

G-SIG FORUM #16

...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 persch3@hotmail.com.

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HOW GERMANS MOVED ACROSS AMERICA

By Gerald Perschbacher

If your ancestors crossed America in the mid-1800s, how did they do it? What route did they take?

It's a questions raised numerous times among historians and genealogists. Dr. Anita Mallinckrodt and other historians agree that the old National Road (or National Pike, basically what is now I-70) was a major artery for cross-country transport to the Midwest by wagon as early as the 1830s. My research agrees, especially for the period prior to the Civil War.

That's not to say this was the *ONLY* route and that wagon travel was the *ONLY* means. Somewhat similar to today, there are options a traveler can choose in order to travel from St. Louis to Chicago. The trip can be made by automobile, bus, train, or plane. Some walk or jog!

Determining the route of an ancestor can depend on personal preference and cost. Today, some people choose not to fly. Perhaps your ancestor chose not to take the train as a matter of preference.

Also, there is the matter of time. Many Germans did not make fast travel to the Midwest their prime concern. Some worked their way to the Midwest, spending weeks, months, perhaps even a year in select locations along the route. They obtained jobs to build their wealth so that they were ready to pay for the next leg of the trip or buy land once they reached their destination.

Some travelers *HAD* no destination once they arrived in the U.S.A. To them, America was America, and they simply moved as they wished.

Fred H Held (fhheld@netzero.net) is in G-SIG. He is studying the question of travel in relation to his ancestors from Baden-Württemberg in the 1850s.

With a little digging into a variety of sources, it becomes clear that the National Road was a cleared route, surfaced with layers of small rock and gravel. Its location was set by a Federal plan. Its construction encouraged travelers to traverse the countryside to the Midwest. This avoided difficulties with landowners who otherwise might have shot at trespassers.

It also protected crops. Along the route, toll stations were established. New taverns, inns and stores were built for travelers. Towns began.

If you were traveling westward with your horses, cows, or a sizeable number of other precious livestock, it would be difficult to do it by train or boat. Land travel could have been your best method, even after the Civil War.

The National Road was made with grassy areas paralleling the rock- paved surface. These “side lanes” were meant for livestock. Toll booths charged for livestock by the head.

Travelers had the choice to sell their livestock in the east, hoping to buy replacements when they settled. Others chose to keep what they had and move them alongside their wagons. In certain cases, they had to buy a wagon.

Canals augmented travel. Fred Held has discovered that the Erie Canal opened in 1825 and enhanced travel from Albany to Buffalo at a tenth of the cost for wagon travel.

Changing technology saw the rise of the steamboat in the 1830s. It cut down travel time and allowed good progress running against the current.

The rise of the locomotive also had a bearing on westward travel. In some locations, it cut deeply into travel along the National Road.

If your ancestors came to the Midwest before the Civil War, determining their route may depend on the year they came. Search the sources (in print, online, and through interviews with experts). Seek first-hand stories from pioneers about their travel experiences. Read Gottfried Duden’s writings on travel. Many travelers did not stick to a single mode of transport. They may have taken a wagon, then a flatboat, followed by a steamboat, perhaps a train, and then maybe back to a wagon for the final leg of the journey. However it happened, you can have fun sleuthing!

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HOW GERMANS CROSSED THE OCEAN

Frank B. Klostermann (klostermann@charter.net) is quite a guy when it comes to doggedly researching his ancestry. Active in G-SIG, he is equally active in digging as deep as possible into his roots, which are on the Illinois side of the Mississippi River.

Frank has been researching various books and pictures. Now he has obtained some translation results of an article by Bernard Brunen from a book on Lingen in Germany (he thinks Linus Schrage has helped with conversion into English).

Bernard Brunen considered himself a “Commuter between the Old and the New World.” About age 30, he came from Lengerich in Lingen. He was an organizer of emigration and cared for the people he helped. History proves that he crossed to America with as many as 70 emigrants from the Hanover province on the ship *Olbers* out of Bremen.

As part of his job, Brunen traveled back and forth between Germany and America. He delivered mail and money between families on two continents. He was a travel advisor and even loaned money for trips.

So we understand the time frame for travel, Brunen wrote that he departed St. Louis on March 6, 1852, and arrived in New Orleans six days later. He departed by ship on March 18 and arrived on May 3 in Bremerhaven on the ship *Johannes*. His crossing took 46 days and cost \$35.

Frank’s research shows that the return trip via Bremen to Lengerich involved “a trek by foot.” Several villages are listed in Brunen’s notes, with 1-3 days’ travel between.

Brunen offered another report, stating how the ship was somewhat at the mercy of winds. He was traveling from Bremen to New Orleans in the Autumn of 1852. On departure day (Sept. 5), a nice, early morning wind was blowing in Bremerhaven. Until Sept. 14, the winds remained good and steady. The wind turned. Overall, he reported perhaps two days when the wind was not good. Some first-time passengers became seasick.

On Oct. 15, the 41st day of the journey, Santo Domingo was spotted. From Oct. 18 –20, the ship passed Cuba. On the 20th, the ship entered the Gulf of Mexico. On the 24th, a steam ship came out to bring their ship to port at 2 o'clock on a Sunday.

