

G-SIG FORUM #28

...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 genealogical, educational, and historical 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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Progress at the 'Yahoo! Group Site'

Good news: the G-SIG Yahoo Group site is reaping informational results. Simply put, the site encourages electronic correspondence with others researching similar topics or surnames.

Here are examples of progress.

Carol Marlo (of G-SIG) wrote, "I have a marriage record for my great-great-grandparents, Johann Jakob Gebhardt and Marie Dorothee Christine Voelkening on 14 February, 1819, at Sankt Simonis Evangelische Kirche in Minden, Westphalen. The record says that Johann is from Maienfeld __(?)__ Magdeburg. The word between the two towns looks like 'bnzu.' I can't find any town in that area by this name and wonder if someone can help me."

Carol added: I am researching in Miesenheim, Monreal, Polch, Gering, and Kaisersesch in Rhein; also Minden, Hamm, Beckum, Holzhausen, and Maienfeld in Westfalen; also Wuerges, Kroeftel, Zeilsheim, Marxheim, Oberrod, and Niederrod in Hesse. I would love to exchange data with anyone else interested in these towns."

Kathy Wurth of G-SIG, deeply involved in the coordination of Clusters, responded: "Carol: Do you belong to any of the Clusters for these areas of Germany? I'm sure there will probably be someone who has

researched in these or close to these towns. As a matter of fact I, too, have ancestors from around the Bielefeld area. I think your Holzhausen town is around there. I will be staying in Bielefeld and visiting in that area....Maybe I can take some pictures for you.”

Next came a response from Karen Ridgeway, facilitator for Westfalen Cluster: “Carol and/or Joe: Minden in Wesfalen is in the Kreis (District) of Minden-Lubbecke; within Kreis Minden-Lubbecke there are two Holzhausens; one in the Gemeinde Teil of Lubbecke and one in the Gemeinde Teil of Porta Westfalica; There are a number of other Holzhausens in Westfalen; Where is the location of your Holzhausen research? The Sister City of Waterloo, Ill., is Porta Westfalica and they (will be) visiting Waterloo....Be more explicit about the location of your other Westfalen towns, (explicitly the Kreis or district). I recognize your e-mail from the listing of our German SIG group... Perhaps you would be interested in joining our Westfalen Special Interest Group because we have people interested in Minden-Lubbecke.”

Get the idea how it works? Here’s another example.

Dorothy (grandma_flippin@sbcglobal.net) wrote: “I’m doing my GGGrandfather John Henry Buhr who came to U.S.A. in 1833; he came from Beln, Germany, with his wife and small children; I’m looking for name of the Catholic church where I can find records -- also a map and other information and photos. I’m now homebound and the only way for me to work on my family is on the computer -- just looking for information.”

Dorothy received a response from Karl of G-SIG Clusters Rhineland South & North. He asked, “Is the spelling possibly ‘Berlin’ rather than ‘Beln’? Using various map and place name searches, I was not able to find ‘Beln,’ Germany. There is a small town of Belm about 8 miles northeast of Osnabrueck, Germany...on the fringe of the town of Osnabrueck.” “See this link:

<http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&ie=ISO-8859-1&q=John+Henry+Buhr&btnG=Google+Search>

“Is this the heritage you are searching...?”

<http://washingtonmo.com/History+of+Washington+MO/St.%20Francis%20Borgia.htm>

“It was on July 25, 1833, that twelve Catholic families left their homes at Osterkappeln and Belm, in Hanover, Germany, and resolved to form a German settlement in Illinois. When they reached St. Louis, they waited many days for the boat that was to take them up the Illinois river. Finally, impatient at the delay, they boarded a boat that was ready to sail up the Missouri river.””

It was Jackie of G-SIG who added, “I don’t know if this is your GGGrandfather or not but found this on the internet:

<http://www.genealogy.com/users/n/u/e/John-R-Nuelle/WEBSITE-0001/UHP-0428.html>

Pretty many details, right? This shows how responses can go a long way.

How can someone “get into” the process? Read carefully. Go to www.Yahoo.com , click on Groups, search for GermanSpecialInterest (all one word) and complete the registration process. Then you may post messages, ask questions, send in a neat Web site, or connect with a fellow researcher. If you need more guidance on how to use this Yahoo group, please contact Karen Ridgeway at (deutschgene@yahoo.com) or Kathy Wurth at (kathyinwashington@hotmail.com).

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Making Serious Contact with Germany

Elizabeth Durako (durako@htc.net) was ready to make contact with Germans in Hessen-Nassau. She wasn’t sure how to initiate it. I’m glad she wrote to ask. Here is her initial comment:

“I live in Columbia, Ill., and receive your G-SIG Forum (and enjoy it very much). I used some of your advice and...found a chat room for the Burgermeister for Anspach, Hessen-Nassau, and asked for local contact information to do my family research. Someone was kind enough to do just that (from) the Society for Homeland and History.

“My father’s ancestors came to U.S.A. in the 1840s from there, I have found through LDS the microfilm for German church records (Evangelische). There are many ‘Brand or Brandt’ names in the records and I can’t tell which ones are directly related (I have verified several).

