

G-SIG FORUM #99

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-coordinator.

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Tools for German Research: Internet Publishing

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

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 new found 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. In 16 April, 2003, *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, like RootsWeb WorldConnect, where you maintain some control of your data.

There are issues in publishing in any form, such as *what can I copyright?* 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 - tinyurl.com/69nwvb7. If that does not connect, try: http://broadcast.lds.org/elearning/FHD/Community/en/Community/Fred_Held/Managing_Your_Family_Records_on_the_Internet/Player.html)

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Not German? Think Again...

by Gerald Perschbacher (LL.D.)

Practically everyone makes a move in their lives. Some move to house after house as they take jobs in various places in North America or around the world. Others move across town

or to the warm environs of the South. Still more move toward downsizing their estates and call a condo or apartment their new home. Moving is often a part of living.

There is a similar analogy to ancient days of the migrating Germanic tribes.

Wherever the human race began, it has spread from that point to include nearly every habitable location on the globe. Movement of individuals, families, and clans began for several reasons: Desire for open space, the necessity of more food, the vision of riches (or improvement, peace, etc.), flight from danger, and merely "sticking together" when the head of a group thought it was in the best interest of the bunch to move.

Your ancestors may have moved to America for all those reasons, plus more.

Today nations have divided the earth's surface into spheres of influence segregating from other populations by reason of borders, laws, languages, cultures, customs, histories, ideologies, and politics. Treaties are formed and broken, trade agreements are made for a time, and either cordial or cold relations perpetuate in a general era of co-existence. Diversity between nations is tolerated, sometime appreciated, occasionally respected, but not always adored.

Because of this and high-population dynamics, nations seldom move. Sometimes a country is split or unified, but as a whole, nations stay put. Their people may leave for a time during war or famine, but it seems the majority usually return.

From the German perspective, the last great movement of German people took place following the Second World War. As East Germany was established with its severely structured Communistic rules, regulations, and demands, millions of Germans in that part of the land moved to the West German side, if they could. Officials on that side welcomed them (even amid apprehension about the shift to higher population statistics and the pressure for more jobs, housing, and food). It was properly "political" to welcome those fellow Germans who were more or less "escapees" from their ancestral haunts.

Perhaps someone will calculate the percentage of "next generation" families that moved back to their eastern homeland now that the man-made border is gone with the collapse of East Germany's governing system. If that calculation is made, it could be small. However, as time progresses, there may very likely be a resurgence of interest in "moving east."

Germanic people have been moving hither and yon for centuries, especially well before 1000 A.D. They moved for all the reasons mentioned earlier in this article -- and probably a few more beyond those. That movement literally formed Western Europe.

So when someone says, "I have no German ancestors," yet their lineage was traced to Western Europe, it would be well for them to have second thoughts! Read on to find out why.

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Tips:

Gain a fuller understanding of Germanic movements by studying the maps and information found at these sites:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Germanic_peoples

or

https://www.google.com/search?q=german+tribal+migrations&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ei=zd0VU_feHOeuvQH04YCIDw&ved=0CD8QsAQ&biw=732&bih=434

or

http://www.ancient.eu.com/Migration_Age/

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What Difference does it Make...*to bring up the subject of the **ancient Germanic tribes**? Several reasons. PERSPECTIVE is obtained when we realize how the European nations (and the peoples) came into existence. It is the EARLIEST REACH for our genealogical studies. It puts our research IN FOCUS with a CONTINUITY that connects us with history. And such a look to the past may unlock NUANCES in the way we act, work, think, play, and face challenges today. The Germany of the last 140+ years is based on the Germanic people of a forgotten era. REGIONALISM and TRADITIONS still reflect a portion of those old tribal practices (the May Pole, for example, and the love of sausage, beer, etc.).*

Understand our present by looking to the distant past.

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Back to Basics

The basic truth is simple: Germanic people had a part in forming nearly every country or culture in the Baltics, Scandinavia, and points westward. How did this happen?

Migrating tribes were the cause. Some historians admit that the **Goths** swung down from Scandinavia by the year 150 A.D. Reasons are unknown, but it may have been due to population growth, avarice for better land, warmer settings, and so on. The Goths swung into what is now mainly Poland. The Germanic **Gepids** were their neighbors to the south while the western part of Poland and the eastern part of Germany was home to the **Burgundians** and **Vandals**. The **Lombards** were more southerly at the origins of the Vistula and Oder Rivers.

