

G-SIG FORUM #17

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



EXPANSION IS GOOD!

By Gerald Perschbacher

Roland Fogt, president of the St. Charles German Club (in Missouri) (<http://www.stcharlesgermanclub.org/>) was happy to discover the German Special Interest Group (G-SIG). The revelation came at a meeting of the German-American Committee, which coordinates activities and information shared between member organizations.

Expansion is good, when it comes to obtaining insights. As G-SIG continues to grow, individuals with varied backgrounds and abilities are pooling information and ideas in order to foster results. Many results relate to genealogical studies, others relate to culture and history.

You can be a good ambassador for G-SIG and help someone who has hit a brick wall in their research. Perhaps you can teach others the path for success in their studies.

What exactly do YOU want from G-SIG? Facts and information about a certain era? A particular part of Germany? Traditions? Challenges of travel in a bygone era? Guidance on research? Good German food? Music? Presentations?

If you have a success story to share on any of these (or other) topics of interest to G-SIG, share the stories by sending them to the G-SIG FORUM. Your ideas might be exactly what others are seeking!

Roland Fogt added, "I have been conducting German genealogy for approximately 20 years. An example of one of my research experiences was published by the German War Graves Commission and is posted at the following Web site:

http://www.volksbund.de/schon_gelesen/leserberichte/leserberichte_english/homepage_english.asp). The German War Graves web site is only in German, but I have Made a checklist on how to use it for non-German speakers -- How to use the German War Graves database (<http://www.axishistory.com/index.php?id=3595>)."



BAFFLED OVER TOWNS AND NAMES?

Ever contact a village or town in Germany and discover there were no records of special acts (marriage, baptism, death, etc.)? John Maurath of G-SIG says some of his relatives have had that challenge.

It may be a matter of properly spelling the surname.

Many people remember the name Studebaker, emblazoned on thousands of cars made in South Bend, Indiana. It was a family name. But many years ago, it was spelled differently: Staudenbeckers. The family consisted of blade-makers in Solingen, Germany.

Restrictions over freedoms forced the family to move to the New World. However, the cutlers' guild would not allow members to leave until they had worked their trade in another city for five years. Sounds to me as though they wanted the artisan to teach apprentices, thus keeping the craft alive in Germany. Not a bad idea for those remaining behind, but not a good idea for those wishing to emigrate.

Departure time came in 1736. Brothers Clement and Peter, plus cousin Heinrich along with their families, boated down the Rhine. Tolls had to be paid along the way. I've seen instances where noblemen stretched heavy chains across the Rhine to snag or rip out the bottom of any boat that tried to get by. Boats risked cannon fire if they did not stop and pay.

When the family arrived in Philadelphia, the surname changed. Clerks, unfamiliar with German, did their best. Thus, the surname was written as Studenbecker, Studebaker, Studibaker, and Studabaker. There were probably more versions. By the way, you can read more about this at: <http://www.studebakerfamily.org/history.html> .

Since most people in German states did not know how to write until education was popularized in succeeding centuries, you might discover some strange spellings. If you are seeking a surname starting with the letter "B," check the "P" listing, too. In some cases, even check the "D's." If a clerk was hard of hearing or there was noise at the time of registration (or census), the explosive sound of the last name's first letter could have been heard differently. Sometimes an ancestor might have had a speech impediment that gave it a different sound.

If a surname started with "H," check the "A" and "E" lists, too.

Get the idea?

Here is a helpful tip: If you know the first names of a couple ancestors, look for them when different spellings of surnames appear. This can be an indication of lineage.

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INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT THE ZITHER!

Jan Stessl (Janstessl@aol.com) is a professional musician, specializing in the zither. She serves as president of the Chicago Zither Club. Reportedly, the organization claims a couple hundred members worldwide. At least 30 players are in Chicago.

She explains that the zither is a multi-stringed instrument with a fret board and open strings, "sort of like a combination harp and guitar, which is laid flat on a table to play." This instrument was derived from the German *scheitholdt* some 300 years ago. That design was updated in the 1850s and was changed to a fully chromatic instrument.

"The zither was originally a folk instrument, used primarily for *hausmusik* (house music) and with small groups." It often was used in homes, in *Stüberls* (*Austrian word denoting small rooms, often found in small hotels or inns*), and sometimes in concert halls.

For much of its existence, the zither was centered in the mountainous areas of Bavaria, Austria, and Switzerland. Many considered it an alpine folk instrument. Bohemians loved it.

Eventually, German immigrants came to the United States, bringing their zithers. These were easy instruments to carry aboard ship. As Germans settled, zither clubs were formed.

At its peak, the zither flourished in Germany during the Victorian era (approximately 1865 to 1910), says Stessl. Recently, there seems to be a revival of the instrument in Germany.

Interestingly, there was a factory near St. Louis. It was the Schwarzer Zither Factory in Washington, Missouri. In fact, there has been a display of zithers at the history museum in that town. There is even a video on Schwarzer and his zither. Schwarzer held several zither “get togethers” at his home involving zitherists from around the country. Concerts brought communities together.

If you like music, you may recall the theme to the motion picture, "The Third Man." It is zither music by Anton Karras! After that film was released, the zither factory had a brief resurgence of business.

You can read more about the zither at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zither>
(Thanks to John Maurath and Pat von zur Muehlen for information.)



HE WAS AMONG THE EARLY ARRIVALS FROM GERMAN

Sherrie Kueckelhan (motokins1@msn.com) knows some interesting facts about her ancestor, Augustus William Kueckelhan. He born in Brunswick Germany in 1812 and immigrated to the U.S.A.

