

G-SIG FORUM #24

...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, Mo.

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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MUCH MORE THAN A NICE COMMENT!

“I just finished reading all the G-SIG Forum posts that are on the STL Gen Society website and enjoyed them very much. Thanks so much for helping all the people with an interest in German genealogy. It is great to see that I am not alone in my crazy passion of genealogy, especially anything relating to Germany. I did read every forum post with interest, as often even the smallest thing will trigger an idea that is helpful!”

So writes Gerry Meier (gmeier@meiermultimedia.com). He goes on:

“I am a former Gen Society member of several years ago, and over the past years, I had let my membership lapse due to working, raising a family, and very little time. Since I am newly retired after 25+ years of teaching (and at the same time, I might add, squeezing in 25+ years of working on my family history). Although I found plenty of ways to let my hobby consume me while working full time, I am hopeful that I will have more time to pursue my interests in a more leisurely pace. I do think collaboration is key in reinforcing the bloodhound instinct of a genealogist while tracking down our history! There is nothing like

sharing your discoveries as well as brick walls with someone who is like minded. I am lucky in that I have a couple of friends who share my interest.”

So true. Digging up ancestral information can be tiring and disappointing if results do not surface as quickly as anticipated. Individuals can stop at proverbial brick walls, with little hope or energy remaining to conquer them. That’s why we have formed Clusters in G-SIG. A Cluster concentrates on a select area of Germany. Then its participants “go at it” with as much energy and interest as possible. When one participant gains a worthy insight, it is shared with others to benefit the whole. No need to face the challenges alone.

“Thank you for all your work,” Herr Meier continues. “Thanks for sharing it with us. As soon as I am official, I would like to join a few cluster groups. So, ‘see’ you online until then.”

Gerry Meier’s Web site is truly outstanding. You might enjoy its strengths by checking: <http://www.meiermultimedia.com/gmeier/archives/bhistory.htm>

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MORE FUN WITH THE PHONE ‘BOOK’

By Gerald Perschbacher

Have you tried to track down a surname at the Web site we mentioned last time? It is: <http://www2.dastelefonbuch.de/> . The real trick is that you should know the name of the “Ort” or area (a county or *Kreis*, city, village, or town). You can experiment with a variety of guesses, but don’t go wild. Use a little bit of knowledge to narrow the field before you start popping the names of localities.

If you walk through the steps, you can not only find the mailing address and phone number of various surnames in an area, but you can see their location on an aerial map. Zoom in or out for more detail.

It’s fun, and maybe you’ll find a distant relative or someone with whom you can communicate about your ancestry.

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MAPS ONCE MORE... Have you had fun at www.verwandt.de/karten/ ?

Pick a German surname such as Klein.

The response says there are 58,201 listings in the phone directories showing this surname, representing 155,202 persons. They are located in 439 counties and towns. The name is concentrated around Cologne (Köln) where 1,407 listings

bear the name. Next comes Berlin with 1,350, Rhein-Sieg-Kreis (1,317), Saarlouis (1,049), and so on, down to Munich (München) at 787 and Hamburg at 680.

Map colorations are outstanding and very helpful in showing where your family might have its origin, since even today many German families still live near ancient home sites.

Not only is the map experience fun, but it can shed light on the distribution and concentration of surnames unlike any other visual vehicle I have seen.

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TAKE A BREAK!

Go to www.germanoriginality.com for a world of information on the subject of German heritage and culture. Issued as a service of the German government, there are sections on history, regional traits, the language, and beautiful visuals of old and new.

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CAN'T HANDLE THE COMPUTER?

If you don't have computer access or have trouble going online, don't think you are forgotten. There are ways to maximize your options. Find a relative or friend who can access the Web sites for you and print the information (or help you walk through it on the screen); or you can seek similar information from books.

Many times, books seem "safer." Online information may not always originate from experts. Sometimes armchair historians and writers get into the act, with not altogether accurate information. However, books usually had their information tested and were polished textually.

Have you checked for new books on German history and heritage? Keeping in touch with your nearby bookstore might bring benefits. What about attending a book fair in search of old books on German history? Don't forget to check with the AAA Automobile Club for free maps and booklets on Germany travel. Sometimes those books provide capsulated details well worth knowing.

