

G-SIG FORUM #32

...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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NOT ALONE!

By Gerald Perschbacher

“I appreciate the G-SIG newsletter you put together every month. Though I belong to my local genealogical society here in California I know of very few members who are interested in researching their German ancestry,” says Marilyn Gesch (marilyn.gesch@sbcglobal.net). “So it is nice to know there are others who are actively working on it and have good insights to share.”

And share, they do! This is the strength behind the G-SIG FORUM as it keeps literally hundreds of people in touch on “things Germanic” relating to research and genealogy. Clusters offer other examples of sharing.

Marilyn is wrestling with Hessian (Hessen) research. So I will focus on that topic in a later edition, plus offer some general applications to help advance research in other regions.

Marilyn is not alone. Neither are you! There is probably a handful (or more) of G-SIG participants who share in the same passion you have for a specific topic or area or even lineage. It’s simply a matter of finding them and “connecting.” One way to do that is to use the free notice section in each FORUM (called *Exchange!*)



REMINDER... Clusters center on specific areas of Germany and offer an opportunity for people of similar interests to pool ideas and support each other in the search for facts. If you have an interest in joining a Cluster, then contact:

Lisa McLaughlin LMcLaughlin@Polsinelli.com

or

Kathleen Wurth kathyinwashington@hotmail.com



SEEK AND FIND

Judith Benton-Klinger (hawksridge@centurytel.net) is proud of the German School Museum in Hermann, Mo.--and justifiably so! See what I mean: visit the Web site at www.HistoricHermann.com. She says, "We have a very special museum that includes six rooms of early immigrant artifacts and history." The museum is located at 312 Schiller Street, Hermann, Mo. (phone: (573)486-2017.

Here is my suggestion: take time to seek out museums of this type. Sometimes they offer insights and artifacts that seldom are seen in regional museums. Items from daily living often are displayed and explained. Volunteers and experts are more willing to take time to explain the displays, thus enhancing your knowledge.

On my third research trip to Germany, I happened to find a private museum. It was one man's accumulation of items from daily life in his village along the Mosel River. He had homemade signs (in German) that explained seldom-seen items. Viewing the material helped me to understand how my ancestors lived. He also was proud of a very interesting fossil collection. This man, now in his 80s, had spent the majority of his life in securing these items from all over the world. They were kept in a protected area adjacent to his house in an old part of the village. I don't know what will happen to his collection when he passes away, but it certainly was intriguing to see the displays and to converse with him. Had I not spent time at his place, I would have missed an opportunity for enlightenment.

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WONDER WHAT YOU MISSED? Past editions of G-SIG FORUM are available online at the StLGS Web site link: <http://www.stlgs.org/meetSIGGerman.aspx>

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PAYING THE PRICE IN EUROS

One of our G-SIG participants, named Carl, recently wrote: “I have a problem with an archive in Hannover. They will only accept Euros for payment -- no checks or credit cards, no U.S. dollars, only Euros. What's the best way to send Euros?”

My reply: “Simply contact a local bank that handles currency exchange and purchase some Euros, then place them safely into an inner envelope and mail them overseas.” I know it’s not the safest method, but it works. If the amount is very modest, you run low risk.

You could send a letter at the same time, stating that the Euros had been sent, and how. This would add a safety measure. If two people knew the money was received, there would be less temptation, if you get my drift. Really, there is little danger of such dishonesty in archives of Germany. Most archivists are extremely honest as part of their job.

When the dollar was stronger, U.S. currency was wanted even more, since its fluctuation could increase in value by the time it was received in Europe. If you want to know how long it takes for a regular mailing to be delivered in Germany, figure five to eight days.

If you have a contact overseas whom you know and trust, you could send the cash (or Euros) to that person for delivery, if they accepted the task.

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CHECKING CASTLES...

Several G-SIG participants have been asking about German castles and if research records can be referenced there. Here are my observations.

