

G-SIG FORUM #7

This is the seventh 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.

FINDING THEIR VILLAGE

Puzzled by your ancestors' exact village of residence? In the 1800s, Germans tended to stay near their ancestral hometown unless driven away by adverse circumstances. Once you find that village of origin, you will possibly be able to trace your family back several more generations (if the records exist).

Liz, who lives in St. Clair County, Ill., recently asked about how to find the town or village of origin for her great-grandmother. Her great-grandfather came from Prussia (which is hard to define as previous G-SIG FORUMs indicated). Her great-grandmother came from Hessen-Darmstadt (that's how the Germans refer to it— "Hessen"). Now Liz is trying to discover the town.

She had searched microfilm from Catholic sources, thinking her family was Catholic. She did not find them listed. She discovered the couple was married in St. Clair County in 1851 at Zion United Church of Christ (UCC) in Millstadt (well, it wasn't UCC back then, since the UCC was not yet founded). Liz did some good digging and also found they settled near Marissa, according to the *Dutch Hill Prairie History*.

I suggested this: When your family came to America will determine where you may want to search old files. The Belleville Library is a great source when it comes to areas in or near that county. But if your family came to Illinois before 1845, they may have lived briefly in St. Louis. The St. Louis Genealogical Society is a wonderful place to check. Much of its collection is housed at the main St. Louis County Library site on Lindbergh, south of Highway 40 (I-64).

There are other collections, too. If you have Lutheran ancestors, check with Concordia Historical Institute in Clayton, Mo. (314-505-7900). If your roots are Reformed (UCC), check the archives at Eden Theological Seminary's library in Webster Groves, Mo. (314- 252-3140 or 961-3627)

Anyone doing serious research should start by gleaning firm facts: names and dates (even approximate) of arrival, baptism, birth, death, or marriage (these are

traceable). It helps to know the names of immediate family (spouse, children, parents). Many early German settlers earned money in St. Louis for a few years before they headed to Illinois or elsewhere. Their "footsteps" are reflected in old church and civic records. Sometimes those records note the name of their village in Germany.

When you finally have the village name, then you may be able to make contact with officials at that village. Many have Web sites. If one of your ancestors has a name that is "different" (such as the uncommon name of Wollenschlaegerhof verses the common name of Schmidt) then you may have a much easier time tracing it.

If your family has connections with congregations now in the UCC, seek files relating to the German Evangelical (Reformed) Church. There may be files on the congregation at Eden. There may not. It depends on what was donated by congregations. Of course, old congregations often keep their earliest books, so you can contact a church official and ask.

If you do not know the denomination of your German ancestors, **CHECK THE HISTORY OF THE REGION** check the history of the region from which they came. Example: **HISTORY OF THE REGION** The majority of residents in Hessen-Darmstadt were Lutheran, then came Reformed. Few were Catholic, albeit the Catholic lands ringed the territory. If you trace the beginnings of German Protestant churches in Missouri and Illinois, as much as 70% of early German settlers were Lutheran. As time progressed, denominational lines formed.

Usually the family bent in the direction of the child that matched the parent. In other words, when a daughter was born to a Catholic mother and Protestant father, the daughter was raised to follow mother (Catholic). If the son had a Protestant father but Catholic mother, he usually was raised in line with father (Protestant). This did not always hold up, but it was generally practiced by Germans. That weakened in America.

If you find old church entries, check for any reference to towns in Germany. Check for listings showing the towns of the baptismal sponsors or marriage witnesses. Many were relatives or close friends who had come from the same area of Old Germany.

LEARN THE LANGUAGE

One hindrance to studying German heritage and old written records is a lack of language skills. I heard a German tell an American, "Oh, you cannot understand what is said because you are illiterate." That was directed at a college graduate who was well read in English but was truly illiterate when it came to German.

Even if you learn only a tiny amount of German, do it. Pick up keys words. Catch certain modifiers, nouns, and verbs that recur in documents. Get a basic feel. Even better, tackle the language as a whole.

Carmen Freeman would agree. She is principal and a teacher of **PICK UP KEY WORDS ...TACKLE THE LANGUAGE** the German School Association, a not-for-profit Saturday school for children and adults. There are three adult classes and three children classes. "Our goal is to provide affordable German lessons to the St. Louis community," she says. "The rates for adults are \$250 per school year, excluding books. The rate for children is \$150 per school year, excluding books." The new school year starts in early September and ends in May.

If you cannot attend on Saturdays or if you prefer more personalized or advanced training in German, Carmen is a good contact. Ask her about the German School Association or tutorial help: Carmen K. Freeman, Phone: (314) 963-9534 or contact by e-mail: carmenkfreeman@aol.com .

