

G-SIG FORUM #96

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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Nach Westen, Junge Deutsche

By Gerald Perschbacher (LL.D.)

In other words, "Go West, young Germans!"

By the 1800s, Germans had mixed feelings about things that went on in the East. From their perspective, Russia was a land of potential blended with risks. Czarina Catherine the Great (*Katharina die Große*) had established an invitational policy of encouraging German farmers to move into her territories to cultivate the land and bring taxable wealth to her realm during her rule (1762-1796). But not all her people (Russians, Ukrainians, and others included) were big on the idea. There had been eastern moves by Germans into the Baltic lands (Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania) centuries earlier but that, too, had met with opposition as years passed.

Germans preferred to move westward when tribal life dominated the landscape before the year 600 A.D., and that worked for a while. Many large or small Germanic tribes migrated either short or long distances along the Rhein River, from the Baltics southward to the Balkans then westward as far as what would become France and Spain, and onto islands (notably what we now call the British Isles). But as France solidified into a nation under a series of notable kings, and as Spain gained riches, glamour, and power as a unified kingdom, Germany was bottled in, so to speak. Topography played a partial role in containment with the Alps to the south and ocean to the north.

When population pressures boiled over borders and wars scaled down communities, fear grew. In Germany's case, the first significant movements to America came from territories up and down the Rhein. Why? French troops and their leaders hell-bent on fun, frolics, booty, or worse were unleashed, so it seemed, by whatever circumstance raised the angry hairs on their necks. A weeklong jaunt to a castle on the Rhein was tempting. Destruction and looting tended to follow. Honestly, it was a French method of neutralizing the fragmented territories along their eastern edge and was the heightening of previous animosities that may be attributed (to a degree) to sibling rivalry. After all, the Holy Roman Empire of the Germans and the Kingdom of France attributed their rise to the Frankish tribes of the Germans which dominated the Rheinland from the sea to the city of Mainz, then beyond.

Germans hardly "fell back" from positions along the Rhein when there was a French incursion. The people by and large were locked to the land. Their noble leaders held sway over

their lives, their jobs, and their allegiance. If a ruling noble chose to negotiate a treaty with the French or any other enemy, the people fell in line with the document. Grumbles were muted.

After Napoleon kicked the breeches off of countless armies and many rulers, people in the German territories were sorely in need of protection, income, medical attention, and most other things that make life bearable. The Rheinland was coveted by the French, at least to a point. If they could not own it, at least they could keep it weak as a protective buffer.

This made inhabitants skittish. They had a local lord (the noble family) but he had diverse rulers impinge upon him--the German Emperor of the Empire where they were located and the French King who could flex a little military muscle to do significant harm.

Atop all this was the booming population of the 1800s in the wake of Napoleon's fade into history. Prussia was growing militarily and economically (certain scholars claim it began as an economic trade union). France was in check, but people feared it was a temporary situation. Militarism had a hold on the Continent and generally afflicted the Germans, regardless of their location in the Empire or their adherence to the Prussian Union.

It was amid this social and circumstantial climate that Germans initiated a longing for the westward land of America.

What set off the movement in the early 1830s were uprisings and demonstrations by students and educated populations in places like Frankfurt-am-Main. Noble leaders felt these were ferocious threats of discontent. Now there were threats from within the German people besides the fear of France.

Clearly, it was time to move -- to move far away, across the Atlantic, to safety in America.

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Best Times to Leave

When did your family come to America? Not sure? Read the following and you may form an educated guess on the era to research in review of

<http://www.loc.gov/rr/european/imde/germchro.html>

1608 - It is widely held that Germanic Norsemen came to America shores around the year 1000A.D. but a permanent settlement did not survive. However, these people were of Germanic stock. If this is not "German enough" for you, then let's mention that there were several Germans counted among Jamestown settlers in 1608. They probably were Hessen (Hessian).

1626 - German Peter Minuit served as the governor of the New Amsterdam Dutch colony. He originated from Wesel in present-day Rhein-Westphalia. He was credited with buying Manhattan Island for the amount of \$24 in goods and trinkets.

1683 - Thirteen German Mennonite families settled in Pennsylvania to form Germantown.

1700s - German religious groups trickled into America. This included "Swiss Mennonites, Baptist Dunkers, Schwenkfelders, Moravians, Amish, and Waldensians"; most German immigrants were from Lutheran or Reformed churches. Catholic Germans tended to come later.

1731 - Protestants left Austria and established Ebenezer, Georgia.

1730s - German newspapers were printed in America; many more would pop up in future years.

1733 - Palatine John Peter Zenger, who came to America as an indentured servant, started the *The New-York Weekly Journal* newspaper; soon he was acquitted in a landmark trial for freedom of the press.

1742 - Christopher Saur of Pennsylvania printed the first Bible in America; the type was donated by a Frankfurt-am-Main lawyer who was descended from reformer Martin Luther.

1783 - About 5,000 Hessian (Hessian) soldiers (nearly a third of the total contracted by Britain) remained in America after the Revolutionary War.

