

G-SIG FORUM #18

...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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GERMAN CREATIVITY AND SERVICE!

Reported by Gerald Perschbacher

Often a little research uncovers Germans who came to America and made their mark in outstanding ways. Sometimes it was in big business. Sometimes it was in science or the arts. Sometimes it was in service to others.

Tom Vernier (tvernier@sebh.org) recently asked about the history of the Hospital Sisters in Belleville, Illinois. "In 1875, 20 sisters from the Hospital Sisters of Muenster, Germany, came by invitation of Bishop Baltes to the Diocese of Alton. Three of these sisters were assigned to Belleville where they eventually built St. Elizabeth's Hospital. That hospital continues to provide healthcare to the Belleville area and is the largest Catholic hospital south of Springfield, Illinois."

Tom's experience can be multiplied several times when it comes to Germans who settled in America and entered into special service to others in need. Orphanages, schools, hospitals, churches, and institutions of higher learning are several ways in which that was realized. Look around the Greater St. Louis area, past and present, and you will find evidences of this community spirit. It was not unique among Catholics, Lutherans, or the Reformed, but seems to be common simply on Germanic principles.

Perhaps it is genetic. Perhaps it is learned. The idea of Germans helping others in society can be traced to the tribes of ancient times, 2,000 years ago. What little is known of Germanic tribes indicates they were social, family-oriented, compassionate toward "their own," and many times willingly absorbed other tribes or sub-tribes that held ideals in common.

Back to Tom: "I am writing the history of the sisters in Belleville. By chance, is there any material...that might be beneficial in my research? At one time, this same order of sisters, the Hospital Sisters of the Third Order of St. Francis, operated the hospital in Washington, Missouri, which is in the St Louis Diocese. I am also interested in a German priest, Fr. Koenig, who was instrumental in helping to found St Mary's Hospital in East St Louis. Any possibility of help in my research?"

If you have any information for Tom, please let him know.

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WHERE IS THAT BIRTH CERTIFICATE?

Virginian Jim Schlake (Neatfam@aol.com) was frustrated. His search for a birth certificate for his ancestor (Henry Schlake, born Dec. 13, 1852, to parents Gottlieb and Dorothea Schlake) was not bearing results.

Pat von zur Muehlen of G-SIG offered a fact that many people have overlooked. She says, "Missouri did not institute birth certificates until 1910. An 1883 law regarding birth certificates was ignored because it did not *require* compliance and was pretty much ignored." Later, the law "was repealed and the issue was not again addressed until 1910. There are some records from this period because some folks did as the law requested." But this does not include ALL births.

In Jim's case, his ancestors arrived at New Orleans in 1849. He says the 1850 U.S. census noted Dorothea Schlaka in St. Louis, Ward 5. His great-grandfather was born in Missouri on Dec 13, 1852.

Pat suggests contacting "A Brief History of Vital Records in Missouri" at:

<http://www.sos.mo.gov/archives/resources/bdrecords.asp>

If you face a similar situation, don't search for a certificate if it does not exist!

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LEAVE THE PLANE?

By Gerald Perschbacher

If reports out of Germany hold true, don't expect to fly into Berlin's historic Tempelhof airport in October of 2008. It will be closed for renovation.

Tempelhof was the main landing site of the 1948-49 Berlin Airlift.

News of the pending closure was not taken easily. There was court action from 13 companies and airlines that use Tempelhof. But a Berlin court tossed out the objections. The general feeling was that the old airport should stay operational until a newer facility was constructed -- the Berlin-Brandenburg International Airport located in the city's eastern Schönefeld district. That airport should be completed by 2011.

What is envisioned as a partial answer to the transportation problem is the availability of the German National Railways.

Germany has prided itself on having a fine system of railways. Lines stretch to all areas through Europe, and with Germany centrally located, the rail system is kept active and in good condition.

A few years ago, my son Philip took a trip from Frankfurt-on-the-Main to Vienna, Austria. He was impressed with the train and its operation. It was comfortable and the German personnel were polite.

That was altered somewhat when the train crew changed at the Viennese boarder. While there was still some politeness, the air conditioning abruptly was halted. Windows were opened (in cars where that option existed), and the tracks did not seem to be in the same good condition as in Germany.

