

# GGSIG FORUM #116

Written for participants in the Germanic Genealogical Special Interest Group (GGSIG; [www.ggsig.org](http://www.ggsig.org)), augmenting German-American research and heritage. *FORUM* contains genealogical, educational, and historical information with fresh insights plus ideas on German culture & ancestry.

Dr. Gerald Perschbacher (LL.D.) is *FORUM* compiler-coordinator.

---



*Above: a tranquil setting in Germany. Courtesy of Eicke Meyer*

## **More than Wars** by Dr. Gerald Perschbacher

Visit a bookstore or an online book site and check the number of titles dealing with German history. A short time ago I visited a new bookstore that is part of a growing chain in the Midwest. It deals in new and used books. I asked if there was a “Germany” section. One of the sales people had a hard time finding it. The section amounted to about 10 books. Call it “paltry” at best. There was more in sections on Russia and Ireland than on Germany. Then I stepped to another section dealing with wars, and (*shockingly!*) there were several shelves loaded with books about Germany and mainly the Second World War. Hmm.

**It may come as a shock to some people**, but German history is not summed up in the little word WARS. Yes, there were two BIG wars in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that involved Germany as

the leading force on the losing side. But if you examine history for what it truly is, the German element on the world scene has been one of the most positive that any “ethnic” group can claim.

I mentioned to the book store attendant how the greater St. Louis area is heavily German in heritage and that if the store enlarged its general history section on Germany far beyond the scope of wars, I would gladly promote that gesture to my friends (that includes YOU) who enjoy learning a research on that topic. However, I am still waiting.

**Let’s take an enlightened look at a few of the many positive German influences.**

You cannot think of **weekdays** without coming across a Germanic impact. Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday are good examples. Wednesday is named for “Woden’s Day” (or Odin’s Day), Thursday reflects “Thor’s Day,” and Friday is derived from a Germanic goddess (with Roman equivalent in Venus). Let’s realize that Nordic lands were of Germanic stock and that many of the mythological Norse “deities” were also honored by Germans even as late as the First Millennium of the Christian era.

The celebration of **Christmas** is Germanic in many forms which include the ornamented tree, gift giving, and Old Saint Nick. The United States is a land of “meat and potatoes,” which are beloved food stuffs enjoyed by Germans for centuries. Ample use of butter in cooking is very German, too.

Classical **music** is heavily Germanic (which also includes Austria).

**Inventiveness** is a propensity for Germans (the automobile is an example).

**Printing and bookbinding plus shoemaking** are trades that had their progressive rise in the Rheinland of Germany.

The American **educational system** from “Kindergarten” on up is heavily mirrored from the Germanic style in Europe.

The **love of freedom** and the right of coursing personal destinies were aspects that have been reflected over centuries of Germanic advancement. Some might say the ideal of plotting personal destinies resulted in numerous fiefdoms in old Germany which was called the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation. And, yes, Germans a thousand years ago were called Germans and their Empire was recognized as their land, even though more recent historians might urge us to think of “Germany” as a fairly recent country that formed in 1870-1871.

When the **American Colonies** opted for independence while establishing a single form of Federal consolidation, the matter of striking a balance of states’ rights versus Federalization (centralization) was a subject of study by the nation’s “Founding Fathers.” The function of the Holy Roman Empire of the Germans became an important source of examination.

Interestingly, Germany had no colony in North America, yet it sent over the greatest number of settlers. Thus, at least 20% and (in some areas) as much as nearly 30% of current citizens are of German descent. German heritage is the largest genetic and ethnic pool in the land.