1784 - A soon-to-be-famous citizen of Waldorf in the Rhein-Neckar area arrived in North America in 1784: John Jacob Astor (1763-1848). His initial net monetary worth of \$25 would be turned into a massive fortune of \$20 million, making him the nation's wealthiest man.

1790 - Some experts say about 100,000 Germans probably came to America by this time. This equated to almost 9 percent of the entire population. A third of Pennsylvania was of German heritage. Maryland was next with 12 percent. Germans tended to stick to their initial land. Many were experienced farmers and knew how to build up the land by rotating crops. Prior to their arrival, other European settlers simply farmed until the yield slackened -- then they moved further west.

1829 - Gottfried Duden became a famous author with his book on Missouri as the "New Germany" in the American "Promised Land." Germans believed it and used his book as a guide to the New World and a bright future.

1837 - The German Philadelphia Settlement Society began; it bought 12,000 acres of land in Gasconade County, Missouri, and formed the village of Hermann.

1844 - Germans settled in what became New Braunfels, Texas. German ancestry is still strong in that area.

1839-47 - A Mainly Saxon movement formed the Lutheran "Missouri Synod" which stood against liberalization.

1848-1850 - Discontent in the Rheinland and adjoining areas results in open resistance to noble families; rebellion and armed clashes arose; the nobles put the movement down and leaders of the resistance, such as Carl Schurz and Franz Sigel, escape to America to make their historical marks in the Civil War more than a decade later. They became influential in Missouri.

1850s - Well over a million Germans moved to America in this decade; the biggest year was 1854 with about 215,000 settlers. They sought freedom, land ownership, and escape from the ravages and threats of war that swung high and low through much of Central Europe.

1860 - As high as 1.3 million German settlers abounded in the U.S.A. They wanted no economic or political shackles to restrict them, but the national stress over North-South sympathies and polarization either for industrialization or for plantation farming were stretching the patience of even the most open minded Germans. About 200 German newspapers were printed, and the city of St. Louis boasted seven. Abraham Lincoln watched Germans carefully and set up campaign speeches and debates to reach the German population in central and southern Illinois.

1872 - German farmers lost their status in Russia as their settlement option was rescinded by the Czar. Eventually, in the 20th century, more than 100,000 so-called Volga and Black Sea wheat-farming Germans would be comfortably settled in the United States, especially in four states: Colorado, North and South Dakota, and Nebraska. Today there are well over a million of their descendants in America.

1880s - 1.5 million Germans arrive in America. A sixth of those (250,000) came in 1882.

1890 - Experts indicated that 2.8 million German-born immigrants lived in the United States with heavy concentrations in Cincinnati, Milwaukee, and St. Louis. By 1894 there were nearly 800 German periodical publications being printed. By 1910 this slipped to nearly 550. In 1920 it dropped to 230 as a result of the integration of immigrants into English and anti-German sentiment due to the First World War. In the 1930s with the rise of German nationalism, about 130,000 prominent Germans left for America to escape threats and ridicule from Nazis.

1950s - Approximately 580,000 Germans immigrated to the United States.

1960s - Another 210,000 came to our shores.

1983 - German-American Day was approved by Congress and acknowledged by President Ronald Reagan. He said: *"The United States has embraced a vast array of German traditions, institutions, and influences. Many of these have become so accepted as parts of our way of life that their ethnic origin has been obscured. For instance, Christmas trees and Broadway musicals are familiar features of American society. Our kindergartens, graduate schools, the social security system, and labor unions are all based on models derived from Germany. German teachers, musicians, and enthusiastic amateurs have left an indelible imprint on classical music, hymns, choral singing, and marching bands in our country. In architecture and design, German contributions include the modern suspension bridge, Bauhaus, and Jugendstil. German-American scientists have helped make the United States the world's pioneer in research and technology. The American work ethic, a major factor in the rapid rise of the United States to preeminence in agriculture and industry, owes much to German-Americans' commitment to excellence."*

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Among the Destinations... of westward-moving Germans were the gold fields of California. In particular, the area around what is now called Sacramento was especially attractive. Among the crowd were many from St. Louis since the city was in the forefront of westward expansion by the 1840s. When word about the gold discovery reached St. Louis, Germans with an urge to strike it rich literally quit their jobs and headed to California via land routes or waterways (Mississippi to the Gulf of Mexico, then across Central America by foot or donkey, and up the West Coast by ship, then boated along the inland waterway to Sacramento.

Many of those Germans were men, and a good number left their families behind. After panning and digging in 1849 and 1850, the majority returned home -- some poorer, some richer, some notably wealthy. A significant number stayed in California to hunt for more riches. To check if your ancestor was among them, you can examine the rolls of the 1850 California Census, but realize that the population was shifting around in the hunt for gold so that a huge number of names were not recorded. This resulted in another census in 1852. Try your hand at http://www.censusrecords.com/content/1850_Census?gclid=CPvF8e7c3boCFSNp7AodPw4AuA or other sites relating to the 1850 or 1852 census. Then spend some time investigating the Sacramento German Genealogy Society website at <http://www.sacgergensoc.org/>.

