

G-SIG FORUM #45

...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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GIVE A HELPING HAND

Don Fischer (doncfischer@mac.com) writes:

My German ancestors arrived in the St. Louis area around 1853-56. I grew up in St. Louis but moved away after college in 1972. I've recently become interested in my family history (now that I'm having grandchildren) and have been using my local library's subscription to ancestry.com and their other resources to conduct some of my research.

I'm particularly interested in St. Louis City and St. Louis County birth, marriage, divorce, and death records for the period 1850 through 1990. Do you know what, if any, of those records are available online? It appears to me that I may need to make a trip to visit the City of St. Louis Recorder of Deeds and County Office of Vital Records but before I go to that expense, I thought I'd ask...if that's the only way to access the records from those dates.

G-SIG's Kathy Wurth offers some sage advice for those of us like Don who are seeking answers to life's genealogical questions. She says:

There are online death certificates available from the Missouri State Archives for the years 1910-1958. Here is the website:

<http://www.sos.mo.gov/archives/resources/deathcertificates/>

You can also work backwards by getting obituaries or death notices for your ancestors. You can get some newer ones from the St. Louis Post Dispatch at <http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/stltoday/> .

Also death records for the city of St. Louis (for the years 1850 to 1908) are available on microfilm in the Special Collections Department at the St. Louis County Library Headquarters. An index of these records was compiled by the St. Louis Genealogical Society and is on a CD that is available for use at the Special Collections Dept. The same index is also available on ancestry.com . Or the CD may be purchased from StLGS at this link:

<http://www.stlgs.org/ecommscds.aspx>

The Web site of the St. Louis County Library has extensive information on genealogical research. See: <http://www.slcl.org/branches/hq/sc/> .

Last but not least here is a page with info for St. Louis research.

<http://home.att.net/~wee-monster/stlouis.html>

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IS THIS BIBLE FROM YOUR FAMILY?

“My name is Debby Paulsmeyer...While doing some research I found an old German Bible, 1827, with names written on the front and back cover. What I thought to be a gold mine find turned out to be a Bible that belongs to a family that is not related to mine. It appears my husband's father (now deceased) had gotten a hold of this Bible...we are not sure how it became his property.

“The hand written text is in German but also inside the Bible is an English translation that someone must have transcribed. The family name is Hofmann.

Anton Hofmann, born 12 August 1823 in Weyher, and his wife Helena Falk Hofmann, born 16 October 1828 in Ubstadt. Their children were Anton, Jakob, Maria Elisabeth, Johann, and Rosa. The place of residence appears to be Highland, not sure if it is Missouri, Illinois, or some other state.

“In case you are familiar with anyone researching the name Hofmann, they can contact me via email at dp1950@swbell.net.”

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WHY DID THEY COME?

By Gerald Perschbacher

One of the most-frequent questions is, “Why did my ancestors come to America?”

“Oh, it must have been a potato famine,” or “I think it was the military,” or “They were looking for riches.” OK, maybe these fit your family...and maybe not. Just because you heard about someone’s ancestor coming to the New World for one of these reasons does not mean it was YOUR ancestor’s reason.

Recently I was asked THE QUESTION. I had a ready reply. It’s probably suitable to about half the German families that came to America in the early to mid 1800s, circa 1830-1860. So walk with me as I explain.

At the start, let’s get it straight-- there may not be ONE answer. So I’ll present a mixture of possible and very plausible reasons why Germans immigrated during that time span. These are not in a special order, mind you, so don’t think the first reasons far outweigh the remainder.

LACK OF LAND—Germany was overpopulated in 1830-1860. Overpopulation is a changeable statistic dependent on the ability of the land to meet the needs of the people living there. If crops are puny and the yield is low, the people go hungry and are forced to move where there is food, or die if they stay. Also, farming techniques and mechanization helped raise the yield capability as years progressed. But some people had little time to wait and hope for improvements.

In Germany, the land was generally “spoken for.” Families held it from generation to generation, splitting it into smaller sections as generations progressed. Important (and noble) families enjoyed land ownership. Imperial estates gobbled up smaller ones. There was no more land for generational expansion unless Germany went to war with a neighbor—and even then, the other population would have been forced to leave. It wasn’t a pretty picture.

Imagine Germans entering adulthood and seeing that there was little future in the Old World. But when they heard wonderful stories about land in America, they listened. Land was cheap. Land was available. Land was rich with nutrients. Some Germans held the notion that farming was so easy in America, that all a farmer had to do was toss a few handfuls of seeds, and crops would grow on their own, bringing prosperity to the laziest of workers.

We know that wasn’t true. But stories circulated. Really, they were more like rumors. Agencies would foster such stories to secure passengers for America, thus making their ship captains and transport companies plush with income.

OPPORTUNITY was another main factor. In Germany, class structures existed. While most citizens had obtained a basic primary education, university learning was restricted to the wealthy, important, or lucky. Very often wages were not high and work opportunities were limited in small towns.

