

# G-SIG FORUM #97

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.gaahs-stlouis.org](http://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.

+++++

*Ever wonder what COULD have been? If your research is good and solid, it's even better to think about what DID happened. When doing genealogical research, keep the names of ancestors tied to the location and events of their time. Example: If you were around when President Kennedy was alive, you probably have a story about where you were and what you knew of the assassination. You LIVED through the event. Similarly, your ancestors lived through many events and years. With good research you could piece together a good approximation of what their lives were like!*

## Old Frankfurt at its Peak by Gerald Perschbacher (LL.D.)

Genealogical research that is limited to names, dates of birth and death, who begat whom, and the mere basics is interesting but somewhat dusty, cold, and lifeless. I like to put flesh on those bones. You can do it, too, with historical research into the culture and times.

That is my conviction as I continue a series of historical novels on the advance of Western Civilization, the Rheinland in particular and its adjacent lands. It's amazing what research can unearth. If you know when a certain ancestor was active in a town or city and then trace the history of that community, you may be surprised with what comes to light.

So it is with the city of Frankfurt-am-Main, where four of my ancestors took high roles in city government even rising to the rank of Burgher Nobility in the 1600s and 1700s. In this FORUM edition I share portions of discoveries now recorded in my recent writings.

As a major city in the old provinces and territories of the Holy Roman Empire of the Germans, Frankfurt itself stood the test of time. It avoided devastation during many conflagrations, including the Thirty Years' War that ended in 1648. It survived French intervention for several years during the Seven Years' War (1756-1763) which was a world-wide engagement by European powers that stretched to continents where the militant nations had colonies (North America included).

During the Seven years' War (notably between France and England) what resulted in Frankfurt was a strong governing interest by France, a reasonably short border distance away. When peace came, a good number of important Frenchmen still maintained their association with the community. This made the city more cosmopolitan in languages. Indeed, Frankfurt faced severe odds but almost always came out on top.

Even today, visitors can take a walk though Frankfurt and conjure the images of Christians on pilgrimage to fill their imaginations. Envision hundreds, thousands, or just bands

of dozens taking refuge in the shadows along a church's tall wall. Frankfurt was a major pilgrim stop for Crusaders heading to Jerusalem to devote life and limb toward religious cause.

Frankfurt traced its German importance to the time of Karl der Grosse (Charles the Great; Charlemagne). It was a crossing point where Carl spared his army by following the trail of a white stag across the shallow ford of the Main River as a war-bent hoard of Saxon warriors bore down from heavy forestland. That was before the year 800 A.D. The name of the crossing became the Ford of the Franks (Frankfurt). Karl and later emperors built the site into a fortress.

With this stellar history, Frankfurt became the place where the Seven Electors of the Empire came to negotiate. Pomp and celebration abounded as the Electors arrived in full regalia to debate their choices and construct an agreement on the selection of Emperor. The jewel-encrusted Imperial Crown and gems brought with dignity from Nuremberg and Aachen, once the seat of Charlemagne's power. When Emperor Joseph II held his 1764 coronation in Frankfurt, he rode to the cathedral in a gilded carriage beside his royal father.

Through first-hand experience on a trip or through the magic of photography and maps, researchers can trace the steps of their ancestors. Those of us who had family in or near Frankfurt in 1764, and those of us whose ancestors held administrative positions in nearby territories and major communities may very well have had them in Frankfurt during some portion of that event. Some ancestors may even have supplied or delivered the massive amounts of food and beverages needed during the anticipated weeks of negotiation, which was not an unusual length of time.

Imagine the "talk around town" about the potential choice of Emperor. View in your mind the surprise an ancestor may have had by turning the corner and seeing one of the Electors crossing the street!

