

G-SIG FORUM #74

...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 forum is for genealogical, educational, and historical information with fresh insights plus ideas on German traditions and ancestry. Gerald Perschbacher is *FORUM* compiler and coordinator.

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That Elusive Surname!

Seems the cyber-world is loaded with options in finding details about your ancestral surnames. Sometimes you can find out a great deal of information merely by instituting a search engine like Google.

For several years I have searched all sorts of information online. This includes my surname, and very good results were realized.

But I had a true awakening when I stumbled onto a tiny bit of information on the spelling change of my surname. With two "c's" dropped and an "h" changed to "k," Perschbacher came out as Pershbaker. I never thought of tracing that variation, although I had investigated others. What brought this version to mind was an entry in the Federal pension File for one of my Civil War veteran ancestors, Adam. Later in his life, he changed the spelling. When he aged and went to claim his pension, he submitted that altered spelling. Federal officials rejected it as "not found." Then he indicated the original spelling and the pension was approved.

So I Googled that name. The results were startling and downright exciting! Good results immediately! This opened the way to the name in old books that could be downloaded without charge and various informative entries, including a significantly detailed obituary article that included a reference to his then-recently deceased brother and an older brother. All three ended up in southwestern Oregon by 1867. Pretty early, when you

factor in the realization that major parts of Oregon were still being settled and some now-bustling coastal cities were first settled in 1852.

More searching led me to the elder brothers leaving the Midwest in favor of northern California as early as 1852. Remember what happened in 1849? The Gold Rush! Right! I made connections that those two ancestors had been active in the dream for gold and resultant financial success. There were sad facts, too.

I'll hold back the fine details for a potential presentation at a G-SIG Gathering. But the point was made: don't give up searching! Be creative when hunting the spelling of surnames! You have little (if anything) to lose to try every idea and pursue each option.

I contacted several historical societies and they, too, were excited over what I found. They have augmented those discoveries with more information and even photographs of ancestors and their businesses. All this progress was made in little more than a week.

It's not impossible that YOU could hit a streak of success by thinking, searching, and letting your fingers dance across the keyboard on the World Wide Web. Ask around. Others in G-SIG (and beyond) have done all sorts of searches, have contacted experts, went out of their way to employ genealogical assistants, plus persistently dug into print and online sources. Some researchers have made grand success. Others are struggling. Often it takes creativity to think through the options and pursue them. Dogged determination hardly goes unrewarded.

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Don't Overlook Societies

Take some basic information and float it around. You never know what you'll catch. It reminds me of fishing when I was a boy. My dad liked to fish deep for catfish, but my mother liked to fish nearer the top. If they were fishing in a lake and the surface water was still, she liked a large red-and-white "float" (or bobber). Mom put a light weight at the end of the line and baited the hook nicely. Then she made her cast and watched the float gently and slowly move around due to light breezes or slight water movement. Usually she got a strike!

Float your information around. Bait the hook and cast it in the right direction. You might surprise yourself if you cast it toward a genealogical or

historical society. Of course, the St. Louis Genealogical Society is a great place to start, but if your ancestors lived in other states or counties, consider finding a society in those areas, too.

At times a genealogical organization will ask for hourly rates of payment. It may be modest at \$10 an hour, but I have heard of \$25 and even more. I'm not slighting that, mind you, but some of the information you may already be able to find online if you search diligently. In effect, you can save dollars.

As I searched my ancestral connections in Oregon and northern California, I focused on two small communities. Searching online I discovered each had a society that would help. One was centralized in a community, the other was county wide. I floated the bait and...TWO STRIKES! In the process, I made new friends. While initial progress was made, I expect more will be coming.

One organization charged \$5 for an hour's effort. No charge for photocopies or postage, but I added a few bucks more since it seemed the proper thing to do. The other organization was run by volunteers and never even thought of asking for payment. I offered to make a donation, and it was accepted with appreciation. That worked beyond my hopes, since the volunteer with whom I was communicating also volunteered in the local library and offered to carry the search with her!

