

G-SIG FORUM #19

...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.



IT MIGHT TAKE A FRIEND

By Gerald Perschbacher

“Can you read old German?”

“Where was that village? I can’t find it on any map.”

“I wonder what my ancestors faced when they departed from Germany.”

Questions abound for the researcher and genealogist. Some try to tackle the questions themselves. Others ask for experts to help. But sometimes it simply takes a friend.

That’s the beauty behind our G-SIG Clusters. People of like mind (when it comes to research) band together to share their knowledge and experiences, or to forge ahead through “uncharted waters” for answers. Simply put, it might take a friend to help.

To make this process work, it’s good if everyone can bring some mutual benefit “to the table,” so to speak. For example: If Sally needs help from Sam in deciphering some old text, then Sally will help Sam find where the old village was located. She has old maps and a knowledge of villages that changed names. He can read the script—or at least can translate sufficiently. The two offer mutual benefits. When this happens, the Cluster achieves a stellar purpose and we walk together in progress.

Perhaps no one in the Cluster can decipher old German. That does not need to be a hindrance. The Cluster can make a concerted effort among its participants to seek out a few potential experts. Once this networking is achieved, results can be golden.

At certain times, it’s good to have a friend just to bolster your spirits. “I haven’t found ANYTHING NEW about my ancestry for five months! How disappointing,” moans Edna. Edward responds, “I was in the same fix. Know what I did? Organized all my papers. Re-read some documents. Did some deep thinking. Found out I had missed some bits and pieces of information, right there on the pages. The discovery woke me up to renewed interest. Maybe the same will work for you, Edna.”

Friends can tell us about new books and resources, new contacts, Web sites, experts willing to help, libraries to check, archives to visit, and more.

Don't feel left out if you are not in a Cluster. You may accomplish many of the same successes by establishing a "Buddy System" locally, by phone, mail, or e-mail. Just ponder ways in which you could find that "Buddy." You can attend meetings and gatherings of organizations that may include potential helpers (such as the St. Louis Genealogical Society or the German American Heritage Society). If you live further away, perhaps there is a local historical society that can offer advice. Maybe you can spread the word about your research among those in your social circles, your church, a club, or at work.

Answers seldom drop in your lap. Most answers beg to be sought. And once found, those answers are cherished even more.

It might take a friend to help you do it.



SUCCESS COMES WITH STEPS

Karen Ridgeway (ostwestland@yahoo.com) is facilitating the Cluster on Westphalia / Westfalen. She has learned that progress and success often come through a series of steps.

Karen serves on the G-SIG Steering Committee and has a sincere ancestral interest in Westphalia. "The Ostwestfalen/East Westphalia group has expanded to include all of Westfalen / Westphalia," she notes. Sometimes flexibility dictates the right steps. Researchers have followed that bit of wisdom for ages. What started as an initial idea might need to be expanded.

Listen for questions. Karen did. When it became evident there were questions relating to military service, a light switched on in Karen's thinking. The existence of similar questions might serve as an impetus for Karen and the Cluster to seek a speaker or expert who can handle German-Prussian, military questions.

Communication is vital. Individuals can use e-mail, phones, or meeting places to facilitate discovery. The Westphalia / Westfalen Cluster meets the fourth Wednesday of each month at the Main Library in St. Louis County. But it was through e-mail communication that Karen and others realized "several of us have researched in the same church in St. Louis as well as the same church in Germany and in the same areas in Missouri." Now that this has come to light, they can pool their knowledge and perhaps increase their understanding. They may be able to advise others in the Cluster.

Karen is taking matters a step further. "I will be asking our members to bring family names and locations, and we will be establishing where we are researching in the area, locating them on a map."



FAMILY ROOTS IN HERMANN?

Many towns in this part of the country take pride in local history by having active historical societies and genealogical societies. Hermann, Missouri, is a good example.

The Deutschheim State Historic Site is on West Second Street (phone: 573-486-2200). As one official notes, "Hermann captures the culture and heritage of the German people who migrated to Missouri in the mid to late 19th century." To foster an

appreciation for pioneer living, visitors can discover home life in that bygone era, along with tools, implements, gardening techniques, and architecture that was carried from the Old Country and updated in America.

