

G-SIG FORUM #14

...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 persch3@hotmail.com.

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On Occasion, *The Week in Germany*, edited by David Brown and Karen Carstens, gives interesting historical and cultural insights that may be applied to previous generations as well as today.

Recently, the subjects have been *lebkuchen* (traditional Christmas spice cookies), crispy cinnamon and almond flavored *spekulatius*, and *stollen*, (raisin yeast bread that may have dried fruit, nuts, or a strip of marzipan).

An increasing number of Americans buy German Christmas specialties and other food items from Germany. These foods are loved in America, too, according to Arnim von Friedeburg of the German Agricultural Marketing Board in North America. He says demand for German food in the United States has risen tremendously within the past 10 years. Projected sale of consumer products this season are expected to rise as much as 13 percent.

As with people everywhere, some eat healthier than others and tend to burn off calories based on level of activity. So German foods, often seen as fatty or even unhealthy, may have received a “bum wrap.”

Select gourmet stores in America have been carrying *pfeffernuesse* and *spekulatius* “to satisfy the American taste for traditional German Christmas cookies,” says the report. German food sections are increasing in volume in certain stores.

The German food influence has reached near the White House, thanks to the efforts of Hildegard Fehr. She has sold products from Germany for 42 years in her small delicatessen not far from the Presidential Mansion in Washington, D.C. The demand traditionally continues past Christmas.

Sellers also have noted good interest in German Advent calendars, incense burners, and wooden pyramids with fan blades powered by the heat of candles.

The report adds, “Von Friedeburg says he believes the reason for Americans’ growing interest in German food is part of a broader interest in German culture. Many of today’s 25-year-olds have ancestors with German roots, sparking an interest in Germany.”

While *sauerkraut* and *sauerbraten* have been widely known, now the likes of *lebkuchen* may join their company.

If you would like future reports from Germany, send a blank e-mail to subscribe-gic-e@lyris.globescope.com .



Society Records are in Need of Translation

Thanks to Hermann Eisele, copies of early membership records of the Baden Benevolent Society are now ready to be translated. The St. Louis Genealogical Society has received permission from Josef Hammes, current president of the Baden society, to publish these records in the *Quarterly*, says Ted Steele, genealogical society president.

To do so, Ted is asking for a volunteer who can read the German script and transcribe names into a spreadsheet or WORD document. “We also have a copy of handwritten names and addresses of members that needs to be transcribed, also into a spreadsheet or WORD. It's not a lot of names in either case,” he notes, and “the info is terrific, as the earlier membership list (the German script pages) include the TOWNS of origin.”

Translation has been an ongoing challenge for researchers and historians. That’s one reason the St. Louis Genealogical Society offers self-help resources at its office. But the number of individuals who learn how to translate often do it word by word and can miss the overall phrasing and initial thought. That’s not a major problem when translating names and simple entries, but it creates challenges when large documents are the subjects.

What are the solutions? 1) Find (and lean on) an expert (perhaps via e-mail, even to Germany); 2) Be willing to pay a reasonable sum for assistance. 3) Take lessons yourself, progressing from simple to more intricate documents. Have an expert check your work.

No child was born with a clear understanding of a given language. If you were born in America, you probably learned English initially as you grew. It did not come quickly but was patiently absorbed. We can speed that process in adulthood when it comes to learning another language.

We now have about 400 households now signed up for the German Special Interest Group. If some of you can step forward to help others learn German, please do so. If you can help with the translation work requested by Ted Steele, please contact him at : president@stlgs.org. You may reach the St. Louis Genealogical Society Web site at www.stlgs.org.



What’s so Great About Towns? By Gerald Perschbacher

In the previous article, we mentioned the significance of listing names of immigrants and the towns in Germany from which they came. Why is that so important?

Many German towns and villages have archival collections listing names and dates of important events in the lives of individuals (such as birth, confirmation, marriage, and death). Tax records may reveal occupations and addresses. Files may note the names of family members and their ages.

Records became an important factor for local churches and villages in the 1500s. Having the names of citizens listed in official record books was helpful in recruiting (or drafting) armies, levying taxes, and making legal transactions.

One set of records I researched in Germany showed the purchase of small portions of land. The old German method of inheritance often divided the land among

heirs. Their heirs divided each of those portions, and soon there were tiny sections of land hardly good for much more than a small garden.