My float was really bobbing with good news and strikes, and I reeled in significant information and pictures. Good stuff and no fishy smell!

A third strike was made by a genealogical organization that was ready to do a thorough search at \$60 an hour. Hmmm. I held back, since I was uncovering notable amounts of information on my own. To the credit of that genealogical organization, a person followed up in a casual way, reminding me that they will do the search if and when I ask. I still held back -- too much fun discovering things on my own and through the other two societies. Even so, I did not burn that bridge since I may still exercise the option.

As in fishing, don't cast a hook just anywhere. Some people do that by standing up in an assembly and mentioning whom they are looking for -- not a bad idea, but hardly a well directed cast. That's more of a shotgun technique which is fine if you are hunting birds but doesn't work well when fishing. In fact, from what I recall, it is downright illegal to use a shotgun to get fish!

So, how do you bait the hook? Find the basics about an ancestor (name, approximate years of residence in the community you singled out, name of spouse and children if possible, and line of work).

Seems as if the "line of work" bait brought the most strikes for me. One of the societies on the West Coast included a maritime museum. Since one of my ancestors operated a shipyard, the museum took keen interest. They checked their files. Pictures resulted. These showed finished schooners and river boats! In at least one picture was an ancestor. He was striking a proud pose.

I also pursued other business ventures in which my ancestors were engaged: mining, storekeeping, and a sawmill. BINGO! I obtained pictures of an ancestor surveying large logs floating on the river and a view of him riding on a wagon as lumberjacks were chopping tall trees. It didn't take much for me to see something in those pictures: not ALL the trees were being cleared -- only the tallest and oldest. That meant wisdom was being followed in the late 1800s when the picture was taken. Young growth was being protected for future harvest. You can learn a lot from an old picture if you study it.

Go fishing on your own and see what you get!

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Fishing on the Other Side of the Pond

The most ominous obstacle is trying to cast your hook to Germany. When did an ancestor leave? From where? If you have the person's name and approximate year of departure, you may find what you need.

There are several ways to do online searches, examine emigration records, and passenger lists of ships. You can read books, scan documents, hire a researcher, make contact by e-mail, make a trip to the "Old Country," reply on tips from others who have already made progress, and fish online for electronic insights.

Let's add another: Try the German Emigrants Database. It provides a record of passenger manifests for emigrants who came to America from German ports between 1820 and 1939. This is issued from Germany and could provide information for your specialized research.

Passenger lists include the following: 1820 to 1897 (4,702,931 names); the list for 1904 (112,121 names); the list for 1907 (79,301 names).

Not all names have yet been entered. But the intention is to make the material as humanly complete as possible as time unfolds. This work is being financed by private funds and no governmental support.

Try your hand at it: http://www.dad-recherche.de/hmb/index_engl.asp. Thanks to John Maurath for sharing this insight about the German site.

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Cyber Tour Idea

"Let me share a link that was provided to me by G-SIG member June Sommer (my cousin). She put together an ethnic tour of St. Louis for the CGSI (Czechoslovak Genealogical Society International) conference that was held in St. Louis this past October. She worked out the complete itinerary, negotiated the bus contract, and acted as tour guide providing narration on the bus."

Those words come from Pat von zur Muehlen who has proved to be a live wire on the subject of genealogy. Pat adds, "June was asked by CGSI to put into print form the narration that she provided on the bus in the role of tour guide. Though the focus is Czech/Slovak history, Germans are mentioned and German buildings are also pointed out. For this online text, pictures of many of the landmarks have been provided.

"I'm proud of June as my cousin, but G-SIG can also be proud of the achievements and talents of our members. I recommend the cyber tour."

<http://www.cgsi.org/news/2011/11/26/meet-me-historic-st-louis-tour>

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Find it on a Map

Karl & Shirley Daubel (KDAUBEL@aol.com) are like a good percentage of researchers. They like maps. I've got to admit, maps and atlases of all kinds are one of my top priorities when I visit used book shops in Germany.

The Daubels have found some e-map resources that may be beneficial for you, too. They say the books were purchased through alibris and shipped from the United Kingdom (see <http://www.alibris.com/>).

