

# GGSIG **FORUM** #117

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.

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*Napoleon's "GOAL": the throne of Karl der Gross (Charlemagne) in Aachen.*

## Goals and Objectives!

By Dr. Gerald Perschbacher

Let's define those two words very simply as they relate to your family research. A GOAL is the BIG thing. OBJECTIVES are steps along the way that lead to the GOAL. Therefore, an OBJECTIVE is a short-term "advance" toward the ultimate GOAL.

A football team aims toward the GOAL, and every "down" should be an objective along the field. Using baseball terms, the GOAL is to cross home plate and score. The OBJECTIVE is to advance the runners from first to third so they are positioned for the GOAL. Ultimately, the baseball analogy is very good for our purposes, since each GOAL for scoring leads to the WIN.

Confused how this relates to genealogy and family heritage?

No need to be.

The best thing you can do in your research is to SET your GOAL. Then establish your objectives. I'll give an example: Uncle Joe was your great-great uncle and you know several family members carried his first name in succeeding years. You heard that he was important but you had little information to tap from family records or recollections. Since the "name thing" shows respect for his first

name, it may also show that he was a baptismal sponsor (and the German tradition often was reflected in the first name of a sponsor being applied to the child being baptized – a boy would take the first name of the male sponsor; a girl would echo the name of the female sponsor). Back at the time of Uncle Joe, that was the tradition for Germans and their descendants over several generations.

So, what can you find about Joe?

Your GOAL is to obtain sufficient information to verify his importance to your family. To reach that GOAL, you set OBJECTIVES such as: (1) Can I find his career or position in society? (2) Was he well educated? (3) Did he frequently move from town to town? (4) Did he hold an office? (5) Was he of noble lineage? (6) How significant were his children?

The beauty of having OBJECTIVES is that you can *float sideways* from one to the other. That's good, because there will be times you hit the old proverbial "brick wall." One way that you may scale that wall and get over the problem is to shift from OBJECTIVE #1 and see what you can find on #2, etc. By so doing, you expand your potential for success; since often one bit of information in the other OBJECTIVES may provide conclusive information that can not merely help you scale the brick wall, but blast it out of existence.

*Below: University of Altdorf*



As you investigate sources of information for the OBJECTIVES, you discover an interesting pattern. Yes, Joe moved around to four towns when he was age 20 through 50, then he settled into his final home site. That may have meant his work carried him from place to place. He stayed at each town for several years. You find that he held some type of position in each area. You discount noble status for now, since nothing showed up on file. You realize that he may have held a lower position among nobility, but he was not a super-rich land owner or powerful territorial ruler. It becomes obvious that two descendants not far removed went to universities in Germany. You cannot be sure what their specializations were, but you begin to think that they may have followed Joe's pattern since they moved to various towns over their younger adult years.

Surprisingly, your diligent research turns another trick. You discover one of Joe's close descendants (who carried his first name) went to a university specializing in theology. The other went to a university specializing in law. What do these tell you?

What they say to me is two things: Joe may have been a theologian. You see, it was hardly unusual for students of theology to study what some call LAW and GOSPEL. To be effective, a background in LAW was advantageous. But you also researched what it took to become a lawyer. It was expected over the decades that a student earning a degree in LAW had to argue cases on a secular and religious basis. In old Germany, there was not much of a separation between Church and State as there is in America.

Now, here is my second point on that subject: start searching Uncle Joe by using variations in spelling his surname. Do searches on those variants by looking at matriculation records. BINGO! You make a discovery. Joe's son evidently went to a LAW school while Joe's grandson went to a school of theology. You search for a few more name spellings and suddenly find JOE! There it is, tucked away under a strange spelling of his surname. You check a few more facts and realize this truly is the UNCLE JOE you wanted!

The OBJECTIVES can change per ancestor, so draft a list of OBJECTIVES you feel are advantageous. Move from one to the other when you stumble for an answer (or hit that brick wall). Be persistent and consistent. You are not racing against the clock but against the centuries and decades.