I am told the Deutschheim is operated by the Missouri Department of Natural Resources. Tours take place four times per day. One building, called the Pommer-Gentner House, was constructed in 1840 in high-style German neoclassicism. It has period furnishings, too.

Visitors can also stroll by the Strehly House, built from 1842 to 1869. It once was the production site of a German-language newspaper.

Items of German American background are on display at the Deutschheim. If you visit the area, bring some questions about life among German settlers in the 1800s. Ask experts on location, or see if your questions can be answered by keen observation. GP

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SPEND TIME AT THE MHS LIBRARY AND RESEARCH CENTER

Dennis Northcott is enthusiastic about the resources in the Missouri Historical Society Library and Research Center. He is associate archivist for research there. You can marvel at the holdings, too, if you visit 225 S. Skinker Boulevard., St. Louis (across from the western edge of Forest Park).

Since its founding in 1866, the society has concentrated on collecting materials relating to Missouri, St. Louis, and the Louisiana Purchase territory. This includes Federal census records as far back as 1830, St. Louis city census records to 1847, newspapers, maps and atlases, directories and gazetteers, military records, organizational publications, periodicals, and other sources of interest to genealogists.

Make a visit. In a short time you will appreciate the depth of the collection. There are many helpers to guide you through the collection and assist with copying, as necessary. For more details, call (314) 746-4500 (library) or 746-4510 (archives); or write library@mohistory.org or archives@mohistory.org



CONCORDIA HISTORICAL INSTITUTE...

...is the Department of Archives and History of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. The Institute is based in Clayton, Missouri, where a massive collection of artifacts and files are available for research. The Rev. Marvin Huggins, who is active with G-SIG, is on staff. Heading the staff is Dr. Martin Noland.

Most Germans came to America with one of three religious backgrounds: Catholic, Reformed (also including Calvinists), and Lutheran. If you think your ancestors were Lutheran, check with CHI for insights.

The history of churches is interesting. Germans often set up places of worship soon after they came to America. Some Germans immigrants chose social societies or ethical associations instead of religious organizations.

Church structures dominated small towns. Most church buildings were constructed in the middle of town or along the main road leading into town. This is not

uncommon in many parts of Germany. Old church structures still stand as active worship sites in Germany, or as historical relics of past communities.

CHI maintains files of various church records. Understandably, active churches may choose to maintain their original books of “official acts” (baptisms, marriages, burials), although in select cases copies may have been made on microfilm to help a wider circle of individuals.

It’s still good practice to narrow your search to a select community where your ancestors had lived, check with the local church for documents, or ask the local historical society for advice.

What CHI and similar institutions also offer is a wider view of the times. As researchers investigate a narrow subject (such as a family surname), other historical information can be uncovered. This may be preserved in a church history on a congregation, a letter from a long-gone pastor, a passage in an out-of-print book, or a photograph with caption.

To receive more information relating to CHI, call (314) 505-7900 or write <http://chi.lcms.org>.



IT’S WHAT YOU *DON’T* DISCOVER!

By Gerald Perschbacher

It’s not always *WHAT* you discover that counts. Sometimes it’s what you *DON’T* discover that can be important.

Thomas Edison, the great inventor, was asked a question by a reporter. This came at the time of Edison’s success in making the first successful incandescent light bulb. The reporter asked how he felt in making as many as 10,000 (or more) failures in his experiments. Legend says that Edison corrected the reporter. Edison said he had not failed once. He simply discovered thousands of things that *DID NOT* work.

Unless you have had success in building on the genealogical work of others, you may feel the same. Research is often time consuming, somewhat costly (just making copies of documents!), includes time-consuming travel, and can keep you from doing other things. Researchers often discover little along the lines they desire. So when a small discovery is made, and if it is even the least bit significant, there is euphoria. Edison could probably have understood that feeling, in spite of his witty answer to the reporter.

But if you plug away trying to verify a certain fact in your family’s history, never finding it as you had hoped, does that mean it did not exist? Maybe. But brick walls do not need to be a barrier. They can serve to point you in a different direction.

