

G-SIG FORUM #9

...from the German Special Interest Group. G-SIG is an effort of the St. Louis Genealogical Society and the German American Heritage Society, St. Louis.

This communication is a forum for educational, historical and genealogical information with fresh insights and ideas on 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 (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 germansig@stlgs.org.

HAVE YOU CHECKED THE FILES?

The Western Historical Manuscript Collection at the University of Missouri in St. Louis might hold answers to your research questions! The "Freie Gemeinde von St. Louis" was the Free Congregation of St. Louis formed by German immigrants in the mid 1800s. After selling its property in 1961, the organization met in members' homes until 1972. Then the final six members disbanded the group. Their files were donated.

The organization's history parallels that of German immigration. Experts note that the group maintained a rationalist philosophy, conducted a German School Association, and maintained a library. Members engaged in business ventures together and operated a cemetery. Some members eventually joined the Socialist Party of St. Louis and Camp Solidarity, the Socialist Party summer camp located at Pacific, Missouri.

For more about the organization and the files, contact:

**STRONG--WESTERN HISTORICAL MANUSCRIPT COLLECTION,
222 THOMAS JEFFERSON LIBRARY,
UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI-ST. LOUIS
8001 NATURAL BRIDGE ROAD
ST. LOUIS, MO 63121**

You may also try to call (314) 516-5143 or send an e-mail to:

< whmc@umsl.edu .

Files date to the early 1850s.

MAKING CONTACT WITH GERMANY

By Gerald Perschbacher

The subject arises all the time: “How can I make contact with experts in Germany?” First, gather as much information from American sources as you can on the names, arrival dates, or at least birth dates of your recent ancestors. Armed with these details, you may be ready to jump overseas.

Steve, who recently contacted G-SIG, has done his homework. Now he wants to extend his research to Germany. He plans to visit. But he does not know how to “plow the ground.” He’s seeking the input of G-SIG and Clusters.

To Steve and anyone else in a similar situation, here is some advice.

There may be no single source of information. There are state archives in Germany that maintain volumes of information far beyond ancestral records. If your surname is unusual or easy to trace, you might make progress in this regard. Or perhaps the state archives can offer suggestions on the town of your ancestors.

Most progress is made by gleaning local records in churches and town files. Churches usually maintain records on births, deaths, baptisms, and burials. Entries may indicate the names of entire households. Town records mainly deal with taxation, property, business, court matters, and filling elected or appointed positions. By examining the church records first, you may find ancestors who can then be traced through town files.

Making contact with historians from the town or village may reap results. Sometimes a chief historian is listed at a town’s Web site. The person may head the local Geschichtsverein (historical society). Send the historian a very simple e-mail message in English. Usually somebody in the town or church can understand enough English to help. If you are polite and patient, results will probably follow.

Expect to pay for information. It might be 30+ Euros for a nice list of ancestors with birth and death dates over 200 years. The price may depend on the research time involved. Since the churches are subsidized by the government, visitors are expected to pay for services. At least offer to pay.

‘THE RED DANUBE’ AND YOU

“The Red Danube” is a 1949 motion picture from MGM. It features a German-Russian ballerina in Vienna who flees from Russian KGB agents to defect to the West. The Russians want her to stop her. The cast features Walter Pidgeon, Janet Leigh, Ethel Barrymore, Peter Lawford, and Angela Lansbury.

Pat von zur Muehlen reports that in 1941 as the Nazis advanced on the USSR; Stalin, fearful that the Volga Germans would collaborate with them, deported them to remote regions of Russia. Many died or were killed. In the movie, that was the fate the ballerina’s parents.

Let me add this: The Volga Germans had emigrated from Germany to Russia due to the generous invitation of Catherine the Great, who also was German. She offered glowing promises of fine, rich farmland. While many had their promises initially fulfilled, successive Russian leaders grew uneasy with the substantial German population in their midst. Russian peasants were envious. Life grew worse for the Germans.

