

G-SIG FORUM #6

This is the sixth communication from the German Special Interest Group. G-SIG is a collaborative effort of the St. Louis Genealogical Society and the German American Heritage Society both based in the St. Louis area.

This communication is a forum for educational, historical and genealogical information with fresh insights and ideas to help your research or enjoyment of 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 which appears at the end (limit 50 words). *EXCHANGE!* notices run only once, but you may freshen the notice and resubmit. We reserve the privilege to shorten and edit. Send your *EXCHANGE!* submission to germansig@stlgs.org.

WHAT ABOUT AUSTRIA?

“My Grandfather came from Neudorf, Bohemia, that is now Nova Ves in the Czech Republic almost on the German border. My Grandmother was from Eibiswald, Austria, that is part of lower Austria. Both Grandparents spoke German. Would your G-SIG group cover these areas or is it strictly German?” So asks John Lorenz (clorenz@worldnet.att.net).

The German Special Interest Group can include a wide range of German-related subjects and interests from genealogy to food, history to language trends, villages to dances. It will be as broad and enlightening as its participants help to make it.

Example: Did you know that Austria in much of its recent history basically has been a German-language country, but some experts estimate that only about 25% of the nation is German in heritage and lineage? Yet, that minority has dominated Austrian culture. Many Austrians like to consider themselves Austrian rather than German. Americans, however, would generally consider Austria to be Germanic. So, does Austria fit into G-SIG? Why not! Maybe there is enough interest to form an Austrian Cluster.

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GERMANY HAS EUROPE’S FASTEST COMPUTER

In recent weeks, Germany's Juelich research center switched on Europe's fastest computer, an IBM-built system that will make complex calculations for scientists in fields like biology, chemistry, and physics. So reports “This Week in Germany,” an online news service. The computer can process up to 45.8 trillion operations per second and is about 15,000 times faster than the average home PC.

More than 200 European research groups are expected to use the new computer for forecasting weather, predicting the stock market, and simulating the diffusion of pollutants. Experts expect that demand will expand computer power by more than a thousand times in a few years. We wonder how much of that relates to searches for historical and genealogical purposes. Interestingly, the Juelich system was funded by Germany's federal government and the state of North Rhine-Westphalia where Juelich is located. To receive the news: subscribe-gic-e@lyris.globescope.com .

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PROTESTANT SAXONS & RHINELANDERS IN OLD ST. LOUIS! by Gerald Perschbacher

Patricia von zur Muehlen discovered (and obtained) a copy of "Zion on the Mississippi" at the St. Louis Genealogical Society annual fair. The book was authored by Walter O. Forster and was printed by Concordia Publishing House in 1953.

This was noted on the book flap: "...interesting account of how Lutheranism originated in Missouri--how a small band of 700 Saxon Germans left their beloved homeland in 1838, sailing in five ships from Bremerhaven, Germany, through the Gulf of Mexico to New Orleans, then up the Mississippi to St. Louis, and then to Perry County, Missouri."

Now, let me add some comments. The book is considered the masterpiece of early history on The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod (LCMS). The book in hardbound version is not easy to find, but it has been reprinted recently in soft back version and is available from the publisher.

The book references the German Evangelical (Ev.) Reformed and Ev. Lutheran bodies. The term Evangelical arose from the union of all Protestants in Prussia in 1817 by decree of Frederick William III, King of Prussia (1797-1840). His action marked the 300th anniversary of the Reformation (1517-1817) and the move was meant to allow the king and his wife to worship and communion together.

However, "Old Lutherans" leaned against such unionism and, in some cases, were so oppressed by it that they opted for America. So it was that about 700 banded together into a society and came to America in 1838. Many, but not all, were Saxons. This was considered the first major immigration to America by Germans based on religious ideals.

These are the people traced in the book, "Zion on the Mississippi."

There is a section regarding their early years in St. Louis. The congregation of Holy Ghost Ev. Protestant Church is mentioned. At that time, it was comprised mainly of Rhinelanders. The Saxon group wanted to worship in the church building. Officials of Holy Ghost were apprehensive, due to the Saxons' large number and leadership. Their total body count would have matched or surpassed the existing church's membership. Furthermore, the Saxons' leader, Pastor Martin Steffan, was a strong authoritarian whom the people of Holy Ghost did not want to encounter. On top of this, the people who built Holy Ghost had labored for at least five years to construct the building, which was just recently being used. To see an upstart group of mainly Saxons try to settle into the new church simply rubbed the congregation the wrong way.

Holy Ghost officially turned down the request, but members of the church and German community helped the newcomers in other ways.

Here's an interesting dimension NOT in the book. This was uncovered via genealogical research. Johann Michael Perschbacher came to America in mid-1833. By the Fall, most had settled in St. Louis. Johann Michael is listed in the first church entry in the register book of official acts for Holy Ghost, St. Louis, which was the first Ev. Protestant German church in this part of the Midwest. The event in the entry was a January 1834 wedding between two people who had come from the village of Schaafheim, where the Perschbachers originated. Johann Michael is listed as a witness to their wedding. This indicates he was a founding member of the church.

