

G-SIG FORUM #40

...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 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 persch3@hotmail.com.

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Maybe Catherine's Idea Wasn't so Great

By Gerald Perschbacher

If you're like John Maurath (maurath1@juno.com) you dig into history. John has been interested in the Germans in Russia. If you haven't heard about how they got there, just do a modest amount of research and some intriguing facts will surface.

John points out that in the late 1700s and early 1800s, Catherine the Great of Russia (who was German) requested German immigrants (especially farmers) to come and develop large areas in Russia. She did this because Russian agriculture was far below the European standard of that era. Many Germans were enticed by incentives and left overcrowded Germany to claim land and potential fame in Russia. Many settled in The Ukraine, which became known as the "breadbasket" of Russia.

If you think your ancestors were among those German settlers, turn some attention in that direction for research and study. However, don't lose sight of Germany. Why? You may find that only a small branch of your clan migrated to the Russia. The rest may have remained in Germany, with all sorts of family entries listed in church books as births, baptisms, and

deaths, and in community books for taxes, land purchases, land rentals, and legal matters.

Catherine realized that Germans were among the most industrious, hardest-working people in all of Europe. They also knew what they were doing in agriculture with three-field rotation techniques and natural fertilization that maximized crop yields.

To attract her fellow Germans, Catherine assured them that their German customs, religious practices, heritage, and language could be retained.

A good many Germans settled in the Odessa area along the Black Sea. John adds that some stopped temporarily in various spots in Yugoslavia, Hungary (the Banat region), and Rumania. "They ended up staying in these areas. That's why there are so many German-speaking towns in these various countries," John explains, "who have kept their heritage and language to this day."

Mother Russia remained true to Catherine's promises, especially during her lifetime. But time moved on and circumstances changed.

When the Russo-Japanese War erupted in 1904, promises were broken. Germans in Russia were encouraged -- well, really forced -- to fight for Mother Russia. Some did. Others left for Canada (even then, a haven for "draft dodgers"). Still others settled in America.

But many remained in Russia. When the First World War came, Russians were highly skeptical of those "Catherine" Germans, even though they had been away from Germany for several generations.

When the Second World War erupted, Stalin was far less trusting of the Germans than were his predecessors. He shipped a high number of the remaining Germans hundreds of kilometers inland by train to remote sections of Siberia. These people (men, women, even children) were literally dumped in open areas to scratch out an existence. Many died. The survivors built a few houses here and there. Villages rose. Then cities were formed. Once more, Germans blazed trails in barren land.

You may wish to pause for a moment and check some facts found at <http://www.historyplace.com/worldhistory/genocide/stalin.htm> . The site details the long-standing oppression of Stalin against the Ukrainians, which affected anyone else living in that region (Germans, too).

Displaced Germans maintained their culture. When Communism banned the printing of religious material as "propaganda," men and women took the few precious Bibles and hymnals they had and wrote copies with their own hands. When the Soviet Union collapsed, there were quite a few Germans in Russia who still sang from those hand-crafted pages and read

hand-written Bible passages. They did not surrender to pressure. I can tell you this from firsthand observations of friends and co-workers who visited Siberia immediately after the fall of the Soviets.

Hitler tried to woo the Germans in Russia. While his invading forces met with accolades in some sectors, there was no cheering in others. He did not unite the Germans in Russia to any historically appreciable degree. Many probably felt they would just be trading one tyrant for another.

Marlene Olson (genealogy800@yahoo.com) got on the research wagon regarding Germans in Russia. She studied a map of Odessa on the Black Sea Region. She encourages interested parties to check the map in the *Journal of American Historical Society of Germans from Russia*, Vol.16, No.1 (Spring 1993).

None of this moving around of significant populations was new to Europe. Celts, whom I consider a pre-Germanic people in many tribes, moved around much of central and Western Europe well past 2,000 years ago. They were the dominant people of Europe until Romans pressed from the south and west, and Germanic tribes pressured from the north and east.

Squeezed by social and military circumstances, the Prussians, an ancient non-Germanic people who were notably strong along the Baltic Sea and far inland into what is now Poland and Russia, literally went out of existence as a separate people. Stragglers of Prussians married into Slavic bands and simply lost their original identity and culture.

Not so the Germans in Russia -- at least for the most part. Even when it wasn't chic to claim you were German, they did. If this is part of your ancestral heritage, you can be proud.

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Notable people Descended from Germans in Russia:

Paula Zahn, a former CBS morning news anchor; singer **John Denver**, born John Duchendorf; actress **Angie Dickinson**; bandleader **Lawrence Welk**; and **Senator Tom Daschle**, former U.S. Senate Minority Leader. For more, see <http://www-personal.umich.edu/~steeles/gerrus/>.

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Please visit the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia Cultural Heritage Research Center in Lincoln, Nebraska! The AHSGR Web site offers an overview of facilities, including photos from the AHSGR Museum. Just check:

http://www.ahsgr.org/german_russia_info.htm

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More about Those Germans in Russia...

