

# G-SIG FORUM #47

...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 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](mailto:persch3@hotmail.com).

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## HERMANN IS MORE THAN A TOWN

By Gerald Perschbacher

**Hermann is considered** the first great hero in German history. He was probably in his late 20s when his tribal army fought the Romans to a standstill at the fabled Teutoburg Forest in 9 A.D. The event took place in early September and is estimated to have lasted three days. Romans called the battle *clades Variana*, and it was NOT a highpoint in Rome's great achievements. Do the math and you'll soon realize that September of 2009 marked the 2000<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this notable battle!

Hermann also carried a Roman name: Arminius. His father Segimer led the Cherusci Germans. Reportedly, one-tenth of the Roman army was destroyed in this fierce engagement! The results were so staggering that Roman officials decided not to expand eastward any further than the line of advance they had already established. In the heart of Germany, this basically was the Rhine River that formed a natural boundary, and a few exceptions such as the first bend in the Main River (however, that section between the Main and Rhine was abandoned by Romans around 260 A.D.). To the south, the Danube formed another natural line, and the Romans built a line of fortifications in the gap between the rivers. The entire defensive line was called the *Limes* (pronounced LEE-mis), which translates into "limit line."

**Who were the Cherusci Germans?** This was a tribal confederation of clans, with associated alliances with other Germanic groups, as needs arose. In

those ancient days, Germany was not a country. It existed as a variety of related subcultures. That type of formation continued in a sense well into the 1800s, leading up to German unification. When 1870-71 resulted in a united kingdom of Germany, ancient tribal enclaves or noble territories were viewed as part of a unified whole.

The Cherusci (known in German as *Cherusker*) lived around present-day Osnabrueck and Hannover. In later years, they became a subgroup of the Saxons! At the time of Julius Caesar, the Cherusci were subjugated by Rome around 50 B.C. But by 9 A.D., there was a split in the Cherusci, and a good number of them were ready to war with Rome rather than live under its domination. Other tribes joined them: the [Bructeri](#), [Marsi](#), [Sicambri](#), [Chauci](#) and [Chatti](#).

**In 9 A.D., it was hard to comprehend** how a tribal defensive could have destroyed a major portion of the mighty Roman army, especially since Rome was at its height in power and prestige! The Germans were in a very limited victorious minority when they boasted how Rome's advanced had been foiled!

The town of Hermann, Mo., is named for the ancient hero. Carrying that name remains a tribute to this day. Some people credit Hermann with keeping Germans from becoming "Romanized."

That is correct, to a point. The Roman advance into Western Europe (what today is mainly France and Germany) seemed to be more an act of genocide rather than absorption. Julius Caesar boasted over the tens of thousands of Celts he and his Roman army killed in battle or mercilessly murdered to gain a hold on their land. The Celts, which serious historians generally accept as pre- (or proto-) Germanic, were squeezed in a vise grip of Rome to the south and west, and fierce Germanic tribes to the east. With nowhere to go for peace, the Celts had to engage in war with one side or the other. While it is not known how many battles may have been waged between Celts and Germans, the written records of the Romans are nicely detailed, thanks to Julius Caesar and his boasts.

**Perhaps the Romans had grown tired** of conquering by 9 A.D. Perhaps soldiers weren't as strong or bold along that northern front. Perhaps the amount of land under Roman control was already more than its new settlers could handle. Perhaps advancing further into the east was too costly. Regardless of the reason, Roman ideals claimed that the empire seemed to be unstoppable. The Celts did not stop it. Neither did most other enemies. But the Germans under Hermann brought a sobering "reality check" to Rome!

In the final analysis, Germanic tribes maintained their territories outside of Roman rule, although there was a growing admiration of Roman society and the flashy, organized Roman army. Germans infiltrated the border, joined the army, settled where Rome allowed, and enjoyed the benefits of a more sophisticated and pampered society. The movement resulted in the takeover of Roman land by Germanic tribes, and the vision of a Holy Roman Empire that was far more German than Roman.

**Even militarized Germany**, after its unification in the 1870s, had flashbacks recalling the grandeur and pomp that glorified ancient Rome! In 9 A.D., Hermann won the battle. But Germans followed much of the “Roman way” in centuries that followed.

The admiration of ancient Rome, even by recent generations of Germans, may have set off a militaristic, expansionistic, and authoritarian approach toward neighboring lands. Perhaps a degree of this was carried to America by German emigrants.

The imprint of Rome can be seen in other nations, France and England included, but we will let those subjects rest for future consideration!

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## **ZITHER ME THIS!**

**If your ears enjoy the lilting strings** of a well-played zither, perhaps that’s because of your German heritage. Properly played, it is one the most beautifully sounding instruments in the world. The zither has a prominent history in many parts of Europe, including the lower portions of Germany. You can learn much about the zither by checking online at:

<http://www.johnmccrady.com/level3-zitherhist.html>

John Maurath ([maurath1@juno.com](mailto:maurath1@juno.com)) says that Germans brought the zither to America in the early days. German immigrants who served in the Civil War took zithers into battle areas. Nationwide, newspaper ads and articles about the zither abounded from the 1800s into the 1900s. Wherever Germans settled in America, zither clubs and bands formed.

