

G-SIG FORUM #5

This is the fifth 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.

This communication is 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, please submit your information in condensed form for the *EXCHANGE!* section which appears at the end (limit 50 words). *EXCHANGE!* notices run only once, but you may freshen the notice and resubmit. We reserve the privilege to shorten and edit. Send your *EXCHANGE!* submission to persch3@hotmail.com .

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SIEGEL WAS HARDLY TYPICAL

When G-SIG FORUM #4 came to Patricia von zur Muehlen, she obtained extra information about the rebellious “Forty-Eighters” who left Germany for America due to political and social unrest in 1848, part of which they supposedly had fomented. Let’s take a condensed look at that situation, which may have had a bearing on your family.

That rebellion was “calmed” by the nobility and politicians in power. Franz Siegel was a “hot shot,” so the story goes. Yet, he made an impact on America. There is a statue dedicated to his memory in Forest Park opposite the Confederate Monument.

Pat’s former husband, Joachim von zur Muehlen, was born in Berlin and came to St. Louis at age 16. So he heard of the “Forty-Eighters” from both sides of the ocean.

He noted that Franz Siegel was truly a German revolutionary who took up the cause against slavery once he came to the New World. Siegel was influential in the German community. Since Siegel had military experience in Europe, he became a general for the Union and raised troops. Because he made blunders in 1861 at the Battle of Wilson's Creek near Springfield, Mo., and another blunder at the battle of Bull Run, his future was in jeopardy. Grant wanted to fire him, but Lincoln wished to maintain the support of Americans with German heritage.

To add to our knowledge, here is more information I gleaned as G-SIG Group Leader: Siegel was born in Sinsheim, Baden, Germany, in 1824. He graduated from the Karlsruhe Military Academy. Interestingly, he retired from the German Army in 1847 and immediately entered politics as a radical. He became an officer in the army of Baden and led revolutionary forces. After Prussian suppression, Siegel fled to Switzerland, then to England, Italy and France. He came to America in 1852.

In 1857, Siegel settled in St. Louis and was professor of mathematics, American history and French at the American Institute. He was among the first resettled Germans to vocally support the Union cause in 1861.

If your German ancestor was in St. Louis in 1861 and was of the right age to serve in the military, he might have been among the force Siegel led under Brigadier General Nathaniel Lyon as they captured the Confederate Camp Jackson in St. Louis.

(By the way, Pat von zur Muehlen sends the e-mail G-SIG FORUM your way!)

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INTERESTING--The Federal Republic of Germany, founded in 1949, chose black, red and gold for its colors to show that it sees itself in continuity with the Forty-Eighters' struggle for German freedom and unity, about a hundred years previous!

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WAS YOUR ANCESTOR REALLY PRUSSIAN?

by Gerald Perschbacher

If you hear someone say, "My great-great grandfather was Prussian," don't take it at face value. Investigate the location of the village and the time the ancestor departure from Germany.

As noted in G-SIG FORUM #1, the name Prussia was derived from an ancient non-Germanic tribe that had lived in the southeastern Baltic region. As Germans moved eastward, especially in the 1200s and after, the original Prussians disbursed.

In the 12th century, Prussia was governed by the Teutonic Knights as a small area along the Baltic Sea. The western border was the Vistula River in current Poland. In the 15th century, it was difficult to even find the word "Prussia" on a map of Central or Eastern Europe. However, the territory of Brandenburg was expanding.

Yet, the word Prussia continued to be applied loosely to that territory. At the heart of eastward expansion was the territory of Brandenburg. Between the advance of that territory and the Teutonic Knights, Prussia grew to encompass most of what became known as Germany.

Other territories were absorbed by early expansion—such as Neumark in 1455 and Eastern Pomerania plus Magdeburg in 1648. As eastern expansion continued, Prussia was partitioned into four parts: East Prussia (1618), West Prussia (1772), South Prussia (1793) and New East Prussia (1795). Silesia, at the southern edge, became part of Brandenburg's expansion in 1740, and New Silesia followed in 1795. Coastal East Friesland, located northwest of Bremen, was claimed by Brandenburg-Prussia in 1744. Brandenburg's foremost city was Berlin.

Find a good historical atlas with old borders of Germany over the centuries, and you'll have a deeper understanding of what I am saying.

**FIND A GOOD
HISTORICAL
ATLAS..**

During the wars with Napoleon and after victory in 1815, the prevailing name for the expanding region was simply Prussia. Brandenburg became known as a section of the whole. By 1866, more lands were incorporated into Prussia: Schleswig-Holstein, Posen, Lausitz, Altmark, Hannover, Westphalia, the Rhine Province, and others.

What developed was the German *Zollverein* (customs union). The goal was to eliminate tariff barriers that were a holdover from medieval practice in which taxation and barriers inhibited trade between states.

