

G-SIG FORUM # 2

Here is the second communication from the German Special Interest Group. G-SIG is a collaborative effort of the St. Louis Genealogical Society and the German American Heritage Society, both based in the St. Louis area.

The purpose of this communication is to provide a forum for educational, historical and genealogical information with fresh insights and ideas to help your research or enjoyment of German traditions and ancestry. Gerald Perschbacher, group leader for G-SIG, will initially serve as “FORUM” compiler and coordinator.

If you would like to include a notice or request for help, please submit your information in condensed form for the *EXCHANGE!* section which appears at the end (limit 50 words). You could say, “**WANT TO HAVE A CONTACT IN FRANKFURT ON THE MAIN—can you provide suggestions to help in my research? (Then add your name, address, phone, or e-mail).**” *EXCHANGE!* notices are to run only once, but you may freshen the notice and resubmit. If the number of submissions is high, then officials will make the necessary judgment as to what will “fit” and be fair within time and space constraints.

Send your submission to germansig@stlgs.org .

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SIGNED ON FOR A CLUSTER? by Gerald Perschbacher

THE BENEFIT of G-SIG is that we have enough people to allow the formation of CLUSTERS. Imagine if 150 people in G-SIG all gathered in the same room at the same time and tried to seek people of common interest from their families’ genealogical past. The task would be *formidable*. Now consider the formation of Clusters under certain subjects. Those who signed for a Cluster would be provided the names, e-mails, phone numbers, and interests of others who signed for the Cluster. The result would be closer communication, more fun in sharing, and increased fellowship.

A Cluster involves about a dozen people with a common interest. If you have an interest in Munich, you could join the Bavaria Cluster. As a Cluster, you could share discoveries and questions, seek sources for answers, and advance as a Cluster! Of course, you would want to limit your time in the Cluster to a year, then perhaps join another Cluster with an interest in the Rhineland, if one of your ancestors came from that portion of Germany, and relish a new experience for another year.

All this can result in a real education! Even if you live out of the St. Louis area, you can still communicate as a Cluster member via e-mail, phone, or regular mail.

Like the idea? If so, it would work best if you get involved with only 1 (but no more than 2 Clusters) and then in a year, if you so desire, change to another. This will focus your interest on a select area of discovery rather than taking on too many subjects or topics at once. It will also keep you from going into overload!

G-SIG members have been signing on for the following Clusters:

+ Prussian Cluster

+ Rhineland Cluster (includes the Palatinate & Hessian territories)

- + Bavarian Cluster
- + Saxon Cluster

Eventually, we can add more based on subjects rather than regions. One might be the German Language Cluster, another could be the Townlife Cluster, a third could be the 1850-1900 Germany Cluster. But first, let's get the initial four off the ground!

If you are interested in being involved in a Cluster, contact one of the following by e-mail: John Wittenberg at jwittenberg@raiins.com or Hermann Eisele at heisele@weissandassoc.com. Just say, "I'd like to be involved in the _____ Cluster." Provide your **name, address, phone number, and e-mail address (if possible)**. If you would **like to help** coordinate the Cluster in its initial formation, please indicate. *State BRIEFLY:* 1) What area of Germany did your family come from? Be exact. 2) What approximate year did they come to America? 3) How long have you been researching your German lineage? 4) Can you read or understand German? If so, how well? 5) What are some of the questions you want to answer? If you don't use e-mail send a note to Gerald Perschbacher at 8868 Rock Forest Dr., St. Louis, MO 63123-1116. One great purpose for G-SIG is to foster and coordinate specialized study in the subject of Germany, and this is a great way to start!

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JOHN KNOWS THE CIVIL WAR!

At a recent St. Louis Genealogical Society meeting, John L. Maurath introduced himself and mentioned his interest in Civil War studies relating the German-Americans. I checked John's Maurath Family Home Page online and liked what I saw. John has compiled some easy reading into a capsule approach to his lineage. His example is good to follow. Family history is much more than facts and dates. If there is one thing many genealogical documents lack it is INTEREST. It's true. A dry list of facts, dates, places or birth, etc., are good and worthwhile, but these can be as edifying as reading the phone book or studying dry bones. The challenge is how to put meat on those bones and communicate the way it was in the past.

