

G-SIG FORUM #42

...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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SONGS OF THE GERMAN REVOLUTION

Even if you are not fluent in German, you may enjoy the songs of the failed Revolution of 1848-49. Centered in Frankfurt-on-the-Main, the revolt was fostered by students and freedom-loving Germans who longed for democratic rule.

At <http://www.udo-leuschner.de/liberalismus/lieder/lieder.htm> you can hear some of those freedom songs once more. If your family had any connection with the revolt or if your ancestors fled to America to avoid the turmoil and its aftermath, the songs may be a “connection” with your ancestors.

Many Germans have relished singing. Consider the numerous German operas, the lusty drinking songs, and the stately hymnody of church services. So when it came to a revolt, songs were a natural result.

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Stumped? Don't forget to try G-SIG's Yahoo Group. Go to www.yahoo.com . Click on “Groups”. In the “Search” box, type **germanspecialinterest** (all run together) and when the page comes up,

you may read the archives which are open to the public. Or join the group to post requests for help with ‘brick walls’ or offer helpful tips.

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FROM GERMANY TO RUSSIA TO KANSAS by Gerald Perschbacher

They might have been called Russians once they landed in America in the late 1800s, but a good many from that Eastern European land were Germans. Some might have been your ancestors.

In the 1870s, thousands of Germans who had spent generations in Russia were ready to move. Many opted for the Great Plains in the United States, especially select areas in Kansas and the Dakotas.

A century earlier those German families had departed their Fatherland. Their hopes were high. Anticipation was great. Various parts of Germany had been rife with war and discontent. Many families of prominence and wealth had lost their advantages. Countless peasants had become extremely poor. Catherine the Great’s offer for a new life in Russia seemed the best alternative.

In general, these emigrants were highly religious. They included Mennonites, Catholics, and Lutherans. Most of the Germans settled along Russia’s Volga River, hence gaining the name “Volga Germans.” They were promised freedom. They would not serve in the military. And they could own land without charge. However, circumstances and leaders changed in Russia. So did the status of these resettled Germans.

But this is not an article about their experiences in Russia. It’s about coming to America—specifically, Kansas.

Those Germans in Russia had the reputation of being hard working. They were discontented. Circumstances were ripe for a move. And move they did, by the hundreds, then the thousands. Mennonite settlers concentrated in Harvey, Marion, and McPherson counties in Kansas. Volga Germans found new homes in Russell, Rush, and Ellis counties.

Why Kansas? The land was available. The climate was similar. But the main reason was a drive by two railroads that launched significant promotional campaigns in 1872 to sell land along their railways. The companies were the Kansas Pacific and the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe. C. B. Schmidt, in the employ of the latter, visited Russia to recruit emigrants. Handbills were distributed in German.

Enticements were offered by the railroads. Free accommodations were provided by train from Kansas City, so if the German Russians made it

that far, the rest seemed easy. Land was offered for schools and churches, too. In some cases, even seed was provided to help the settlers plant their first crop in the New World. Who wouldn't have made the move with all this plus freedom? By 1880, nearly 12,000 of Russian-Germans had settled in Kansas—about a third of those who had been in Russia.

For more, visit <http://www.kshs.org/exhibits/russia/russia1.htm>, site of the Kansas State Historical Society. There are research options available. If you prefer, you may call or write KSHS, 6425 SW Sixth Ave., Topeka KS 66615-1099 (telephone: 785-272-8681).

Since long-distance travel often took place by ship and wagon, those transplanted Germans most likely came to America by seaport, then made their way by land or riverboat to Kansas City, clearly adding to the legend of St. Louis as the Gateway to the West.

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ALL ABOUT BADEN

Baden is the historical area on the east bank of the Rhine River in southwestern Germany, now the western portion of the federal state called Baden-Württemberg. Check a map to see what I mean. The name is derived from the old Roman town of *Aquae* which translates into Baderstadt (Town of Baths). Today it is known as Baden-Baden. As with other areas along or near the Rhine, it made its contribution of emigrants to America. A significant number settled in the Midwest.

Baden did not achieve major significance until its land area was quadrupled as it was expanded to the status of a duchy in 1806, thanks to Napoleon. He gained influence over the region and reallocated the lands of noble families as he wished. Usually this was done to confuse the established norm and thereby lessen potentially negative impact by his enemies. On the plus side, Napoleon also eliminated rules and social structures that had become stagnant or that stifled progress, according to his way of thinking. At that time, this part of Germany was basically a puppet state with strings pulled by the French.

According to historians in Germany, the community spirit of Baden was a result of the grand duke's descendants. “The Baden civil service created a unified and organized community in the 19th century. In 1818, the land's constitution was established. This was represented, in particularly modern fashion, by the people themselves,” say authors Wolfgang Hug and Walter Gruber in the book, *Badener Land*, Konrad Theiss Verlag GmbH& Co., Stuttgart (1996).

They add, “The Baden ‘Volk’ managed to develop during (the 1800s) due to a mixture of cultural politics, economic dynamism, and social harmony. Since the foundation of the Reich in 1871, it has identified itself with the German ‘Volk’ without losing its own regional identity.”

