

G-SIG FORUM #13

...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.

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Power: One More Point in Common

St. Louis, Mo., was the hardest hit area for a power outage among all major U.S. cities in the summer of 2006. Even in this aspect, it shared a common point with Germany.

The Week in Germany reported a few months later: “When millions of people in Germany, France, Belgium, Spain, and even Morocco lost power for an hour (on a Saturday) experts traced international power grid failures back to Germany like a trail of toppled dominoes. The meltdown prompted new calls from the European commission for infrastructure improvements and a harmonized European Union energy policy.”

The weakness was credited to a series of power links rather than a concerted effort to coordinate the distribution of electric power. Europeans feared a “power meltdown” similar to one that plunged 50 million Americans in the Northeast into darkness in 2003.

European officials are clamoring for “more investment in Europe’s power infrastructure,” said the news report. The current system of interlinks has kept European power flowing since the 1950s. But now large volumes of power flow across borders when demand surges.

A high number of electronic appliances and increased computerization have added to the danger of meltdowns and blackouts.

In St. Louis, the summer of 2006, it was a storm front that caused a series of power outages as trees fell against strategic power lines. I liken it to a “wind *tsunami*” that rumbled along the land bordering the Mississippi River, hitting St. Louis very hard. Some estimates noted a million or more electric customers without power, some facing hot temperatures and lack of refrigeration for up to a week.

German forefathers who settled in the general St. Louis area in the 1800s would probably have coped better. Our ancestors were not accustomed to air conditioned homes and refrigerated food. Candles were more important and practical. Power lines for much of the 1800s were unknown. If a tree fell, so be it—as long as it did not fall on a house or barn. On the plus side, a fallen tree often made it easier to prepare firewood for the winter!

The 2006 power outage in Germany was complicated by the interruption of power on a 380,000-volt line “crossing the river Ems in northwestern Germany so that the newly built *Norwegian Pearl* could safely pass the waterway. The government of North-Rhine Westphalia, the German state hardest hit by the blackout, said that a surge from German wind farms had also contributed to the breakdown by creating a load imbalance.

The grid nearly collapsed under these pressures, according to Christoph Maurer, an engineer at Aachen University's power institute.



Rowan's Books

C.M. "Mike" Schueter of G-SIG is impressed with Dr. Steven Rowan's grasp of German-American history. Professor Rowan of UMSL spoke at a G-SIG gathering in November of 2006. His presentation centered on the Civil War in Missouri.

It doesn't take much effort for historian or genealogist to uncover a wealth of information on the role of Americanized Germans who proudly defended the Union in that war. General Robert E. Lee said he might have won the war, had it not been for the German element. I know of no historian who discounts the importance of German immigrants in keeping Missouri at least neutral if not downright cordial toward the Union in the war years of the early 1860s.

Mike makes a good suggestion for G-SIG when he encourages the reading of two books by Dr. Rowan:

Memoirs of a Nobody - The Missouri Years of an Austrian Radical, 1849-1866.

Germans for a Free Missouri - translations from the St. Louis radical press, 1857-1862.

I've been reading *Memoirs* and find the work very fascinating. Dr. Rowan translated the journal of Henry Boernstein, born in 1805 in the empire of Austria-Hungary. He tended to be an anti-capitalist, anti-Catholic journalist who ran a newspaper in Paris. Among his friends was Karl Marx. Boernstein came to St. Louis and took over *Anzeiger des Westens*, and was active as a leader in the pro-Civil War action in Missouri. He returned to Vienna to spend his final years.

Interestingly, other Germans returned to Europe and used military tactics from their Civil War days. Some of those tactics were employed in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71.

Mike suggests other books that mention Germans in the Civil War:

Civil War St. Louis by Louis S. Gerteis

The Civil War in St. Louis - A Guided Tour by William C. Winter of the Civil War Round Table of St. Louis.

Lion of the Valley - St. Louis, Missouri, 1764-1980 by James Neal Primm (an academic associate of Steven Rowan).



More Thoughts on East Prussia!

Gordon Seyffert in Kansas City (gordonseyffert@mac.com) says, "I have more thoughts to share from my research in East Prussia. As you know, the church books often identify our ancestors by occupation or by community standing. Two terms seemed to pop up with regularity. The first seemed easy enough to read. It looked like *Justmann*. I even found it on a

person's typed 1936 *Ahnentafel*, except that it appeared as *Instmann*. I just figured that to be a typo, and then continued on to search for a definition of the term in English.