GERMAN HOLOCAUST FILES MAY BE OPENED

Records on millions of Jewish Holocaust victims may be made accessible for research, reports the National Coalition for History. This includes files on slave laborers, concentration camp prisoners, and other victims. German officials have pledged to work with the United States and other nations for access to as many as 50 million documents stored in the German town of Bad Arolsen. Much of the credit to make the files accessible goes to the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C.

Eleven nations jointly oversee the records which for some 60 years have been used nearly exclusively by the International Committee of the Red Cross to trace missing or dead persons. The Red Cross still gets about 150,000 requests per year. Except for fulfilling those requests, the records have been off limits to historians and the public. Now plans call for the digitization of records.

Thanks to Pat Stamm for sharing the news. For more details, you may try to contact R. Bruce Craig: rbcraig@HISTORYCOALITION.ORG .

GOING OVER!

When Sister Annamary Fellner attended a lecture by Roland Paul, associate director of the Research Center for History and Folk life Studies of the Palatinate, she got much more than expected. In discussions, the schoolteacher heard mention of Aschaffenburg. She knew right away that the city was near one of her ancestral areas.

Equally interesting, she had made plans to head to Germany and wanted to make contact with officials from the village of Wenigumstadt. After several e-mails and some special insights, Sister Annamary was successful and set up an appointment with an English speaking historian in the village.

But there's a side story that must be told.

"My Millmann ancestors were from Wenigumstadt, and I had the privilege of meeting some of my 'cousins' last summer. These cousins showed me family records and photos...copied from the parish records of their local Catholic church. They trace the Millemann family as far back as approximately 1655 when Jan Millemann appears as the godfather at a Baptism."

She also heard that the Millemanns came to Wenigumstadt from the Walloon part of Belgium. Why? The Thirty Years' War (1618-1648) had devastated much of Germany. Some areas lost well over half the population. The wealth of noble families and leaders was equated with the use of the land to raise crops. People were needed to farm and serve in armies to protect the areas. A new population was needed quickly. Around 1660, French people were invited to settle in Wenigumstadt.

Who knows? Some of *YOUR* German ancestors may have been among them!

BEAUTY RETURNS TO EASTERN GERMANY

Americans who traveled to the eastern portion of Germany since reunification can easily note the somber appearance that dominates in many cities. Now that is being changed as funds are driving more and more restorations.

One recent effort involved Dresden's "Green Vault." After a four-year restoration, the museum has returned to its former glory. The work was spearheaded by more than 100 artists and craftsmen. Restoration of the former royal residence cost 45 million Euro (\$54 million U.S.).

The exhibition rooms are now ready to house a world-famous collection of around 3,000 medieval, Renaissance, and early Baroque works of jewelry and gem art.

No costs were spared in the use of materials such as gold leaf, Saxon oak, and marble to recreate a section of the residence that for centuries added to Dresden's fame as "Florence on the Elbe." The design of the chambers as well as the contents were organized and displayed according to the exacting aesthetic of Prince August I, who began the collections in 1560.

But it was Saxon Elector August the Strong whose tastes defined the collection. He opened the vault for viewing in 1730, thus making it the very first museum that is also a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or work of art in itself.

The completion of the project comes at the right time since Dresden is poised to celebrate its 800th anniversary

(This report appeared in *The Week in Germany*. To receive more news, send a blank email to subscribe-gic-e@lyris.globescope.com).

SALE OF POPE'S CAR WILL BENEFIT CHILDREN

Thanks to *The Week in Germany*, A previous FORUM reported the story behind the sale of the Volkswagen hatchback once owned by Pope Benedict XVI. Now there's more to the story.

Benjamin Halbe of Olpe, Germany, donated about \$18,000 to help start the *Hoffnungsschimmer* (Glimmer of Hope) foundation which works to brighten the lives of terminally and seriously ill children. Halbe, age 22, said he was looking to provide long-term help to the less fortunate. The funds came from his profit of \$220,000 on the sale of his six-year-old gray Golf with registration papers showing its last-known owner as "Josef Cardinal Ratzinger."

GERMAN-BUILT CARS?

Years ago, you didn't have to travel to Germany to see and buy a high quality, German-built car. You could do it right here in America.

Over the decades leading to 1920, many German craftsmen who settled in America brought a quality of workmanship and mechanical ability that soon was manifested in automotive products. Most notable was the production of automobiles with German heritage and workmanship.