**You might just make a special strike on your own --
which may be good as gold, figuratively speaking.**

When You Have Some Spare Moments...GO!

A wealth of information and ideas are waiting at this website, just begging to be used:

http://www.genealoger.com/german/ger_immigration.htm

It's the site called German Genealogy -- German Immigration: Ship Records and Passenger Lists. The site offers an overview of German immigration. In reviewing its content, here are a big handful of bits and pieces to get you going:

Did you know that Germany provided more immigrants in America than any other county in the entire world? To press that point, the site says that "between 1820 and 1996 the largest ethnic groups were, in order, **Germany (7 million)**, Mexico (5.5 million), Italy (5.3 million), Great Britain (5.1 million), and Ireland (5.1 million)."

If you tally those numbers, it comes to about 28 million people. Since 7 million of those were from Germany, **that comes to an honest 25% of all immigrants from those countries**. To be honest, the numbers relate to Europe, not to Asia or Africa, so keep this in perspective. If you check into the Chinese-related population in America, the number is around 3.5 million (including "mixed races," according to the source which you can check for yourself at <http://www.ask.com/question/how-many-chinese-people-live-in-america>). Even so, this means the German influx was twice that of the Chinese.

Now, play around a little more. Since Italy includes some remnant German tribes (such as the Lombards), and since Great Britain has old Germanic blood circulating in ancestry, and since Ireland is based on Celtic ancestry (which may very likely be derived from a Proto-Germanic base making the Celts "cousins" to the Germans) then the percentage of Germanic peoples who were immigrants in America could increase substantially. But let's let it rest.

The lead source for this article also notes that "many 'German speakers' emigrated from Austria-Hungary and Russia but were not counted as Germans."

What benefits did Germans bring to America? There were tradesmen and builders to be sure. But they included more, such as well-educated inventors and farmers who knew their stuff. "German immigrants, choosing the best farmland, settled mainly in Maryland, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Wisconsin, Illinois, Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, and Kansas." Well, folks, that's the "national breadbasket" and even is a substantial source of food and nutrient-rich exports to other less endowed portions of the world.

Even as recent as 1900, "about 40% of the farmlands of the U.S. were owned by German Americans." We may conclude that *this reflects the Germanic propensity to stick with a job, do it well, and apply good knowledge.*

You may wonder about the descendants in some major cities. We realize today's population is greatly mobile, but even so, it seems German communities in large cities attract German descendants to jobs. According to the main source of this article "many U.S. cities had a high percentage of Germans. In 1900, American cities had the following percentage of German immigrants and their children compared to total populations: Milwaukee (70%), Davenport (62%), Hoboken (58%), Cincinnati (54%), St. Louis (45%), Buffalo (43%) and Detroit (41%)."

Bremerhaven was the point of departure for millions of Germans; Baltimore was an early recipient of many transient German who funneled through its port. Not surprisingly, a good number stayed in Baltimore (perhaps by reason of no cash to move westward, the need for an

immediate job, or simply to fulfill the wish to live in a large city that was a long ship-ride from the Old Country). Thus, Baltimore statistics show that 28% of its people were tabulated as being first and second generation Germans around 1900. Similarly, New York laid claim to 32% with Chicago coming in at 35% and Cleveland topping those with 38%.

Sources for these figures are noted in the text at the website, but for those who cannot check the site, you may want to find the following in a library: Edward A. Fleckenstein, "The Distinguished German Ethnic Population of America -- (XVI)" in *Der Volksfreund/ People's Friend* (Buffalo) May/June 1998; as reported in "Germans: The Largest Immigrant Group in the United States,:" by Gary Carl Grassl, *The German-American Heritage Society of Great Washington, D.C. Newsletter*, Vol. XVII, no. 4, July 2000. Reprinted in *Der Blumenbaum*, 25, no. 1 (July, August, September 2007).

Online "techies" may revel in these links: [Ancestry.com - Immigration Databases; Bremen \(Germany\) - New York Passenger Lists; Bremen Passenger Lists 1920 - 1939; Castle Garden Immigrant Database Online](#); and [DAUSA \(Research Center German Emigrants in the USA at the University of Oldenburg\)](#). Try your hand at [Ellis Island](#), a searchable database of over 22 million passengers. Also try <http://www.stevemorse.org/>.

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The non-German Hyphen--

The stumbling block many people find in tackling the German language is the use of L-O-N-G words.

One of the longest is **Donaudampfschiffahrtsgesellschaftskapitän**. This phrase translates into several words: Danube (Donau) steamship (dampfschiffahrts) company or corporate (gesellschafts) captain (kapitän)."

The use of German is really akin to English, even in this regard. English does much the same by combining words, only through the use of hyphens. If we treated this like English, it would be written like this: **Donau-dampfschiffahrts-gesellschafts-kapitän**. Another long word is **Bezirksschornsteinfegermeister**. It means "district chimney sweep master" and would be divided with hyphens like this: **Bezirks-schornsteinfeger-meister**.

Clearly, if we train our eyes to see invisible hyphens between combined German words, we will grasp the meaning of long phrases with better speed and comfort. **GP**

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