Augustus gained passage in Bremen and traveled to Baltimore, arriving in July of 1833 . On August 16, 1833 he settled at his destination, St. Louis, Missouri. He was 21 years old and a trained physician.

If you check the history of St. Louis from that time, you will discover that only a handful of Germans lived in the community. Augustus was among the first wave of Germans to come to St. Louis in 1833. In just a few years, hundreds of others had come from Germany to enjoy the Rhineland-like setting of this area.

After about 2 1/1 years, Augustus Kueckelhan moved to Boonville, Missouri, then Lamine. In the fall of 1863 he returned to St. Louis to re-establish a medical practice before returning to Cooper, county in Missouri. There he passed away.

“I have only been able to place him in St. Louis by census during the years he or his offspring lived there. I am having difficulty locating any other documents of his life in St. Louis. Records of his medical practice, land purchase or otherwise,” says Sherrie. She adds that “several of his daughters attended The Covenant of The Sacred Heart in St. Louis, but I have yet to locate their years there as well.”

If you have any insights, contact Sherrie.



WHAT ABOUT FINDING THAT BOOK?

Mrs. Ralph Weiland (rmweiland@juno.com) writes, “I recently wrote to an archive in Hesse-Darmstadt requesting information on the immigration of my husband's great-grandfather, Jakob Weiland. From census records I had that he was born in May of 1830, and from his naturalization record, that he was from Hesse-Darmstadt. His marriage record in St. Louis did not shed any light on exactly where he was from.

“The archive found no record of his emigration, nor of any birth in May

1830, however, they did find a Jakob Weyland in the family albums from Brandau with a birth date of May 12, 1834, and no death date, thus the assumption of the emigration is obvious. They gave me the name of his father and mother, and today I found that family in the IGI, with all his siblings listed. Great news, except how can I make sure this is my Jakob Weiland? Perhaps I can investigate the other Weilands in St. Louis at the same time he was here.

“The archive suggested purchasing the book ‘The Werkres of Ulrich Kirschnik’ on families in Brandau during 1635-1910, at the price of 10 Euro plus forwarding expenses. My real question is this: do you know if the book(s) is available anywhere in St. Louis? I called the County Library Headquarters, and they could find no listing of it.”

People in G-SIG have been very helpful in offering ideas and suggestions. In the true sense of a FORUM, please offer any insights directly to the Weilands.



DID YOU KNOW...?

When it comes to Missouri, did you know that of those claiming descent from at least one specific ancestry group in 2000, there were 1,313,951 who claimed German ancestry, 711,995 Irish, and 528,935 English.

For more details, check:

<http://www.city-data.com/states/Missouri-Ethnic-groups.html>

Or try:

<http://www.city-data.com/>

You can check by locality. Take Arnold, Missouri, for example:

Click on Missouri

Click on Arnold

Scroll down and see the percentages of ancestry of Arnold residents:

Ancestries: German (36.6%), Irish (16.6%), United States (11.1%),
English (8.9%), French (7.3%), Italian (6.3%).

Play around at the sites, and you might dig up more details for your research.



ANY IDEAS?

Interested in learning more about the Germans who settled the Volga River area and the Ukraine in the 1700s and 1800s? Catherine the Great of Russia invited them into her land. She was a German and believed her former people to be industrious. They carved towns and villages out of the wilderness.

Many of these Russian-Germans fled bolshevism and communism in the teens and twenties. Some came to America. Others came through the St. Louis on their way to Kansas. From Kansas, some went to Montana and on up into Canada.

If you have knowledge of your lineage from this group of Germans who had lived in Russia, share your insights with G-SIG.



NOTHING LIKE A TRIP TO GERMANY!

Never been to Germany? If you can withstand the trip, it may be worth your while. Even if you go with a tour group and never have the time to do research in Germany, you can learn from the experience.

When I made my first trip, I literally could not believe I had landed in the Fatherland of my ancestors. The Rhineland area was cordial toward Americans. Many Germans know enough English to answer your questions. Few can write comfortably in English, but they can converse.

Traveling to the eastern part of Germany was another matter. The cities were somewhat stark and run-down. People were not as pleasant. They seemed to distrust visitors, perhaps a remnant from the former communist regime.

If you plan to visit Germany, here are some tips:

- + Learn a little German just to get along.
- + Take a handy German dictionary with you.
- + Take a German-English travel book with short phrases in German.
- + Wisely choose your time to travel; if in the Spring, go in mid to late April before there is a rise in airline rates due to the travel season.
- + Make arrangements well in advance.
- + Work with a travel agency or tour company.
- + If you plan to have a day or two for research, make contact with German officials months ahead of your trip. You could do this by e-mail or letter, checking Web sites for the city or village of your choice.
- + Study maps and read books on Germany dealing with travel and history.
- + Be pleasant!
- + Look forward to a good time.
- + Go with a friend (esp. someone who knows German)

Once there, enjoy sampling the tasty food and beverages that Germans prepare with skill and enjoyment. If you CANNOT go to Germany, view all the DVDs and videos you can, read books, and talk with people who have made the trek.

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

+ In the previous FORUM, Charlie (cralmstedt@yahoo.com) wrote about information on the ALMSTEDT FAMILY in Germany. Now we understand that the Almstedt family was involved in the Civil War. A Web search for Civil War records may bring results. Perhaps your surname search could also benefit from finding Civil War records.

+ **LEADS:** A good book for folks to read is John Rodabough's book titled "Frenchtown" (1980s). It's a history of the Soulard area, where many Germans

started settling in the 1840s. 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 any information on Henry Schlake, born Dec. 13, 1852 (parents Gottlieb and Dorothea Schlake).

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