Online, John had much information under the title, "**The German Cause of Missouri**" and shared credits with Scott Williams. You can read more if you search with that title. John isn't the only person to succeed in fleshing out his family's Civil War history. Recently I researched three of my Perschbacher ancestors who had served the military in the Civil War. One was from St. Clair County, Illinois, and served for several years, marching to Shiloh and back, never reporting an injury while much of his unit was killed or wounded. What I did not know was that a branch of the Perschbacher family had served in St. Louis only for a few months among the Home Guard in the defense of the Union in their new homeland. It appears that at least one of them was involved with the takeover of Camp Jackson, a major strategic move that stabilized St. Louis and much of eastern Missouri for the Union. That site is now the home of St. Louis University!

By learning what was taking place at that time, I can imagine what my ancestors faced. Only months before, on Jan. 1, 1861, the final slave auction was held in St. Louis, and John says it was German-American pressure that resulted in its discontinuance.

From my personal studies, I learned Germans were well known for expressing their anti-slavery preference in newsprint. Germans were relatively new to St. Louis (most had settled there since 1833). They had little intention of seeing freedom oppressed. Many had escaped bondage or legal difficulties by heading for America at a time when Germany was facing major disruption and riots. In America, those newly settled Germans and their families wanted peace, prosperity, and freedom. They reasoned that if it was good for them, it was good for everyone.

Learn to flesh out the history of your ancestors' times. Discover what was happening in the areas they lived, and you might just get a good glimpse of their experiences.

John Maurath sets a good example of how to research and flesh out the past. We hope John will make a presentation to the G-SIG at one of its meetings in 2006! GP

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DAN KNOWS THE HESSEN!

Some say "Hessians," but in Germany the term is Hesse. It means the same—the people who live in the Hesse-Darmstadt or Hesse-Kassel areas of Germany, just east of the Rhine and centered around Frankfurt on the Main.

Those Hesse were known as one of the earliest major sub-tribes of the Franks, and many were among the fiercest fighters for Carl der Grosse (Charles the Great, also known by the French as Charlemagne). It was Hesse who were called into military action against the barbarian Saxons regularly, practically every springtime for 30 years, during the reign of Charles before the year 800 A.D.

St. Boniface, who is credited with bringing Christianity to the Franks, was deeply involved in reaching the Hesse. In fact, he headquartered in Fulda, made it a major seat for a monastery and a school, which is part of the northern portion of the Hesse lands. That's where he is buried, after he died in the mid-700s at the hands of Saxons he was aiming to convert.

In his book, *A SOCIAL HISTORY OF HESSE, Roman Times to 1900*, Dan C. Heinemeier tells much of this history in wonderful style and high interest. I think I will forever be impacted by his effort.

OK, so you say you don't have a deep interest in those ancient times. Well, that's not the BEST answer, since German heritage was formed by centuries of traditions and experiences, and some German mindsets were shaped dramatically by ancient history. For example, Germans experienced an eastward expansion somewhat similar to our "Westward Ho!" in America, albeit the tribes were not Indian but were Prussian, Latvian, Lithuanian, generally Slavic, and several others (toss in some Huns, too). That eastward movement was still fresh in the minds of Germans in the 1900s and played a part, in a certain respect, in two wars.

If you have Hesse ancestry or want to learn about the earliest movements and settlements of the German tribes, Dan's book is an outstanding source. Large in size but softbound with 376 , it covers subjects ranging from social to political, military to religious, and is ample with visual helps. Price: \$29.95 + \$5 shipping & handling.

Order from Heinemeier Publications, 4401 N. 33rd Road, Arlington, VA 22207-4423.