The main town center was called the Roemer, which was the original site for a Roman border settlement and military port. A short walk to the river's edge in the mid 1700s would have revealed this panorama: ease through Frankfurt's city wall's portal near the church and find yourself beyond the protective confines of the massive stone edifice. Commanding the rivers cape was the fourteen-arched stone bridge, built for eternity, proud and stout, strong as the everlasting will of Frankfurt and its Great Council, robust as the 180 families or so that accounted for the backbone of wealth that made Frankfurt's continent-wide mercantile nature thrive with the labor of almost 36,000 inhabitants.

Imagine standing near the wharf of the River Main as cargo was unloaded from several boats. One of the city's two small unloading towers with cranes lifted crated and wrapped goods from one small boat, swung its load over the wharf, deposited the items, and retraced its movements for another load.

+++++

## **Selling Frankfurt?**

*Now open your ears to history and hear what might have been. A discussion like this could easily have taken place if your ancestor conversed with people of similar interests. When researching, it is good to find what I call co-lateral persons who may be traced in history through documents they wrote or via the reports of others.*

"It is plausible that the city could be reclaimed by the Emperor, then sold openly at his whim," says Herr Doktor Johann Jacob Perschbecher, a legal Advocate and official for Frankfurt

in the 1760. He was conversing with a researcher appointed by the City Council to trace problems in Frankfurt at that time. "I cite the year 1360 when Charles IV of the House Luxembourg allowed unique privilege to Siegfried zum Paradies. He was elected as 'an important man of the Empire,' a special designation to be handed down through male posterity. This was opposed by the imperial Schultheiss of Frankfurt."

The researcher, added, "Truly, I know of it. This was a famous case. Frankfurt's Council and magistrates were against the declaration. Still, the Emperor forced the deal."

"To his regret," the Advocate offered. "A rebellion resulted. A wave of actions and counteractions enveloped the community. Local guild leaders forced entry into the private confines of Siegfried. They spat hateful words at him, questioned his authority, dishonored him. We cannot say what held them back from inflicting bodily harm. Was it good sense? Fear of retaliation? Sobriety at the last moment? Regardless, they stood their ground. It was an ugly moment which should never be witnessed again."

"As I think back through my research, that was that the period of rebellion, was it not?" asked the Burgermeister.

"Ja, and the prospect existed for the Emperor to be overthrown," added the researcher. "If rebellion succeeded in Frankfurt, it could have spread like a flame through dried grass. Such was the depth of unhappiness."

Perschbecher continued. "Siegfried offered 4,800 Gulden (current currency) for rights as chief magistrate. The deal was sweetened with rights over the old Imperial Forest of the Dreieich region south of Frankfurt. The situation turned from severe to ugly until it was resolved on June 2 of 1372. The wealth of Frankfurt flexed its muscle and the same Emperor Charles was offered 8,800 Gulden for the mayoral office of Schultheiss with judicial authority over its affairs. Also included was that portion of the Imperial Forest."

"I recall," admitted the Burgermeister, "that documents credit that act as setting Frankfurt on a special course with its elevated leadership in full charge. It is written in the Book of Privileges retained in a special place in our library."

"Truly so. And the Emperor remained royal head over the city but in a peculiar sense," the Advocate explained. "The relationship was altered when Frankfurt increased its wealth and status with its annual Fairs..."

"...The Messe, named after the Cathedral Mass said near the city center that hosts the Fair," the Burgermeister clarified.

"...Ja, the Messe-Fair, as I like to call it," Perschbecher extended. "Frankfurt continued to offer its homage to the Emperor as protector each time a new royal was elected to that highest of honors. Then in 1442 the Frankfurt Council adapted the relationship more favorably to Frankfurt. In early years the city swore to be obedient and faithful to the Emperor. But in that year it was stated that Frankfurt would remain faithful, but not necessarily obedient."