I experienced the German railway, also, and it is a nice means of mass transit. The confusing part is to find the correct loading area at the station. Since tickets can be

purchased at a vending machine, the human element may be missing. So when you take the train, ask around if you have questions. Or, read the signs. Either way, that's when a little German comes in handy.

I enjoyed seeing Germany from the rails almost as much as by car, boat, or airplane. Granted, some of the portions of towns are not new (trains have been around a long time), but the experience gives you a glimpse of Germany that many tourists miss.

If you like airport history, then I'll add that Tempelhof became an official airport in 1923. In fact, Lufthansa was founded there in 1926. Terminals were replaced in succeeding years. Then, in 1975, Tempelhof was basically superseded by Tegel Airport, which lies further outside of the city.

However, Tempelhof was constructed to be a landmark and a site of pride for Germans. I suppose that will never change for those who dream of past memories.

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A LEADER IN RENEWABLE ENERGY

It's the hottest topic in the news: the environment. In America, global warming has grabbed the attention of news writers and politicians, activists and promoters, school teachers and the general public.

The question being debated centers on the human element. How much of global warming is a result of man's industrialization, trade, shipping and personal transportation?

Earth's mean surface temperature has changed over the centuries. In Europe during the Medieval Ages, there was a warm pattern that prevailed, so large castles were constructed. Warmth in the winter was not a major issue if winters were reasonably mild.

As the climate shifted toward the harsh side, smaller buildings were constructed, and fireplaces became more important. Since wood fueled those fires, its use had to be regulated.

Leave it to the Europeans to sense the need for conservation. Your German ancestors probably lived under mandates from noblemen that regulated the gathering and burning of wood. In long-settled areas of Germany, such as the Rhineland, one was not to cut down a tree for the fire place without special permission of governing authorities. Even gathering sticks and twigs in the common forestland was forbidden without permission!

This resulted in an appreciation for nature and replenishing natural resources.

Now news reports say German companies are world leaders in renewable energies. The amount of German business in this sector had increased from 6 billion euros (\$7.9 billion) in 2006, a dramatic rise from 500 million euros in 2000.

Germans, in general, realize they are preserving their land for the future. This results in a clean, pleasant countryside and relatively manicured streets, even in big cities. If you wonder where the idea of "South St. Louis Scrubby Dutch" comes from, simply visit the central Rhine and points nearby. Germans in small villages take to the streets almost daily, to sweep small debris and keep their walkways looking attractive.

There are not many yards in the older portions of town and villages. The ancient format of the houses did not lend to this extravagance. Space was at a premium inside walled, defended cities and towns. This meant farmers who lived in town went out to the

fields each day for their living. Often they did not count many heads among their livestock, only enough to keep the family comfortably supplied with milk, eggs, and an occasional roast for special events.

Recycling was a common way of life in Germany and, in a major way, still is.

When Germans settled in America, succeeding generations were tempted to take the spacious countryside for granted. Owning more land meant having less time to keep the area looking neat and groomed. And so it was.

Soon industrialization catered to planned obsolescence and over abundance. Perhaps that's when much of the "old German way" was lost or compromised in the New World.

Today, it has been noted that a third of the hydroelectric installations throughout the world were made in Germany. Perhaps as many as every other windmill and every third solar cell were also made in Germany.

Maybe we can learn from our ancestors how to live joyously with nature. GP

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KNOW HOW MUCH TO TELL

In recent months, a woman had been searching for an answer via e-mail. It was about a family mystery. Years before, a relative told of a family secret, but died before it was revealed. She said the mystery haunted her father. The reason she was hoping for a quick revelation was due to the illness of her father. She wanted him "to know."

The search was on. E-mails were sent, documents obtained, information compiled, contacts made. An ancestor had been married twice, birth information was uncovered, along with the names and locations of other relatives.

Basically, this is what the researcher discovered.

When her great-grandmother gave birth to a daughter, the child went into someone else's home. Perhaps this was under a special arrangement, although there was some belief the child may have been "sold." The great-grandmother did not know this had happened until she returned home from giving birth at the hospital. Seeking a priest, he advised that she keep the matter quiet.

Now the descendant wonders, "Who was involved? What agencies? Was it legal? I know it wasn't moral."

The example brings several observations.

