

G-SIG FORUM #35

...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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THROUGH HAMBURG

From 1850 to 1939, about 5.2 million European emigrants left Hamburg, headed for the New World. This fact is emphasized at "BallinStadt - Emigrant World Hamburg," which opened to the public in July of 2007. Visitors come to Hamburg to trace their ancestral past. You can find out more by checking: The Week in Germany (info@germany.info).

“Hamburg has the world's most extensive emigration records: There are 550 ship's manifests, preciously stored in a Hamburg City Hall cellar, which contain the names of 5 million passengers who departed for the US, Canada and Latin America in the early 1900s. The museum's research center allows visitors the chance to search the old passenger lists and access the world's largest genealogical database. Recently, Hamburg has still served as a main departure point for 150,000 people per year. Slavic emigrants swelled the roads to Hamburg less than a hundred years ago, seeking a fresh start overseas,” says the site.

In reviewing the site, I give it high marks. If you want to keep learning about Germany's past and present, get on the automatic list.

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THE POSSIBLE MEANING OF 'von der'

Walter's been advancing his knowledge of ancestry by communicating with G-SIG participants at GermanSpecialinterest@yahoogroups.com. It's a marvelous way to quickly share ideas and challenges. I won't reveal all the details of his search, except to say that G-SIG participants are quite willing to help. Walter's response to this assistance has been wonderful.

I'll share a few insights, since these can relate to a wide audience. Walter provided his ancestor's name, but said it was followed by "von der Jacobsmuehle."

This was probably a location. "Von der" means "of the" or "from the" and the name really means: Jacob's Mill. People with this "name" may have lived near (or worked at) a mill named after Jacob. When a person left that area, he was known as the one from that site.

My suggestion: Do a search for Jacobsmuehle to see if there is any notable site still in Germany that used this name. Contact officials via e-mail in Hanover to see if they have any insights on Jacobsmuehle.

Does the word "von" mean there was nobility in a person's lineage? My next comment quickly followed.

Some Americans carry the word "von" as part of their name. When they visit Germany and say that they think their name indicates a noble origin, Germans tell them, "If you had nobility in your line, you would have known it already." Lists of noble families are registered. These are official lists that are carefully (and legally) protected. Nobility very, very, very seldom is a matter of discovery, despite what some "ancestral searches" may tell you.

Many names seem to indicate noble status (Herzog, for example). However, people who served a duke, count, or other nobleman often were referenced as his manservant, maidservant, or field hand. Thus they were given the surname since they had worked at the noble house. The name became a locator, not an indicator of nobility.

I have an ancestor listed as “von Schlierbach.” It merely means he came from the village by that name.

People who have surnames that are translated as “mill” may have an interesting background. Old mills often were owned or administered via the noble family of an area. There was taxation that came from use of the mill, and the nobleman wanted his share. Administrators worked for the noble family, and it is possible an ancestor held a position. But this is just conjecture until documentation is found.

Sometimes researchers never find a single document or listing that answers their ancestral questions. In those cases, various items of evidence could point to a certain direction and might help form a conclusion. Accumulating such evidence can be helpful. GP

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IS IT GERMAN? THINK AGAIN...

Learn a little about other languages that may have been used in old Germany. French, Flemish, and Dutch are three examples. Slavic languages may have had an influence, too (with names ending in -- *nick*). German families living in or near these language areas may have had their German names altered by those languages, or perhaps had their names derived from those tongues. Don't forget that names may also be derived from letters in the Jewish alphabet. Why? Jews were late in taking surnames. After 1500 or so, if Jews in a city did not have a surname, they were given one by officials for taxation and civil records. If Jews preferred to pick a letter of their alphabet, so be it. Also, a man who was grey-headed might have been called Weis (white) and a man with black hair may have been given the surname Schwarz (black). A peddler who sold shoes might have been called Schuman. Know a little about those other languages.

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GERMANS IN OLD NEWSPAPERS...

Thanks to John Maurath and the Missouri Civil War Museum, we've uncovered some interesting old news articles relating to Germans. I'll condense some of the findings.

