

# G-SIG FORUM #10

...from the German Special Interest Group. G-SIG is an effort of the St. Louis Genealogical Society and the German American Heritage Society, St. Louis.

This communication is a forum for educational, historical and genealogical information with fresh insights and ideas on German traditions and ancestry. Gerald Perschbacher, Group Leader for G-SIG, serves as *FORUM* compiler and coordinator.

If you would like to include a notice or request, please submit your information in condensed form for the *EXCHANGE!* section (limit 50 words). *EXCHANGE!* notices run only once, but you may resubmit. We reserve the privilege to shorten and edit. Send your *EXCHANGE!* submission to [germansig@stlgs.org](mailto:germansig@stlgs.org).

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## SHE FOUND IT!

Kathleen Wurth ( [kathyinwashington@hotmail.com](mailto:kathyinwashington@hotmail.com) ) recently found her ancestral home in Bavaria. How did she do it?

“I contacted a German researcher that Mary Huestch, a member of the G-SIG Bavarian Cluster, had been in contact with and gave him the information I had on my great-great-grandmother. He found her--and her soon-to-be-husband--in a newspaper clipping that stated, ‘The following people are leaving; does anyone have a problem with that,’ or something in that order. It told her birthplace...near a town called Kotzting (now called Bad Kotzting)....

“So after more than 25 years of looking, I have the name. This is the first time I had to pay for research but I guess you get to a point when you have to do that--saves a lot of time. I will try to pick up the ball from here and will write to the archives in Regensburg where the church records are kept.”

Bravo, Kathy! This is one way in which participants in a G-SIG Cluster can benefit each other. The worst that can happen to a researcher is to feel alone in the search. Clusters can support your efforts and enlarge your scope, as Kathy points out. If you would like to participate in a Cluster, contact Kathy, or send a message to Lisa McLaughlin at [lmclaughlin@lewisrice.com](mailto:lmclaughlin@lewisrice.com).

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## GORDON'S SUCCESS WITH PRUSSIA

Gordon Seyffert [gordonseyffert@mac.com](mailto:gordonseyffert@mac.com) is making progress on his Prussian roots. He shared his insights in a recent message to Lisa McLaughlin, Cluster coordinator, and to me as G-SIG leader.

Gordon is researching his JASCHINSKI matrilineal 4th great grandparents. “This would be Prussian research...I have been reading and re-reading baptismal and marriage records for Kreis Johannisburg at my local Family History Center (in the Kansas City area), and have more films on order. This was a district on the Polish border, and Fort Lyck was a garrison located not far from Johannisburg Stadt during the Napoleonic wars.

“My WAGNER family lived in the city, and the JASCHINSKI family was

associated with a nearby (8 km.) farm (Adl. Borken) linked to minor nobility. If I understand correctly, the German and Polish cultures were closely tied in this area. Certainly many of the surnames I find are of Polish derivation, but the given names are mostly German. The records are hard to read... a mixture of German and Latin. The church books are Evangelical Lutheran, and this fits with advice I was given years ago that JASCHINSKIs from Masuria should be found to be Polish Protestants.”

Gordon hired John T. Humphrey, a genealogical expert on Pennsylvania Dutch church records. John had access to *ahnentafels* discovered in captured World War II German records. “Three *ahnentafels* from JASCHINSKI SS men were delivered to me ...and they are very intriguing. The most complete is for a storm trooper from Kreis Ortelsburg, next door to the west from ‘my’ Kreis Johannsburg; it is from 1936, and traces back his JASCHINSKI line six generations (to #64 on his chart), all with birth and death dates, and places, in the first five generations. The name changes slightly in each of the first four generations, and I will be consulting with a friend who is half French and half Polish to give me her reaction to this documented record of surname ‘drift.’

“The other two *ahnentafels* appear to be for men in SS regular military units, as they only go back three generations and are for sons of working-class families (per listed occupations); they also concern West Prussia and Posen locales, instead of the East Prussian area I am studying.”

Gordon has downloaded all sorts of information from other sources, thus creating his own special database. He continues to add to his genealogical list.

“Additionally, I am keeping a record of all persons born and baptized (plus parents and witnesses) in the villages where people of the JASCHINSKI name were born -- at least for the late 18th and early 19th centuries -- in the event their names may turn up in the course of my continuing research. Examples of surnames I am finding are: NIKODEM, SADOWSKI, and URBAN. My new matrilineal name appears to be ULATOWSKI, a new challenge!”

Now Gordon’s research is centering on Kreis Ortelsburg, “once the Kreis Johannsburg data is mined to my satisfaction. I feel a bit as though I am following genealogical breadcrumbs through a forest of records as I search for my ancestral ‘Hansel und Gretel’!”

Available records are limited in this old area of Prussia, due to war. “This point was brought home to me when I found a German Web site devoted to Kreis Johannsburg. There was a tab for genealogy, but the period to which they referred was not the 1780s to 1810s, but rather 1944-45. They have assembled a map of the city that identifies, based on aging memories, where each family lived in the last days of the Third Reich. They have established friendly ties to some of today’s Polish residents, but it is clear they have a thirst for the past that cannot ever be quenched. They ‘can’t go home again.’ Because they have this particular time fixation, it seems rather pointless to try to find any Germans who would be interested in what I am attempting to construct -- mostly for my personal enlightenment and amusement.