For months, I tried to find where one of my ancestors received his university education. The path was 400 years old. Many facts had been lost in Germany due to war and disaster. Perhaps his information no longer existed.

I contacted universities closest to his home village. Indeed, they did have lists of former students who had attended. Even though my search was dealing with the 1600s, it was no problem. One university, then another, then another, told me they could check their listings. All this was done by e-mail to Germany.

Disappointingly, they could not find his name. There was a sense of frustration in their replies. I felt even more frustrated.

Then I mentioned the matter to a friend, who had a contact in Germany in an area of the country where I did not have a contact. The answer came to me on Easter Sunday. What a nice present! I'll hold back from telling you the remainder of this story right now, but I was pleasantly surprised.

What led me to the final search was the fact that my ancestor was *NOT* listed as a former student in the universities near his village. It became apparent that my circle of research had to expand beyond the areas I had intended.

Mr. Edison was correct. Sometimes we discover what *DOES NOT* work while on our path to the answer!

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QUOTABLES about the Civil War...

CARL SCHURZ was a leading German in America's Civil War. A revolutionary in the German freedom movement of 1848, he honored democratic ideals. He became a confidante of Abraham Lincoln, served as foreign minister to Spain, and commanded troops in the Civil War. He and his men fought gallantly at Chancellorsville and Gettysburg. Eventually Schurz became major general and fought at Chattanooga and Nashville.

FOR THE SOUTH, Major Johann August Heinrich Heros Von Borcke served with distinction with JEB Stuart. Von Borcke was from an old Prussian military and noble family. When the Civil War began, he was in the Second Brandenburg Regiment of Dragoons but switched allegiance to the South.

Von Borcke returned to Prussia. He fought in the 1866 war with Austria. He claimed early retirement in 1867 since a Yankee bullet still agitated his lung. Until his death in 1895, he displayed a Confederate flag from his family's castle.

"Take the (Deutsche) out of the Union Army and we'll whip the Yankees easily."
General Robert E. Lee

European immigrants willingly joined the Union Army. In New York, more than 6,000 Germans quickly volunteered when war began.

In Pennsylvania, about 4,000 more volunteers joined the Army. Experts estimate that among the 400,000 immigrants in the Union Army during the war, nearly 216,000 were Germans.

The Confederate Army had few foreign-born soldiers.

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

+ **If your German ancestors lived in or near France**, you may want to speak with Larry Franke in Special Collections at the St. Louis County Library (Main Branch). He is an expert on Quebec records, too. Call (314) 994-3300, ask for Special Collections, then ask for Larry.

+ **Watch for those histories!** That's the advice from Patricia von zur Muehlen.

She notes, "I learned the town in Germany that my paternal ancestors came from when a another researcher told me that she had discovered it in a parish history that was published in 1990 as part of the 150th anniversary celebration of that parish. If you know of a church that your relatives attended, check to see if it has published a history."

+ **Mary Lou Wright** (beagles003@sbcglobal.net) says, "I am trying to locate where in Germany my family came from, and guess it is time to hire someone. Do you have any suggestions? I have been searching in Salt Lake, and have the place a great uncle arrived in Quebec. The information contains names in Germany that have multiple cities with the same name, such as Caroline, Korlin etc. This search has covered about 20 years...None of the family has ever lived in Missouri, as far as I know."

+ **Check the book fairs!** Watch for new and used books to be offered for sale at fairs (some of which benefit charities and libraries). Check notices for announcements of pending sales. Also, check for estate sales and auctions. If you can ask in advance, contact officials and find out if books will be offered that can help you understand Germany, European history, the language, geography, and genealogy.

+ **HUNT!** Go to <http://www.slcl.org>, click on Genealogy, click on Links, click on German Genealogy, scroll to bottom of page, click on Metasearch; type in a surname (Nachname); type in a place (Ort); if you get no response with both, try entering just the Nachname. Response (Datenblatt or data sheet) gives the following: geboren (born), getauft (baptized), gestorben (died), and begraben (buried). Also listed are: Eltern (parents), Ehepartner and Kinder (spouse and children), Einsender (poster or originator), and more. You could also try <http://meta.genealogy.net/>.

(Thanks to Pat von zur Muehlen for this tip!)

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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