

G-SIG FORUM #31

...from the German Special Interest Group. G-SIG is an effort of the St. Louis Genealogical Society (www.stlgs.org/) and the German American Heritage Society, St. Louis, Mo. (www.gahs-stlouis.org).

This communication is a forum for genealogical, educational, and historical 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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PLANTING AND NURTURING...

By Gerald Perschbacher

Michael Sedwick has an interest in German heritage.

When Lansing Hecker shared that news, I took notice. Lansing heads the German American Heritage Society (GAHS) and is honorary consul of the Federal Republic of Germany. Besides his many duties related to German connections, he is also active in G-SIG and has attended with regularity.

Lansing indicated that the young man was interested in “matters Germanic.” He had served as an intern at GAHS for “community service credit towards his high school graduation.” Next, Herr Sedwick der Jung (the young) turned his interest toward the St. Louis Genealogical Society. Another great choice!

Then he was invited to attend a Gathering of G-SIG. Who knows what all this will bring!

In my book, I hope it brings a cordial introduction that will develop into a life-long interest. Lansing adds, “As one of his study topics, he has been reading about the German Special Interest Group. His grandmother is German and has been helping him with his family's genealogy.”

Wunderbar!

There's more. We have learned that Herr Sedwick is a talented linguist, commanding four languages including German. Lansing points out that this young man will be one of a very select few students to embark on a your-long International Parliamentary Scholarship co-sponsored by the U.S. Congress and the German Bundestag.

Learning German heritage can be something into which you are born or something you discover later in life. In my case, I was raised in Germanic manners and principles without realizing it. This became clear when I started to travel extensively beginning 30 years ago. I did not realize how "German" South St. Louis was until I compared it against other American cities I visited.

My first trip to Germany cinched my appreciation of this natural heritage. Having traveled through a good portion of Germany, I can say that the current German way of life in morals, manners, and ideals is reflective of the way South St. Louis had been in the 1950s and early 1960s, in every good sense.

If you grew up in Germanic neighborhoods in North St. Louis, I think the same holds true.

Look around at many of the old communities dotting the banks of the Mississippi River and the Missouri River. Examine the nearby communities in Illinois -- more of the same, in many respects. Maybe the idea of a "New Germany" proposed by early settlers in the first half of the 1800s has been realized to a special degree.

Young Herr Sedwick is probably on an advanced track in this realization. Maybe you are, too. Even if you have a late appreciation for "matters German," you can still learn – and enjoy – as long as your mind functions like it should.

One other thought: Encourage your young family members to take a sincere interest in their German heritage. Every family needs at least one serious researcher who serves as the anchor of information while the family ages and advances. It is likely that some day others in the family will seek out that expertise in their midst. So plant that seed-of-an-idea as soon as possible. Then water and nurture it, the best you can.

That's what Michael Sedwick's grandmother is doing. You can, too.



Idea: If you have an old document reflecting your German heritage, make copies and give them to others in your family. This will hedge against loss of information and may trigger a new interest!



READ ABOUT THE JEWS IN GERMANY

G-SIG's ever cordial and enthusiastic Pat von zur Muehlen (patvonzurm@msn.com) is seeking books relaying the Jewish history in Germany. She is to be congratulated. Here's why.

For many centuries, Jewish history has been interwoven with German history. It started nearly 2,000 years ago as German tribes and Jewish families migrated and settled in Western Europe. While aspects of faith and tradition often were separately maintained, there were daily aspects that merged and were woven into the fabric of German life. During World War Two, some Germans did not believe they had any part of Jewish lineage until officials methodically traced their heritage.

To a good number of people, being "German" doesn't mean being German in blood as much as in tradition and place of birth. That concept is similar to people of varied nationalities claiming to be Americans by reason of birth or choice. After all, there is really no "American bloodline" by birth (even native tribes in America migrated here).

If you want to garner a wider picture of German heritage and history, read about the people who called Germany home. This would include Jews, Slavs, Bohemians, and others. In centuries past, Eastern Germany logically had more of a representation of Eastern European tribes and cultures. There are French, Burgundian, and Flemish influences, too, farther west. Realize that some of these bloodlines mingled with German tribal lines, so that your heritage may, indeed, be a special blend.

Perhaps the Jews held the most unique position among non-Germanic peoples in Germany. Some experts say that they clustered among friends and family, fostered their language and traditions, and integrated into German society more on a voluntary level than most others; although that's a tough issue to debate in this space. In ages past, Jews had a track record against them of not being allowed to own German property. So many took to special crafts or peddling to earn a livelihood. The Jewish influence in banking and finance has been credited by certain historians as the direct result of not being land owners. Jewish people simply used their monetary resources for loans.

If you are seeking books on the Jewish influence in German history, consider the following approach.

There are several books printed over the years that showcase the subject. A Web search or a visit to a good library may lead you to discover the titles and availability.

Watch for book fairs this season. There are often a variety of books that can reflect insights on the subject. The Jewish Community Center in suburban St. Louis usually holds a book fair--so stay on the alert.