Pat says there are several sites where you can discover more.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Volga_German

<http://www.webbitt.com/volga/history.html>

http://www.kshs.org/portraits/volga_germans.htm

<http://www.genealogienetz.de/reg/ESE/russia.html#gener>

I'll add one more comment. The story of the Volga Germans is also told in the 52-minute video "A Light in the Darkness." The production, taped around the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union, was produced for national distribution through churches and special agencies. The professional production contains interviews with Volga Germans who tell of their difficulties. For details, call 1-800-523-0226 or check www.visionvideo.com . GP

THE IMPACT OF 'OSNABRUEKCERS'

"In 1822, **Caspar Heinrich Brockmann** (born in Buer, 16 January 1799) married **Marie Elisabeth Horst** of Sehlingdorf. The young couple lived next at Heuer Place, Sehlingdorf, Number 17, and in the year 1832, took over as sole heir the possession of the sheds (buildings) and the mills in Hustädte. For 80 years, until the year 1912, the Brockmann family remained as tenants of the mills, The six children and the descendants of the married couple Caspar Heinrich Brockmann and Marie Elisabeth Horst since the middle of the last century became caught up in the remarkable wave of migration; nearly half of them emigrated to America."

Thus reports Terry J. Daugherty who has edited a study by Walter Brockmann. It's the story of their family. Terry is a member of the St. Louis Genealogical Society and the Ohio Genealogical Society, and has an interest in G-SIG.

Her research reaches back to the late 1700s, which is quite an effort for many genealogists.

When four emigrant Brockmann brothers came to America, their progress was traced through scattered information in surviving letters. The brothers reported news of their offspring and other matters.

The Brockmann family recognizes the assistance of the research department at the University of Oldenburg concerning the Lower Saxony emigrants in the USA. There are also copies of the church registries of the North German Lutheran Church in Cincinnati from 1838–1982. Terry agrees that congregations in 1838 listed the family as "Plattdeutsch-" or "Osnabrücker-" Their congregations had split from the German Lutheran & Reformed Church established in 1814, and developed their own church organization.

Did your family come from Osnabrück? Then perhaps Cincinnati was their destination. That was true for a good number of northern Germans. The four Brockmann brothers were in Cincinnati from 1866 to 1881 and joined this church. The weddings, infant baptisms, and deaths are recorded by the church.

The Brockmann report continues: “ From 1866 on, a second wave of migration took place...from 1830 until 1860 alone, approximately 60,000 people had migrated to the United States.... Desperate problems caused the people to leave...and from 1866, on top of that, a political motive. The annexation of the Kingdom of Hannover to Prussia after the unfavorable outcome of the war of 1866 for Hannover (the Battle of Langensalza, 27 June, 1866) brought about many changes for the Hannoverians. While in Hannover, the sons of employees who were not property owners did not have to enter military service, in Prussia compulsory military service was in place. In order to circumvent service in the hated Prussian army, large numbers of men of military age fled from their homeland.

“Those who now emigrated, entered the new world through connections with relatives or acquaintances who for several decades had already been living there. So, inked in the church registries from the year 1838 until 1860, are recognizable names from the Groenegau -- for example, Aszmann, Aubke, Dettmer, Dickbreder, Dierker, Ellermann, Elscher, Moellering, Nagel, Prior, Remme, Rohlfing, Rothert, Sprenger, Thies, Wischmeyer, Wulfert. Also two aunts of the Brockmann brothers lived in Cincinnati. For the arriving Germans, there were ample advance preparations for a place to live and a place to work. They no longer traveled as before, like the early emigrants, into the unknown. The costs related to the passage, about \$50, were raised by relatives or acquaintances in the USA.”

Bravo, Terry! You and your family have made some admirable discoveries.



PLEASE ‘CONFIRM’ YOUR CLUSTER!

Have you signed up with a Cluster? Then double check the names and places you are researching. We want to make sure you are properly “located” to maximize your experience and enhance “networking.” Lisa McLaughlin (LMCLAUGHLIN@lewisrice.com) wants to verify. Please contact her.

Hans Vetter suggests that G-SIG could make the regions and names of interest for each member available to others via a data base. This is a big step in that direction.



GERMAN INFLUENCE ON U.S. CARS

Eberhard and Ruth Reichmann share some online insights about Germany and the American car industry. “On January 5, 1889, the *Scientific American* reprinted an earlier

report of the *Leipziger illustrierte Zeitschrift* about the successful use of the high-speed Daimler engine, together with a woodcut illustration of the Benz car. When the first news about the success of the Daimler and Benz vehicles reached America, inventive minds soon responded. There is a report of a car built by a German immigrant, Henry Nadig, in Allentown, Pa., in the early 1890s. At the same time another automobile designer of German origin, Gottfried Schloener, built a car which ran 12 miles per hour in Milwaukee in 1889.”