“Ernest Thode, who has an excellent German-to-English genealogical dictionary, did not appear to be of any help on this. It was only when I went to the nearest research university library to search for books about East Prussia that I found my answer -- and my mistake: *Justmann* > *Instmann* > *Landarbeiter* > agricultural laborer.

“Or, going to the root of the term, via my 1936 *Cassell's New German and English Dictionary*: *Insthaus* = cottage and: *Instleute* = cottagers...which has a special meaning with regard to the peasant classes in pre-modern Germany (pre-1807 for Prussia). As I understand it, a cottager was someone who was perhaps temporarily settled in a dwelling provided by the owner of the farm where he worked.

“I learned an important lesson: Don't overlook clues! There was no typo in that 1936 *Ahnentafel*; the second letter really was an ‘n.’ But, they understood in 1936 that a written “J” in the old script could stand for an “I” as well as a “J.” So *Instmann* wasn't an unpronounceable word, after all.”

See the value of research and mental concentration?

Gordon goes on: “The second word with which I struggled was Köllmer or Cöllmer. The initial script letter looked on its top half like the top of a coat hanger facing rightwards, or a shallow letter ‘U’ on its side, while the bottom part of the letter merely looked like the bottom half of a script capital ‘L’ in English. It compared with the given name initial in Christian, and not with the names or words that began with ‘K.’ Nevertheless, my 1936 *Ahnentafel* had three instances of this word, and the word began with ‘K.’

“Here my answer came from a translation of a book chapter written by Hartmut Harnisch in an edited book on *The German Peasantry* by Richard J. Evans and W.R. Lee. Harnisch, in treating two main categories of peasants, discounted: ‘...the comparatively small number of peasants who were subject to the sovereign himself and not to any local lord (a minor number of free peasants and above all the so-called Köllmer in East Prussia). These were large peasants with especially favorable conditions in the area of the former territory of the Teutonic Knights. They were personally free, were obliged to render only modest feudal dues, and had legal property in their holdings. In the eighteenth century they lived almost exclusively within the sphere of the sovereign demesnes....’”

“Now ‘demesne’ has a specialized meaning, too, as I found when I researched the meaning of East Prussian place names that begin with the word *Adlig*, or its abbreviation (Adl.). But that's another story....”

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Back to Lutherland by Gerald Perschbacher

In 2005, while visiting in Germany, my friends Eicke and Gertrud asked if we wanted to see the sites in the old Saxon city of Wittenberg, where Dr. Martin Luther nailed the 95 Theses on the church door in 1517, marking the beginning of the Protestant Reformation. We said, “Yes.”

Visiting Wittenberg is not solely a “Lutheran thing.” For Germans, it is tantamount to visiting the home of George Washington. Luther stirred up religious principles to correct many

wrongs in the church of his day. But he also was seen as a champion of the common German. It was Luther who translated the Bible in German and thus codified the language. This became a unifying element for Germany. Luther also showed common Germans how to be proud of their heritage amid the powerful nations and rulers of Europe.

Recently I read a report that about 26,000 former Protestants from parishes across Germany have been returning each year to the Protestant Church of Germany (EKD). Officials said this was due to special centers it set up across the land starting in 2001. The goal was to encourage people to rejoin the church into which they were born.

It's a positive move. Every year for decades, thousands of people gradually left the Protestant and Catholic Church in Germany. The reason was simple: to avoid paying a national church tax applicable to all citizens officially registered as Christians. Now most "re-joiners" are age 30 to 50.

If you want to capture a feel for the time of Dr. Martin Luther, the religious questions, and the nationalism that was growing in Germany, see the 2003 film, *Luther*, starring Joseph Fiennes. Do an online search for more details.

As much as Georg Friedrich Handel was renown as a composer, he is outdone in popularity by Luther. The Luther movie was extreme popular in Germany, which may have augmented the move back to the organized church. It no doubt rekindled feelings of German pride among the general public as Luther, a relatively unknown scholar, befriended the poor and helpless against the evils of empire.

Wittenberg boasts a number of castles in or near the city, but today it has become known in the chemicals industry. Investors have found the area attractive, even though parts of the city are working out of a depressed, communist spiral of dingy appearance and destructive skepticism.

I walked the streets of Wittenberg in bright daylight and late at night. In the dark, as streetlights and special spotlights bathed old buildings and towers, a sense of the past was recaptured. Shops were closed. Streets were fairly quiet. It was quiet, much like centuries ago. And you could almost hear the hammering of a solitary nail into the church door.