+++++

## **On the Jewish Side...** by Gerald Perschbacher (LL.D.)

*More from the 1760s...and you are there! Let's see how another portion of actual history could have related to an ancestor.*

It was not long before Advocate J. Jacob Perschbecher stood at the narrow entry to the Judengasse, the enclave of Frankfurt's Jewish people who were restricted to the homes along the narrow street. Old laws perpetuated the notion that Jewish people had to be clustered here. A

good number of the 500 or so dwellings were painted in bright colors. Since last names (surnames) were not commonplace among Jews of the era, the usage was practically forced upon them for tax purposes. J. Jacob was aware that families packed inside often chose their last name based on the color of the house. Family names of Roth (red), Weiss (white), and Schwartz (black) were known this way. It was a trick against the “Goy,” the gentiles who dominated Frankfurt politics.

Nearly 2,500 Jews in Frankfurt learned to live with it. There was little choice. They could move to another city, if allowed by authorities. But since land ownership by Jews in many places was more of a promise than a reality, families stuck to the Judengasse. On the positive side of circumstances, Jews had become important fixtures in society. As outsiders to the mainstream of society, they became money lenders, specialty sellers, traders of unusual goods, and did a significant amount of menial labor. This often had been the case in large cities of homogenous composition.

The Judengasse had been “their street” since 1462 when the area was constructed by city command. J. Jacob felt the tightness of surroundings as he, an intruder, set foot through the gateway and felt the walls of the buildings closing in. The street was more like an alley, hardly large enough to allow the passage of a modest cart. Heaven forbid that two carts should meet in the middle! Still, the street’s cobblestone surface was clean in most places and residents took pride in keeping the outer appearance of homes in good order.

J. Jacob heard Yiddish emanating from homes as he walked, even though it was a cold day and windows were shut. The close environs did not allow the luxury of much privacy and a little rise in volume resulted in none at all.

There were select odors that were foreign to J. Jacob. Whiffs of unusual spices, scents of eastern perfumes, and different woolen smells tickled his nose. The burning of who-knows-what for warmth in their stoves and fire places was tinged with aromas he could not place. It seemed a different world rather than a slice of German Frankfurt.

He looked up. Tar-pitched and sometimes painted wooden construction beams carved with religious images and Hebrew words were extremely crooked, hardly the type of building material used by the lowliest of Frankfurt's gentile population. Some beams may have been salvaged as waste from old decrepit buildings elsewhere in the Imperial City or perhaps even Sachsenhausen across the river. If that were not the case, then the wood beams were counted among the least taken from the forest, probably mandated for use by the lesser populace in the Imperial City. That would include Jews.

J. Jacob noticed that since the land was limited for living space, levels of housing were added in upward design. If a partial story were added, then an addition soon followed as families grew. Many dwellers were related by blood or marriage, even both. This kept their society tight and self-supportive. The Advocate knew these things from court cases he studied in the course of his profession.

He further knew that there had been “removals” of the Jews from the ghetto in the city’s long past, but that they were now a protected people...but a race kept in its place socially and politically. It was a perceived “stand-offish” lifestyle that set the Jews apart, he surmised. Personally, he didn’t mind their lifestyles and almost admired their principles, even if his nose still tickled and he felt hemmed in.

The Advocate remembered that many Jews floated from city to city. Not that they wanted to, but out of necessity. Such was the case with the ancient race in Cologne and Nuremberg, escaping to Frankfurt years ago for sanctuary at its figurative altar of open-

mindedness and tolerance. That was not a LARGE altar but sufficient in generosity to allow Jews respite from the slings of others....

Only a short distance outside the Judengasse was a small shop with a red shield hanging in front. As sunlight flashed off its painted surface, it seemed more like a beacon than a sign. The door was locked, but Cohn (a resident of the Judengasse) used his large metal key to gain entry. A small mounted bell jingled as it was brushed by the door. A man in his early 20s stirred in the back of the very full single room. Stacks of books and decorative items for sale stood in tall stacks or were stashed in semi-orderly bins. A slightly musty odor dominated.

“Mayer! A visitor!” shouted Cohn.