The membership of Holy Ghost was in a state of flux. Immigrant Germans were moving to and through St. Louis. Johann Michael was among them, living in town long enough to gain an income as a shoe maker, saving for the purchase of land in St. Clair County, Illinois, to become a farmer. But I like to say that when the Saxon group arrived at the St. Louis river front, Johann Michael was already well acquainted with the area and was waving from the shore!

Germans were moving through St. Louis... working, saving, then buying land....

In doing research, more was uncovered. When Johann Michael departed Germany, he was Lutheran. Why, then, would he help form an Ev. Protestant church? Well, in digging for an answer at the U.C.C. archives through the help of Dr. Lowell Zuck, I discovered that Holy Ghost was generally considered 70% Lutheran in the mid-1800s. In church files in 1843, reference is made to Lutherans in the constitution of the congregation. It turns out that the majority of German Protestants who came to America were actually Lutheran. As time waned, there was a marked shift toward teaching in the Reformed tradition in the Midwest, due to aggressive evangelizing by individuals who had been trained in Basil, Switzerland, which was an enclave of Reformed thinking.

Interestingly, when Johann Michael moved to Illinois, he settled on a farm outside of Lenzburg--a Swiss-named village. But he remained Lutheran.

Note: Information about ancestors who were in the German Reformed Church and the Saxon Immigration may be obtained by contacting the U.C.C. archives at Eden Theological Seminary, St. Louis (lzuck@eden.edu , call (314) 252-3140) or Concordia Historical Institute (chi@chi.lcms.org , call (314) 505-7900).

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MORE ABOUT PRUSSIAN GROWTH

Several people in G-SIG have commented about Prussia since the previous FORUM. So here are more insights.

By 1866, more lands were incorporated into Prussia. This included Schleswig-Holstein, Posen, Lausitz, Altmark, Hannover, Westphalia, and the Rhine Province. Except for Westphalia, the Rhine Province was given to Prussia at the Congress of Vienna, held there from September 1814 to June 1815.

Europe was ripe for riots from the 1830s through 1850s. Active feelings of individualism and nationalism resulted in discontent against the old authority of the noble

families. There was little future in many parts of Germany as land use often was restricted to old, wealthy families or land had been pieced into smaller and smaller parcels as inheritance. Nations round about were uneasy about the growth of Prussia and a feeling of German unity.

In neighboring France, the results of over-extension by Napoleon, and the resultant victories by allied nations, deprived France of its conquered territories.

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TIP: CHECK IT OUT!

Have you checked any archives in Germany? You might want to try:

<http://home.bawue.de/~hanacek/info/earchive.htm>

Meander through the options and discover ideas and facts about archival collections and assistance in Germany.

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WORDS & NAMES...

--**Ach** is used the same way as the Latin word *aqua* (water) and usually was used for a river. You can find this word in certain names such as **Aachen** (the capital of Carl der Grosse), and **Anderach**. However, be careful. [Words changed in meaning over the centuries](#). **Ach** also has been used for the old word *achi* (terrain) used in the word **Steinach** (stone terrain) and **Dornach** (thorny place). So says George F. Jones in the book "German-American Names," currently in print.

-- **Bach** can be tricky. [It often refers to stream or brook, but can also be a spring.](#)

[Recently I ran across a source saying it can be a pond.](#) I wondered about that until I recalled seeing something in Germany last year. There was a village fed by a spring that surfaced uphill from the village and trickled into a gully to make a pond. In fact, in the 1500s there was a pond in the center of the village in order to have easy access to fresh water for the people and cattle. The pond overflowed and ran gently outside the village where it once more disappeared underground. This was not a stream or brook in the common sense, since it did not directly tie into another body of water. Interesting. So **Bach** can mean a variety of things relating to water. However, do not confuse it with baking. **Becker** and **Backer** were words for "baker." Yet, depending on the German dialect, a person named **Bach** could be called **Becker**, but the word would have still been derived from "water." You'll know by seek more information on a name's usage in its native area (and over the years) before you settle on a meaning.

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TIP: TO LEARN ABOUT PALATINES...

...check online at www.palam.org. The site says, "Palatines to America is a genealogical society dedicated to the study of ancestors from all German speaking lands, not just the Palatinate. We take our name from the fact that some of the earliest German-speaking immigrants to the American colonies came from a region in present-day Germany known as the Palatinate and were called Palatines."

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WHAT WERE THEY CALLED? By Gerald Perschbacher

If you succeed in uncovering a list of German ancestors, it is likely you will see the same first name repeated with regularity. Often it is **Johann** (*YO-han*) or **Maria** or **Georg** (pronounced *GAY-org* in the old days, *Sh-ORSH* in the last 100 years or so, at least in central Germany). The second name is different. You may see Georg Reinhold, Georg Peter, and Georg Henrich. The same last name, of course, was carried by all.