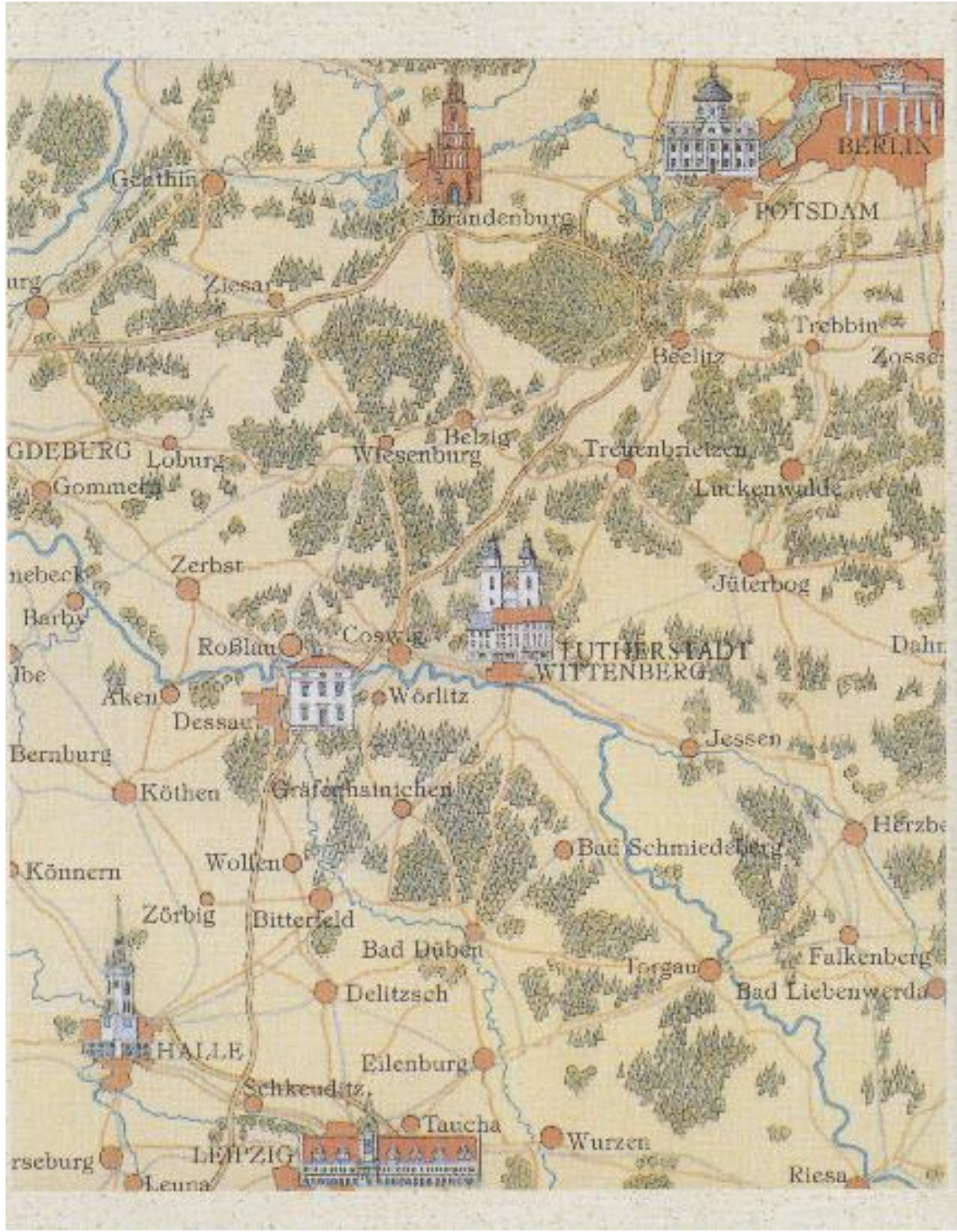
As you can see by this brief overview, the United States was (and is) heavily influenced by the impact of Germanic ways.

Be proud of it.

---

**TIP: Some people may see Germany as a “State of Mind” over the centuries – a place located strategically in Central Europe and enjoying the benefits of contact and communications throughout the continent and far beyond. Today Germany is a land of wonder and enjoyment.**

---



# Finding the Elusive Details

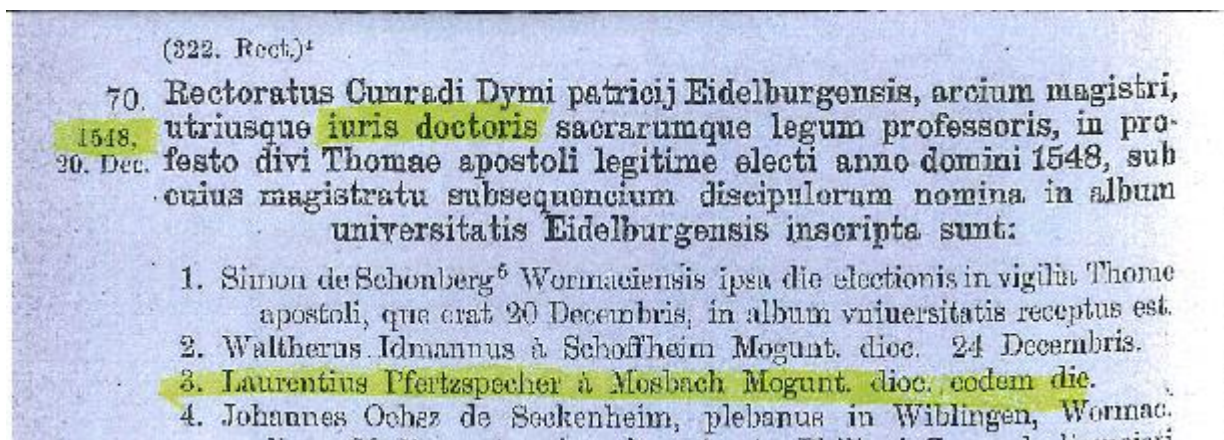
If you've found all the answers about your ancestors, think again.