“Ja?” said the man in back. As he approached, he wiped his hands on his ink-stained and slightly torn printer’s apron. Near the neckline it bore a small thread-stitched seal, which J. Jacob recognized as Heinrich Ehrenfried Luther’s (a descendant of Reformer Martin Luther; Heinrich was a lawyer of high standing in Frankfurt and was extremely successful in printing). A gift, no doubt, from that printer. “Hallo! I am Mayer Amschel Rothschild. How do you wish to be helped?”

Cohn jumped ahead. “The books. From the British Colonies on the American coast. He wants to know about them.”

J. Jacob nodded his assent. “A short visit, please, to see the books....”

With that, the shopkeeper returned to his labors while Doktor Perschbecher milled around. Cohn tagged along like a puppy....

The Advocate was drawn to a stack of books Mayer had pointed to. Perschbecher was impressed with the quality of binding and the clarity of print from the English books printed in the British Colonies. When he asked about it, Mayer explained from the rear of the room that these were among the admirable books printed in America—expensive when new but reasonably priced now due to slight wear...and the fact that few people in Frankfurt spent little time reading English unless it was for purposes of business. He added that more would be coming. The books were in English but future books would be in German, thanks to the help of Heinrich Ehrenfried Luther.

As they spoke, Mayer moved closer. “There is sparse demand for English books in Frankfurt except as oddities, and who among the people would afford to have an oddity like these when food and warmth are utmost in their minds this season? Herr Luther placed them in my care to sell. Are you a buyer he has sent?” Mayer carefully watched J. Jacob’s reaction.

Cohn edged into the conversation. “If you are, I can sniff out more. That’s what I am – the ‘Sniffer.’”

Mayer cut him off. “A small matter for an important man such as you, Herr Perschbecher.”

The advocate was surprised! How did Mayer know his name? J. Jacob had not introduced himself. They did not move in the same social circles. He had no recollection of past dealings with him. So, how...?

“That is your name, is it not? You wonder, don’t you? It is no mystery. I know most of the Advocates and Burghers in Frankfurt.”

Cohn snorted, “I sniff them out for him if he does not know them! I do, indeed! “

Mayer cast a cold stare at Cohn for him to hold his peace. “Oy vey! It is my business to know them. It is prudent to stay on their good side if I wish to be safe and prosper.”

J. Jacob cautiously warned to Mayer with the admission. “Ja, that is my name. I congratulate you for being observant.” He continued to examine the books.

“So...you wish to purchase...?”asked Cohn.

“GO! Sniff out more books! NOW!” said Mayer, fanning his hand at Cohn for him to scoot out the door.

As Cohn departed, J. Jacob and Mayer talked about the value of the books. “Not much, I wager,” said Mayer. “Oddities, as I stated. Herr Luther wanted me to repair damaged spines then find a buyer. Oy! Extra work! Do I look like I need to do extra? But I do it. I have two lined up in London through Jewish contacts. But if you like the books, I would just as well keep them in Frankfurt. So would Herr Doktor Luther. I must know quickly, though. Otherwise they will be sent by post to London tomorrow morning.”

“Tell me of the German books, please.”

“They are not here. What more can I say? They are promised to Herr Luther. This is his word to me. I can only tell you that much.”

“Books...in German...printed in the Colonies?”

“Ja.”

“I have not heard of such books. Collectors and libraries will compete for copies.”

Mayer developed a twinkle in his eye and added, “V-e-r-y rare. Among the first German books printed in the Colonies. How valuable? Shrewd men will set their OWN prices if they know how to build demand! The books’ worth will be as much as a buyer would be willing to pay. Will those early German books coming here be valuable? Oy! Ja! Because of limited numbers...it would be best if their leather covers had fancy tooling.”

There was a slight pause. “The books. If you are interested, make your offer now. I am clearing out the books. I have a new business in mind.”

“What, may I ask?”

“I have built up cash...for loaning. Have you heard of two brothers Johann Philipp and Simon Bethmann? Oy! They turned to loaning in 1748. Two merchants turned to banking; that is what they are. Successful, too. That is my goal. To be honest, my family has encouraged it for years, on the side of their other businesses.”