“I wonder if others in the Prussian SIG have this problem, or if most St. Louis genealogists are searching closer to Berlin and points further west.”

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**MORE ABOUT PRUSSIA...** by Gerald Perschbacher

**Let's stick with** Gordon's project. In response to his success, I noted several things. I'll condense them for you.

I told Gordon he was a trailblazer for his lineage, which is what most genealogists strive to achieve. Indeed, the ability to uncover information in eastern Prussia is problematic but not impossible. As nations contended for the fertile flatlands of the area, villages and populations were devastated, refugees resulted, names were changed by reason of language shifts and background cover-ups, and more.

I liken eastern Prussia to America's Wild West as Germans headed east. A degree of danger over the centuries in eastern Prussia resulted in the construction of castles and fortresses to assure protection and a military presence. Many Germans believed eastward expansion was their manifest destiny. Perhaps this was based on ancient realization that Germanic tribes had inhabited the region, then moved westward. By 1200 A.D. the swing was back to the east.

Here's a bit of advice for all genealogists. Don't limit your research from the present on back. You may find it advantageous to study the general history of eastern Prussia from its earliest days of tribal jurisdiction under Baltic peoples, through the era of the Teutonic Knights who claimed much of the area, and then up to the Napoleonic Age.

Approaching history from two historical fronts will provide a deeper understanding of the cultures and events engulfing the region. This holds true for any part of Germany. There will come times when you will dip into this reserve of knowledge to glean a deeper appreciation for your heritage, and such information may turn on mental lights as more recent genealogical findings surface.

When it comes to research, be persistent. Continue to document your findings. Network with others. Track new leads.

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## MAYBE IT'S IN YOUR NAME

Have you studied the etymology of Germanic names? Have you checked recognized sources to see if your family names are listed as nobility? If you make a connection with known nobility, this could open several more generations for you.

If you are unaware of print resources, check with an online search for both subjects, or consult an expert at one of the large and established libraries near you. Basically, if a family's name does not appear in the verified lists of nobility, as approved by European officials, then nobility most likely does not exist in a given family. That does not mean a family was automatically of peasant stock. There was a middle category of ministerial plus a later category of urban leadership that arose in patterns similar to nobility, but these were not noble families of old, nor did many achieve noble status.

Certain German names took on Slavic influences and spellings, but the people were still very much German. Sometimes etymology also gives a better idea of regional origination of surnames.

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## NEW BOOK ON GERMANS IN THE CIVIL WAR

John L. Maurath ([maurath1@juno.com](mailto:maurath1@juno.com)) passed along details of a new book dealing with Civil War history and German heritage.

When the Confederate attack on Fort Sumter precipitated the war, the North requested militiamen to fight. Many Germans were among the first 75,000 who signed to serve. Members of the Indianapolis *turnverein* were among the first who joined the army. These volunteers only had a three-month enlistment. When they returned home, they encouraged politicians and prominent individuals to form an Indiana German regiment. The formation of the 32nd Indiana Infantry took place in August of 1861 when Indiana Governor Oliver P. Morton tapped August Willich to form the unit.

Now wartime experiences come to life in the book, *August Willich's Gallant Dutchmen: Civil War Letters from the 32nd Indiana Infantry*, by Joseph R. Reinhart. The author translated and edited 60 letters written by soldiers of the unit. The book is published by Kent State University Press (266 pages, \$35).

Willich had military experience as an officer in the Prussian army for 19 years and had led a group of revolutionaries in the failed 1848 German Revolution. He was court-martialed and emigrated to New York. Reinhart asserts that a good number of German Americans wanted to fight the Confederacy because it reminded them of European aristocracy.

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## STUDYING WARFARE

In Germanic history, it was common for citizens to fight for their lord and region. At times this was seasonal. Usually when war was imminent, service was mandatory. *The Art of Renaissance Warfare* by Stephen Turnbull covers the period from the fall of Constantinople in 1453 to the beginning of the Thirty Years War in 1618. The author reviews the advances in warfare, strategies, and the general thinking that prevailed among Europeans and Turks. Out of this period came the philosophy of war that has been perpetuated nearly 400 years.

For the historian, the book is a grand source of knowledge. In 272 pages hardbound, and covering 15 chapters, advances are discussed. Wars are noted. Philosophies and mistakes in battles are expounded. As these aspects developed, Europe was shaped.

Artillery, fortifications, castles, revolution, monarchs, and political motives form an interesting interplay. Knights in their final years in shining armor gave way to the gun and canon. The rise of Swiss battle techniques made the relatively small nation powerful beyond expectation. Siege warfare took its sinister toll.

For the genealogists who can trace their lineage to 1600, the book will set the stage for European life and challenges. For genealogists who would like to trace their lines to that era, a keener understanding of the times can come through the book. This, in turn, may provide insights for research that may enhance ancestral discoveries.