More and more information is being made available online in what may be called the Golden Age of Communication. From the comfort of your easy chair (or at least desk chair) you can span the continents and the centuries to enlarge your search. If you felt you had all the answers, then do some current "re-searching" and see what fresh information has surfaced.

What I am about to say is a good example and a follow-up to the previous *Forum #115*.

In *#115* I introduced you to Bonifacius Perschbacher who was an important yet elusive character in my lineage. Historians in my ancestral village knew of Bonifacius and realized he held significant authority for the family and the community. They just did not know HOW important he was or the status of his background. Through online searches I came across his listing in the matriculation records of Heidelberg University (1518). Quite a few European universities are avidly scanning their files just to help people like you and me find some ancestral links and to research facts.

You can read *#115* as a refresher so I won't recap all I said previously.



**ABOVE:** the entry in the matriculation list of Heidelberg University, 1548

Moving forward, I decided to see if there were others in the family who followed his footsteps. Indeed, 30 years later in 1548 Laurence Perschbacher appeared at the University of Heidelberg, securing his "*juris doctoris*" (law degree) on the day of Christmas Eve (Dec. 24). It is possible he was the son of Bonifacius. More than that—I will say it is **LIKELY** since the means to finance an education or to be singled out by noble patrons to pay for the education practically ran in family lines. I'd like to think that an educated father tried to educate his son and thereby lift him up to the attention of community leaders.

There will still be searches made on what I had found. Maybe more will come to light in the days, weeks, months and (sadly but sometimes necessary) the years that follow. I shall remain undaunted in my search. You should do the same in yours!

---

**TIP: Work in TEAMS; find someone with similar interests and work together, share findings, and tackle problems. Never give up.**

# Keep the Momentum!

If you make a discovery, don't end there. Keep the pathway open as you track more "game." Hunt while the hunting is good. In effect, your method of discovery and sharpness of wit may be at their best during times of discovery. So make the most of it.

Put yourself in the place of your ancestor. Try to think how YOU would react to the long-past events of that era.

**Example:** A serious illness hit your ancestor. You have no evidence that he/she died or even was afflicted personally. Yet, three children were lost in that household. This is what you discovered.

## **How did your ancestor react to the loss?**

To find out, study the era to learn facts about the illness, its symptoms, and how it ran its course. Then ask yourself, "What would I have done? What would I have thought?"

Since you are a product of your ancestry, your reaction may be very close to that of your ancestor.

**With this in mind I think it is advantageous if a researcher writes his/her feelings and thoughts about ancestors once some facts are aligned.** In other words, the best historical writing might be captured by a direct descendant, if we use the theory I have proposed.

OK, so there are other genes in your genetic pool. I don't deny that. But there is at least PART of you that can relate to your ancestral situations. Also, as you research, you may find **evidences of similarities** between you and your direct ancestor. Especially golden are those bits of writing from your ancestor that reflect inner feelings and thoughts. If you find such a document, cherish it. Translate it. Ingest it mentally.

"That's the way I think, too!" you may exclaim when no one is around.

When you find a note or document from an ancestor, it is a special moment to appreciate. Then come more moments learning what exactly was said and the impact it held.

---

# I Never Thought...

...that I would find things my ancestors had written. The first surprise came from Germany when a friend forwarded the text of a hand-written letter dated circa 1834 that was sent from America to Germany. The latter had been kept and handed down from generation to generation since it was a link to the New World and their family settlers there.

**A few years later on a trip to Germany** my daughter was instructed to search through a pile of folded documents tied into a bundle with string. The bundle probably had not been opened in half a century. No one knew what was in that bundle. I told her to look for our surname. If she found it, I would capture the document with a picture for later research.

