

G-SIG FORUM #30

...from the German Special Interest Group. G-SIG is an effort of the St. Louis Genealogical Society (www.stlgs.org/) and the German American Heritage Society, St. Louis, Mo. (www.gahs-stlouis.org).

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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THE GERMAN IMPACT ON AMERICA

By Gerald Perschbacher

Germans immigrants had a favorable impact on America in more ways than most people realize. For this supposition, I'll glean thoughts from Albert B. Faust, who authored *The German Element in the United States*, printed in 1927 by The Steuben Society of America. Please realize that this synthesis of his comments and ideas is based on the period ending in 1927 and does not knowingly reflect the time thereafter. For that, we can make our own conclusions.

He said, "From the very beginning of the colonial period and continuously throughout the history of the United States, **the Germans were seen to furnish brawn, brain, and blood** in the building of colonies and cities, in the development of the nation's material resources, in the struggle against wild nature and savage foes, in the war for political independence, and in the rescue of the Union from disruption and disgrace. Such service is equivalent to favorable influence."

It gets me thinking. As you do your genealogical research and rummage through old family pictures, documents, and small heirlooms, take some moments to pause and ponder the times through which your ancestors

lived while in America. Your genealogical appreciation is hardly complete without a grasp of history.

Let's say your heritage is Prussian. Consider the era of Prussian pride prior to World War One. Faust said, "When Baron Steuben became the inspector-general and drill-master of the American army, he was not only grafting the system of Prussian military discipline on the American root, but he was also exercising a function in which the German nation has led the world, that of the teacher and scholar."

If you study the rise of Prussia and understand the proud heritage of Prussian Germans, then you might deepen your appreciation of your family's past. When did they "come over"? What was happening in Germany at that time? In America? In Illinois and Missouri?

As a boy, when I had questions about things I tended to ask my mother for the answer. She commonly gave the same reply: **"Look it up!"** I've been doing that for most of my life, and it was probably one of the wisest things I could have learned—thanks to Mom.

So, I'll say the same to you: Look it up. Check references on the time period you are researching. Get acquainted with St. Louis history or any other town or city in which your ancestors settled and lived. If they were farmers, learn about former farm life in their area.

I'll take that advice further: Contact museums, too. This can include church archives or historians. Seeing old artifacts and family documents may give you ideas of what YOUR family experienced.

Faust gave Germans high marks in another area. "The German cosmographers in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries furnished all the charts and maps that directed the marines of all nations on their voyages of discovery." Interesting. It may have been the seemingly hereditary eye for accuracy that made those maps so precious for travelers in bygone centuries.

Pondering simple statistics, we can make several observations about the influence of Germans in America. When Mr. Faust wrote his book, he outlined the number of families and homes in the United States. Among those whose parentage was known, Germans led the way with 1,982,917 families and 522,252 farm homes. The next largest group was the Irish with 1,234,108 families and 176,968 farm homes.

Examine the German gift of farming. Yes, I'll call it a gift, since it brought benefits to America as a whole. Faust: "German agricultural industry has been pushing the wheel of prosperity for more than two centuries. The location of the German farmers in the eighteenth century has been compared with the geological formation of the soil."

He did not stand alone in his comment. He cited F.J. Turner in Chicago's *Record-Herald* for August 28, 1901: **“The limestone areas in a geological map of Pennsylvania would serve as a map of the German settlements.** First they filled in the Limestone Island adjacent to Philadelphia, in Lancaster and Berks counties; then they crossed the Blue Ridge into the Great Valley, floored with limestone. This valley is marked by the cities of Easton, Bethlehem, Allentown, Reading, Harrisburg, etc. Following it towards the southwest along the trough between the hills, they crossed the Potomac into central Maryland, and by 1732 following the same formation they began to occupy the Shenandoah Valley in Virginia.”

Look around Missouri. What type of rock prevails in the greater St. Louis area, east and west? Limestone. Hmmm.

Faust claimed the Germans settled new territories where limestone was located. “The Germans are most numerous where the limestone appears, while the Irish are settled on the slate formations. This phenomenon is repeated so often that it might create the impression that the early settlers had some knowledge of geology. It is more reasonable to suppose, however, that they studied the surface of the land in regard to its vegetation and general appearance, the Irish taking land well-watered, near the big rivers, and the Germans, with a better eye for good land, choosing that on which there grew the best trees, such as oaks, a sure sign of good land.” Look around and you’ll see a good number of oak trees in Missouri.

Faust likened their selection in America to that of the Rhenish Palatinate: undulating country with rich forest growth.

He brought up another point. Germans looked to the future in farming. They brought good techniques for fertilizing and employed crop rotation. Earlier American settlers aimed for open land and prairies. They farmed an area until the ground could no longer sustain good crop yield. Then they moved westward. Germans stuck with their land, clearing it, improving it, and nurturing it. Depth of topsoil was important. I have read that settlers had visions of topsoil 30 feet deep in the Midwest. Strong, tall oaks needed good soil, so where oaks flourished, Germans settled.

If your family had farmers, consider all that I have included in this article and see if the circumstances match theirs. You might have a revelation!

I have found Mr. Faust’s book to be very enlightening. I’ll share more from it in the future.

Meanwhile, I’ve got to look it up!

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MILITARY POSSIBILITIES IN THE 1860s

I've enjoyed watching the progress made by G-SIG participants. Much of this comes from sharing ideas and information.

