

# G-SIG FORUM #3

**This is the third communication from the German Special Interest Group. G-SIG is a collaborative effort of the St. Louis Genealogical Society and the German American Heritage Society, both based in the St. Louis area.**

The purpose of this communication is to provide a forum for educational, historical and genealogical information with fresh insights and ideas to help your research or enjoyment of 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 for help, please submit your information in condensed form for the *EXCHANGE!* section which appears at the end (limit 50 words). *EXCHANGE!* notices are to run only once, but you may freshen the notice and resubmit. If the number of submissions is high, then officials will make the necessary judgment as to what will “fit” and be fair within time and space constraints.

Send your *EXCHANGE!* submission to [persch3@hotmail.com](mailto:persch3@hotmail.com).

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## CAN GERMAN COINS TALK?

I’m not a coin collector, but friends tell me that coins can talk. So I did some investigating. It’s true. They DO talk—but not in verbalization. They carry messages that speak as loud as words. They carry inscriptions that convey information. They also carry images that give us a feel for the past.

In German lands, prior to the unification of Germany in 1871, coinage was plentiful. A duchy or territory could mint its own coins with inscriptions and images of importance to the area. Coins became symbols of regional pride. The plethora of coinage also created a strain on trade and commerce between German lands, since standardization was necessary in size and weight, otherwise someone would get the bad end of a deal. Even the quality of content was important. Seems that many lands over the centuries tried to dilute the percentage of silver or gold content in certain coins just to realize savings and stretch expenditures. While copper coins carried value, it was much lower and therefore less prone to such tricks.

Have you ever examined German coins, especially prior to 1871? Check a good library and examine books on the subject. Find the territory from whence your ancestors originated. Learn from photos in the books. The visuals and supporting text could unlock some interesting insights as to leadership, symbols, even mottoes from your ancestral past.

If you enjoy ancient items, check books relating to Roman coinage, then work your way up to coins of the Dark Ages and Medieval times, then beyond. It’s an interesting progression. If you can’t find books on the subject, contact a coin collector or coin shop. You could even search online under the topic GERMAN COINS and specify an era or year. It’s fun, informative, and there’s another factor: when you see a coin from your ancestral area, you might just feel a closeness to your ancestors—who knows, they might have held that very coin in their hands!

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## ABOUT CLUSTERS by Gerald Perschbacher

In G-SIG, a Cluster involves about a dozen people with a common interest.

Now that more people are signing with Clusters, it's timely to see what serves as motivation. Generally, G-SIG individuals want to learn WHERE their ancestors had lived in Germany, if RECORDS exist in those areas, and what historical EVENTS their ancestors faced. In a Cluster, participants can share discoveries and questions, then seek sources for answers. Even those living out of the St. Louis area can communicate as a Cluster member via e-mail, phone, or regular mail.

We're starting with four Clusters:

- + Prussian Cluster
- + Rhineland Cluster (includes the Palatinate & Hessian territories)
- + Bavarian Cluster
- + Saxon Cluster

More can be added as progress is made, but we'll "cut our teeth" on these four initial Clusters. Members of a Cluster are encouraged to limit their involvement to one year, then move to a different Cluster to enhance their research.

Lisa McLaughlin is willing to serve as the Cluster Coordinator. Please be patient if you already have made contact to be in a Cluster. We're working through the formative stage and want to do it correctly to maximize your results.

Want to join a Cluster? For now, simply send an e-mail to John Wittenberg at [jwittenberg@raiins.com](mailto:jwittenberg@raiins.com) or Hermann Eisele at [heisele@weissandassoc.com](mailto:heisele@weissandassoc.com). Just say, "I'd like to be involved in the \_\_\_\_\_ Cluster." Provide your **name, address, phone number, and e-mail address (if possible)**. If you would like to help coordinate the Cluster in its initial formation, please indicate. *State BRIEFLY:* 1) What area of Germany did your family come from? Be exact. 2) What approximate year did they come to America? 3) How long have you been researching your German lineage? 4) Can you read or understand German? If so, how well? 5) What are some of the questions you want to answer? If you don't use e-mail send a note to Gerald Perschbacher at 8868 Rock Forest Dr., St. Louis, MO 63123-1116.

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**ANOTHER GERMAN-AMERICAN CONNECTION**

GERMANY--Late last year, a six-year-old Volkswagen Golf hatchback once owned by the man who is now known as Pope Benedict XVI, sold for nearly a quarter million dollars due to some frantic and heavy bidding that exceeded eight million hits on eBay. The car had just 46,000 miles when Benjamin Halbe, a 21-year-old student, bought the vehicle from a VW dealer a year ago for less than \$13,000. He did not know it had been owned by the future pope until registration papers arrived after the purchase. Reportedly, a man in Texas made the winning bid and plans to display the car in a casino.

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**TIP--** If you visit a bookstore or sale featuring old books, don't forget to check the atlas or map section for items on Germany. Often some great resources can be found at a fraction of original price.

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**TRANSLATING ONLINE OPENS YOUR UNDERSTANDING**

If your understanding of Germany is “nicht zehr gut” (not very good), then consider two alternatives: find a friend or relative who can read German, or go online.