“Were they active in the Frankfurt Stock Exchange?”

“A bit. Just...a bit. I am not privileged to say more,” the Jewish dealer squirmed

J. Jacob knew the exchange had sprung from the spring and autumn Fairs of Frankfurt. J. Jacob had studied this for a court case. Since buyers and sellers needed to exchange cash for goods, the “exchange” was begun in 1585. A mere 85 merchants agreed to found it. They established standards and fixed the values of nine species of coins for rates of exchange. The Great Council of Frankfurt solidified their decisions.

“Perhaps now is time to make it my main business,” said Mayer. “You know, our Rabbi, he approves of loaning to non-Jews. Why? It helps! It helps us. It helps them. I hear this in our synagogue here in the Judengasse.”

“Better printing blocks,” mumbled J. Jacob as he set down the last pamphlet.

“Bitte...?”asked Mayer.

“If there were better printing blocks in the Colonies, their books and circulars would be in demand,” J. Jacob offered as he switched back to the main subject.

“Oy! Until they have them, this is all I can offer. Is there a deal?”

J. Jacob said he would think about it.

“Until tomorrow. You have until then. I am honest! That is when the post will wing them to London.”

As J. Jacob reached the door, Herr Rothschild made a surprising statement. “In Frankfurt, Catholics have the big churches, the Calvinists like their money, and Lutherans hold to power. But what do Jews have? Books to sell, old items to peddle, new things to sell, a little of everything, and a ghetto to call home...our crooked little street with its crooked little houses. Oy! I should be pleased to God that I have a roof over mine head.”

He left one parting thought: “Oy! Tomorrow...early...if you still want them.”

+++++

## **Penn, the Visitor**

*The year is 1765. The composite character I call Brunhilde was among the wealthy of Frankfurt. I have little doubt that someone in Frankfurt very likely had a similar conversation with one of my ancestors, and perhaps yours, too. She told Francine, twin sister of Advocate Perschbecher, the events of a century earlier as relayed the old woman's family.*

"The young man who stole the loving glances of my ancestor nearly a century ago was more taken up with the knowledge and practice of Protestant religion than he was of a woman's charms. There was a breeze of religious thought blowing through the Rhein and Main regions. A Britisher from the American Colonies came to blow that breeze even more. William Penn was his name. He came to Frankfurt to bend the ear of anyone who wished to hear his quaking over God's Word. So, Grandmother attended a special gathering. I do not know where it happened, perhaps in a stately home or meeting room in one of our many halls in Frankfurt. Perhaps it was in a cozy hall in the large, ornate theater here. She frequented musical performances that she said were artful. Wherever the location, if she told me, I have forgotten it. Silly! I should have written her recollections." She sighed, snapping out of a near-trance over spilled years. "All that is past.

"It was the woman of our city who welcomed him warmly. Their husbands resented his intrusion. They took his acts as a political assault indirectly aimed at them and sent as an unexpected arrow through their wives. You know, Francine, that politics and religion have oft times been blended beyond the point of separation, much like a hen's egg. Break it into a dish and you see the separation of yolk and clear. Beat them with a fork and the two become one, inseparably combined. The one overpowers the other in appearance as the yellow yolk dominates. When fried, streaks of white appear, lessening the tone of the yolk. Still, the blend is one, not two. When Herr Penn preached religion and talked politics—freedom, he named it – the blend offended leaders of Frankfurt. They did not trust him – not for what he said, but more for the method he used to convince the women. It must have been his hope to change the minds of their husbands with this method, for a wife can be a strong influence on her spouse even if he cannot sense it."

"Penn became very important in the Colonies, didn't he?" asked Francine, half knowing the history.

"Of a fact, he did! His family was prominent in Britain but Penn's stiff-necked religiosity offended those who bartered in power. He went packing to the American continent. There he obtained privileges to land...."