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READING THOSE GERMAN DOCUMENTS

Got to admit it—somewhere in your future there will be old German documents or books you will want to read. You can rely on someone else, wait for their expert services, find a fast friend who knows German, or you can learn the language yourself.

No one is too old to do it. I've heard of people past the age of 60 who take an avid interest in one, two, or three languages and spend their golden years conversing in those tongues. Well, German may be enough for you as a "second language."

Even if you don't want to become fluent in German, you can learn tons of insights on how the language works, even how the old Germans thought. This can assist in deciphering documents as you unlock your heritage.

Dave Meyer is on our G-SIG Steering Committee. He has been active in learning German since 1988 with an organization called the German School Association of Greater St. Louis / Deutscher Schulverein. At its Web site, it is listed as "an independent, not-for-profit organization serving the St. Louis area" for nearly 40 years. "The school is dedicated to promoting the language and culture of German-speaking countries."

Dave says there are classes for adults and children, beginners through advanced students. For adults, there is no language prerequisite. But children must read and write English at the 1st grade level. Classes are held on Saturday mornings in the South County area. There are 30 sessions. For more information, Dave suggests you call Helga Thalheimer at (314) 544-3990. Or send an e-mail to gsa_stlmo@yahoo.com.

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What about "The Week in Germany"?

German history grows each day, and it's probably true for most of us in G-SIG that our distant relatives who remained in Germany are still making historic strides and facing challenges. You can learn about them by checking info@germany.info.

"The Week in Germany" is offered without charge online. Once signed up, you receive the automatic news each week. It's in English, so don't fret about language.

The site states, "This newsletter is brought to you by the German Information Center, dedicated to fulfilling the public diplomacy mission of the German Embassy by offering Americans a window on modern Germany. Looking for more daily news out of Germany? Turn to DW-WORLD.DE for an independent view of what's happening...."

One recent story noted the 16th anniversary of the demise of the Berlin wall. The report notes: "Germany this week recalled the courage of the freedom-loving demonstrators who helped bring down the Berlin Wall and usher in the end of Europe's Cold War division 16 years ago."

In reviewing the story, it tells how the East and West portions of Berlin were sliced apart for nearly 30 years before the wall's collapse on Nov. 9, 1989, "amid massive protests led by East German democracy activists. Its dramatic collapse sparked euphoria on both sides of the Iron Curtain and set the stage for the formal unification of communist East and democratic West Germany 11 months later."

Interestingly, the report does not mention how East Germans were activated around candlelight vigils, many of them held as prayer events for the unification of their land. Soviet-empowered officials said they could fight a military army, but did not know

how to handle an “army” in prayer. Don’t expect to hear this side of the story in all the secular media, including the news from Germany. But numerous reports verify its accuracy. That movement of prayer started a generally bloodless rebellion.

In the Fall of 2005, the Web news noted: “Around 150 people gathered at the main Wall memorial site at Berlin's Bernauer Strasse to remember those momentous events, including Berlin Mayor Klaus Wowereit and Marianne Birthler, a former East German democracy activist who is now in charge of archiving the files of the regime's brutal Stasi secret police.

”The fall of the Wall 16 years ago on this day moved the world and it made the Germans, at least for a moment, the happiest people on Earth,’ said Birthler.”

Unbelievable as it may seem, the report says more than a thousand East Germans were killed while trying to escape to western freedom. About 230 of those died right at the wall. Some of us can well remember seeing newscasts with guards shooting wildly as Germans fled across the No-Man’s Land beyond the wall.

If recollection serves me right, I recall that perhaps as many as 17 million Germans fled from East Germany in the early years of partition. Most went to the western side, which caused an already stressed recovery system to reel even more in those early postwar years. A good German friend of mine was among those who fled—and made it!

Our current President Bush recently made this statement: "The fall of the Berlin Wall showed the world that the love of liberty is stronger than the will of tyranny."