Leading the movement was Prussia, in which internal customs were removed in 1818. In 1834 the union expanded southward and westward, becoming the German *Zollverein* after a series of small unions merged into it. What resulted was a uniform tariff against non-members. When trade took place with a foreign land, a levy was collected at the border. This was shared proportionately with member states in the union.

As a result, a federal council was formed. It became the forerunner of a centralized administration. Prussia was very influential in the council's operation. When the nation of Germany was formed in 1871, the rules and regulations passed into the new administrative structure.

Let's trace the advance of the *Zollverein*. In 1819, that union mainly included the areas controlled by Prussia. Anhalt was added in 1828. Portions of the Hessen lands were added in 1828 with the remainder in 1831. Brunswick came into the union in 1841. In 1833, Wurtemberg, Bavaria, and lower portions of Saxony were added. Baden came over in 1835, as did the free city of Frankfurt on the Main. Nassau entered in 1836. Alsace-Lorraine was admitted in 1871. Even Luxembourg had been included in 1842.

So, when someone says their ancestor came from Prussia, ask when they had come and where they had lived. Then you can tell if the advance of Prussia truly had reached them by that time.

Evidently, many northern families liked to be called Prussian. Central and southern Germans did not appreciate the term nearly as much. Still, the reputation for Prussia was admired by many. It embodied strength, stamina, determination, and military success. Since it was a seasoned Prussian military that led the nation in two world wars, by 1945 the good reputation of "Prussian-*anything*" was tarnished.

Today, I can't even find the term on a current map of Germany or Europe.

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HISTORY IN A NAME!

"Both Beam and Dice are German-American names, even if we do not easily identify them with Boehm and Theiss," said George F. Jones in his book, *German-American Names* (2nd edition, Genealogical Publishing Co., Inc., 1001 N. Clavert Street, Baltimore, MD 21202; available through bookstores).

I was so impressed with the comments by Author Jones that I wrote to him several times, seeking an understanding of German surnames. Between the book and his replies, I discovered some interesting points.

While "Bach" means brook, it "was often a shortened form of a compound name...examples being Auerbach, Bacher, Bachmann, and Rauschbach. In Pennsylvania the name Bach and its compounds are often written as Baugh because the English scribes knew the sound *ch* only in Scots names. These still retained the sound and indicated it with *gh*, whereas the sound had long since ceased in English and survived only in the archaic spelling of words like through and though....In Pennsylvania the names Bach and Bacher also appear as Pack and Packer." So said Author Jones.

I've found that names originally beginning with a **P** may also be written with a **B**. Have you consulted some good books on the subject of last names? Besides the book by Jones, you might check *Dictionary of German Names* by Hans Bahlow, translated by Edda Gentry, Max Kade Institute for German-American Studies, University of Wisconsin—Madison (available through bookstores and in libraries). It's a widely accepted sourcebook with entries that give good detail on dates and origins. For example, if a name includes "Fries—" it could mean "Frisian" or reflect your ancestor's efforts as a "dike and mud worker who digs drainage ditches" (Middle High German usage). In Swabian or Swiss understanding, it could simply mean "ditch."

...WIDELY ACCEPTED SOURCEBOOK WITH ENTRIES THAT GIVE GOOD DETAILS...

I appreciate the booklet by Arta Johnson, *The Origins, Development & Meanings of German Names* (1984, published by the author, 153 Aldrich Road, Columbus, OH 43214). If a name includes *adal-*, then it could mean "famous through nobility." If it includes *arn-*, it could mean "having the strength of an eagle." *Kon-* can imply "bold" or "bold in counsel," and *-mund* may mean "hand, protection." While *-wald* may refer to a forest, it may also mean "power, rule."

If your lineage includes Meyer (or Maier or Meier) it could reflect your ancestral bent in dairy farming. Your ancestor may have worked on a farm, owned it, or managed it. The name is derived from Latin, which was the official written language of most German lands until 1550. Or, there could be a Jewish connection with the initial use of the name. If it was based on the Jewish name Meir, it means "giving light."

So, when did surnames begin? Some experts say in the 1200s, some stretch that to the late 1400s. A few make the usage slightly later. There was a growing trend toward legal entries in the 1500s being recorded in church and local tax registers, so the widespread use of last names resulted. Although people did not relocate as much as today, there was some shifting of populations due to war and famine, and on occasion there was an upward movement in positions. Hence, a Bacher (one who lived by the stream) might have had his name changed to Meyer if he managed a farm later in life and gained revenue for the noble family of the area.

Study your ancestral surnames and you may unlock history! You may even unlock locations, and more.