“So my question: Where do I start – what questions do I ask? Do I write in English or use Babelfish to translate my English into German first? I’m so thrilled I can’t think. Your advice would be greatly appreciated!

My response:

“You are well on your way to progress! Here's my next suggestion: refine your information from the present back to the 1840s when your family arrived in America. Find your exact line of descent, as best you can. If you can trace to a particular first name among your arriving ancestors, it will make the job easier for the Germans. Provide the basics on your direct ancestor who would have left Germany. That's what they really need. Adult names will be preferred, although the names of children would help.

“Often first names reappear within a family line. Watch for this indicator of direct ancestry. It's not always certain to bring results, but sometimes it works very well. Don't be too concerned with ‘Johann’ or ‘Maria/Ann’ as the first name, since this was probably a holdover from German days of naming the child after a saint (among Protestants and Catholics in Germany). Children often were known by their second name in those cases. Check for patterns of reappearance of the second name in family lines.

“Ask the German contacts: (1) The entire family unit that came to America together (father-mother-children; their ages, occupations); (2) Are there any records of their involvement in the Anspach community up to their departure? (positions held, occupations, place of residence) (3) They were members of what church? (4) Are there any related Brandts still in Anspach? (5) Has anyone in Anspach researched the Brandt lineage?

“If and when you make contact with a researcher in Germany who has compiled details about your family, keep an important factor in mind. As you compile the information on your Americanized ancestral branch, record it clearly and crisply in print. This can be offered as a trade-off for older information provided from Germany. Generally, Germans are highly interested in discovering what their families accomplished in America, and how they ‘grew and boomed.’

“Using a translating mechanism is handy. Even so, make your initial contact very short and simple. Example: ‘Hello. My name is _____. I am writing from America. My family came from _____ in the year _____ (or approximate date). I would like to find more information on my German heritage. I am willing to share what I have discovered, also. Can someone help me? My German is not strong, so I hope you understand my questions. Can you understand English?’

“Translate using Babelfish or a similar technique, then send it off. Copy the message into a saved file in both German and English. You may have reason to use it again, and it's handy for reference.

“When replies come, copy the messages into a new, ongoing file. I suggest saving that file and printing it out in stages as more information accumulates. In this manner, you will have a handy reference on the screen and on your shelf. *(A good safety measure against a computer crash.)*”

“After you have made some progress with German contacts, you may wish to raise the question of cost. Raise it carefully, otherwise you may be putting the idea into their minds. Also, some researchers might stereotype you as a wealthy American who thinks money makes the world go around.”

Pay someone to research? “Some Germans might be offended at this thought! Many do not like to think that a dollar sign has been placed into their research and the precious facts they can uncover. If you raise the question of cost, it could be approached this way: ‘You are being very helpful. This is greatly appreciated! Is there information I can provide for your files, or some other way I can help?’ This can open the door to the subject. You may even offer to mail a book or other documents to them.

“Some Germans appreciate English history books from your area of settlement. Others prefer old German books printed in America (many of which can be obtained from well-established churches that are cleaning off library shelves and discarding seldom-used books from the late 1800s and early 1900s). Since St. Louis was a center for publishing in German, many books of this type appear at used book sales and estate sales. Such German books (even worship books) give Germans the idea of how their people lived in America.

“These ideas should be helpful. Above all, be short in your sentences, clear in your thinking, concise in your phrasing, and courteous in your attitude and tone. In certain respects, visiting many parts of Germany is like stepping back to the wholesome days of the 1950s in America, where family values, community spirit, and sensible ideas prevailed. When you communicate, realize the cultural mindset.

“If you want to love the Germans, they will probably sense this and will show it in return.”

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

+ **Request:** John Maurath (maurath1@juno.com) says, the beautiful sounding zither is a Germanic instrument...prevalent in southern Germany and Austria.... It's starting to make a come back here in the U.S.

John's friend Bob Yarbrough is perhaps the only zither player in the St. Louis area who performs in public. They would like to restart the St. Louis Zither Club. "We would love to hear from G-SIG members (or any St. Louisans, including our friends in Illinois) whose ancestors were zither players and would love to see their old pictures...to start a scrapbook of the history of St. Louis zither players."

John adds that there are some good zither Web sites:
<http://www.zithers-usa.com/> (Chicago Zither Club)
<http://www.zither.us>
<http://www.zitherist.com>
http://washmohistorical.org/about_our_museum.htm#Franz%20Schwarzer
(Schwarzer Zither Museum in Washington, Mo.)

+Idea: When spring festivals begin, you can bet they will give way to summer festivals. Then fall festivals follow. The St. Louis area is heavily Germanic in traditions, so if you want to realize a "bit of Germany," visit some of the festivals in towns nearby that trace their origin to German settlers. Visit historical sites in those towns. Speak with longtime residents. You may discover some interesting facts about old German traits and traditions. Of course, look for books of local interest at the festivals. These may not mention your family surname, but they may reflect traditions common to your line. -GP

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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: SLGS, Attn: G-SIG; #4 Sunnen Dr., Suite 140; St. Louis, MO 63143