But none of these German tribes remained in those positions for long.

The Lombards (Langobards or "long beards") resettled in northern and central portions of Italy and south of the Danube River. The Goths eventually split into the West Goths (Ostrogoths in the Balkans) and East Goths (Visigoths who moved along the Mediterranean Coast from Greece into the Iberian Peninsula) and dominated those areas. Some groups continued moving and reached the western environs of the Black Sea. Evidently living off the crops of earlier population groups, both types of Goths gained reputations for being barbarian marauders. Even Rome was not beyond their sights for booty.

Not far removed from the movement of the Goths were the Vandals, who gave up their name for the *dark art* of "vandalism" as they plundered and ravaged portions of Central Europe and eventually meandered into northern Africa, even as far away as ancient Carthage by the year 450 A.D. Around that time the Vandals headed by sea to Rome for more "vandalizing."

The confederation of the **Suevi** (see: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suebi>) who had dwelled southeast of what we call Denmark, swept to the south and the southwest, taking up their

abodes in Swabia and Switzerland. The Burgundians stretched their living space to southeastern France and between the Rhein and Meuse Rivers.

As tribes moved from one point to another, some clans spun off. They no longer could (or wanted to) move based on family situations (age, illness, giving birth, desire to settle down, etc.). Each time this happened, the central core of a new population group was ripe for being established. Centuries of marriages between families in that clan and with the existing population melded their cultures into a conglomerate of necessity to survive and keep peace among neighbors. But where the dominant Germanic clan perpetuated, it promoted Germanic ways of thinking.

Swing into Central Europe and examine its tribal movements. The **Saxons** were adjacent to the east of the **Frisians** (who lived in the low countries). **Thuringians** called the Weser River their central home. The **Franks** (including the **Hessen** sub-tribes), not wanting to move very far, dominated along the mouth of the Rhein River and up to what are now Mainz and Frankfurt.

Most of the tribal movements subsided between 450 to about 550 A.D., so when you consider the great distances of hundreds of miles over little more than two centuries for most tribes, it meant keeping on the move every so many years or decades. GP

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Progress...

That's what the Germanic tribes wanted. There were interesting similarities between the range of tribes when it came to laws, rules, family honor, the respect of marriage, and the raising of children to be obedient. This is bought out by ancient sets of laws that exist from the Burgundians and Franks. Search to find out more (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burgundians> or check http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lex_Gundobada).

Also see <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/salic-law.html> for the Laws of the Salian Franks who lived along the Rhein River as it poured into the Atlantic (hence "salian" was the term used to locate the Franks near the salty ocean).

As laws were enforced and adjusted, society was established more and more. The rise of nations was beginning. There were still little kingdoms even within tribal bounds. But the solidifying of nations and territories began as the wandering tribes found their homes.

The rule of law was the backbone for disseminating the virtues and ideals of the tribes. As the Burgundians and Franks grew, they absorbed other smaller tribes and became confederations. Generally those smaller tribes (or clusters of clans) were offshoots of the larger, so they had a propensity to "rejoin" the bigger tribe from which they arose or had been closely associated. Bonds of commonality were strengthened. GP

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Making Small Steps Count

G-SIG's Patricia Konert von zur Muehlen (whom we call Pat: patvonzurm@msn.com) had a bit of spare time and energy to show how a person, with a little creativity, can explore genealogical research options online. Her exploration centered on the name Messmer. She was not alone in her suggestions since other G-SIG folks offered their own quick investigation. However, for the sake of linear progress by one person, here are some steps Pat took to help.

By the way, the person who asked for advice attended a G-SIG Gathering and interfaced with others for counsel. That's a real benefit in attending a Gathering!

Pat reported: "Mary Elizabeth Hoffer, wife of John Moehsmer, had parents who were born in Switzerland. I found records for John Moehsmer, John M. Moehsmer, John W. Moehsmer, and John U. Moehsmer -- and I believe that they could all be the same person.

"I found records with the name Hoffer and Minor in the Missouri Death Certificates database (<http://www.sos.mo.gov/archives/resources/deathcertificates/Default.asp>). On the StLGS website (<https://www.stlgs.org/>), the name Rombach is also connected with a Moehsmer who may or may not be of the same branch that (the researcher) is searching.