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TIP—As you research your lineage, learn the various ways in which your family names are written in English and in German, and be aware of variations in spelling. Train your eyes to catch these as key words in a manuscript. When you encounter some old documents you cannot read but you detect your ancestral names, then duplicate or copy the information for future deciphering.

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Teutonic Knights and Their ‘Cause’

by Gerald Perschbacher

In the days when men would rather “fight than switch,” there was a group of dedicated Germanic friars who stood for their faith with sword in hand. These are revealed in *The Teutonic Knights, A Military History*, by William Urban (Greenhill Books, MBI Publishing Company, www.mbipublishing.com or (800) 458-0454; \$19.95; in bookstores). The softbound, 290 page book is the first English survey of its type.

The role of order members, their vows, daily life, wars, lineage and dedication are detailed. Their part in defending the faithful and expanding the borders into Prussian lands are an important element in the book.

From crusades in the Holy Land to crusades against pagan tribes in northeastern Europe, the history of this knightly order is quite interesting. This goes far beyond the image of chivalry and our romantic impression of knighthood. Individuals interested in German history will discover many aspects of medieval life and events as German states began an eastward expansion, which may remind some of the westward drive in early America. Thirteen chapters trace the rise and demise of the Order of Teutonic Knights. Information on Grand Masters is included up to the last in 1525.

The knights labored and campaigned for their faith. The Reformation had a tremendous impact on the order. In 1523 Dr. Martin Luther had written to the lords of the Teutonic Knights “that they avoid false chastity.” The book then adds, “The knights, and there were fewer of them now, had been reared in a Germany seething with unrest over church corruption...”. Secularization entered their ranks but did not keep them from serving. Overall, the book is a story of expansion, the movement of people, trade, intrigue, and the formation of Central and Eastern Europe.

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TIP- Is there nobility in your lineage? An expert on the subject once told me, “If you have to ask, the answer is probably ‘no.’” The reason? There are official lists and details on each noble family and its Coat of Arms. It is not something easily forgotten. And in spite of organizations that claim they can find nobility in your line, it’s probably more a matter of grabbing your money than finding the truth.

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YOU CAN’T ALWAYS TRUST FAMILY LORE

When Lisa McLaughlin noted her quest for information (see G-SIG FORUM #3), she hoped good would result. Lisa, who is our Cluster Coordinator, noted, “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.”

Gordon Seyffert of Kansas City, Mo., responded as a G-SIG participant. He said, “My Seyffert family, too, had such an oral tradition. Like most of these stories, it appears there was some misinformation as well as a large grain of truth...”

In Gordon’s case, after careful research he concluded that the eldest son did not stay behind to serve in the military. He came to America as an advance guard

for his family. “He seems to have come over...in order to locate his father's friend in St. Louis, and thus to ‘scout out’ the territory.”

Gordon continued his research in St. Louis city directories. “I discovered that the eldest surviving daughter had married a man who joined a fire company in St. Louis, allegedly to avoid conscription. Living with them in 1864 was my own ancestor and younger son, who were building wagons. He had served three months in the militia from Moniteau County, and seemingly came to St. Louis to avoid further service. I have a hunch he worked for Louis Espenschied and John Cook (both Germans, despite the latter’s name) in the (New) Bremen district north of Cass Avenue and along Broadway. During the war, Ernst Kargau reported these partners ‘made thousands of wagons for the army.’ I presume this, like service as a fireman, would have exempted him from further military duty -- as he would have been a part of the ‘defense industry’ of the day.

“So, my advice is: Check as many printed sources as you can, but also cast a wide net amongst your distant relatives....”

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IDEA—Start thinking like a German and it may help when you contact someone in Germany or try to analyze your information. Check online Web sites about German culture. Read articles about German life. View videos on sites and events in Germany. Go FAR BEYOND the events and reports about World War II. Aim at the social level of daily life!

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

+ **Herr Roland Paul**, the director of German Genealogy, Rheinland-Pfalz/Rhineland-Palatinate (in Germany) would like information on families that came to America from the Rhineland-Pfalz area. He may have information for you, also. The collection is a record repository on over 300,000 persons who emigrated.

Contact: www.genealogienetz.de/reg/RHE-PFA/rhein-p.html

+ **“I want information about Lutheran Church Records**, Ballersbach, Nassau, Germany, 1840 and before, particularly Johan (?) Heinrich, parents Philip Heinrich and Elizabeth Ney, John Henry (Johan Heinrich) born 36 April, 1833.

Contact: Tom Henry (636) 458-0878 jbatchu@charter.net .

+ **Seeking interesting books** on German history to help with the G-SIG FORUM.

Contact Gerald Perschbacher at (314) 849-5249 or write: persch3@hotmail.com

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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., Suite 140, St. Louis, MO 63143.

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