You may have met your GOAL with Uncle Joe, so let the information settle for a while. You can get back to Joe as you now investigate others in his direct line. Sometimes THEY shed light on family members including Joe!

As you fiddle with the details, you make a choice find. Joe's movement pattern matched up with one of his sons. The exact movement from town to town was not in the same order, but the towns were the same. You study what such movement may have meant to that area of Germany many years ago, and realize that Joe was a PASTOR! (Catholic research is tougher on this matter since priests/pastors were celibate, but check all your possible options via church records.)

Apply a bit of historical information and you realize that the noble ruling family of the territory had favorite towns to which pastors were assigned. As it happens, those towns each had a significant dwelling for the noble family. In effect, the rulers were enjoying the services of their pastors as those men rose to greater importance in the communities.

Now you can concentrate on THAT aspect of Joe. This results in a new GOAL and fresh OBJECTIVES leading to that conclusion.

GOALS and OBJECTIVES are primary aspects of your research.

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## Go in All Directions at Once?

Try to take a trip without written directions, a good map, or GPS help, and you may get lost. Use incomplete instructions, carry a bad map, or find an "off day" for GPS accuracy, and you may get just as lost.

This leads us to another major aspect of family research. Try not to go in all directions at once. I think you know what I mean. Using another analogy, you vacuum up every particle of information you can and jumble it with all the other things you found. Pretty soon your vacuum bag is stretching and needs to be emptied. Well, DON'T get to that point of overload. Sift, categorize, and set the most important "stuff" in good order. If you don't then you may find yourself going in ALL directions and getting dizzy as you do.

Personal computers are the most common "vacuums." Your system becomes overloaded and more memory is required because (sadly) you sucked up every tiny particle you could, hoping it might provide an answer in the near future. Your technique results in your computer locking up. You fear that information has been lost. Yes, this could happen to YOU!

Equally alarming is that YOU go into overload over all the details you have in your computer and in printed form.

So write notes and compile data, by all means! But CLASSIFY each bit by category or segment according to importance as you consider your GOAL.

If you wish to use a computer program to organize your electronic files, be my guest. If you use a paper filing system, you are basically in the same spot – the data needs to be organized and prioritized. The system you use may be complicated or simple. I suggest you not get TOO complicated OR too simple. Strike a method that makes you comfortable and go for it.

One important GOAL is to maintain the housekeeping chore of good record keeping. It makes much more sense than emptying the overfull vacuum bag of family research!

*Below: Objectives leading to GOALs are bridges to the future (shown: Frankfurt am Main)*



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## Just What ARE You, Anyway?

These topics lead us to yet another—are you a researcher or a collector?

A researcher pounds the literary “pavement” (including but not limited to a paper trail, online discovery, downloads, going “copier-crazy,” buying books on key subjects, compiling existing file information from other researchers, etc.). Some folks hold on to the same questions and wear out their phrase which may be, “I just CAN’T break through the year 1850, much as I have tried.”

At times it seems as though some people want answers to drop into their laps. They look for a quick, final fix to bring success. Although that happens now and then, it can hardly be expected or predicted. Still, some people mull over what they CANNOT find and spend too little time on what they COULD find.

Some family researchers seem to revel in the malady. If you fit the bill, then take an honest look inside yourself. Maybe you need new GOALS and productive OBJECTIVES.

**One thing is clear:** don't let your genealogical trail turn cold. Brush up on your findings, keep your details alive, and THINK CAREFULLY as you consider future research. You are MORE than a collector of tiny facts and minor occurrences.

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**GATHER** all the important “stuff” you can, but **ORGANIZE** it. **KEEP UP** with what you have; **APPLY** what you know. **SEEK ADVICE** from others. Be **CREATIVE**. **LEARN** about historical events that made an impact on your ancestors. **DIGEST** the findings and put them to good use. When you **FLOAT** your questions to others, remember that **YOU** may have tips that help them, too!

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*If you make successful contact with distant relatives in Germany, ask if they have pictures. Perhaps they can scan some and send them – so you can see how the “other” branch of your family looked...and what they did!*

**Next page: Don't neglect to check church records here and “over there.”**



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