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Nikolaikirche and 'The Wall'

Leipzig's Nikolaikirche Lutheran church was the epicenter of a peaceful protest movement, which brought down the Berlin Wall in November of 1989. So reported *The Week* in Germany. The report coincides with other eyewitness accounts.

St. Nicholas Church goes by the motto "St. Nicholas - open to all" and attracts thousands of visitors each year. It became the centralized location for the *Montagsdemonstrationen*, or Monday demonstrations in which brave citizens demonstrated peacefully against the repressive communist regime of the German Democratic Republic (GDR, commonly called East Germany).

"Demonstrations began after prayers for peace in the Nikolaikirche with Pastor Christian Führer and filled the nearby Karl Marx Platz square. Bolstered by support from the Lutheran Church, many dissatisfied East German citizens gathered in the church's courtyard, and non-violent demonstrations began in which they demanded rights such as the freedom to travel to foreign countries and to elect a democratic government," says the report.

While this was happening, members in churches around the world also joined in prayer. Since the media was repressed in East Germany, news often was conveyed person to person. Other East Germans followed the example of the church in Leipzig.

Tension heightened on October 7, 1989. It was the 40th anniversary of the GDR. East German police threatened and locked up peaceful protestors. On October 9, about a thousand East German communist party officials had been ordered to fill “the 2,000-seat church during a Monday service. After the peace prayers ended, thousands of people carrying candles were waiting outside to greet people coming from the church.”

Pastor Führer said the moment was unforgettable. “The miracle occurred.” Non-violence seized the masses and became a material, peaceful power.

What about the soldiers? Units were deployed to the site. But after they conversed with demonstrators, military units withdrew. Human dignity was honored. Peace was paramount. Change was in everybody’s mind, so it seems. “This non-violent movement lasted only a few weeks. But it caused the party and ideological dictatorship to collapse,” said the pastor.

The popular chant during the demonstrations was, “*Wir sind das Volk!*” –“We are the people!” In a spirit similar to Luther’s time, the masses rose to action. And the common man once more helped to reshape a major part of Germany for the better.

Is it in the genes for Germans to love peace, freedom, honesty, and goodwill?

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WITCH HUNT! By Gerald Perschbacher

“The hundred years from 1550 to 1650 was one of the most terrible periods in Germany’s history. It was also the epoch of the witch craze,” says Lyndal Roper in her book, *Witch Craze*, (2004, Yale University Press, pg. 18 ff.). “Across Europe, the image of the witch was remarkably consistent: she was an old woman, and she attacked young children. The vast majority of those executed, around 75-80%, were women....It was in Germany that these fears found their most terrifying expression and resulted in the largest numbers of deaths.”

Author Dan Heinemeier, who has written on several regions in Germany, says as many as 50,000 witches were accursed in Germany. At least half were put to death.

Executioners were paid well and wore brightly colored clothing. They were not loved in society. But they were respected. They did the job that villages said had to be done—to rid the community of evil.

How was a witch discovered? Witnesses claimed they saw magic being performed or Satanic chants voiced. If anyone seemed to have supernatural powers that brought evil, they were believed to be in league with the devil. They would be caught, tried by officials, tortured, and then, if a confession was given, they would be put to death in a public area in order to not repeat their evil ways.

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

+ ARCHIVES Institut für Pfälzische Geschichte und Volkskunde, Benzingring 6, 67637 Kaiserslautern, GERMANY, Tel. +49 (0) 631 / 3647-302 formerly known as Heimatstelle Pfalz- (Research Center) is a record repository on over 300,000 persons who emigrated from the Rhineland-Pfalz area of Germany. Herr Roland Paul, director, wants to enlarge the center's holdings. Please submit a 3x5 card per person/ancestor, their name, where settled, who they married, date/place of death, giving where buried, occupation and religion if known (perhaps including the village in the Pfalz where they immigrated from and date, if it is known).

+ KATHY WURTH (kathyinwashington@hotmail.com) is coordinating e-mail messages from a genealogical society of Osnabrueck, in Germany. This communication was established via the St. Louis Genealogical Society. Messages are in German and usually ask simple questions about the birth or emigration dates of ancestors of people still in Germany. However, many of those ancestors came to America. Kathy will be sharing the information as it is appropriate.

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Have some great ideas for the G-SIG FORUM? Any topics to suggest? Want to share your findings in order to help others in their search? Then submit your material to germansig@stlgs.org or mail it to: St. Louis Genealogical Society, Attn: G-SIG, #4 Sunnen Dr., Suite 140; St. Louis, MO 63143