"Dad...", she said with a degree of excitement after several minutes into the bundle. "I think I found something."

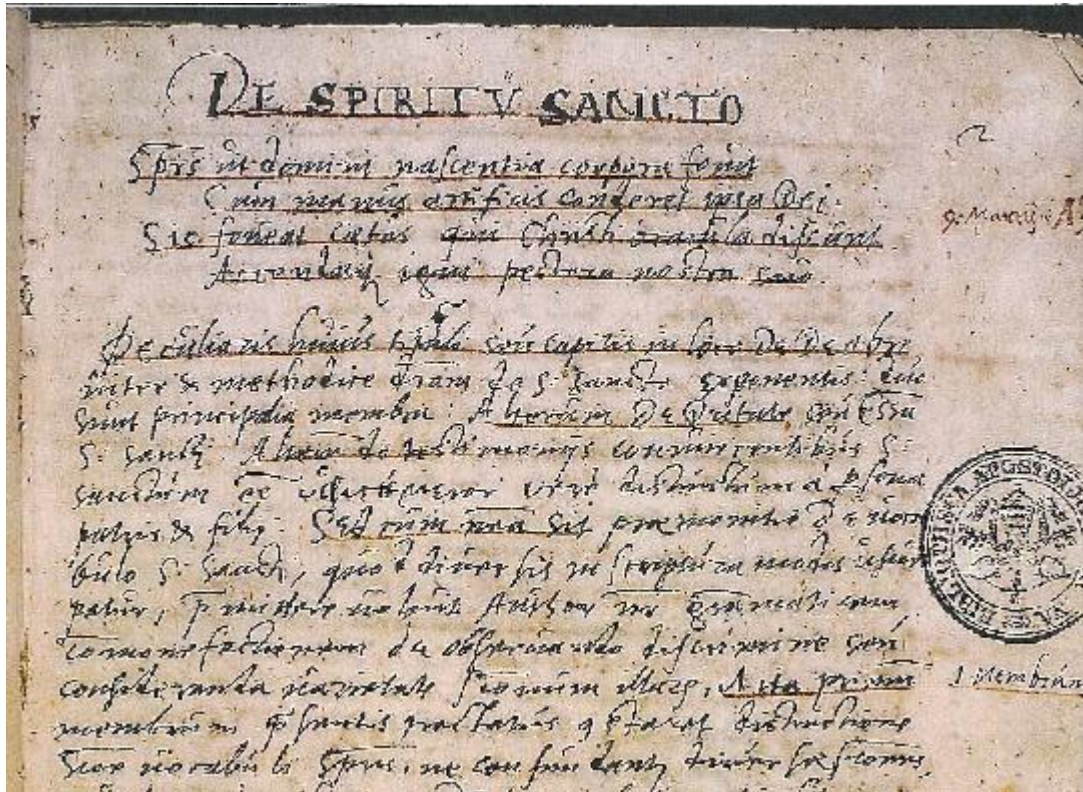
**She did!** It was a piece of paper from 1608 that served as a note of services rendered between our ancestor and the community he served as pastor. Two Germans were with us when the discovery was made. One did a quick translation. The other smiled in this moment of success.

Since then there have been various documents that have surfaced from my ancestors. The most recent is the meatiest of all!

**A set of manuscripts exists from 1570-1571** by a student named Wilhelm Perschbacher. The pages were bound in two volumes. The first set is mainly class notes taken at the University of Wittenberg. These are lecture notes by Wilhelm while Professor Caspar Cruciger read portions of a book by Phillip Melanchthon, then lectured on it.

**HOW** did such a set of documents survive the centuries?

To answer that, I tried to THINK like my ancestors.



**ABOVE:** From the bound manuscripts of 1570-1571 as they look today. Can you recognize the seal at right? Read on for the source that is outside of Germany.

Bonifacius had become a pastor. His son was trained to become a lawyer. By 1570, this Wilhelm may have been a young son of Laurence (making him a grandson of Bonifacius). Since the pages numbered more than 340, this was a large body of work for that era. Interestingly, I had made it a point during my high school years to maintain a file of sample writings I had done for school. Was I acting like my ancestor Wilhelm? Possibly. The inclination could be in the genes.

I have taken pains to make sure the samples of my writings are preserved for my descendants. Was it the same for Wilhelm?