In reviewing their comments, we read, “Other vehicles became known, for example those built by Charles H. Black in Indianapolis in 1891-93. On July 4, 1894, Elwood Haynes drove his Haynes automobile on the Pumpkinvine Pike near Kokomo, Ind. While this was not the first automobile built and operated in Indiana, this well-documented event served as a focal point for an Indiana celebration of the history of the automobiles.”

The writers further mention that more than 500 makes of cars were made in more than 80 Indiana cities. “German-American involvement in these companies was substantial, with many successful companies being started by German-Americans or Americans of German descent. Some examples of lesser-known companies with German names are Zimmerman Manufacturing Co., Roman Eichstaedt, Herrmann Automobile Co, Huffmann Brothers Manufacturing Co, W. H. Kiblinger Co, and Merz Cyclecar Co. More famous names include Duesenberg, Studebaker and Stutz. While some companies can be easily recognized through their German names, others cannot. For instance, the famous Auburn Auto Company was founded by the Eckhart Brothers, but named after their hometown. H.C.S., the Ideal Motor Company and American Underslung were all Harry C. Stutz ventures.”

Now a few of my own observations: What was it that attracted Germans to this industry? Many Germans who lived in industrial areas of their homeland would logically have sought similar work in America. German artisans could have tended toward industrial work once they arrived here. There seems to be a learned appreciation for exactness among Germans, which would have been well applied in the car world. The images of Germans as frugal, wise, analytical, hard working, and determined also fit the car industry. Germans and cars seemed to be a perfect match.

In St. Louis, there is a connection with Germans and early Chevrolets. Car bodies were constructed by the Banner Buggy Company (owned by the Gardner family who later made a car bearing their name). These were used for the mass produced Chevrolet Four-Ninety introduced in 1915, the first serious effort by Chevrolet to compete strongly with the Ford Model T. Thousands of touring car and roadster bodies were made by the Banner operation as a vendor. For a couple years before this, Banner also was making bodies for other Chevrolet models. German wood workers and craftsmen were plentiful in St. Louis, due to the large German population. I suppose we could adapt the later slogan to those St. Louis cars and say, “See the USA in your German-made Chevrolet...”



1848 ALL OVER AGAIN?

Joschka Fischer, 58, perhaps the most popular diplomat in Germany, recently quit parliament and headed to America to become a teacher. "To all of those who think that I

will come back, I say: The door is shut, the key has been turned and thrown away," said Fischer, who will spend a year teaching international politics at New Jersey's Princeton University. Fischer is doing much the same as Germans more than 150 years ago.

University students had risen up and clashed with police in 1848. A "New Order" was envisioned. Freedom was promoted throughout much of Western Europe at that time. After failed efforts by the "48ers" to bring change to Frankfurt and other cities, many came to America to escape the stringent circumstances they could not change. A good number of German agitators were to rise to high positions in America.

More recently Fischer had completed seven years as foreign minister and vice-chancellor. Interestingly, the German media reported, "He battled the police in Frankfurt during 1960s-era protests but later turned to politics, becoming a member of parliament ...in 1983. Two years later, he became the first German (of the Green Party) to hold public office, as environment minister in the state of Hesse."



EXCHANGE! This *Forum* offers a special note--

'TIME AT THE LIBRARY'... was something your teachers probably commanded. But it takes on a new twist with special meaning when we head to the library to discover our ancestral roots.

A short time ago, Christine Human Hughes invited me to the St. Louis County Library at 1640 S. Lindbergh. As supervisor of special collections, she offered insights on how the material can help everyone in G-SIG. There is a powerhouse of material that literally puts the library "on the map" for genealogists nationwide.

A multitude of records are on microfilm, microfiche, and CDs relating to births, marriages, deaths, funeral homes, cemeteries, church records, and probate records. There is a hefty collection of St. Louis City Directories dating to 1821. Census records are on hand back to 1830. Land records are indexed to 1771. You'll find records on deeds and plat books, too. Want to check military backgrounds? Start here. The same holds for naturalizations, newspapers, court records, ward books, and more.

It was a pretty quick tour of the holdings, but it still lasted well over an hour. It wasn't my first time there, but I find something new every time I visit.

Christine is willing and ready to assist G-SIGers in their hunt. If you prefer books, you can probably lose yourself in texts for several days and not realize the time has passed. You can also have remote access to subscription databases if you are a St. Louis County Library cardholder. It makes the "deal" even sweeter. For more, call (314) 994-3300, ext. 208 (chughes@slcl.org). You may visit the Web site at www.slcl.org. GP

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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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