas of origin were added later as the movement continued up to 1862, according to the American Historical society of Germans from Russia. This is an international organization dedicated to the discovery, collection, preservation, and dissemination of information related to the history, cultural heritage and genealogy of Germanic Settlers in the Russian Empire and their descendants. (Phone: 1-402-474-3363)

...**The Czechoslovak Genealogical Society International** (CGSI) is active in promoting genealogical research and creating an interest in ancestry and heritage among descendants of ethnic groups who comprised the former nation of Czechoslovakia, including Bohemian (Czech), German-Bohemian (Bohmisch), Hungarian, Moravian, Ruthenian (Rusyn), Silesian, Slovakian, and those of Jewish ancestry. <http://www.cgisi.org/> (Phone: (651) 964-2322). Also, several professional readers serve the organization.

... www.theswisscenter.org/swissroots/culture/heritage/?Id=253 -- **FIRST GERMANS AND SWISS** - In April, 1819, ten German and Swiss families embarked on a flatboat on the Aar River at Berne under the leadership of Jacob Tisher. They descended the Aar River to the Rhine River and continued to the city of Antwerp where they boarded a French ship, Eugenius, for New York. After traveling 48 days, they landed at Amboy, New Jersey, where they purchased teams. Six of the families starting to travel to Wheeling, Virginia, The little colony now consisted of Father Jacob Tisher, Abraham Tisher, Jacob Tschappat, Daniel Fankhauser, Nicholas Fankhauser, Jacob Marti (together with their families), and Jacob Nisperli, single. After a tedious journey , they reached Wheeling and again embarked on a flatboat -- their destination being the Great Kanawa (sic) River...(by [DAVID TSCHAPPAT](#) -- click to read more!).

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