

G-SIG FORUM #25

...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 .

GERMAN MONUMENTS by Gerald Perschbacher

A monument is in the works! “On the 18th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, the German Bundestag has voted to build a memorial to peace and freedom. The decision calls for the memorial to be erected in 2009, the year of the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, to commemorate the peaceful revolution of 1989 and German unification.” So reports the German embassy in Washington, D.C., (www.germany.info).

Consider the past. Germans have had the tendency to construct monuments for all sorts of good reasons. Perhaps it is a “Western European” thing. Or perhaps it’s simply human nature, as exemplified in Egypt’s ancient pyramids. Indeed, even a grave marker is a monument.

The 1989 movement for reunification was for the freedom of Eastern Germany, too. In this light, it is similar in spirit to the revolt of 1848 and in 1832, both centered in Frankfurt on the Main. If you study monuments to great events such as these, or the Reformation, or German unification in 1870-71, you can appreciate the depth of feeling and intensity which flowed in those eras, long past.

By contemplating and examining those monuments, you may grasp a feel for your ancestral past. Perhaps one of your relatives was involved in a freedom fight and may have stood by the monument to that event, thrilled by remembrance of the challenge, once more.

As we research our German heritage and ancestry, we share in much of what went behind those old monuments. As some of our familial branches remain in Deutschland, too distant for even us to realize, it gives pause for us to consider the freedom heroes of today – that may well be related to us.

LUTHER WAS FOR ALL by Gerald Perschbacher

Martin Luther was truly a man for all seasons and all people. He did not intend to divide the Roman Catholic Church in Germany, as much as redirect it toward more positive aspects of Christianity. As with any large and honored institution, the evil ways of man can slip in, and re-examination is necessary. I won't go into the shortfalls of the organized church in 1517. You can read about it elsewhere. You can also read accounts of fanatics who took the Reformation to the extreme.

No, I'm talking about Martin Luther as he has been known by many Germans since the 1500s. In America, we honor the memory and achievements of George Washington, Father of the Nation, as some have called him. Well, in Germany, Luther fits this description in many ways.

Dr. Martin Luther (indeed, he held an earned doctorate) was educated, prolific, articulate, creative, forceful, domineering, thoughtful, considerate, harsh, brash, loving, gentle, and determined – all characteristics of a good leader. Of all these attributes, perhaps “prolific” and “determined” are best suited. Let me explain.

Luther translated the New Testament into German. It was a good, solid, and relatively common German translation, something adults could read and understand, regardless of their stage of life or their position in society. The printing press had become the most famous invention for mass communication in its time, and Germans were itching to use it. Centered in Mainz (where Gutenberg succeeded with his invention of a press with moveable type), the industry flourished and grew. By the start of the Reformation in 1517, the stage was set for mass communication via print. I can't imagine how many rags were recycled and trees were toppled to be turned into pulp and paper for the movement (even more amazing when it is realized that the noble families controlled most forestlands and businesses, thus showing their support for the movement). What the New Testament translation achieved was monumental. It was the first time Germans could read the Bible in their language. This fostered a systemized format to the German way of writing and speaking. Even today, that translation is held in high regard.

For Luther, the translation was the result of his prolific effort and sheer determination to see the project through before he might have been killed by religious and political enemies. His life was spared various times, and this enabled him to complete the German translation of the entire Bible.

What Luther also symbolized was an awakening of German unification and pride. As the nations of Western Europe formed (such as England, Spain, and France), Germany was among the late comers. German lords, dukes, counts, and higher nobility longed to be free from foreign domination. By the early 1520s, a young emperor (Charles V) sat on the throne of the Holy Roman Empire. He was Spanish. He was related to several noble families, even in Germany, but he was not considered German. Luther became a lightning rod for German pride and the early signs of unification.

Truly, Germans today generally respect Luther for these main achievements, if nothing more. He is considered the Father of Germany in the minds of many, regardless of their religious preference.

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CHECKING OLD RECORDS, and MORE!

Helen Snyder is on a quest to trace her Breitwieser family lineage. Sound familiar? You're probably in a similar boat, regardless of family.

Turns out that I had access to some old village files from her family's area in Germany, since it matched my family's area. I did some research.

Church and village files can be hard to read, so I've got to take my hat off to some good research done in Germany in recent years, that compiled all the bits of information in logical and readable form (although you've got to know some German to understand its full benefits).

Old church files often dedicated a page or more to a family surname. I gleaned the Breitwieser entries. This is what I found. Follow along, and you might pick up some insights for YOUR research!

There were several "Johann Jacob Breitwiesers" listed in the Schaafheim files in Hessen-Darmstadt. These would have simply been known as "Jacob," since the first names related to their baptism (the church was dedicated to St. John, so most of the boys baptized there took the name "Johann" but were called by their second name).

The Breitwieser family generally lived in Schlierbach, which is the neighboring village to Schaafheim. It is very small and was practically wiped out in the Thirty Years' War of 1618-1648 (I believe 3 people survived). From what I can tell, the Breitwieser line might have survived in Schlierbach, or others in that family may have moved into Schlierbach after that war to help with resettlement and to claim their family's land if the line had died out in that village. There were also Breitwiesers living in Cleestadt and Harreshausen (both close). Some lived in Langstadt, also nearby. Several lived in the large village of Schaafheim in the 1600s and 1700s.