Ships took various routes, depending on the company and its cargo stops. Certain trips formed a triangle from Europe to the Caribbean to the United States. So don’t take for granted that ship travel (especially in first half of the 1800s) was always “direct.”

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MOST VALUABLE?

Deutsche Welle reports that perhaps the most valuable book ever known is Prince Henry the Lion's 12th-century book of Holy Gospels. It is a handwritten, medieval masterpiece kept locked away and only occasionally displayed.

Henry the Lion was prince over the kingdoms of Saxony and Bavaria when he commissioned the book in 1188. Those were the days before the printing press, and all books were done by hand. Henry wanted it for the consecration of St. Mary's altar in the cathedral of Braunschweig.

The book is typical of handmade techniques in its day, with special artwork illustrating Bible stories. Many of its “illuminated” pages were decorated with gold leaf.

Somehow, the book ended up in England where it was auctioned for 16 million Euros (\$20.7 million). The winning bid was a combined effort that included Germany's federal government, the governments of Lower Saxony and Bavaria, a foundation, plus individual donors who all joined their finances to bring the book “home.”



GERMANS—HOW OLD?

When a giant excavator was digging into a coal mine in Germany, the least thing from the mind of its operator was an archaeological find.

But that’s what happened.

The discovery of a hand axe was made in late 2005. It was less than 18 feet below ground level. The site was slightly west of Cologne.

What was discovered was an ancient site, thousands of years old, with glacial deposits. The remains of holes were noticed, possibly for posts used in shelters. The remains of fires were also uncovered. So were stone tools.

These discoveries seem to predate the arrival of Germanic tribes to the area, and even Celtic tribes, which may have been genetically related. Was this “find” really representative of the very first Germans?



TRAVELING IN GERMANY

In 1906, there were just slightly more than 27,000 registered motorized vehicles in Germany. That was a mere two decades after the first successful internal combustion car was made by Karl Benz. However, more than 4,800 accidents took place in 1906; almost 150 people were killed.

Germany can be proud of its new record. Based on the number of registered cars and total accidents recorded, Germany is more than 50 times better than in 1906.

There has been a noticeable drop in recent years, too. 1970 was a particularly bad year for deaths due to automobiles -- more than 21,300 people lost their lives. However, in recent years, that number has been around 5,000. It's still a shame, but at least the numbers are moving in the right direction.

If you travel to Germany, you will probably drive (or ride) on the Autobahn. Except for stretches through large cities, there is no posted speed limit for much of the high-speed system. A few years ago, while riding with a German friend in a Mazda, I noticed the speed. It calculated to about 120 miles per hour. Then I watched a sports car zip past, about 30 miles per hour faster.

You've really got to think quickly when the pavement moves by at a high clip! How are the high speeds possible? Generally, Autobahn road surfaces seem perfectly graded without numerous patchy repairs.

While in Germany, do like the Germans. Take the bus, train, and boat. Each time you will probably see a different side of the country.

Standing at a bus stop is much like here in America, only the conversations aren't in English. You'll probably see some Germans with cloth bags filled with fresh produce, if it's market day. The train is an experience, but be careful to note which track is your departure spot. It's easy to get confused.

As for boat trips, the Rhine River is a great way to go. Drive to a set location. Board the boat. After the trip, catch the rail back to the car. Expect the trip to last most of the day, with short stops along the river as people come and go. The Rhine, after all, is a transportation system, and a beautiful one, I might add. .

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ARE YOU THE ONE?

Do you have a special word of advice to share about Germany or how to communicate with Germans in your search for history and genealogy? Share your insights by sending them to G-SIG FORUM!

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

+ "Through a German contact, I have information on the ALMSTEDT FAMILY in Germany (Hildesheim, Almstedt, Everode, Klein Freden etc.) is

anybody...doing Almstedt research (also STROTTMANN---same area)?” Charlie (cralmstedt@yahoo.com).

+ Indiana author Mike Peake reports that a new book has been authored by Joseph Reinhart, titled, "August Willich's Gallant Dutchmen." The author translated over 50 letters sent to German language newspapers in Indiana, Kentucky, and Ohio. It demonstrates how important it is to look to German newspapers for hidden history. The letters provide insights found nowhere else. For details, call Atlas Books at (419) 281-1802.

+ Jim Schlake (Neatfam@aol.com) lives in Virginia. His ancestors arrived in New Orleans in 1849. He says the 1850 U.S. census noted Dorothea Schlaka in St. Louis, Ward 5. His great-grandfather was both in Missouri on Dec 13, 1852. He seeks information on finding a birth certificate for Henry Schlake, born Dec. 13, 1852 (parents Gottlieb and Dorothea Schlake).

+ Cindy Fischelli (cfischelli@yahoo.com) is seeking to uncover a family secret relating to Alberta Francis Berkschneider (Bergschneider).or Alberta Sylvia Mary Beers, born in Missouri on Feb. 1 1922 (died May 22, 1972)

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Want a printed copy of G-SIG FORUM by mail? Send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to: St. Louis Genealogical Society, Attn. Ed Schmidt; #4 Sunnen Dr., Suite 140; St. Louis, MO 63143.

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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: StLGS, Attn: G-SIG; #4 Sunnen Dr., Suite 140; St. Louis, MO 63143.