Don't overlook the less obvious books, either. In a local mall featuring antiques, I came across a large, one-volume book printed in the 1960s. Used and in great condition, it cost \$15. It was an encyclopedic history of the Jews. I looked up references to Germany, Frankfurt, Mainz, and major events plus localities. Much information was found. The book even showed maps of Jewish sectors dating to the 1500s in select German cities. It commented on the influence and presence of Jews in Germany as far back as a thousand years.

Since very few books have all the answers on a given subject, check for books on the history of Jews in Europe and look for a section on Germany. Or check a book on the history of Germany and see how many references to Jews are indexed in back. You might find some intriguing information by searching!

Similar books are “out there” relating to the Slavs, Wends, and others who had significant connections to Germany. GP



FINDING THAT EVASIVE VILLAGE

G-SIG's Gordon Seyffert (gordonseyffert@mac.com) shares a discovery. It dealt with locating an obscure place in Saxony. He credits the ideas to John Humprey, a research expert on genealogy.

For example, let's say you are aiming to find a tiny place in Saxony. Names change over the years. Maps come and go. Errors may be perpetuated from old maps.

First, it's helpful to do a word study of the town's name. It also is worthwhile to connect with the German mailing lists found through Genealogy.net (<http://list.genealogy.net/mailman/listinfo>). Even if you don't read German, you can draw some associations and conclusions by investigating and using brainpower. You might even connect with other German Web sites.

Gordon points out that help came through SACHSEN-L (<http://hov.isgv.de/alleorte/>). Watch for notations that old names have been changed.

Since maps change, some researchers have had marvelous success with http://deutschefotothek.de/?MEDIA_KARTEN#home . They find the time period during which their ancestor departed Germany and search for the village name on a map of that vintage.”

Gordon concludes, “I should note that a general article on ‘Finding a “lost” German village’ is to be found in the January-February-March 1998 issue of *Der Blumenbaum*. This publication also has an article on ‘German Research on the Internet’ in the July-August-September 2004 issue. It’s a four-page article.”

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FUN AND EDUCATIONAL!

Want to learn German pronunciation? Try this site—type in the words, click the spot, and the on-screen character will speak the words! <http://www.oddcast.com/home/demos/tts/frameset.php?frame1=talk>

What are the benefits? It’s fun. It’s an educational way to learn German pronunciation. It’s truly fascinating, so try your hand at the site.

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Germans in Mexico?

John Maurath (maurath1@juno.com) was surprised to learn of German influence in Mexico! He heard Mexicans speaking a German dialect and sought the answer. Indeed, Germans had settled there. Some still hold to the German language and cannot speak Spanish.

John tried Wikipedia. In a nutshell, these were the results: Germans came to Mexico in the mid to late 1800s. Most settled in Mexico City and Puebla. There are German descendants in the states of Chihuahua and Durango. Bavarians came from their Texas settlement in Austin County in the 1830s and fell under Mexican rule. Roman Catholic Germans (who sided with Mexico) left Texas and moved south after 1846. Later, German farmers and craftsmen came from Hamburg. Interestingly, Alexander von Humboldt school in Mexico City is the largest German school outside Germany.



EXCHANGE! G-SIG comments, ideas, & requests:

+ **Karl Daubel** (KDAUBEL@aol.com): Free downloads of "The German Element in the United States" (1909) by Albert B. Faust that you read about in the *Forum*. *This is the link to Volume I:*
<http://books.google.com/books?id=4xgOAAAAIAAJ&pg=PR9-IA1&dq=%22The+German+Element+in+the+United+States%22+++%22Volume+1%22&lr=&ie=ISO-8859-1#PPR5,M1>

This is the link for Volume II:
<http://books.google.com/books?id=3yPK62Gsg6kC&printsec=frontcover&dq=The+German+Element+in+the+United+States&ie=ISO-8859-1>

+ **Bob Braun** (braun.robert@sbcglobal.net): Interested in Braun, Welkener, Messerschmitt, and Kunz families who started arriving in St. Louis (Benton Park/Soulard) in the mid 1830s; my wife's family (Ortmann, Sellenrich) in St. Louis County (Creve Coeur) around the same time.

+ **Elsa Amelung Logan** (elsamelog@mindspring.com): is seeking information about the records in Thedinghausen, Germany. If anyone in G-SIG has insights, please let her know.

+ **Gloria Cingano** (gcingano@sbcglobal.net): Keller family; from what part of Switzerland? Ship manifest (1847) from the Bark Wheaton shows Jacob Keller and Marie/Mary (Neff/Nef/Naef) Keller of Switzerland arriving in New Orleans. How to narrow my search in Switzerland? Are there any groups that maintain records of origination?



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. Not yet on the e-mail list for the G-SIG FORUM? Write to patvonzurm@msn.com . (Note: All copyright privileges for this FORUM are reserved by the compiler; no item is to be duplicated or distributed without permission.)



Have great ideas for the G-SIG FORUM? Submit your material to persch3@hotmail.com or mail it to: StLGS, Attn: G-SIG, #4 Sunnen Dr., Suite 140, St. Louis, MO 63143.