LESS RESTRICTIONS. Indeed, there was a time when America was not hamstrung with laws, rules, regulations, and official decrees. In the first half of the 1800s, trade and commerce were not monitored as now. There was no Income Tax. Uncle Sam didn't tell you where to live, how many people should occupy a house, and that there were high taxes due. Germans who wished to feel free and determine their destinies hankered for a place where they escaped the drudgery of control. While South America was the destination for some Germans in the 1800s, North America held greater potential. It was not tropical, displayed season changes similar to Germany, and was populated by Europeans. Since Europeans often learned more than one language for trade or travel, it was logical to use this skill in the New World. If you didn't find a German in America, you could at least find a former French citizen, Englishman, or Spanish operative and try to converse in languages that sprang from Europe.

Yes, the military draft was a decisive factor for some people, but not all. Even so, a greater pull from the New World came due to peace. If there is no chance of war, there is little need of a large standing army. America was expanding from ocean to ocean, with occasional skirmishes along its border with what became Canada and what we now know as Mexico. In between was a vast amount of country, with Indian populations spotted here and there. After the War of 1812 and until the Civil War broke loose, there was little reason to expect a major war in America.

Not so in Germany, which was at the crossroads of the continent. Significant passages and valleys became natural pathways for conquerors. Each time one arose, armies were drafted for defense. But in America, the militia was an occasional formation and did not propose to be a long term period of service.

This had been vividly proven when Napoleon raised army after army to defend his cause or claim countries. That fear of new despots was very much alive in the minds of generations young and old.

True, there were famines and blights, but Germany was not as prone to these difficulties as other nations. Perhaps this was due to diversification. There are areas of the Rhineland where wine making was the major livelihood for hundreds of years until blight or low profits prompted change. Some noble families ordered the raising of tobacco for the New World. Others raised beans or healthy foods that were derived from hearty plants that could withstand blights or harsh weather.

Perhaps the most overlooked reason for coming to America was that other close members of a person's family were determined to move. There may have been several reasons, each being held by a different member of the family. Each reason was logical to the individual. But no one reason held sway over them

all. That is, except the need to maintain family ties which brought strength, the opportunity for loans, defense, and security. You could say that close families were a form of insurance and banking.

In my case, there were 21 relatives that came on the same boat, and several more followed in succeeding years. If your loved ones decided to live in America, perhaps there was little reason for you to stay behind. Part of life's enjoyment is to share it with family.

Dig around. You may find a few more reasons why your ancestors became Americans.

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

+ From: layne.mills@intel.com -- "I was doing some Googling on my 'original' family name von der Jacobsmühle and noticed that in one of the G-SIG Forum newsletters than a man named 'Walter' was doing research on my great-great-great-grandfather Johann Elhert von der Jacobsmühle. I don't suppose it would be possible that you would have contact information for this guy so that I might contact him? I think I have more info on Johann and his German kin than he does. (And perhaps, he might know something I don't know!) Regards, **Layne Mills (916)-356 -3980.**"

+ The Missouri History Museum Library and Research Center holds a wealth of resources for researching your family history or the history of your house. The ever-growing [Genealogy and Local History Index](#) is a good place to start your research, but don't forget to consult our [Family History--Get Started](#) page for information about additional catalogs, guides, and indexes to our collections. Visit our [Genealogy Links page](#) for links to websites that may help you locate information on your St. Louis ancestors. For questions or comments about *Genealogy and House History News*, contact Dennis Northcott at dpn@mohistory.org. **The following sources have recently been added to the Genealogy and Local History Index. To search the index globally, visit the [main page](#). To browse or search one of the individual sources below, click on the link for that source.**

1. [Making It Safe \(history of the 354th Machine Gun Company in World War I\)](#)
2. [Mary Institute graduation program, 1905](#)
3. [Mary Institute graduation program, 1920](#)
4. [St. Louis Central High School graduation program, 1905](#)
5. [Fontbonne College yearbook, 1929](#)
6. [St. Louis Normal School graduation program, 1892](#)

7. [Program for Washington University Sixty-fourth Commencement, 1925](#)

+ **Robert Bruns** (snurb51@sbcglobal.net) of Crete, Ill., writes: "I am looking for a source of information concerning Ernst A. Eggers (gr.gr. grandfather) schoolteacher for Immanuel Lutheran Church school in St. Louis. He lived at 1727 Wash St. then 1910 Franklin Ave. during the 1870 era. Some of his children were born there and baptized in church. Problem is, I can't locate the family on 1870 census. If I knew where this area was listed in census I could check but checking every page for St. Louis is prohibitive. If you can be of help w/info on maybe what census ward etc. or could narrow it down it would be appreciated. Wife of Ernst was Katherine nee Bohn, children Wilhemina, Gustav, Clara, Freidrich.

+ **Maximize your potential** -- connect with a **G-SIG Cluster**. Each Cluster brings together a small bunch of people with common interests. Interested in a 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.