Below are two segments of text. The first is in German; the second is the online translation. There are various sites that can help with translating, but be wary of cost. Some are free, at least to a point. For example, the Alta Vista site offers a Babelfish translation service that can work well.

**So, let's check the German text:**

**GEORG Christoph Rudolph MÜNCH**, zuletzt Weinbauer in Augusta, MO (USA). Er studierte seit 7. November 1818 Theologie auf der Universität Gießen, war von Oktober 1828 bis 12. April 1837 Kaplan in Homberg a.d. Ohm. In erster Ehe war er vermählt mit Sophie geb. Soldan. Aus dieser Ehe war ein Kind hervorgegangen, nämlich eine am 12. Dezember 1834 zu Homberg totgeborene Tochter. Kurz darauf verstarb die erste Frau. Er entschloß sich, verstimmt über die politischen und kirchlichen Zustände in Hessen, jenseits des Meeres eine neue Heimat zu suchen.

**Now, let's see the online translation:**

**GEORGE Christoph Rudolph MUENCH**, last wine farmer in Augusta, MO (the USA). It studied 1837 Kaplan since 7 November 1818 theology on the University of pouring, was from October 1828 until 12 April in Homberg a.d. Ohm. In first marriage it was vermaehlt with Sophie geb. Soldan. From this marriage a child had followed, i.e. on 12 December 1834 to Homberg stillborn daughter. On it the first woman deceased briefly. It decided, detuned over the political and church conditions in Hessen to look for beyond the sea a new homeland.

OK, so it isn't perfect. But if you can muddle through a little German with a dictionary and know a bit about the language, you can do reasonably well. After a little cleaning of the text, your results can be very helpful. The steps are simple. Find a translation site, follow the directions, enter the text, copy or paste as needed, and print the results.

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## **BEING IN THE ARMY, HERE AND 'THERE'**

Lisa McLaughlin joined G-SIG with a sincere interest in ancestral research over a good portion of the past 20 years. According to Lisa, “Family lore says that the immigrants came to America ‘to escape Bismarck's draft’ -- I'd like to find out more about Bismarck's conscriptions, to test that theory.”

Interestingly, once her ancestor arrived in America, “he ended up in a local militia raised to protect Cincinnati from a threatened invasion of Rebels who were rumored to be massing on the other side of the Ohio River in Kentucky. That militia was then mustered into and out of the Union Army...later in order to award pension benefits. So if he was running from Bismarck, he got here and Lincoln handed him a rifle!”

A little research can probably determine the units of German heritage that were formed in that area during the Civil War. It's much like other German-American communities of that era. Germans came to the New World with high hopes of land ownership, freedom from strict regulations, and the possibility to succeed in a land that was spacious and unencumbered by deep-rooted traditions. Once they settled down, they did not want anyone to threaten their new life or its future. Hence, militia or short-term military units were formed to stop battles before they began, or to protect their new life through preemptive strikes of strategic significance.

*So it was in St. Louis...* as rumblings of civil war surfaced. German-American units were outfitted and officially established, some of which lasted a few months until the job was done. Some units were then merged with others or were given new mandates for longer service.

Understand that armies did not form back then as they do today. In the early 1860s, a man who raised funds to outfit, feed and equip a military unit and attracted volunteers to fight was often approved for leadership and service. He became an officer and his men held allegiance to their leader based on ideals and income (direct payment or spoils of war). Training was often crude and simple. The spirit of freedom and the excitement of war and victory were the driving forces for soldiers. Also, there were ways in which men did not have to serve. Others could be paid to take their place.

In Germany, serving in the army in the mid-1800s usually was mandatory. If a man did not wish to serve, his family could suffer the consequences in a heavy fine or worse. There also was the matter of disgracing the family by not serving.

*As Prussia was on the rise* earlier in the 1800s, men needed to serve the army, but there was also an unsettled fear in other German territories that neighboring nations could threaten many parts of Germany that had yet to be united to Prussia. For hundreds of years, Germany was the marching ground and battlefield for numerous engagements. In general, a young man feared his loss of freedom perhaps more than military action.

As for Bismarck, his rise on the national scene really took hold later than the American Civil War. Reluctantly Bismarck accepted the idea of uniting Germany. When he became Germany's Imperial Chancellor under Kaiser (Emperor) Wilhelm I of Prussia, Bismarck systematically strengthened Germany while isolating France. While he was not one to avoid saber rattling, he often maintained peace and Germany's position through negotiations as one of the great politicians of his era.

*So, did Lisa's ancestor really come to America* to avoid the draft? Possibly. But once here, he might have served willingly if he was willing to defend the prospect for peace and prosperity.

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## **THERE ARE MAPS...**

...that can unlock all sorts of historical insights and genealogical nuances. Just have to know where to find them.

Two places to look are the St. Louis Genealogical Society office and the St. Louis County Library main location on Lindbergh just south of Highway 40 (I-64). There are other places, to be sure, but let's center on these as examples.