First, if you are digging deeply into family history, be ready for some sad or surprising information. The old joke was that people avoided tracing their lineage since they just KNEW there had to have been a horse thief in the family. Perhaps your family did not have a thief in its ranks, but expect to find something that isn't as pleasant as you might expect.

Second, realize your responsibility to current relatives and future generations. As you uncover the information, recognize the downside of letting a lot of people know it through electronic communication. Will the dissemination of family details create an embarrassment for your family, now or in years to come? Once the information is 'out there,' it may never be retracted or forgotten.

Third, excitement can get the best of researchers. Before you share with a wide circle of individuals, settle back and ponder your actions.

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VILLAGE FACTS ONLINE

By Gerald Perschbacher

Once you have the names of villages from whence your ancestor departed for the New World, you can try your hand on an Internet search.

Many German villages sustain Web sites and serve as a point of contact. Some sites translate German texts into English.

Here are two examples of Web search results. These are villages now in Hessen-Darmstadt. This is the translated text:

MOSBACH -- The first documentary mention of Mosbach took place in 828 (Charles the Great). MOSBACH, at that time, was mentioned as the seat of a "nun monastery." Beginning in the 13th Century (1200s) it was granted as a donation by the Count of Wertheim to the Johanniterorden (Order of St. John or Knights of Malta). The site grew in Bachgau (local region) by further donations and purchases. The Order of St. John became exclusive master of the village. Across from the Order House is the St. John's church (Johanneskirche), built by the Order around 1250. This site for the Order was led by an independent Komende (commander or Komptur, relating to Frankfurt). Over six centuries the fate of MOSBACH was determined by the Order. After the expropriation of the Order (secularization and disbanding in 1806) MOSBACH went first to the Dalbergstaat (Grand Duchy of Frankfurt), in 1815 went to Bavaria, and in 1817 became Hessian. MOSBACH has given up its former rural nature and today is purely a worker-living municipality. In 1977 it lost its independence as a village. Through regional reorganization it became part of the Municipality of Schaafheim. The Mayor of Schaafheim (Burgermeister) is its mayor, and a representative is elected to the city council.

SCHLIERBACH -- Schlierbach was first mentioned in documents in 770 in the Codex of the Monastery Lorsch. Already very early the wealthy Counts of Wertheim claimed the land. In 1218 the count gave St. Veitskapelle (the Chapel of St. Veits) in Schlierbach to the Mosbacher Johanniter Orden (Order of St. John in Mosbach). Schlierbach once had a residential castle, but its location and fate are not known. With Schaafheim the small village came to the Counts of Hanau and thus, over the centuries, the connection grew between the two villages. Both politically and religiously became very closely. Of very great importance were three mills in Schlierbach ("waiters –", "under" and "Road mill"). Today only a small part of the Schlierbach area is inhabited by farmers in agriculture actively. Many inhabitants commute daily as workers or employees into the surrounding industrial cities. Schlierbach became, as of Jan. 1, 1972, by border modifications, basically a part of Schaafheim.

It's capsule information but can carry some significant hints for further study. Be aware of name duplication. There are at least two Mosbachs in Gemany. The name basically means "a marshy area near the stream." Schlierbach means "muddy creek," which is interesting since some Germans from that village area settled in the Mud Creek area of St. Clair County, Ill.!

Note: A shortcut to searching for German cities, towns or villages is this format:
www.name of town.de . Example: www.mosbach.de

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

+ **Searching for the village** of Kasper (Casper) Alt (1787-1844) who came to St. Louis, then Belleville, Ill., via New Orleans on Dec. 17, 1839, on the *Tamenend* from Liverpool. He had an English wife (Anaria Maria); children Maria, Johannas, Catherine, Henrich, and Maris (sic) Emma were with him. From Hessen-Darmstadt (Lautenbach?). Call Georgia Munro at (970) 242-2491 or write: 350 Orchard Ave., Grand Junction, CO 81501.

+ **LEADS: Check the book fairs!** This is the season for a plethora of new and used books to be offered for sale at fairs (some of which benefit charities and libraries). Check notices for announcements of pending sales. Also, check for estate sales and auctions. If you can ask in advance, contact officials and find out if books will be offered that can help you understand Germany, European history, the language, geography, and genealogy.

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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: Attn: G-SIG, #4 Sunnen Dr., Suite 140, St. Louis, MO 63143