Some of those German names have faded from our daily scenes. Yet, legends with German sounding names are still in many minds. The Stutz Bearcat is a sign of early motoring Americana. Quite high on the list of such cars was the Duesenberg, a large, beefy, high-powered car engineered for performance and racing. Its chassis usually was purchased bare, then a body was ordered and custom built. In the early 1930s, that put the cost around \$12,000 or more. Given an inflation factor for the dollar, that converts to more than \$200,000 in today's buying power.

Still with us is the name Chrysler, but many have forgotten the German-sounding name Doble, the builder of high-priced steam cars in the 1920s. There were people of German heritage who helped to design and engineer cars, too. So it was with Charles Kettering, who perfected the first popular electric starter used on cars from General Motors. His invention took hold while Europe was engaging in World War I. Kettering was the dean of engineering for GM over several decades.

Among ancient looking vehicles was the buggy-styled Schacht made from 1905-13. Even dedicated car collectors know very little of the Schoemeck or the Schaefer (1910). Hardly anyone heard of the Schlotterback of 1912 or the Zimmerman.

What about the St. Louis area? It had its German influence in car production. Henry Borbein built a car in St. Louis from 1904-08. He was a Lutheran German active in South St. Louis. Cars carrying the Dorris name used German craftsmen. And cars made under the Moon badge had a large percentage of German workers who assembled or engineered the final cars along the assembly line. One historian noted that supervisors went out of their way to hire factory workers of German background since they were exacting workers who took pride in their achievements, gave an honest day's work, and maintained high ideals.

The Gardner automobile was made in St. Louis from 1920 to 1931. The name may have been of German derivation and means just what it says (some versions had been written as Gaertner but became "Americanized"). Regardless, this was the last truly St. Louis-built car unique to the area. If nothing more, there were German craftsmen on that assembly line, too!

Years ago, you could truly buy a German-built car in America!

UNIFICATION RESULTED FROM THREE WARS

Some analysts conclude that Bismarck had to fight three wars to unify Germany.

Through much of Germanic history, anyone wanting to unify the land faced extreme odds since old nobility was entrenched in various territories that were often loosely strung together in alliances to make larger regions. That mentality continued until Napoleon generally tried to dash the old nobility to pieces as he conquered and controlled German states in the years around 1800.

One expert notes that the 1864 Danish War helped Bismarck consolidate his internal position in Prussia. Two years later, in 1866, another war followed through which Bismarck loosed the bonds of Austrian rulership over German states. Last of the three battle times was the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71. That war brought the South under the aegis of the Prussian eagle.

It's easy to over simplify a process of unification. There were social barriers and increasing ties with trade unions that also had a bearing. Commerce was important, and

this, also, increased a spirit of unification. Also important is the fact that what is now German territory was the crossroads for armies throughout the history of Europe. Unification was a protective measure, too.

EUROPE DAY, SINCE 1950

Since 1950, May 8 is Europe Day. The celebration is intended to unite Europe peacefully after generations of division and conflict.

In 1950, French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman called on France, Germany, and other European countries to pool their coal and steel production as "the first concrete foundation of a European federation." This is known as the "Schuman Declaration," considered the first step toward the creation of what is now the European Union. Today the union has 25 member states.

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

+ Interested in Germans who came through New Orleans and Galveston, to St Louis, Madison, and Macoupin counties in Illinois (1850-1878). Any references to recommend? My grandfather, George Gerdes, had a feed store on Jefferson Street in the 1890s, latter moved to the Bunker Hill, Ill. Ellis Schmidt (EASytree@aol.com).

+ From Adie Dietz (adiedietz@sbcglobal.net): Seeking information about Gottfried Dietzfelbinger, believed to have been born in Turnau around 1882-1887, died in Zwickau around 1944.

+ Deepen your appreciate of German culture! Explore your options with the GERMAN CULTURE CENTER, reports Larry Marsh, coordinator. The site is on the spacious UMSL campus in north St. Louis county (the center is located near Natural Bridge and Hanley). Write to: germanculturecenter.org or call (314) 516 6620. Regular hours: Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, Noon to 5 p.m.

+ Herr Roland Paul, the director of German Genealogy, Rheinland-Pfalz/Rhineland-Palatinate (in Germany), seeks information on families that came to America from the Rhineland-Pfalz area. He may have information for you, also. The collection is a record repository on over 300,000 persons who emigrated.

Contact: www.genealogienetz.de/reg/RHE-PFA/rhein-p.html

+ "I want information about Lutheran church Records, Ballersbach, Nassau, Germany, 1840 and before, particularly Johan (?) Heinrich, parents Philip Heinrich and Elizabeth Ney, John Henry (Johan Heinrich) born 36 April, 1833.

Contact: Tom Henry (636) 458-0878 jbatchu@charter.net .

+ 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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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.

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