Generally, the type of records kept in castles would have been files pertaining to the noble family of the site and the operation of the land which that family owned. Case in point: the southern Count of Hanau who lived in Babenhausen. His files were handled by a secretary and Amtmann (administrator). As time went on, those files were retained by the Amtmann in his administration building (and house) near the castle but not inside the castle. Those files eventually went to the State Archives in Darmstadt, and I examined many of them on my recent trip. These include signed documents by the various counts over the years, and correspondence with other nobles.

Among papers kept by the administrator were tax records and protocol transactions (legal matters). These types of files list names of individuals who were levied fines, bought land, took people to court, or were brought to court by others.

Since the nobleman was concerned about his own private matters and paid the Amtmann and a few others to handle daily operational causes, castles usually retained only the necessary papers and archives of the noble family. Since some of those bloodlines died off or had their lands combined via marriage, the papers often shifted to other castles or were destroyed, unless someone in the successor family felt inclined toward preservation. Files were destroyed in wars, too. So when it comes to genealogical study, castles usually will not be the place to check.

One more explanation: know the difference between castles. The defensive castle (which we often picture) has stout walls and is a fortress. This is really a *Burg* in the German sense. There are residential castles, too, which may not have a wall. Some are strong and tall, others are relatively small but ornate. The term for such a place is *Schloss* (our definition of palace).

If a *Schloss* was converted into an administrative center, then there might be some documents from the Amtmann that were archived. But this is still a long shot.

Bear in mind one more thing: A *Schloss* often was a good target for bombers during World War Two and for armies on the march over the centuries. Many were put to the torch. Many *Burgs* were also destroyed by armies. Papers were easily incinerated.

Better than looking for documents in a castle, I suggest finding the Amtmann's house or the *Rathaus* (sometimes spelled Radhaus). Many local files are retained in village or town archives and the church (legal stipulations helped this to happen). Files may be retained in the current *Kreis* (county) and may be elsewhere than in the Rathaus. If your family's village does not have archives, then check to see where the center for the *Kreis* is located. Chances are good that there will be papers preserved from nearby villages.

A State Archives is the next best place to check. In Darmstadt, on my recent visit, I checked two locations in the State Archives. (1) the reference section and the (2) genealogical section. The reference section was a large room with a photocopier and a microfilm reader. When you selected documents to view, these were retrieved for your use that day. I examined documents dating to the 1400s. While waiting for those to arrive at my table, I visited the genealogical section. It was a cramped two-room area adjacent to the reference section. I asked if there was a file on my surname. Indeed, there was! At 15 cents (Euro) I copied a multitude of papers, some of which were letters from Americans, asking about their lineage. Others were German documents. The cost to make copies at the reference section was about five times higher.

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

+ **The Rev. Dr. Bryan Christian Peistrup** of St. Louis (bcpeistrup@yahoo.com) is researching German Immigrant Joseph H. Peistrup, married Johanna M. Ehlers (April 1897) in Washington, Mo., at St. Francis Borgia Church. Unsure of family connections to others named Peistrup. Contact the researcher for more details.

+ **carl492@charter.net** writes: "Johann Adam landed in St. Louis in 1862...he was 62 at that time and had a 20-year-old son, Johann

Adam, my great-grandfather. One of his daughters is my dad's mother. Know almost nothing about the rest of the family. Anyone in St. Louis willing to research this family for me? Willing to pay a reasonable amount for research.”

+ **Are there any German organizations** that have a library and are looking for books printed in German? John Maurath would like to know. If you have helpful information, contact: maurath1@juno.com

+ **Where I can find microfilm** for Protestant church records for the former state of Hesse-Kassel, 1800-1840? I cannot find any in the LDS Library. From: Dave Pardoe (dhpardoe@verizon.net).

+ **Josephine Leach of Denton, Texas**, (Jjpleach@aol.com) seeks specialists in German surname research (preferably English speaking). “My maiden name is Poneleit (sometimes spelled Ponelite). My grandfather Robert and his two brothers Carl and Frank came to the U.S. from East Prussia in the late 1880s. They apparently passed through Collinsville, Ill., and worked in mining.”

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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. 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.)

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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.