There was a Johannes Breitwieser who was *Schultheiss* of Schlierbach in the early 1700s. This meant he was the appointed official who acted like the mayor (appointed by the noble family, which would have been the Count of Hanau who lived in Babenhausen). Since Schlierbach was very, very small (perhaps 50-100 people by 1725), this was not an extremely important job, but it carried authority and a little prestige. By the way, "Johannes" is not a baptismal name; "Johann" was reserved for that usage. So he would have been called "Johannes."

Good names were worth repeating, especially if the person was held in honor. In the mid 1700s there was another "Johannes" who was a legal official (similar to police officer or city councilman) who served in Schaafheim. He had 6 children by his first wife, then 8 more with his second wife. However, at least 8 of all these children died (3 years old or younger), or were stillborn. So it was in those days.

I've got to add that some names were retired, just like the number on the uniform of a famous ball player. A good example is one of my own ancestors, Bonifacius Perschbacher in the 1500s, who

dominated his family and village and had received a formal education in Latin, at the school financed by the Count of Hanau. There is evidence that his reputation was so high that no one after him dared to carry his name, due to total respect.

Let's return to my research for Helen. There was a Martin Breitwieser who served as a soldier in Mainz in 1735. Mainz was one of the most ancient cities in Western Europe, and once claimed to be the military capital of the Roman Empire shortly before it collapsed.

Records make it easy to conclude that much of the Breitwieser line lived in Schlierbach, at least in the 1600s and 1700s. So we will need to do more searching to find who lived in Schaafheim in the 1800s.

You might ask: What does the name mean? In doing some research, this is what I conclude. "Breite" means lowlands. "Wieser" means meadow. Hence, the name means "one who comes from the lowland meadow."

Since some Breitwiesers settled in the St. Louis area in the mid-1800s, could the name have made a metamorphosis into Budweiser, of St. Louis beer fame? Theory, perhaps; but little to go on, at this point. "Bud-" was possibly derived from "Budde," which is a tub or vat or a term relating to a cooper (a worker of copper). "Weiser" is someone who is wise, sensible, experienced, such as a guide or teacher. So, the term can be aptly applied to beer making, in which a cooper would have had to make the vat, and this would be someone who was a craftsman (experienced). This meaning is completely removed from the meaning of Breitwieser. As a safety, I added this encouragement to Helen: "However, you would have to check with A-B archivists to determine for sure."

Helen received a pronunciation suggestion which set her thinking in the direction of a Budweiser connection. However, the source was incorrect. That's why it is wise to secure a second opinion. When Germans place e-i together, the second vowel is pronounced while the first one is silent. When i-e are together, the same holds true.

Budweiser would have been pronounced "Bood-Viser" (or Bood-Visah). That is not very close to the pronunciation that had been used for Breitwieser. So the actual pronunciation of this family name would have been close to: "Bright-Veeser." The first r would have been rolled far back in the throat (almost as though you were saying Bwight) and the second r (at the end) would have had a pronunciation almost like a soft a. hence: Bwight-Veesah would have been the old pronunciation in Schaafheim.

As with so many other things, more research is needed. Stay tuned.

By the way, Helen has a notice in the *Exchange!* section of this *FORUM*, in case anyone else in G-SIG has some insights.

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HOW MANY COUSINS DO YOU HAVE?

I call it "intertwined lineage." I'm not talking about immediate cousins (the offspring of uncles and aunts). I'm referring to the wider circle of cousins.

If your lineage is traced through German settlers in Missouri or Illinois, you many have more cousins than you could imagine. I'm convinced that good portions of east central Missouri and west central Illinois (along the Mississippi River) are probably related.

Distant cousins are discovering their relationships due to the union of

various families that only solid research can bring to the surface. If you find out you have a Hessen (Hessian), Saxon, or general Rheinland past, you may be related to quite a few other families of German origin who liked to "stick with their own" in ages past.

It's fun to count your cousins. GP

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

+ **Helen Snyder** [hrsnyder@mchsi.com] is tracing Johann Nicholas Breitwieser, b. 11/10/1822, Evangelisch, Schaafheim, Starkenburg, Hessen. His father was Johann Michael Breitwieser and his mother was Anna Margaretha Perschbacher. Any insights on the Breitwieser family will be appreciated.

+ **Special note:** " I am in the process of updating a previous publications on my Bauers from Stockstadt am Main that I had available for all my cousins some years ago. Even then I did more than print names, dates. and descendant trees. I tried to put the times they were living in, as a backdrop to their stories...I did write a short historical story about each generation based on known facts as I unfolded the migrations of our ancestors from Stockstadt am Main to Millstadt, Ill. I also did a little bit of pre-Bauer family history of the area to give some background info on the peoples who inhabited the area circa the First Century B.C. to present."

So reports Mark A. Bauer (mabauer@peaknet.net)

+ **From Germany:** Wilhelm Mueller (fwillem.mueller@arcor.de): Looking for Schierhoff (Scheirhoff or Sherhoff). My information on this family around 1865 to 1910 does not "fit." Schierhoffs were mostly in Oakville, Mo., in St. Louis County. I'm not experienced in U.S. research: Do you know a person in your society researching the Schierhoff family? I found all Schierhoff "death records" available on one page of www.slcl.org.

+ **Still 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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Then submit your material to germansig@stlgs.org

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