So it was that G-SIG's Marlene Olson shared insights relating to the military service of John Gottlieb Lessing, waggoneer, who died in 1862. Marlene is one of a handful of G-SIG participants offering ideas on how to research that surname.

She had some basic information shared by a family. John Gottlieb Lessing was father to Charles Hermann Lessing (Lassing) and died seven months before his son was born (Feb. 1863). Family folklore says he was trying to get a wagon and team of mules out of the mud. His death may have been in the summer of 1862.

Marlene knows that 1861-1865 was the period of the Civil War. "Some servicemen were called Wagonners (those who drove a team of mules with supplies). Waggoners also worked for the Civil Service. Some were forced into battle by troops showing up at their door which could be either side." In other words, an ancestor from one state may have been enlisted in another.

"Military Records can be found at the Illinois State Archive in Springfield, Ill. There are three types of records that I had found on one of my relatives: enlistment, who were the leaders of his company and the men in that company, where the company fought at what time period, and muster-out records..."

What can a researcher find in the records? Date of enlistment, place of birth, residence, transfer to another company, date of death (sometimes even place or cause).

Marlene had more ideas. If an ancestor was in Illinois, newspapers can be found at Lincoln Library, Sixth Street, in Springfield. "Ask them to make you a copy of the index sheet for (your) city and...county" that shows the names of newspapers available. Also, an obit might be found in news relating to the military, the church, a club, or a guild (occupation).

She added that the Lincoln Museum in Springfield, Ill., has a great wall map of statistics that tells the time period of all battles during the Civil War, relating to overall death count. "You could note what battles took place during your time period. I think it takes four minutes to watch."

It is good to contact local societies, too. Marlene said that Chester, Ill., has a great history and genealogy society above the bank across

the street from the court house. It includes all of Randolph Co. “The ladies there are very helpful.

“Check the Web page [Http://www.iltrails.org](http://www.iltrails.org) for Randolph County. Volunteers donate information to put on site.”

Thanks, Marlene—and thanks to every one in G-SIG who offers help and advice to advance our knowledge. GP

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POMERANIANS, TAKE NOTE!

Martin Henrichs (mhenrichs@earthlink.net) in Indiana is new to our G-SIG. But he’s been studying family histories for years. As he was reading a newsletter called *Die Pommerschen Leute* (The Pomeranian People), he wondered how many of his friends might be related to him. Then he tells some intriguing details. "I would probably not be a Lutheran if it weren't for my Pomeranian grandmother by the name of Hulda Pribbernow. The Henrichs family was Catholic, and when they arrived in St. Louis in 1851 to build a brewery, my great grandfather caught cholera and died, leaving my great grandmother to fend with six children. Being Catholic, she went to the local priest for help. He ended up helping himself to the family savings. As a result of this betrayal by a churchman, the Henrichs boys turned away from the church. When my grandfather's first wife died, he married my grandmother. She was born in Pomerania and was Lutheran. When he died she raised my father as a Lutheran. The newsletter (<http://pomeranianews.com/>) helps people trace their ancestry and is full of interesting history... going back a thousand years. I highly recommend the newsletter if your ancestors are from eastern Germany.”

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ANOTHER GERMAN ANCESTOR

In April of 1870, a bird dealer in St. Louis, Mo., received a shipment of songbirds imported from Germany. Among them were 20 Eurasian Tree Sparrows (sometimes called German Sparrows). The dealer set them free in Lafayette Park. This first group managed to establish a breeding population of from 25,000 to 150,000 individual birds along the Mississippi River in eastern Missouri and West-central Illinois. Bob Remmert, G-SIG participant, has been happy to have three or four pair of these descendants at home at his backyard feeders every year.

The Eurasian Sparrows are easy to identify, both male and female look alike. They have a reddish brown cap and a black spot on the cheek. They are smaller than the English sparrow.

Thanks to Bob Remmert (NRemm10335@aol.com) for this report!

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

+ grapenuts@frontiernet.net : “Made attempts to do a family tree/genealogical study, but have yet to get the correct information.

Are there people who will do this for a fee? John L. Unnerstall, second son of Henry J. Unnerstall III, yes, north of the Baden area, what is now know as Bellefontaine Neighbors, but I believe we go back to the Gen. Daniel Bissell days, i.e. 1790s -- early 1800, but unable to validate .”

+ priftiwi@webster.edu Here is a chance to introduce yourself to German or refresh your German! ST. LOUIS COMMUNITY COLLEGE AT FOREST PARK--ask about short-term mini crash courses. Take for credit or audit. Much fun with German culture, food, and artifacts. Reduction for age 65 and older. Call Christel Handel at (636)-537-2977 or Jennifer Schaber at (314) 644-9376

+ [The German School Association](http://www.germanstl.org/germanschool) (Deutscher Schulverein) of Greater St. Louis, Mo., admits students of any race, color, national and ethnic origin to all rights, privileges, programs and activities. Call: 314-544-3990 or 963-9534 (e-mail: gsa_stlmo@yahoo.com; www.germanstl.org/germanschool).

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Have great ideas for the G-SIG FORUM? Submit your material to germansig@stlgs.org or mail it to: StLGS, Attn: G-SIG, #4 Sunnen Dr., Suite 140, St. Louis, MO 63143.