Something you may not know: Erich Honecker headed Easter Germany beginning in 1971. When he was ousted with the collapse of the Communist regime in mid-November of 1989, he was placed in the protective custody of a Lutheran pastor, actually living in the pastor’s house while health issues were addressed and the political climate became predictable. During that time, the pastor was interviewed on a broadcast of “The Lutheran Hour” originating from St. Louis and airing nationwide. Honecker and his wife were given a private home in the parsonage. The pastor noted that the love of God should move people to offer help, even in situations dealing with harsh, deposed leaders such as Honecker.

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REACHING INTO GERMANY’S PAST...

John Wittenberg, one of our associate group leaders for G-SIG, recently shared an old copy of a history publication from the St. Louis Public Library, listing various Web sites and archival sources on Germany and Germans. I tried some of the sites.

You can, too, simply do a search for “Archives in Germany,” then make your selection. One choice was www.ghi-dc.org . The site revealed that “the German Historical Institute (GHI) was established in April 1987 as an independent non-profit foundation. Since 2002 it has been part of the Stiftung Deutsche Geisteswissenschaftliche Institute im Ausland (D.G.I.A.), which is governed under public law and supervised by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research.” There are associate sites in Rome, Paris, London, and Warsaw, to name a few. Funding comes from the Federal Republic of Germany and grants. The purpose is to educate people on the political, social, economic, and cultural developments in Germany and the U.S.A., especially in the 19th and 20th

centuries. This includes transatlantic movements and exchange, transatlantic comparisons, the roles of Germany and the United States in international relations, plus environmental history. Yes, most Germans are BIG on saving the environment.

There is a section on “German History in Documents and Images” That can be read in English or German, so if you want to sharpen your language skills, go ahead!

There is another site to note: home.bawue.de/~hanacek/info/earchive.htm . That site shows: Common German Terms, State and Private Archives, Church Archives, Archives of Concerns, Military Archives, Special Archives, Further Listings of Archives, and Archives in other states. Play around and discover some nice resources.

For those who are not comfortable using the Internet, my suggestion is simple: Find a friend or relative who likes to work their computer, ask them to do the search, then have them print out some details on how you might contact those German sites.

It’s common for German archives to have someone on staff who knows at least a little English who can provide help in translating your letter or e-mail note.

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

+ *John L. Maurath* (maurath1@juno.com) is researching these family names from St. Louis and St. Clair County, Ill. : Maurath, Jacob, Schuler, and Rohr, plus others.

+ *Kathleen Wurth* has stepped forward, as have several others, to help with G-SIG. She would like to assist in some way with the G-SIG FORUM.

+ *Patricia Von Zur Muehlen* is now “transmitter” for the FORUM. She sent it in a matter of a couple hours to more than 180 destinations! Yes—we have nearly 200 on our G-SIG e-mail list! Thanks were sent to Pat from Hermann Eisele and John Wittenberg (associate group leaders) plus Gerry Perschbacher.

+ *Beverly Wehner* of Springfield, Mo., isn’t alone in liking the first G-SIG FORUM. She wrote: “ G-SIG FORUM #1 was great. Mr. Perschbacher did a marvelous job with not only the newsletter prep but also the articles he contributed.” *Lansing G. Hecker* who heads the German American Heritage Society adds, “Thank you. This is excellent! Keep up the great work.”

+ *Don Bergmann*, 4046 Botanical Ave., St. Louis, MO 63110, likes the idea of Clusters and wants to shed light on his Rhineland origins. He is especially hunting for Johann Caspar Schaefer and has a keen interest in the Dreieich area of Hesse-Darmstadt.

+ *Heinz Hang* in Germany says, “Thank you very much for the...G-SIG FORUM. I think this is a nice idea!” He says many German church officials are not able to read old scripts and often deny having churchbooks. “It is by far better to ask a private non-professional researcher; however, in special cases a professional researcher is needed.”

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G-SIG FORUM will be sent by e-mail. If you prefer a copy by mail, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to: St. Louis Genealogical Society, Attn. Ed Schmidt, #4 Sunnen Dr., St. Louis, MO 63143.

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