The third option is to register for an e-mail address, then use a library computer to gain access. In this manner, you can receive the *G-SIG Forum* or even pass it along for others to enjoy.

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FOUR VILLAGES PLUS DIEBURG

In the early 1820s, these areas held something in common: Schaafheim, Schlierbach, Altheim, and Harpertshausen. These areas

Were assigned under the auspices of the town called Dieburg.

The territory is in Hessen-Darmstadt, south of Frankfurt and east of Darmstadt.

Why do I tell you this? A good number of people with German lineage in the areas of St. Louis, Mo., and points directly east in Illinois, trace their lineage to these areas. After studying the immigrations to our part of America, I wonder if dire problems plagued Germans in that southern Hessen area, thus fomenting their move to the New World.

Or was it convenience that brought them here? As groups of settlers often formed travel associations as they migrated from Germany to Midwestern America around the mid 1800s. Sometimes this was done by one or two families, sometimes by friends in a village. They knew one another in many cases, and knew they could rely on each other in the New World. In very small villages, marriages between families was very common.

Realignment of this territory was necessary as a result of France. When the Napoleonic government collapsed, the region was hard hit for survival. Marriages between families was augmented.

If you are descended from one of those families, you may have an interesting story in your past, regarding how the “trip” was organized. Check around for other researchers on the same area, and you might tap into highly worthwhile information!

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WHAT DOES THAT GERMAN DOCUMENT SAY?

Translating that old German text may be less of a challenge than you think. Here are some simple ideas.

Listen to your neighbors and friends. I mean, actually listen to their voices. Do some sound as though they have a German accent? If so, ease into the subject as you get to know them. You might ask, “Do you know anyone in Europe?” Or, be downright specific and ask if they know anyone in Germany. If they have a German heritage, perhaps they would like to be a good neighbor or friend and do some translating for you! Maybe they would be happy to do it out of the goodness of their neighborly heart, or perhaps a nice, home made pie or “thank you” gift certificate to a nice restaurant would be a great way to show appreciation for their help.

Do you know of any high school or college students who are taking German? Maybe they are looking for a special project or some way to gain extra credit. Make a copy of the document you need translated, and see what can come of it.

You can take German language classes at several reputable places or through individual tutoring, if you are embarrassed to try it in public. Check some past editions of this *FORUM* for contacts.

There is always the option of teaching yourself via CDs or audio tapes, taking classes, or simply muddling through German word after word with a dictionary in hand. If record entries are in need of translating, your work may be very simple. Once you understand a few key words for column headings, the details can be relatively easy to surmise.

Do your friends have any knowledge of German, or do they know of someone who might be willing to help you? Don't keep your challenge a secret. Share your need.

If you travel to a historic site of German settlement in America, ask officials or volunteers if they have anyone in the area who has mastery of German.

I guess you could marry a German, too, but not everyone is "in the market" for a new spouse.

Perhaps the biggest challenge is how to limit yourself to items needing translation. Don't ask someone to translate an entire book. Keep your initial request to a few pages, at most. Select what you believe are the most important. If you have a certificate that needs translating, OK, make it easy on the person and just ask for the general content. If you have a cherished letter that was handed down through the generations, make a clean copy of the document for a translator to process.

Truly, you will strengthen your understanding of your lineage if you learn at least a little of the language. In the meantime, explore your options. And be willing to pay as you go, if necessary.

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THANKS, PLUS A FEW IDEAS

"I love the newsletter -- it's always great -- thank you so much for the energy put into it!" says John Maurath, a G-SIG participant.

"My Grandma Maurath's maiden name was Gude, and her mother was a

Hoevelkamp. The Hoevelkamp's came from the town of Ankum, north of Osnabrueck. While I was there researching in the Catholic Church of Ankum one year, the lady in their archive's office was named Vonder Haar. There are a lot of people with that name in St. Louis, and I especially remember Vonder Haar Concrete Company.

“She told me that the Vonder Haar name originally came from the town of Meppen, and that the name evolved (accents and dialects, etc.) from the name Von der Heide (from the lowland or flatland heath area between Germany and Holland). I just thought I'd throw this out there, in case any of the younger generations are now trying to find their origins.”

Recently, John Wittenberg (one of our G-SIG officials) has been asking about his ancestral origin. As G-SIG Leader, I have encouraged him to make contact with officials in the city of Wittenberg, in Germany, a very historic location credited with being the cradle for the Reformation. When a person's surname is the same as a German town or village, there is a likely connection.