"The current online German telephone directory has no one with the surname Moehsmer, but it does for Messmer...(so) the search was extended for related or similar names and brought up a list of folks with the surnames Mössmer or Mößmer. Searching the German telephone directory for Möhsmer brought up a list of folks with the surname Mössmer or Mößmer. Going to the English Wikipedia and typing in Moehsmer got this response: Did you mean: *Messmer*?"

Pat continued to track down details.

"The following was found on Mundia website: John M. Moehsmer, born in Germany in 1847; died in St. Louis in 1902." There were immediate family members. She checked at: <http://www.mundia.com/de/Search/Results?surname=MOEHSMER&birthPlace=Deutschland> There was more to learn at: <http://www.mundia.com/de/Person/36168473/19076183737>.

Pat explored newspaper obituaries and articles online to find even more! That included the reason for a sudden death. She also found several pdf files with added information on family members.

Pat found death certificartes connecting relatives by relationships. It was a simple matter online. She also added, "As for non-digitized records, probate records in St. Louis from 1900 to 1935 may be researched under **St. Louis Probate Court, 1804-1900** —case files are microfilmed, digitized, & indexed online. **Case files 1900-1931 & 1959-1971** are stored and available for research; all other St. Louis City Probate records are accessible at the Probate Court file room in the Civil Courts building (Contact Gregory Ingram, Records Officer, 314-622-4919, gregory.ingram@courts.mo.gov)."

Do a little digging and you will find that the St. Louis files include:
+ **St. Louis Circuit Court Civil Case Files** (and predecessor courts-1804-1815):
+ **1804-1835** —microfilmed and indexed on database; record books and indexes on microfilm for Civil and Criminal Case files

- + **1836-1860** —most unprocessed; record books and indexes on microfilm
- + **1861-1863** —processed; not yet indexed or microfilmed; record books and indexes on microfilm
- + **1864-1865** —unprocessed, not yet indexed or microfilmed; record books and indexes on microfilm
- + **1866-1868** —processed and indexed June 2008; record books and indexes not on microfilm +
- + **1869-1875** -- unprocessed, not yet indexed or microfilmed
- + The St. Louis Circuit Court Historical Records Project digitized and made accessible on the project website more than 500 selected antebellum case files. These relate to Slave Freedom Suits, Lewis & Clark and the Corps of Discovery members, Fur Trade, and Native Americans. Additional thematic areas will be added as processing continues.

St. Louis Criminal Court, 1831-1875 — case files on microfilm, 1840-1875 (some gaps in sequences of records filmed); record books and index books for 1831-1875 on microfilm.

St. Louis Court of Common Pleas, 1841-1865 —case files unprocessed; record books and indexes on microfilm

St. Louis Land Court, 1853-1865 —case files unprocessed; record books and indexes on microfilm

St. Louis Court of Law Commissioners, 1851-1865 —(smaller claims similar to justice of peace)-- case files unprocessed; record books and indexes on microfilm

St. Louis Probate Court, 1804-1900 —case files microfilmed, digitized, & indexed online.

All this information shows how a little known-how, a bit of time, a good interest, creativity, good online tools, or personal visits can advance learning, genealogically speaking!

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TRY IT! Sometimes it bears good benefits to institute a little search of current families with the surname you are seeking. You never know what can pop up! This can provide leads and contacts for you to pursue. Go online to: www.whitepages.com.

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Celts Were on the Move, also

Look closely at sources keen on Celts and you may be surprised. The Celts may have been more German than you realized!

It appears safer to say "**Proto-Germanic**," since the rise of Celts likely preceded the rise of German tribes but that both arose from the same branch of the human race. When you study their physical features, methods of warfare, tactics of tribes...there are striking similarities.

There are differences, too, among methods of worship, deities, and cultural trends. But these may SEEM different since we know so little about them.

If a jury had been appointed to decide the matter with certainty, we can also admit "the jury is still out." That may be due to the centuries of lost information between now and the Celtic era. It may be attributed to the lack of recorded documents by the Romans and the fact that (at least up to the present) there is no firm evidence that the Celts had an advanced written language.