"Penn-Sylvania Colony?"

"That remains its name, even after he passed to heaven," Brunhilde emphasized.

+++++

# A Firm Frankfurt connection with America

*Are you getting the idea how history and your genealogy can be intertwined in an interesting and factual manner? Read more and trace the rise of a series of ancestors in the Imperial City of Frankfurt.*

In 1683 that personage organized a migration group, as Francine called it. Checking family papers jogged her memory. When Apotheker Johann Wilhelm Perschbecher settled in Frankfurt by 1648, he held a much needed position for the city. The Thirty Years' War devastated families and their riches. The toll on lives was huge. Frankfurt avoided severe stress but still was prey to diseases that lingered among the population of the Empire. Medications were necessary to curtail illnesses.

So it was that the Apotheker J. Wilhelm set up shop in Der Engel on the north corner of the Ostzelle line of buildings lining the Roemerberg plaza. (**NOTE: *Der Engel* was accurately reconstructed following the devastation of the Second World War; it was pictured on the cover of German Life magazine for August-September of 2012.**)

This positioned him for notoriety among the Patrician families that conducted business in the plaza area. Francine mused, "Little did he know he would create a dynasty of sorts with a line of well educated Burghers, Lawyers, and Advocates that participated in the maturing of Frankfurt." Yet, he did not live to see it nor did he have an inkling of it. Due to his premature passing and the death of his wife, their son, later to be known as Doktor of Laws Wilhelm Perschbecher, was raised in his teen years through the major assistance of two Medical Doktors. Francine had forgotten many of the facts. But there it was in writing: Doktors Daniel and Georg Horst, important men in Frankfurt and well traveled experts. The latter held renowned for his professorial ability in medical science at universities in Marburg and Giessen.

"Such facts would bore most people," Francine thought out loud in the privacy of her home as she nearly tired over flipping through sheets of information. Call it curiosity or fascination, but an inner force pulled her forward through documents that connected to the top leadership of Frankfurt.

By 1683, her branch of the family found their abode and future in the Free Imperial City. An early Francine was born into the family through a marriage connection with Burgher stock in the city of Brede. So it was that the present Francine, twin to J. Jacob, was named after that great aunt, chosen to be her baptismal godmother.

Francine held little doubt that during that point in history the paths of Pastorius and J. Wilhelm crossed several times while operating in their legal professions.

Francine lifted her head from the papers. It wasn't that she needed a break from flipping pages and scanning sheets with her eyes. In that moment she delayed as her mind wandered to the idea of what might have been. Her Perschbecher family had no thoughts of leaving the comforts of Frankfurt. Why should they? Their income and positions were high and secure. But as for Pastorius and followers, the invitation of Penn was very appealing.

Her thoughts settled on the extended family in Schaafheim. They certainly had more to gain in the New World, but their daily schedules were safe, modestly productive, and predictable in the cradle of their ancestors. At least, for the present.

Francine read that on August 20 of 1683 Pastorius sailed for a six-week voyage across the Atlantic Ocean. With him was a company of 13 German families with roots in Crefeld in German territory. Pastorius secured 5,350 acres of Penn's land near Philadelphia. His site was



named Germantown. She knew there had been earlier arrivals of Germans in the British Colonies. Yet, the Germantown formation relied on a small, concerted migration, unlike the New World travels of others that involved individuals or a couple families.

Francine wondered what could have happened if her ancestor had gone to Penn's colony. She would not be in Frankfurt struggling to help the city meet its financial obligations. Life may have been simpler but certainly not safer with the threat of disease, potential danger from Indians, skirmishes looming between British and French settlers, and multiple disputes between merchants, trappers, and soldiers. Even frontier living in general was a huge risk as an American community scratched its way into existence.

Francine's mind drifted into more aspects of "what could have been" before she shook those thoughts from her mind and returned to the present dilemma of the Free Imperial City.

GP

+++++

**Where Can You Find** reliable historical information about your ancestral town, city, or territory? It may be closer than you think!