John Maurath adds a similar note about a man named Rossfeld: “There just happens to be a town of Rossfeld in northwest Bavaria. We just couldn't find where his Rossfeld ancestors came from. I had his ancestor's name (Wilhelm Rossfeld) and his birth date. So, I got an idea to simply look in the Catholic Church archives in the town of Rossfeld for the first name and birthdate. Lo and behold, there was a Wilhelm Sprattler, a beer brewer, who was the only Wilhelm born in the town on that date. He had an illegitimate birth. When he came to America, Wilhelm Sprattler assumed the name of the town of his birth and became Wilhelm Rossfeld.

“I've seen this in a couple of other instances. Illegitimate births were as common back then as they are today, and many researchers are overlooking that fact.”

I'll add a word right here. In the 1700s and 1800s, young German maidens often had to move away from their ancestral town just to find employment. Many became domestics, working for wealthy people. It was not unusual for a maiden to return to her ancestral town as a single, pregnant woman or with a newborn child. (Sometimes domestic work was taken to the extreme.) Usually the child would be given the mother's family name. In certain instances, perhaps this was superseded by the child taking on the name of the new village with an “-er” ending implying this was a person of that locality. However, that was more likely to occur when the youngster moved from the village. Emigration to America or other new lands may also have been a handy time to change a surname for this or other reasons to make the person less traceable. Reasons for anonymity were related to debts, a break with their family, and escape from the law, to name a few.

John Maurath adds another thought about Germans in Russia. "Catherine the Great sent representatives to various areas of Germany, soliciting the people (especially the farmers and craftsmen) to come to specific areas in Russia. For instance, the representative in the Black Forest was soliciting for people to settle around Odessa on the Black Sea (the towns of Joseftal and Mariental, valleys named after St. Joseph and the Virgin Mary). Many Maurath families (and hundreds of other families) from the Black Forest and also from Mothorn (Alsace, France) went to these two towns and other surrounding towns, near to Odessa."

He suggests checking these Web sites:

<http://www.ahsgr.org/>

<http://www.lib.ndsu.nodak.edu/grhc/>

<http://www.cyndislist.com/germruss.htm>

<http://feefhs.org/grhs/indexgrh.html>

"One of my distant Maurath relatives is really into this. She is related to Johnny Weissmueller (who played Tarzan in the movies) and his German ancestors also came from Russia. Other famous German-Russians are John Denver (Johann Duchendorf), Lawrence Welk, Senator Tom Daschle, Angie Dickinson, Lenin (the Communist dictator), and possibly Cary Grant, Richard Simmons, General Schwarzkopf, and others....many German-Russians began leaving in the 1890s because they saw things starting to change, and the many promises of Catherine (which were suppose to be perpetual) being revoked."

Now, back to John Wittenberg and anyone named after a town or village. Find out all you can about the location, establish a contact (via e-mail through a town Web site or any other means), then hold tight for some discoveries! You may not find all your answers easily, but sometimes the search is exciting--and you learn many things that are intriguing about the history of Germany through the years.

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EXCHANGE! G-SIG comments, ideas, & requests:

+ **I would like to know where I can find a copy** of "*Auswanderer-Chronik der Gemeinde Lienen*" by Gemeinde Lienen of Westfalen, published 1990. I read that your the St. Louis Genealogical Society has a copy of it. Is it at the St. Louis County Library Headquarters now? I looked over the weekend and can't find the book there. Thanks! Darlene Rich (steve_patty@sbcglobal.net)

+ From: NRemm10335@aol.com: **"I am looking for information** about Wilhelm Vogel. He controlled immigration from Borgholzhausen to American in the mid 1800s."

+ **Early Germanic history!** Find out about “The Quest for the Lost Roman Legions, Discovering the Varus Battlefield” by J. A. S. (Tony) Clunn by looking for a copy in your local book store or contacting Savas Beatie LLC, P.O. Box 4527, El Dorado Hills, CA 95762 (Phone: (916) 941-6896) www.savasbeatie.com .

+ **Wanted:** “**The German Church on the American Frontier 1840-1866**” (printed in 1939) by Carl E. Schneider; contact Gerald Perschbacher at persch3@hotmail.com or call (314) 849-5249.

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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