The records I researched were from the 1500s and 1600s. They reflected the purchase and transfer of land parcels (sometimes through inheritance). It was obvious that some families were purchasing adjacent small parcels of land in order to form larger tracts for vineyard use. Just as today, the ownership of more and more land often equates to wealth and stature in a community.

If you discover the town or village of your ancestors and strike up a positive relationship with a local historian or official, you have a good chance to unlock more information through old lists and records. With good etiquette, contact may be possible via e-mail or the U.S. Postal Service (which works with other national postal services). If a small opportunity opens wide, you may strike it rich with information.

But don't be unhappy if all you find is a tiny bit of this and that. Small pieces of information may serve as missing pieces to your ancestral puzzle. So finding that elusive information about your ancestral village or town might be the success factor in your research!

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Making Good Use of Your Time

Gordon Seyffert (gordonseyffert@mac.com) shares some interesting insights about how to spend time in research and discovery. Here are his comments:

Time may not equate to money, but it can still be a scarce commodity. Following my retirement, I now have the time to discover...how those ancestors lived their lives. For years I knew very little of my German ancestors on my mother's side. An American-born sister of my grandmother had returned to Germany a century ago, married, and then lived in Berlin through both wars. Her husband prepared an *Ahnenpass* for her, and some of the information was retained by a daughter through bombings, fire, and flight from the Soviets. That was all the information I had.

Now I am fortunate to be able to spend hours at the Mormon Family History Center near my home. I read the churchbook films that contain the records of my ancestors. It is slow, but rewarding. I am not a speaker of German, but have dictionaries and other books to guide me. Though I may overlook some things, or mistranslate on occasion, I feel that the records are revealing their story to me all the same.

The records of Kirchspiel Norkitten, Kreis Insterburg, "begin" only in 1757. "Why is that?" I wondered. Research into the area led me to the Battle of Großjägersdorf, and the burning of surrounding villages by the Russian army to create a smokescreen defense against the Prussian attack. Now I know that my ancestors lived close enough to the battle to have heard it, even if their own home (in Schernupchen) may have survived. A quick search for available dates might have overlooked this fact.

Time--the time to savor the research--provided it.

Now I read the churchbook films for the Lithuanian Congregation of Insterburg, which served Gaitzuhnen. Baptisms here begin in 1695. I can chart the effect of the plague of 1709 by following the yearly or monthly records of those baptisms. Over 200 baptisms a year through 1709 quickly drop to 93 in 1710, and then recover to 160 in the following year. And then I observe something else: Names of family members that appeared before 1710 are not appearing as I read further. The loss has now become personal, in a very small way.

Some may believe I waste my time in these pursuits. Others may respect the persistence that allows me to understand what is written, when many find the records to be unreadable. I know that few will be interested in my findings, in any case. But I have come to realize the value of time.

Gordon in Kansas City, Missouri

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What was That—in German?

Interested in learning more about German language and history? At low cost, you can find several types of books at used book stores, malls for antiques, estate sales, moving sales, and book sales. The price for such books may be only a few dollars each.

What type of books might prove helpful?

+ German-English Dictionaries (buy several spanning different decades in order to realize shifts in definitions and usage); obtain the ones that seem to offer the most information per entry.

+ German language study books (course books for high school and college levels); beginner books often were followed by intermediate and advanced levels. Sometimes it's good to get all three to continue your study. These books usually are printed in English and German. Some use the older style of printing which can help you learn to read old documents.

+ German language tapes or phonograph records can assist in your understanding and usage of German.

+ A good historical atlas that shows the changes in Germany over the years, perhaps even the centuries. This could provide some interesting insights to the era under study.

+ Several books on the history of Europe, especially Germany.

The great thing about ancestral research is that the older the book, the better it may serve your purposes. If your study centers around the 1880s, then look for books around that period (perhaps 1870-1900) for a reflection of the era.

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OSNABRUECK Rediscovered!

In relation to the efforts of a G-SIG Cluster, Kathleen Wurth (kathyinwashington@hotmail.com) has been active in advancing knowledge relating to the old Osnabrueck area in Germany.

“I have been receiving the e-mails (in German) and trying my best to decipher the ones that mention looking for relatives that may have emigrated to the U.S. I then decided to go ahead and e-mail the list in English and see what happens. Of course, so many of them speak English and I have had quite a few responses of people willing to help us. I will list a few...offers of help from Germany for the following information:

+ **Lutheran Church Records of the town of Menslage 1694-1815 -**

There is an offer to help anyone looking for ancestors from Rieste or Malgarten.