The earliest verified Celtic culture is called Hallstatt, named after the Austrian site where significant findings were discovered. Generally the wave of Celts preceded the Germanic hordes. That allowed the Celts to be the dominant people of Western Europe for a time. The Slavs to the east were the third major genealogical group that placed their historical stamp on Europe.

If Celts ARE Germanic (or Proto-Germanic) then the German tribal migrations were a second wave of Germanic influence.

To use an example of differences and similarities within the same culture, consider the present Germanic societies of High German (Hoch Deutsch) and Low German (Plat Deutsch). There is even a Middle German that seems more akin to High than Low. (Take time to see: http://pascal.kgw.tu-berlin.de/gnom/Lehre/kw1/06_dialektologie/dialekte.jpg.) If these regions were studied 2,000 years from now with little historical record except for a few samples of the dialects, experts could be hard pressed to say they all were German. If different dialects were taken as German, then how would the Dutch of the Netherlands or the Danes be rated? As German? The dissimilarities may seem close enough yet wide enough to result in a hung jury!

On the heels of the Celts were the Germanic tribes jostling for position in Europe. The Celts evidently gave ground either by choice, necessity, or lost battles. There are numerous Celtic evidences of habitations giving way to the Germans.

The Celts were squeezed by Roman legions that swept into Gaul (now France) and up through the Balkans. With pressure from both sides, Celts either capitulated and blended into the German tribes, or they headed for other territory. Hence, Celts made it to the British Isles. GP

To learn more about the "facts" and the "debate" on the Celtic-German subject, see:

<http://www.city-data.com/forum/europe/1457341-celts-germanics-same-people.html>

or

<http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20080618131631AA3TA69>

or

<http://gardenstone.info/?p=196>

or

<http://www.proto-english.org/l4.html>

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ANGLO-SAXON CULTURE

To focus on the idea of Western Europe being largely Germanic, let's investigate the Saxons along Germany's northern coast, and the Angles who called Denmark home by 450.

Historical overview: By 400 A.D., the Roman Empire was a shadow of its former greatness in strength, military presence, morals, and achievements. Finances were an issue, also, so troops in extreme reaches of the Empire were recalled. This affected the outposts in the British Islands. Soon Roman structures were claimed by local tribes and even to the present many Roman structures exist. By that time Christianity had entered that part of the empire.

Holding fast to their local roots were Celts who had migrated to the islands. There also were Britons, Scots, and Picts. A tribal leader named Vortigern asked for Angles, Saxons, and Jutes to join his forces on the islands. Thus, there was an influx of interested Jutes (a Germanic tribe concentrated in Denmark) followed by bunches of Angles and Saxons.

As with many Germanic tribes, these newcomers to Britain bowed to men of power called lords and even kings. These were not super-influential leaders, but they held strong sway among enclaves of people who followed their instructions and were awed by their abilities.

Tribes were maintained as structures for several reasons. There was safety in numbers. Many clans in a tribe were related to each other, so there was common blood and purpose. There was familiarity and trust. No doubt their language, worship forms, traditions, and outlook on life held striking similarities.

Just as in other lands, tribes began to unite, form alliances, or otherwise rely on each other for trade and other aspects of living. Or, they fought. They eliminated their opponents. They fled. It was a matter of choice and practicality -- even survival.

One strong proof of the Germanic influence in Great Britain is the language. English traces its origin as a Germanic offspring. Even today there are words of similarities between early English and German. *Haus* versus house is a good example. Another is *gut* (pronounce "goot") versus good.

There was little uniformity among the German-speaking people of any tribe before the year 1000 A.D. It wasn't until Martin Luther translated the Bible into German in the early 1500s that the German language became codified as we came to know it.

As tribal groups were separated from others, there was little need to maintain casual phrases commonly used between them in trade and negotiations. This allowed for the rise of other variants as isolation from older tribal ties with the European continent eventually weakened and dissolved. What followed was fresh creativity and adaptation of language, customs, and actions. As tribes in the British Isles made more contact, regional interests were strong but an overall uniformity in trade and practices was promoted for the sake of practicality.

So...if you are tracing your lineage to England, realize there is a possibility you could trace back to an old tribe with Germanic origins. Indeed, it will be nearly impossible to trace a direct line by generations, but you may be able to claim physical, cultural, and historical ties. If so, it may merely be a jump across the Channel for you to connect to a larger tribal heritage and track the movements of that group via ancient writings of the Romans! GP

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