**Try books.** Start wide and narrow down. That is to say, get a grasp on the big historical picture and then focus down to a smaller time frame or location.

If your family research is on the last half of the 1800s, then study the period from 1851-1899. Take the big view of Germany (which was in the formative stage up to 1870-1871). Narrow down to the history of the territory or area from which your family came. Discover how the land was ruled from on high and how daily life was channeled by lesser officials. Watch for wars, disasters, plagues, blights, bad weather...and you may get an idea why they left for America.

Do the same for the time period and location they chose for their settlement in America. An East Coast community may have been vastly different to that of the Midwest or South. Overcrowding in large coastal cities was far from the lifestyle of farmlands and plains. Cost of living and land availability were important. WHERE they settled may provide insights as to their LINE OF WORK and their financial CIRCUMSTANCES.

Watch for disasters. In this edition I mentioned the Kennedy assassination. My great-grandmother told me about the assassination of President McKinley which was a milestone event for her as a young girl in September of 1901. Your ancestors struggled through thick and thin circumstances, to be sure! Every generation does! There usually are reports of tragedies, earthquakes, floods, epidemics...you name it...that can have a direct impact on your family.

**Try newspapers.** I'll make the example simple. You wonder why there were three deaths in your ancestral line within a few-month period. You stumble onto an American newspaper article from 1870 that tells of an outbreak of smallpox which was a killing disease in the past. You notice that the deaths of your ancestors came at the peak of the epidemic. Now you can draw a simple and safe conclusion based on historical evidence.

You may not always be correct and your assumptions should have as much evidence as possible. But if all major variables are eliminated and your evidenced still stands, then you can be more certain those are the facts behind your family.

Try maps. Find accurate renditions of your ancestral land and become familiar with it. Make note of nearby towns and villages and of land features (such as mountains, rivers, and forests). If you are fortunate to find a late 1800s atlas of your family's county in America, look

for the names of families on farm land plats or housing spaces in small towns. Examine the names of other families who live nearby. Chances are good that some of those adjoining farms or houses were owned by close friends or extended family.

**Go online.** Play with searches for any word, name, or phrase that relates to your ancestral period and see what transpires on the screen. Copy, save, or print the pertinent stuff. Many German villages have websites. Large cities have archives. Some towns have archives, too, but their material may be combined with the archival collection of a town a short distance away.

Why? Economy. The way a German Kreis (similar to our concept of a small county) has been formed combines several small localities into one larger administrative site. All the archival civil documents of several towns may be centralized in a single place for ease of research and to save on upkeep that would have happened at several locations.

Regardless, go online to find a village or town website, then trigger in to it for an archives. You may not find one, but there may be a reply from an amateur archivist that is the best historian for the area. That person may provide a wealth of information that at one time made an impact on your ancestors!

**Ask around.** There may be people in your neighborhood, in G-SIG, at your Church, associated with a nearby school, or in your circle of friends who may have interesting material to lend. Do not neglect to study the genealogical/historical reports drafted by others. These could open new insights on what your ancestors experienced.

I seldom do "light reading." Usually I enjoy reading historical facts over a 2,000+ year period, then make mental (and physical) notes worth recalling at a later date. That's one way a person builds a reference library...small or large...but functional for genealogical purposes. GP

+++++

## ***CONCLUDING THOUGHT:***

***If you add historical depth and social perspective to your rendition of family history, you will find it enriching and personally rewarding. You will be walking in the shoes of your ancestors in ways many people may never understand.***

***When I construct a setting from the past, it has a degree of creativity to it. After all, no film footage exists. My best rule and guide are documents. However, you and I have another benefit. Since we are derived from our ancestors, we probably have mental gifts and thought patterns that may be patterned from them. What YOU think they may have said could be as close as ANYONE can tell...because YOU become the closest thing to that bygone relative.***

+++++

Want to get yet on the FORUM email list? 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.

+++++