

G-SIG FORUM #26

...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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G-SIG AND THE 'Yahoo Group Site'

Kathy Wurth reports: "Check out our G-SIG Yahoo Group site. It's easy and will give you the opportunity to correspond with other members who may be researching in your hometown or on your surname. Also, if you are new at German research it's a great place to ask a question. Just go to Yahoo, click on Groups, search for GermanSpecialInterest (all one word) and then sign in with your Yahoo e-mail account or make one up to use for this. You then can post messages, ask questions, send in a neat Web site, or connect with a fellow researcher." Questions? e-mail Kathy at: kathyinwashington@hotmail.com.

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WHAT ABOUT SCHIERHOFF?

Wilhelm Mueller (fwillem.mueller@arcor.de) is researching **Schierhoff** in the St. Louis area. But it's not easy, since Herr Mueller lives in Germany!

"I'm not experienced in U.S. research, and thus I do not know all U.S. record types," so he is asking for help. Wilhelm Mueller is from the Sauerland in Westphalia, and now is living in Bavaria. Herr Mueller adds: "Let me know, if

you need assistance for research in Westphalia.” He also suggests checking a wonderful site at: <http://www.westphalia-emigration.de/> (thanks to John Maurath for forwarding the request).

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‘MAKE MINE A BREIT’?

I’ve received some responses to the Breitwieser-Budweiser question on whether one name had been derived from the other. No connection. Evidently, there is a beer brewed in Europe that carries the name “Budweiser.” It is derived from the town of Budweis in an old German area of what was western Czechoslovakia. Some type of legal action was taken over the use of that name, but it held no bearing at all on Breitwieser. Thanks for the insights shared by G-SIGers!

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ALTERNATE VIEWS OF LUTHER

The previous FORUM ran a feature on Martin Luther and his influence, even beyond the religious realm. After reading the feature, Pat von zur Muehlen quoted William L. Shirer (The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich):

"Through his sermons and his magnificent translations of the Bible, Luther created the modern German language, aroused in the people not only a new Protestant vision of Christianity by a fervent German nationalism and taught them, at least in religion, the supremacy of the individual conscience. But tragically for them, Luther's siding with the princes in the peasant rising, which he had largely inspired, and his passion for political autocracy ensured a mindless and provincial political absolutism which reduced the vast majority of the German people to poverty, to a horrible torpor and a demeaning subservience. Even worse perhaps, it helped to perpetuate and indeed to sharpen the hopeless divisions not only between classes but also between the various dynastic and political groupings of the German people. It doomed for centuries the possibility of the unification of Germany."

Of course, history takes various swirls. So do historians who study it. Recently I came across the reminder that history is made by those who write it. Sources much closer to the time period than Shirer are not as negative on Luther's influence. The political situation in the German states was becoming intolerable for a rising merchant class that felt strangled by the nobility, and a lower class that

felt strangled by both. Luther spoke of freedom in the area of faith--others took it farther. Had Luther's initial slant been taken, changes might have come slower but with greater positive impact. We will never know. Today, freedom of thought allows us to check with a wide variety of opinions, then form our own.

I suppose you could also say that the person who brought on the Peasants' War was really Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor, since he allowed his youth, initial political weakness, and indecision to encourage Germans to "run wild" with the taste of potential freedom.

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HAVE FUN WITH....

...germanoriginality.com . With a few simple key strokes, you can explore history, lineage, culture, and more.

Here is a sample: "Elvis Presley...would have been Elvis Pressler if Johann Valentin Pressler hadn't changed his name during the Civil War." There's more: "He made wine in the village of Niederhochstadt in the Southern Palatinate until he moved to the States. A number of descendants of the Pressler family still live in Niederhochstadt today. But Elvis is the most famous descendant of this German family."

You may have heard the term "48ers." If you are among those who are new to the study of German history, you may not know its meaning. According to the Web site, "48ers" were individuals pursuing religious freedom and feeling burdened by economic hardship. I'll add that there was another segment that believed in the freedom of spirit; and that meant freedom FROM religion, if they so chose.

These factors were major influences in the transatlantic migration to North America. Says the site: "After the post-Napoleonic government persecuted liberals and democrats, politically motivated emigration surfaced. In Germany, the effects of the 1848 revolution could be felt in all parts of the country. But most emigrants came from Baden, Hessen, Rhineland, Württemberg, which is now part of France."