The StLGS office has Pitzman's Atlas (1878) in reprinted form and recently on CD (both versions for sale). The maps show streets and neighborhoods, plus names of property owners. If your ancestors were in town in 1878, you might find some interesting details about their place of abode. Once you realize their exact neighborhood, you can check other books on the histories of certain neighborhoods to glean a sense of history.

In the main county library on Lindbergh, there are many original atlas books on select counties in America. More than a few have large German contingents. For example, I believe it is the 1901 atlas of St. Clair County, Illinois, that is in the collection, laminated and easy to check. Interestingly, most pieces of farmland have a name

connected. I've found my family in several locations. In fact, by comparing this atlas to an older one of the same county, I discovered that the initial farmland purchased my first ancestor to America was not kept in the family. Shortly after his death in 1870, the land was sold to the adjacent farmer to the north. My ancestor's son owned his own farm, a short distance away. The maps told a story!

Maps are great when comparisons can be made over various lengths of time. Maps also serve good purpose in locating our ancestors and seeing who their neighbors were—there is even a strong likelihood that some of those neighbors were relatives by marriage, or came to America on the same ship from the same part of Germany.

I've heard of Americans who made it a point to check bookshops while visiting in Germany. An old atlas doesn't sell for much in most cases, since it is out of date for present Germans. But it may hold significance to those who crave the study of ancestry and a bygone era. If you visit a bookstore or sale in America, also spend time in the foreign language section. That's where you might find some wonderful reference books and maps at reasonable prices.

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## **WHAT DID THEY THINK?**

At a given point in your genealogical studies, you'll probably come to a certain event or challenge that made an impact on your ancestors. You may very likely wonder, "*What did they think?*"

There are some traits that are inherited such as physical features. Perhaps you carry the nose of a certain ancestor, or the chin, or toes. We are a composite of genes and traits handed down through the years.

Similarly, you can expect your mental and social skills to reflect some of that gene pool, too. The question is, Which ancestral line do you reflect?

If you have the opportunity to meet distant relatives from Germany, or share pictures with them, check their features. In my family's case, there are striking resemblances to distant relatives in Germany, even though the gene pool has been separated for about 200 years. Yet, we share common traits: we are active in volunteerism, church work, and hands-on projects, to name three. There are also similarities in the way we think.

Temper that ability to think with a knowledge of the prior times and circumstances in Germany or here in America.

So if you wonder how one of your ancestors might have worked through a challenge many, many years ago, perhaps the best person to first ask is YOU.

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## **BOONE, DUDEN, GIESSEN & MISSOURI**

Some of the earliest German settlers in our area made their abodes in Warren County, Mo., to the west of greater St. Louis. Why? It was an attractive and conducive landscape able to handle light farming, good for wood as a source of building materials and fuel, and abounded in wild game for food.

Who blazed the way before the Germans? A report notes that in 1801 "Colonel Daniel Boone and his son-in-law, Flanders Calloway, and known then as Calloway's Post, located near the Missouri River, in the southeastern part of Warren County, 20 miles southeast of Warrenton, the county seat, 5 miles north of Washington, on the MP

Ry., 60 miles west of St. Louis, and one and one-half miles north of Marthasville Landing, on the Missouri River, the most convenient shipping point.” So much of the area was accessible, too, and early settlers noticed it.

Boone’s family and friends followed his lead. Then came Gottfried Duden, a gentleman farmer and transplant from Germany. He lived along Lake Creek from the fall of 1824 to the spring of 1827. His writings about Missouri became best sellers in Germany, and the international move was on—toward St. Louis and adjacent counties, since the city was realizing its role as Gateway to the West.

In the early 1830s, the Giessen Emmigration Society was formed in Giessen. Several hundred people signed on for the voyage to America. About half landed in Baltimore, half in New Orleans, and they regrouped in St. Louis, only to begin the process of disintegration as members sought their own fortunes. Among them was leader GEORGE Christoph Rudolph MUENCH, mentioned earlier in this FORUM.

If your ancestors came from Germany before 1860, they probably had been versed in the writings of Duden. So seek out his material (at least one book is in English) and you will get a feel for the times and challenges. Search for details about the Giessen society, and you will be enlightened, too, on those early voyages.

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

+ Barnes & Noble locations have been offering the complete works of the Brothers Grimm in special leather binding at less than \$30. The large book contains legends and “fairy tales” derived from the territory of the Counts of Hanau and therefore reflect the times and traditions of old Germany along and near the Rhine River. The Brothers Grimm came from Hanau.

+ Any ideas on current tapes, discs, or videos that help teach the German language? Share your knowledge and experiences on such items by submitting the details to the next G-SIG FORUM.

+ Seeking help in reading German? The answer may be closer than you think. Check with neighbors. Since there are many families with German connections in our greater St. Louis area (both sides of the river), some aunt or uncle or nephew may be able to help read German. Some neighbors may even maintain a contact in Germany. Then, there are colleges and universities that may have German exchange students who would be willing to help for a modest charge.

+ Have an item for *EXCHANGE!* ? You could see it here if you send it in!

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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., St. Louis, MO 63143.***

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