* An article in the *Wheeling Register*, dated May 3, 1881, included a report from the Secretary of the Immigration Society of St. Louis. While in Hamburg, he visited the immigration bureau. The authorities in Berlin “are bewildered at the extraordinary and unprecedented exodus taking place this year.” To underline the rise in travel to America, he noted the number of emigrants in the first quarter of 1880 was 7,707. For the first quarter in 1881, the total was 24,441. “Every steamer of the Hamburg-American line leaving the port for the next five months is contracted....” Extra ships were added. People stood in ship ticket lines that stretched a half block. Most were “the better class of laborers” and included merchants and clerks. These were not poor people, but after then sold property and bought tickets for America, plus paid to travel inland and settled down, it was a costly venture.

* Gotthold Langer of St. Louis received patents for a horseless carriage. A contraption based on his design was built, evidently for use in New York City. The vehicle looked like a fancy enclosed coach minus horses, and tall rear wheels nearly six feet high, which had an opening in the center that served as the entry to the coach. (*St. Louis Republic*, March 6, 1897).

* On July 1, 1897, this report appeared in the *St. Louis Republic*: “According to John Stephenson of the German-American Motor Wagon Company, there will be several horseless vehicles in operation on the streets of St. Louis within the next 10 days.” He predicted that within three years, the horse would become a curiosity on the streets of St. Louis. A horseless carriage weighed around 500 pounds and could run 100 miles on a gallon of gasoline. Its full speed was 15 miles an hour. While motorized transport was slow in coming to America, Germany was already operating an omnibus line of gasoline vehicles, a round trip to various cities costing only a dime.

* The *Morning Herald* for September 7, 1903, reported that Dr. Theodore Lewald, Imperial German commissioner, “has obtained a large space in the Transportation Palace at the World’s Fair at St. Louis and the German automobile builders will make a complete exhibit of all their vehicles.”

* Lastly, the *Idaho Daily Statesman* for October 7, 1904, told of German Day at the World’s Fair in St. Louis that took place the day before. They commemorated what they believed to be the first landing of Germans on American soil on October 6, 1673 (*however, historians have reverted that conclusion back to the early 1600s due to evidence of German-made articles*

in old settlements). Among German honorees present was Carl Schurz, who had served in the President's Cabinet in Washington, D.C. Baron von Sternberg told the crowd, "America owes her astonishing rise in a large measure to German virtues, as frequently announced from the lips of America's foremost men."

* German connections with cars continue to the present. John Maurath's father "built stock cars in the Early 1960s. In the 1980s, he got into silver crown race cars (one step Below an Indy car), and if his health had held out, he would have gotten into Indy cars and NASCAR. There's not doubt he would have been one of the pioneers of this area for NASCAR. He knew Rusty Wallace and family, the Earnhardt's and others."

How many people do you know who have (or had) German surnames and worked at car factories in the St. Louis area?

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

+ **Pat von zur Muehlen** encourages G-SIG researchers to check online at <http://home.foni.net/~adelsforschung/index5.htm> The Web site encourages e-mail correspondence. You may write in English, the response will be in German. The site offers links to two online translation tools.

+ **G-SIG Clusters** are "where the action is"! Meet and communicate with others who have similar aims in research and information. Learn from them. Share your successes. For details on existing Clusters, or to explore the formation of a new Cluster, contact Lisa at lmclaughlin@polsinelli.com) or Kathy at kathyinwashington@hotmail.com).

+ **The Rev. Marvin Huggins** (mhuggins@lutheranhistory.org) made a noteworthy discovery in the holdings of Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis. The collection has diaries from the Civil War years that contain entries relating to the attacks by "Bushwackers" on a German community.

+ **Eric von Dorster** (evondorster@wanadoo.fr) seeks the grave of his great-grandfather, Carl Dorster (a German born in Riga in 1854). He was baptized Lutheran; died in Anniston, Alabama, March 23, 1923; wife Clara sent his body to St. Louis for burial.

+ **Chris at** ludachrisw@sbcglobal.net is looking for information on St. Ann's orphanage during the 1940s. "My mom was one of those that were given up for some reason or another. Her real name was Bernadine Leingang. Her birth mother was full-blood German...and came from Germany. Her natural father was in the military but I am not sure from which country (U.S. or Germany)."

+ **Byron Sherfy** (mbsherfy@charter.net) is digging for details about his ancestors (came from Nuerenberg, Germany, in the late 1780s). "The spelling of our name at that time was Scherffig. There are numerous variations of that name today. My grandfather settled in Alhambra, Illinois, where he was a sharecropper." Some of his family is buried at Harris Cemetery, not far from the farm where my grandfather worked."

+ **Looking for ancestral towns** in Europe before World War I?
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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.