There "48ers" weren't farmers, tradesmen, or craftsmen, as earlier migrants had been. "A large number of them were doctors, teachers, lawyers, editors, artists and musicians. A German-American cultural renaissance began."

Word reached Germany, via friends and family members who had crossed to the New World, that America was the place to go. If you have the chance to read firsthand reports of those early immigrants, do it. Their early accounts truly reflected a better life in the United States. "Land was easy to come by, and the German community was firmly established," says the Web site.

Just to put rising German immigration into perspective, the site shares some numbers: About 10,000 Germans per year left between 1825 to 1861. This peaked at 220,000 in 1854. According to calculations, there were around 1.3 million German-born settlers in the U.S.A. by 1860. A good number resided in or around St. Louis.

Those were the days before radio and television. So, what did your ancestors do for recreation? In America, nearly 200 magazines and newspapers were available in German. Seven of those were in St. Louis.

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JEWISH CONNECTIONS

For centuries, Jews and Germans lived in towns and villages, each relying on the other for income and protection. What was life like for Jews in years past? Examine some factors at these sites:

[Jewish Life in Germany \(from Germany.info\)](#)

[Jewish Cultural Sites in Berlin \(from Germany.info\)](#)

[ITS Holocaust Archive Now Open for Research \(Germany.info\)](#)

Not long ago, I scanned books for sale on the shelves of a local used book store. I noticed several on Jews in Germany, the communities, and the circumstances, some subjects dating to 1500 and earlier. If your study takes you in this direction and you cannot use the Internet or would rather have hard copy, check with a local bookstore. Type your requests, leave a phone number or e-mail address, date the sheet, and give copies to several owners or managers. You might open new avenues in your study. GP

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Have an item for the *Exchange!* section? Send it for the next *G-SIG-FORUM!*

LISTEN FOR GERMAN!

Listen for mother tongues to be spoken at holidays and festive celebrations. Seems like people like to welcome family and friends in ancestral or cultural phrases that strengthen their bonds.

If you have relatives who still remember their German, converse with them about familiar phrases they recalled hearing in their youth. Not only discover the words, but also ask for the intonations! Tape the comments.

Why? Comments can be a piece of the past. More than that, the intonations might reflect the region of Germany from which your family departed. Regional dialects still abound among old-timers in Germany. By studying dialects, you may have a key to your family's place of origin.

Have you learned German phrases for special occasions (holidays, birthdays, etc.)? Nearly any good study book on the German language will feature the phrases, so we don't need to take space here to list them. The point is this: get to know some of your heritage by becoming familiar with phrases.

It can make a person feel special when they recall their family's original tongue.

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PIONEERS IN AN UNTAMED LAND...

Times were changing in Germany in the 1800s. There was a rebellion in Frankfurt-on-the-Main in 1832 involving artisans and craftsmen, and the "put down" by authorities had repercussions up and down the Rhine River. Maybe that's one reason your ancestors moved to America.

If your family settled in the 1830s in Illinois, just east of St. Louis, there might be a good reason. The last Indian War east of the Mississippi ended in 1832 and land was up for purchase from the Federal government. St. Clair County and adjoining counties in Illinois became prime sites for farmers to settle. If your family settled there in the 1830s, they would be considered pioneers.

If you cannot find an official record of your ancestor coming to America by boat, consider this: he or she might have been a stowaway. Yes, it happened. Legal status usually was granted once they arrived in America. In the mid-1800s, people became stowaways to escape payment to their village. Officials in much of Germany determined the value each person held for the future of the community. Based on their conclusions, a payment price was set before they would be legally allowed to leave. Of course, other matters had to be met, such as payment of all debts.

So, it was not cheap to come to America prior to the Civil War. Still, some experts assert that about a third of Germany's citizens left Europe for America from the 1830s through the 1870s.

As revealed in a study done by German Historian Hans Dörr, many villagers left their traditional homeland from 1830 to 1850 to try their luck in America. They were mostly poor day workers (wage earners) and craftsmen. They lived in general economic poverty not by their own debt, but through conditions. In many cases -- even after the sales of their entire property-- they did not have the cash to apply for passage, but turned to the municipality and asked for support. At times, the local council was very generous with financial grants because the payment for emigration eliminated the need for future community funds that would have been considered social welfare assistance to a given family.

Why would councils be willing to help? Several of those officials were probably relatives of the emigrants. Better to let the community pay their way than the family!

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

+ **Idea:** Check antique malls and shops for old German greetings cards and decorations. They can add a nice touch to your home and are fun to display for friends.

+ **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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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