If your ancestry is traced from Baden, I’ve got a tip for you. It is very possible that your roots trace to the Franks or Alemanni. These were two ancient Germanic tribes that settled in Baden by the year 500 A.D. Unlike certain other tribes, these dug in and made the area their permanent home.

If your ancestry traces to the northern portions of Baden, you are likely to be Rhenish Franconian. If to the south, the Alemanni dialect and traditions were yours.

Both tribes are among the oldest in Germanic history. However, the Franks tended to be clannish. Sub tribes, such as the Hessen (Hessian) are very much from the Frankish stock. The word Alemanni stood for “all men” and was a composite group of various tribes, not necessarily of the same ancestral stock in ancient days. It was this Alemanni federation of tribes that played a significant role in overrunning the Roman lands east of the Rhine River before the year 300 A.D. The Franks slowly advanced from the north and entered the area later.

Before the Grand Duchy was established, Baden claimed three territories: The Palatinate, to the right of the Rhine; The Baden Margravate, and the Austrian foothill region. Mingled here and there were lesser land holdings controlled by church officials, monasteries, and knights of the Holy Roman Empire.

With such a varied background, Baden was considered a moderate land in its way of thinking. People seemed tolerant of different opinions and ideas. According to Hug and Gruber, this moderate stance “forced the Baden people to experiment, to rationalize, and to innovate. The land has a history of great inventors and innovators,” and I’ll leave it to you to find out more on that subject.

The heartland: It was in 1715 that Karlsruhe was made the new residence of the Margraves of Baden-Durlach. They made sure the streets of the city expanded rapidly from the residential castle to the town and from the castle to the forest. This resulted in a fan-shaped street pattern. This is not the only castle in Baden, nor it is the only one used by the Margraves, who were considered the top leaders of the land. Other Margrave castles are in Ettlingen and Rastatt.

What individuals discover when they come to this area is that the Rhine was “straightened” in the 1800s. What resulted were Rhine meadow islands circled by the topographical reminders of a nearly motionless

riverbed. These islands are considered nature reserves and are enjoyed by townsfolk.

The Ortenau Region includes the Renchtal and Kinzigtal Valleys.

This area was noted as “a small but quite fertile little region, in which wine and an ample amount of corn grows,” according to an old report made by Sebastian Munster in 1550. The “corn” is not maize which is common to America, but is basically the kernel of common crops found in this part of Germany. In your research, be sure to understand the use of words such as “corn” or you will gain an improper concept of the past.

The Black Forest is included in this area of Baden. The wealth of this forest was derived from the fine timber that was naturally produced. Good logs were transported to the Rhine, then to Holland by raft. Lesser wood was made into charcoal and used to fire ironworks, glassworks, and pottery kilns. There are other sections of Baden, but we’ll leave those for future reference.

From 1871 to 1918, Baden was a Grand Duchy, then it became a republic. Its northern boundary was shared with the Kingdom of Bavaria and the Grand Duchy of Hessen-Darmstadt. West was the Rhine. Southward was Switzerland. To the east was the Kingdom of Württemberg, the Principality of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, and a bit of Bavaria.

Following the Second World War, Baden merged with Württemberg (1952). To show how singing remains popular among Germans in this region, the Baden anthem (called Badnerlied, *Song of the people of Baden*) originally consisted of four or five traditional stanzas. However, some versions have up to 591!

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Interested in the Baden, Germany, Emigration Index, 1866-1911?

<http://www.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=4610> The index was compiled by the Badischen Generallandesarchiv Karlsruhe, and contains 28,000 names of people who emigrated from Baden between 1866 and 1911. Included are residence, place of birth, and year of departure. Wives were not indexed unless they traveled alone or with their children. Children who left with one or both parents were not indexed. Some cards state that the person whose name is listed was traveling with "five persons" without naming each.

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

Pat von zur Muehlen (patvonzurm@msn.com) notes that it was more than overcrowding that brought Germans to Russia in pursuit of Catherine the Great's offer for farmland and a new life. "Mennonites were attracted because they were oppressed under Prussian rule. Among the hardships they endured were restrictions on property ownership." She lists three key changes that led them to later abandon their adopted homeland, Russia: "1871, loss of tax privileges; 1874, loss of military exemptions, so they were now subjected to military service; 1881, they were required to study Russian in school and lost all of their remaining social privileges."

+ **A group** involved with the Gustave Koerner House in Belleville, Ill., is looking for volunteer translators. If you know of someone who is interested, contact Jack LeChien (jlechien@sbcglobal.net) .

+ **Carol Schlueter** (cannmueller@gmail.com) seeks information on the family Heller from Basel, Switzerland, immigrated about 1834, first went to Baltimore and then to Monroe County, Ill.

+ **Bill Oberjohn** (bill.oberjohn@gmail.com) is tracing Henry Ratermann, born 1846/47 (?) in Germany, died Feb. 18, 1938 in St. Louis (also Henry Ratermann born c. 1865 in Germany, then lived in St. Ferdinand Township, St. Louis County, in 1920).

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+ **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).

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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.