For much of German history, the first name was the baptismal name. That name was derived from the patron saint of the village or town, or the favorite saint of the nobleman who owned the land. In many instances it was the name of the church in the village. When a child was baptized in the church, the name of the church (St. John) was given to the child: **Johann**. In the case of women, they may be called Hannah or **Johanna**. So the first name became a sign of their faith and church.

The second name was what they were commonly called. So Georg Peter would really be Peter (*PAY-ter*). Johanna Maria was really Maria.

You may see the name Johann Johannes. This was never meant to be “John-John.” **Johann is almost always considered a baptismal name. Johannes is the common name by which the person was known. From this we derive Hans.**

At a given time in a German village’s history, certain names were popular. **Sebastian** was one of those, back a couple hundred years ago. The shortened version of it was **Best**. If there were several branches of the same bloodline that used that name plus the same baptismal name and, of course, the same last name, then the village might have had **three or four Johann Best Schmidts** running around. But German logic avoided that problem. As such a name was entered in the city books or church register, it was given a number. I have heard off “**George the 14th**” which sounds like royalty, but it was the simplest way in which names could be kept straight for legal purposes and taxation.

In such a system, Georg the 12th did not necessarily beget Georg the 13th, but there could have been a skip in numbers to his son, the 14th, while a nephew born in between was granted number 13. It was a numbering system based on time of birth in the lineup.



GET TO KNOW SOMEONE IN GERMANY

One day you will be grateful you came to know someone in Germany who has an interest in learning about America. However you can do it, make contact with a German who has a reasonably good command of English. This should not be too difficult, since the presence of the American military has become natural in select places in Germany, and since Germans (especially in the former West Germany) are basically cordial toward polite Americans. English was picked up by large portions of the population. Many children learned basic English in school, too.

I would say you could easily converse in simple English with more than 25% of the people who live around the Rhine River. Frankfurt on the Main is an especially good area. Another 25% would probably understand your basic words and be able to respond a little in English. Many Germans over age 65 will be likely to converse only in German.

Writing is another matter. Speaking is much easier than knowing sentence structure and spelling. Explore your options. Get a “pen-pal” in Germany, strike up a genealogical friendship via the Internet, or write letters to a select village asking for someone with whom you can communicate.

Don’t wear out your welcome and bury the person with questions. Take the matter a step at a time and enjoy your experience. Share your insights about America.

Too many Germans think of Americans as impatient and impolite. Unfortunately, I met some Americans like this in Germany. As tourists, they sent the message that Germany was their playground. Their children jabbed and joked loudly in public. To Germans who did not know English, it probably sounded like an argument and an impolite way to act in public. Avoid adding to any of these impressions when you are in contact with Germans.

There may come a time when you will owe something for genealogical help. This can be done in currency or in trade. Would the person like a certain book from America? Some pictures? Work out the details. Trading can be enjoyable. GP

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EXCHANGE! Comments, ideas, and requests from those in G-SIG:

- + Walter Kramer says: “What’s the significance of the titles EIGNER & PRIVAT? Also, the old German script is difficult to read. Any suggestions?” (314) 432-3561 or write: (peggykramer1@juno.com).
- + Sister Jane Behlmann (jbehlmann@csjssl.org) says: “I am looking for some help with translation of letters from the 19th century written in German Gothic script. Is there any source you can recommend for help with this?”
- + Mary Shaffer (ms919@mindspring.com) asks, “Does anyone do research into St. Louis German newspapers, 1883-1901? I live in Atlanta and do not read German. Is there an index of names, obits, etc., of these newspapers (esp. in the 1880s)?
- + Pat von zur Muehlen says, “‘Peter the Great’ by Robert K. Massie is one of my favorite books....If you have not read it, I challenge you to read the first chapter and you will be hooked. If you don't have time to read all of the 855 pages, at least check out pages 567 to 580. Those pages comprise Chapter 43 titled, ‘The German Campaign and Frederick William,’ and contain some very good background information on Prussia.”
- + From Bob Doerr (bdoerr@msm.umn.edu) – “Seeking starting point re: my 2-great-grandmother, Theresia STEIGER, born somewhere in Baden about September of 1806. She and Conrad WANGLER had their four children in Pittsburgh in the 1830s. (Records there reveal only one of their children.)She died in St. Louis in 1879.”
- + Leroy Schroeter (lhschroeter@earthlink.net) writes: “In my wife’s family is the secretary of the ill fated German revolution...he signed traveling papers for his escape through Switzerland to the U.S.A.”
- + BOOK WANTED: “The German Church on the American Frontier 1840-1866” by Carl E. Schneider, 1939; contact Gerald Perschbacher at persch3@hotmail.com .

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G-SIG FORUM will be sent by e-mail. If you prefer a copy 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.

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