Price: \$34.95; through bookstores, or available from MBI Publishing, Galtier Plaza, Suite 200, 380 Jackson Street, St. Paul, MN 55101-3885. **GP**

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## **NAPOLEON & WESTPHALIA...again**

Recent inquiries have been made about Westphalia and the Napoleonic Age, so here are some sources you can research to discover more about the late 1700s and early 1800s in Germany, especially the Rhineland.

**1812—*Napoleon's Russian Campaign*** by Richard K. Riehn, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., New York, (McGraw-Hill) © 1991; 525 pages, softbound (1991 price was \$15.95; ISBN 0-471-54302-0). Author Riehn covers the 1812 campaign with intense sensitivity for the nationalities involved. On pages 224-225 (excerpted with this letter) he offers insights on the Westphalians. I am not sure the book is still in print but it may be available from libraries.

***Armies of 1812, the Grand Armee and the Armies of Austria, Prussia, Russia and Turkey*** by Digby Smith, Spellmount Limited, The Old Rectory, Staplehurst, Kent TN12 OAZ; © 1977, 2002; hardbound, 216; ordered through Barnes & Noble (ISBN 1-86227-165-8). Author Smith provides several pages of details on the Westphalian contingents in Napoleon's Grand Armee.

***A Social History of Hesse, Roman Times to 1900*** by Dan C. Heinemeier, privately published by Heinemeier Publications, Arlington, Virginia, © 2002; softbound, 378 pages; still in print; [heinpubs@earthlink.net](mailto:heinpubs@earthlink.net) (\$29.95 + \$5 postage; payable to D.C. Heinemeier, 4401 N. 33<sup>rd</sup> Road, Arlington, VA 22207-4423). The author concisely explains the composition of Westphalia. In other sections he examines how Napoleon formed the army and suffered losses. This is a monumental work for any American with Hessen (Hessian) lineage. Since a good portion of the Rhineland area of Westphalia was northern Hessen (Hesse-Kassel), he includes various references to Westphalians. This book also covers St. Louis, Missouri, and Illinois from a Hessen perspective but is tangential and includes other types of Germans. The same author also has two books on Brunswick (and Saxony).

There are numerous books that have been published on the subject of Napoleon's 1812 war with Russia, and you will no doubt discover more insights as you consult them. The dictator did, indeed, reshape German territories and also was instrumental in the rise of Prussia from the status of puppet state to that of a victor over France, thus leading to Napoleon's demise as leader.

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## **WHERE WAS THE PALATINATE?**

The history of Germany reflects territorial boundaries that often changed. Such was the case for Prussia, which grew through alliances and war. Along the Rhine River was the Palatinate (die Pfalz). It, too, had changing borders.

In the 1600s, the Palatinate was ruled by the Count Palatine (der Erbpfalzgraf). His land was divided into two sections. One was the Lower or Rhenish Palatinate (Rheinpfalz) on both banks of the Rhine with Speyer as its focal point on the west bank, Heidelberg on the east side. The other portion was called the Upper Palatinate (Oberpfalz) north of the Danube near Regensburg. So for a time, there were two Palatinates.

Early in the 17th century the Duke of Bavaria took possession of the Upper Palatinate. Therefore, by the early 1700s, the Palatinate was greatly reduced. Nearly all Palatinates who emigrated to America came from the Rhine area.

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## KNOW ANY “HOFF”MANS?

If “*hof*” is part of your family name, then take note.

A Hof was basically equated to an English manor. It was owned by an absentee landlord. In Germany, a Hof was an estate, sometimes one of many that belonged to a nobleman. He rented the land and facilities to common farmers. Farmers abounded in much of Germany, but land was at a premium.

If your ancestors lived and work on such a Hof, then they may have derived their surname from the experience. The “head man” on a Hof may have been known as “Hoffman,” whether he was wealthy or a peasant. Some explanations define Hoffman as the administrator of a Hof, similar to a Meyer (Maier, etc.) being the administrator of a dairy farm. While this could be true, they usually administered the site as tenant land workers.

Hof means “court,” and carries with it most of the same meaning as the English word. A courtier or nobleman is a *Höfling*. Estates similar to the Hof would be called a *Bauernhof* if owned by a farmer, a *Landgut* or *Gut* if owned by a non-noble patrician.

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### ***EXCHANGE!*** *Comments, ideas, and requests from those in G-SIG:*

+ Ken Roberts ( [kwroberts@swbell.net](mailto:kwroberts@swbell.net) ) says: “I found this site very interesting. Although my family, the Horines, high over the Rhine. are not listed, I'm sure they were there during all of this. Please share this site.”

<http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~henderson/nameinahundred.html>

+ Matthias Uthoff ( [unsutze@gmx.de](mailto:unsutze@gmx.de) ) writes to us from Germany. He says: “I found some Uthoffs in St. Louis. I hope that you can help me to find more information about them, their children, grandchildren, etc.”

+ “My German ancestors are Wiecher, Weinburger, and Reupke. I know very little about them and have not had a great deal of success finding out about them in the St. Louis area. Any help would be appreciated,” says James R. Smith. 1415 N. Logan Avenue, Danville, IL 61832. ( [mailboxjrs@aol.com](mailto:mailboxjrs@aol.com) )

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