Could be. Even more significant is that the class notes may have been his personal reference material when he became a full-fledged pastor. That makes even more sense. Perhaps

he was saving the pages for his son, Johannes, who followed his father's footsteps to the University of Wittenberg to become a Lutheran pastor.

Regardless, the volumes exist to this day. Once more I wondered why? How?

**The inventoried collection** that includes the volumes by Wilhelm indicates that the manuscript pages had been collected by Ulrich Fugger (1526-1587), whose extremely wealthy family financed many realms in Central Europe in their role as successor financiers to the Medici family. Ulrich broke with his Catholic relatives and moved from Augsburg to Protestant Heidelberg. He collected books and documents. Upon his passing, the collection was willed to the Elector Palatine of the Rheinland.

During the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648) a Catholic army took the library from Heidelberg as the spoils of war and gave the collection to the Duke of Bavaria. As time progressed, the *Bibliotheca Palatina* (the library of the Palatine) **was donated to the Pope and became part of the Vatican Library**. That is the current home for the volumes.

Fortunately, I was able to obtain copies. The pages are mainly in Latin, although some sheets carry German and Hebrew. Included in the collection were notes about the "disputations" of five Wittenberg professors who were earning their doctoral degrees. At the very end of the collection were pages that appeared to be two sermons by Wilhelm.

**In a joking mode, I thought:** "Maybe I should go to the Vatican and ask if they are ready to return the books, since they are well over two weeks delinquent." HAA!

---

## Optional Spellings

Be flexible when it comes to the spelling of surnames you search. After all, spelling was a flexible "sport" over the centuries. It also was regional. And, honestly, it was phonetic based on the person who put it in writing.

**I found the initial link online** (to what I just stated about Bonifacius and Wilhelm) by using **divergent (deviant) spellings** of PERSCHBACHER. I have found success with these spellings: PERSBECHER, PERSHBAKER, PIERSBACHER, PERSPECHER, PFFERSCHBECHER, and (weirdest of all!) PFERTZSPECHER. There are more versions beyond that, but you get the idea.

**It is advantageous to couple a surname with another key word** such as UNIVERSITY or the name of a CITY. Explore the links when they appear. All it takes is one good lead to give you a significant step ahead in your discoveries!

**More common names may have other variants:** SCHMIDT may be searched as SCHMITT, SCHMID, and other creative spellings you may choose to enter along with the name of your ancestral village or region. MILLER may have been MUEHLER, may have had an umlaut, and may have even been changed from MAHLER. Test the options by tagging other key words with it.

---

**TIP: don't let old German or Latin hold you back. Recognize the spelling of your surname and consult experts on translating. Make a copy of the page(s) and pursue your course of action!**

# RELIABILITY...

...is very important in your research. Some researchers gather up all they can and become overwhelmed by the mass of pages and notes. Some of those may be helpful. Others may not. Some may be accurate. Others...well, they need testing.

Since ancestral research has become a hot subject with the **potential for the sale** of family crests (real or conjured), family lists, and how-to books and seminars, **DO NOT** grasp for straws as you float around for information. When you **FIND** some information, **TEST** it. It is good to have **TWO SOURCES** that agree rather than accepting a statement on its own merit. Also, when testing the validity, try to check that one source is not based on the other source. Repetition does not mean the information is good. The better track to take is to **find two unrelated sources** that conclude (or reveal) the same information.

**If you have an armload of notes, do yourself a favor.** Thin it down. Make two piles (or loose-leaf binders) marked **MAJOR** and **SECONDARY**. The **MAJOR** references will be the important stuff for future study. The **SECONDARY** is backup or additional information that you may not need unless you hit a snag in research.

I advise you to save all the notes, even if that means having a **THIRD** pile of "MAYBE."

**Ultimately, you only need the key stuff but should never burn your bridges by destroying the lesser stuff.**



*Above: Pass along your tips for success to others!*

---

*All copyright privileges for this FORUM are reserved by the compiler; no item is to be duplicated or distributed without permission. Do you have something to share in print? Submit your material to: [persch3@hotmail.com](mailto:persch3@hotmail.com). For more about GGSIG and past editions of the FORUM, check: [www.ggsig.org](http://www.ggsig.org).*

*GGSIG officers, Steering Committee, and Participants are not be held individually liable for GGSIG debts, promises, losses, or adverse results of activities and events or the cancellation thereof.*