

# G-SIG FORUM #33

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

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## CLUSTERS: WHERE THE ACTION IS!

You may come to G-SIG Gatherings, receive this **FORUM**, and make contact with an occasional fellow-researcher on German heritage and traditions, but if you are involved in a Cluster, then you know this is where the action is!

The concept behind Clusters is simple: join like-minded people in a common regional search and let them share their ideas, successes, failures, and creative approaches. Clusters coordinators are Lisa (who may be reached at [lmclaughlin@polsinelli.com](mailto:lmclaughlin@polsinelli.com)) and Kathy (her e-mail address is [kathyinwashington@hotmail.com](mailto:kathyinwashington@hotmail.com)).

From the West Coast to Up East, we have received requests from people who are checking their German heritage. Long distances do not need to be a hindrance for a Cluster. That's right. A Cluster can function by e-mail. If you have an interest in an existing Cluster by using e-mail, contact the coordinators. Let them know. If a few people would like to form a Cluster around e-mail communications, bring up the idea.

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## FIRST LUTHERAN GERMANS IN AMERICA ARE CELEBRATED

Dr. Johannes Fleischer came with the initial English settlements at Jamestown, Virginia, in May of 1607. “The German Lutheran presence for years, at Jamestown, has been omitted in American History textbooks, but has been historically established, and recently celebrated in a historic occasion at Jamestown and Williamsburg,” reports Dr. Albert Jabs who lives in the Southeast. He is a recent sign-on to G-SIG and a professor of American history and World civilizations.

When Prof. Jabs wrote to me recently, he explained that the “German-American presence...began perhaps with the world revolutionary map of German cartographer Martin Waldseemueller who charted the way for the ocean voyages back in 1507.”

Dr. Jabs told of a 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration: “Beginning with a welcoming evening (*Gemutliches Beisammensein*) at William-Mary College, the once of a kind of *Platzregen* event brought forth an international audience of scholars, German-Americans, interested observers, a Symposium of the Society for German-American Studies, a very notable address by German Ambassador Dr. Klaus Scharioth, along with a very timely speech by David Smith, Deputy Secretary of Commerce and Trade from the Governor's office, and a very informative and spirited welcoming message from third generation German-American, the Honorable Jeanne Zeidler, mayor of the City of Williamsburg, which along with Yorktown and Jamestown constitute the very historical triangle of noted Americana scene of considerable German-American experience.”

He went on: “Dr. Fleischer’s father, the senior Dr. Fleischer, had even studied under the great servant reformation leader Philip Melanchthon at Wittenberg, and for a time was a major Pastor in the Breslau area of Germany. However, young Fleischer lost both his father and mother in childhood, and was able to secure a superior education primarily due to the kindness of the Lutheran community, which his father had served. This education, which resulted in Fleischer earning both a doctorate in theology and a PhD in botany, drove him to take the risk of faith, by going to England and making the journey to the New World.”

Prof. Jabs noted how dangerous the early days were at Jamestown. “The first days and weeks...were battlefield days of survival. Dysentery, and other illnesses reduced the original colony to 40 from the 105 that had

landed on the James River. Of course, in a sense these folks from England were invading the lands of the American Indians, and conflicts and tragedy occurred in this area as well. Amazingly, Pocahontas, the daughter of Powhatan, was part of the bridge with the visitors, married an Englishman, was converted, baptized, and died in England at the age of 22. But her statue is there at Jamestown for visitors to read and reflect on God's mercy, even in those early testing days. The Jamestown scene is miraculously reconstructed; religious expressions and a towering cross dominate the area. It is absolutely clear that this blessed nation was founded on Christian gospel principles right at Jamestown.

**“YES, IN ADDITION** the challenge of the American Indians (Caucasians were the invaders), there was a struggle with building living quarters, planting crops, and surviving under drought conditions; yet, in all of this the Lutheran German Fleisher served to be a kind of healer and renewing presence. Although, Dr. Fleischer himself would eventually succumb in 1608, his presence and work in the first permanent human settlement has been thoroughly documented. The German Lutheran presence at Jamestown is without equivocation.”

Jabs had more: “The German American presence has been a historical fact for 400 years in both peace and war. In fact, there is also additional evidence that there was a German presence back in the 16th century. This long history of German contributions was also well established when the German leader Francis Pastorius led a colony of Germans to settle around Germantown, Pennsylvania in 1683. Pastorius and his Mennonite families were among the first Lutheran immigrants to signal their opposition to slavery.