+ These Germans are looking for information on relatives who may be in the St. Louis area:

- Hinrich Husmann (from Tutingen) came to U.S. Had one daughter who became a nun and one daughter who married Eugene Dalton in St. Louis.
- Johann Gerd. Heinrich Lonnemann & his sister Catharina Gertraud, emigrated 1845 possibly to Cincinnati.
- Uthoffs in St. Louis. Other names in this family: Dinklemann (in Belleville), Spelker, Kurtzeborn.
- Ruppenkamp, Mecking and Elskemper/Elskamp and Lobbert names being searched.

“The following are great web sites I have found from the Osnabrueck Web site or other means that have lists of names from the area that may be useful. At the www.osfa.de Web site, go to Links and see some of the genealogy pages like:

Town of ALFHAUSEN - has records of St. Johann Catholic church records.

A list of 347 Hannover family farms with the owners surnames, transcribed from LDS microfiche.

List of emigrants to the US from the town of BUER, near Osnabrueck.

“Another Web site that has a good list of US emigrants is www.venne-families.de If you find a name on this list that you would like more information, you can e-mail them. Great site. This is also one of the towns we are planning on visiting on our upcoming trip.

“I am willing to receive e-mails with request for look ups or names being researched. I will post them on the list (as time progresses).”

Special note: Kathy is organizing a trip to Osnabrueck in 2007. Contact her if interested.

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Only a Few Clicks Away...?

Marilyn Gesch (marilyn.gesch@sbcglobal.net) of California tells us about hadis.hessen.de and how she found emigration data “on ancestors from Hessen who have appeared in few U.S. records. For the first time I have the name of a village to research for two family names.

“My command of German is limited to a couple of college classes. However, I understand enough to negotiate the emigration data that's available and other English-speakers could do the same with a little guidance. *Auswanderer-Nachweise* have been digitized from cards that I believe were indexed from the older records back in the 1930s. On the home page, all one needs to do is enter the surname in the bottom left search box, click on a little magnifying glass icon and the list of databases and the number of hits within each appears in the right frame. Click on the *Auswanderer-Nachweise* database and you get the list of individuals who applied for emigration, 20 at a time. Click on the

arrow in the 'Details' column and you get all the information for that individual - town of origin (*Herkunft*), destination (*Ziel*), age (*Alter/geb.*), year of emigration (*Auswanderungsdatum*), spouse's name (*Ehepartner*), who they planned to travel with (under the remarks, or *Bemerkungen*), and the source for the data (*Quelle*). Click on the printer icon and a separate window opens with a printable format of all hits."

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

+ John Gaebe (jrg@stolarlaw.com) is seeking information about his ancestors Heinrich (Henry) Gaebe and wife-to-be Anna von Hoffee (arrived together in New Orleans in about 1850-1851 from Hamburg and immediately came upriver to the Cape Girardeau area).

+ Gloria Cingano (gcingano@sbcglobal.net) is asking if any G-GIG participants have Swiss German ancestors.

+ Angela Allen (angelacmc@sbcglobal.net) says, "I am in need of someone to translate some Missouri deeds, letters, and other various papers that are in German. I am scanning them to preserve copies for a friend. They are from as early as 1840 in Bollinger County and surrounding areas. "

+ Michael Madonna (MKMADONNA@aol.com) has been researching Mrs. Odell Hunkeler who died in Prince George's County, Maryland, on June 7, 1956, but was buried in St. Louis.

+ ARCHIVES Institut für Pfälzische Geschichte und Volkskunde, Benzinoring 6, 67637 Kaiserslautern, GERMANY, Tel. +49 (0) 631 / 3647-302 formerly known as Heimatstelle Pfalz-(Research Center) is a record repository on over 300,000 persons who emigrated from the Rhineland-Pfalz area of Germany. Herr Roland Paul, director, wants to enlarge the center's holdings. Please submit a 3x5 card per person/ancestor, their name, where settled, who they married, date/place of death, giving where buried, occupation and religion if known (perhaps including the village in the Pfalz where they immigrated from and date, if it is known).

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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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Have some great ideas for the G-SIG FORUM? Any topics to suggest? Want to share your findings in order to help others in their search?

Then submit your material to persch3@hotmail.com or mail it to: St. Louis Genealogical Society, Attn: G-SIG; #4 Sunnen Dr., Suite 140; St. Louis, MO 63143.