They add that "a Stadtplan is a city map, not a regional map." Here are some e-stops you might wish to check:

Falk Stadtatlas Großraum

http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&q=ravenstein+strassen+Deutschland+und+Europa&gs_sm=s&gs_upl=337515859101857812101010101578189013-1.0.11210&bav=on.2,or.r_gc.r_pw.,cf.osb&biw=1245&bih=885&wrapid=tlif132663937692110&um=1&ie=UTF-8&tbm=isch&source=og&sa=N&tab=wi&ei=EukST5vEKMbYOQHh2tSDBA#um=1&hl=en&tbm=isch&sa=1&q=Falk+Stadtatlas+Gro%C3%9Fraum&oq=Falk+Stadtatlas+Gro%C3%9Fraum&aq=f&aqi=&aql=&gs_sm=s&gs_upl=883901115375101173751341101010101215941137710.1.1.1.0.11510&bav=on.2,or.r_gc.r_pw.,cf.osb&fp=4f04f28c8cf3d88f&biw=1245&bih=885

Falk Stadtatlas

http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&q=ravenstein+strassen+Deutschland+und+Europa&gs_sm=s&gs_upl=337515859101857812101010101578189013-1.0.11210&bav=on.2,or.r_gc.r_pw.,cf.osb&biw=1245&bih=885&wrapid=tlif132663937692110&um=1&ie=UTF-8&tbm=isch&source=og&sa=N&tab=wi&ei=EukST5vEKMbYOQHh2tSDBA#um=1&hl=en&tbm=isch&sa=X&ei=-ekST9bbDouHOQGS28W6Aw&ved=OCDOQvgUoAA&q=Falk+Stadtatlas&nfpr=1&bav=on.2,or.r_gc.r_pw.,cf.osb&fp=4f04f28c8cf3d88f&biw=1245&bih=885

Ravenstein Strassen Deutschland und Europa

http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&q=ravenstein+strassen+Deutschland+und+Europa&gs_sm=s&gs_upl=337515859101857812101010101578189013-1.0.11210&bav=on.2,or.r_gc.r_pw.,cf.osb&biw=1245&bih=885&wrapid=tlif132663937692110&um=1&ie=UTF-8&tbm=isch&source=og&sa=N&tab=wi&ei=EukST5vEKMbYOQHh2tSDBA

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More on Maps

If you take a trip to Germany, be sure to visit shops or magazine stands that sell maps. I stumbled into one little shop in my ancestral village, and another one in the town nearby. Each had packets of what we might call "hiking maps" that showed walking trails and bike paths in conjunction with elevations, river, hills, roads, and points of interest. Those maps indicated the types of trees that dominated various landscapes, too, which I found fascinating.

Such maps were not expensive and they provide several times worth of information and assistance as you track the trek of your ancestors across that age-old land.

Hint: don't settle for one atlas or a single map. Check different stops you make and gather the necessary local maps while you have the chance. Ask officials at the Rathaus (city hall) if they have maps, too (often for free, but hardly fancy). If you visit with any historical society, ask if anyone has copies of old maps of your ancestral land. You may never know unless you ask!

By the way, if you don't travel to Germany but have a contact over there, you may ask if that person could purchase a good set of maps for you (be sure to adequately reimburse the individual).

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Exchange! *G-SIG Comments, ideas, and requests*

You may share your discovery or offer ideas for others in this section (limit 150 words). We reserve the privilege to shorten and edit. Send your submission to: persch3@hotmail.com.

+ From Karl Daubel (kdaubel@aol.com): Some interesting links:

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Center-for-Family-History/114162888659171>

and <http://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=pu.114162888659171&type=1>.

+ Germans tend to be pro-environmental! Read: "German village generates 321 percent more renewable energy than it needs, earns millions selling it back to national power grid." To read the story by Ethan A. Huff, go to:

http://www.naturalnews.com/034440_renewable_energy_Germany_power_grid.html#ixzz1jy1WvxCt.

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