“Soon William Penn’s colony mushroomed with further German settlements that also moved south along the Shenandoah into the Middle Atlantic States and the Carolinas. When the Reverend Henry Muhlenberg arrived in Charleston in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, he immediately recognized that slavery would reap a punishment on the new nation. Muhlenberg, a Lutheran minister out of Halle, Germany, was a tireless missionary for the Lutheran church throughout the Eastern Seaboard through much of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

**“THIS GERMAN PRESENCE** would be strengthened by such notables as Muhlenberg and his descendents, who were active in both pastoral and political work, and notable (in 1776 and after) during the War of Independence. Baron Von Steuben, on the advice of Ben Franklin,

came to the Colonies, and due to his 15-year experience under Frederick in Prussia, knew the importance of discipline, organization, and morale in the building of any kind of army. He was indispensable to George Washington in the struggle for American independence.”

Dr. Jabs had some opinions, too. “It is safe to say that the sinews of American progress were brought together by the German American contributions in all fields...German Lutherans, Roman Catholics, and other communions...put cement into the American experience.”

The professor further said that 43 million of present day Americans claim some roots within the German experience.

***You can be glad your family is one of them!***

*Note: You may reach Dr. Albert E. Jabs at [AJJabs@aol.com](mailto:AJJabs@aol.com). He is on the Global Affairs Council in Columbia, South Carolina, under the Society for German American Studies*

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## WHY GERMANS SETTLED NEAR ST. LOUIS

By Gerald Perschbacher

Germans came to the heartland of America for several reasons. Land was easy to obtain, there were transportation routes from the East Coast (via rivers, the National Road, or eventually by rail), and St. Louis was the tip of the arrow for Westward expansion and settlers heading westward for new opportunities. But it was just a tip. Illinois was more like the arrow’s shaft.

Let’s keep history in perspective. The Revolutionary War ended in 1783. Great Britain surrendered the Old Northwest to the United States. Included in this area was Illinois.

In 1800, Illinois was included in the Indiana Territory carved from the Northwest Territory. The Illinois Territory was recognized in 1809 and included all of Illinois, most of Wisconsin, and much of Michigan and Minnesota. In 1809 the portion what was to become the state of Illinois was divided into only two counties: St. Clair was on the north and Randolph was to the south.

In 1791 there were only 1,221 white inhabitants in Illinois. The country had been explored by the Jesuits and other Catholic missionaries and French traders. By 1810 they numbered 11,501 whites, 168 slaves, and 613 “others.”

Up to 1850, the Irish numbered the highest among immigrants in Illinois. But that changed in favor of the Germans soon after.

Illinois became a state on Dec. 31, 1818, when James Monroe was president.

Now fast-forward to 1832. Indian Chief Blackhawk was the last great warrior in Illinois noted in history books. He led his people into the final Indian War fought east of the Mississippi River. As you might expect, his people lost, being greatly outnumbered. They argued about not understanding that they had signed away their land. Washington, D.C., believed otherwise and held the documents to prove it.

Once the area was free of Indian attacks, settlers tended to make their homes in St. Clair County, Illinois, and nearby counties. Federal land was sold to settlers. Trade flourished with St. Louis being a ready market for crops and wares.

One more thing: In general, Germans did not approve of slavery. It was a reminder of medieval tyranny and noble domination. Many Germans had come to America to experience freedom in the New World. So a good many preferred to move to the Free State of Illinois rather than stay in the Slave State of Missouri.



### *Looking for interesting sites to see in or about Germany?*

**Need some information about your German-American heritage?**

**Or, do you just want to relax with some *real* German Radio?**

**Check out the many popular links on site at the *German American***

***Heritage Society --Your Link to Germany*, at <http://www.gahs->**

**[stlouis.org/Interestingplacestovisit.htm](http://www.gahs-stlouis.org/Interestingplacestovisit.htm) and (while you're in the**

**neighborhood) see what's up in the German-American community at**

**the *GAHS* homepage <http://www.gahs-stlouis.org>.**

**The *Deutsche links* that's really *right*.**



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

+ ***Read about it!*** *Explore German history at Web sites including:*  
[http://www.germanlife.com/Archives/1996/9608\\_01.html](http://www.germanlife.com/Archives/1996/9608_01.html)

***YOUR LINK TO GERMANY!***

+ **Don't forget those book sales!** Just about any time of the year is a good time to watch for special annual book sales or estate sales—look for books that will help you understand German culture, history, and immigration. Watch for historical atlases of Europe and Germany that trace border changes and explain territorial limits.

+ **Wanted: documents & books** on Germans and German settlers who entered the field of automobile production. Wanted for research. Contact Gerald Perschbacher at [persch3@hotmail.com](mailto:persch3@hotmail.com) .



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