Why did Germans move to Russia? “The Seven Years War (1756-1763) was finally at an end and the people of Germany were eager to have peace restored to their lives. The German people, tired and hungry, seemed to have no hope. There was no work and no money to buy goods from the merchants or farmers. This came as an aftermath of war, followed by crop failures, and other economic disasters. Catherine's manifesto of 22 July 1763 has rightly been called ‘the cornerstone of the whole inner colonization of Russia.’”

This quote and a wealth of links and resources may be found at:

<http://www.genealogyforum.com/gfaol/resource/German/GerfromRussia.htm>

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The YAHOO GROUP is for YOU!

How can someone ask for help from a significant number of fellow-searchers? Get into the G-SIG Yahoo Group. Here’s how: Go to www.yahoo.com . Click on Groups, search for germanspecialinterest (all one word), click on “Join This Group” and follow the prompts to sign up. Then you may post messages, ask questions, send in a neat Web site link, or connect with a fellow researcher. If you need more guidance on using this resource, contact Karen Ridgeway at deutschgene@yahoo.com or drop a quick note to Kathy Wurth who also has been sharing keen insights (kathyinwashington@hotmail.com).

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

+ **Susan Craig** (mocraig@sbcglobal.net) is researching William and Roberta Montz -- her maternal grandparents in Missouri. Their surname may have been Muntz, von Muntz, or another deviation. Her grandfather was born in Muntz in 1879 and died in 1939 in Brookfield, Missouri.

+ **Civil War connections** are actively pursued by John Maurath (maurath1@juno.com). If you are interested, here are some sites to visit (understanding German is very helpful...or obtain help in translating):

http://www.bigcountry.de/index.php?Seite=/auswanderer_buergerkrieg_offizielle_konf-m.htm

<http://www.tegermany.com/>

<http://www.tegermany.com/MO.html>

+ **Bettie King** (bettieboop1052@sbcglobal.net) seeks information on her grandparents and great grandparents HEILIG. Her grandfather was John Augustus Heilig, born about 1869; his father's name was David Heilig (born about 1835). Her mother's name was Eliza Heilig (born about 1835). All had connections to Gold Hill, Rowan County, located in North Carolina.

+ **Do any of you have any leads** on an audio recording of the Star Spangled Banner in German translation? National Public Radio (NPR) is interested. So says Walter Kamphoefner, Department of History, Texas A&M University -- Office: (979) 862-1314 or e-mail waltkamp@tamu.edu.

+ **From John Maurath** (maurath1@juno.com): This is from my friend Dietmar in Hamm, Westfalen, Germany. Dietmar went to DeSmet Jesuit High School with me when his parents lived here in the St. Louis area for about 15 years. The two links he gives below are about the history of the Schuetzenvereine clubs. Wherever Germans settled in America, they always formed Schuetzenvereine clubs. Most of the 10,000 volunteers here in St. Louis at the beginning of the Civil War, were German immigrants, who belonged to several St. Louis German Schuetzenvereine clubs.

<http://www.schuetzenbund.de/dsb/tradition/historie/>

<http://www.schuetzentradition.de/GruendungDSBVorgeschichte.html>

+ **Time to look for books! Maps! German documents!** (So suggests Gerald Perschbacher.) "It is surprising what exists. Some of these documents can be purchased for low prices, if you head to estate sales, rummage sales, and auctions. Look for German books. Maybe these exact books were not in your family, but your ancestors may very well have read

books like them. The same holds true for maps, which deliver outstanding insights into the old territories of Germany and the newly settled regions of America, where Germans made their mark.”

+ Helpful! Informative! Check these resources if your ancestry has Lutheran or Evangelical & Reformed backgrounds: the book *Zion on the Mississippi* by Walter O. Forester. Learn about Saxon immigrants at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Stephan . Scott Holl at the St. Louis County Library can offer insights on Lutheran (plus E&R) immigrants in or near St. Louis (call 314- 994-3300; request “Special Collections”). Contact Concordia Historical Institute in Clayton, Missouri. The Rev. Marvin Huggins is interim director (<http://chi.lcms.org/about.html#contact>).

+ G-SIG Clusters are “where the action is”! Meet and communicate with others who have similar aims in research and information. Learn from them. Share your successes. For details on existing Clusters, or to explore the formation of a new Cluster, contact Lisa at lmclaughlin@polsinelli.com) or Kathy at kathyinwashington@hotmail.com).

+ Interested in Germans from Russia who settled in the Dakotas? Have fun with the options located at the following Web site: <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~coleen/> and you might discover familiar names. It’s free information! The site includes surnames and photos on select families.

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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. **Not yet on the e-mail list for the G-SIG FORUM?** Write to germansig@stlgs.org (Note: All copyright privileges for this FORUM are reserved by the compiler; no item is to be duplicated or distributed without permission.)

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Have great ideas for the G-SIG FORUM? Submit your material to persch3@hotmail.com or mail it to: StLGS, Attn: G-SIG, #4 Sunnen Dr., Suite 140, St. Louis, MO 63143.