**Germans immigrants in America** “even formed a nationwide zither congress, with annual zither concerts and competitions, held in various cities and towns across the country.” Indeed, the zither was prominent in America. St. Louis had well-known zither clubs: the Arion Zither Club, the Concordia Zither Club (Lutheran Church), and the St. Louis Zither Club. Unfortunately, these disbanded during World War I, mainly due to anti-German sentiment.

John adds that Missouri became an important center for the production of zithers. “[Franz Schwarzer](#) came to America in 1864, and settled in Washington, Mo., where he commenced producing zithers that were shipped all around the world, and for which he won numerous international awards. His company produced thousands of zithers, even into the 1950s. It is well worth a visit to the Franz Schwarzer Zither Museum in Washington, Mo.”

John Maurath is working with Dave Kyger ([dave@zither.us](mailto:dave@zither.us)) of Washington, D.C., to acquire stories of German Americans (and anyone else) who played the zither. If your family had a zither player or if you know of anyone who plays the zither, please contact John or Dave for a short interview.

Check <http://www.zither.us/?q=node/30> to read about John's zither-playing ancestor. Incidentally, St. Louis' public zither player, Bob Yarbrough, is interested in re-forming the St. Louis Zither Club! For details, contact him at [ralkyarbrough@earthlink.net](mailto:ralkyarbrough@earthlink.net) or (314) 961-2473. For more information, please visit Dave Kyger's zither website at <http://www.zither.us>

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## **ANCIENT GERMAN ANCESTRY**

If Celts were a pre-Germanic culture (differing mainly in language, at least from what little is known of that language), was there a pre-Celtic German people that dated even earlier?

Some scholars say “yes.” Their conclusion is based on discoveries from the past 50 years relating to the Hittites.

In Biblical history and secular records found in ancient Egypt, the Hittites were a mighty people. They lived in central Asia Minor. With the use of a speedy, light-weight chariot produced in mass number, they out-manuevered their adversaries on the battle field and nearly killed a Pharaoh, let alone destroyed the elite cream of his army.

C.W. Ceram revealed the facts, theories, and observations in his book, *The Secrets of the Hittites*, Schocken Book, New York, 1973. On page 92 he remarks

that researcher Dr. Friedrich Hrozný “had shown not only that ‘Hittite’ was Indo-European, but that it belonged to the ‘centrum’ or western (language) group, which includes Greek, Latin, Celtic and Germanic...It seemed an obvious conclusion, therefore, that the Hittites had come from the West, penetrating Asia Minor via the Balkans and the Bosphorus.” Still other researchers have concluded the Hittites came across the Caucasus Mountains. Ancient Egyptians called them the Hatti.

We’re talking about a culture that was active by the year 2000 B.C.! Quite old, indeed, generally predating the Celts! “Doubtless their army amounted to no more than a few thousand men. But obviously they were more intelligent and vigorous than the natives...from the moment they appeared on the scene they displayed a rare combination of political shrewdness and military strength.” When they conquered a population, they “enlisted (their) loyalty.”

Only a handful of sites remain from that great culture, which flourished at its peak for only a couple hundred years at best. No one really knows where they went as a culture in the dim mist of history.

Germanic? Possibly. But if the Hittites knew how to forge iron and make magnificently nimble chariots, why were these inventions not shared throughout Europe via other Germanic cousins? Maybe the climate, the terrain, and the general format of warfare in the heavily forested North eliminated the use of chariots. Maybe there was little need for iron making, too. Or perhaps the Hittite branch simply kept their ability a well-guarded secret in order to be the dominant group! Interestingly, there was a German tribe called the Chatti (derives from Hittites?)

Conjecture. But if you find more on the subject, let us know!

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**SPECIAL NOTE:** Karl Daubel ([KDAUBEL@aol.com](mailto:KDAUBEL@aol.com)) has found a marvelous online reference: the *Atlas des Deutschen Reichs of 1883*. It is worth checking! There is no charge, and you might enhance your understanding of Germany as your ancestor knew it! The site is:

<http://www.library.wisc.edu/etext/ravenstein/home.html#Overview>

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

+ **Sign up** for the St. Louis County Library free publication called Pastports, by checking: <http://www.slcl.org/pastports/>

+ **Maximize your potential** -- connect with a **G-SIG Cluster**. Each Cluster brings together a small bunch of people with common interests. Contact: Lisa at [lmclaughlin@polsinelli.com](mailto:lmclaughlin@polsinelli.com)) or check with Kathy at [kathyinwashington@hotmail.com](mailto:kathyinwashington@hotmail.com)).

+ **LEAD**--*Possible source* for translation help (honorarium probably appreciated): Carlos, in Olivette, Mo.; (314) 997-1537.

+ **Kathy Wurth writes** “A friend of mine sent me this site with pictures of old sailing vessels. It is pretty cool, I found pictures of three ships my ancestors came over on. Perhaps you will be lucky, too.” <http://geocities.com/mppraetorius/>

+ **Anyone researching the HEILIG name?** Then please contact [bettieboop1052@sbcglobal.net](mailto:bettieboop1052@sbcglobal.net)

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