

Ein frohes Weihnachtsfest und ein gutes neues Jahr!

Translation –

A Very Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!



Volume 32 Issue 4

December 2012

Doing German Family History Research

By Larry Eucher

Part Two of a Two Part Series

In the previous issue of Mesa Dwellers we talked about the historical context of our research and reviewed a number of ways of defining the home village of our ancestors. While we are using German research as an example, the same techniques may be applied to research in other countries. In this issue, we will present where and how the records may be accessed, how we can overcome the language differences, and additional places you can search for information.

Step 2: Accessing the German Records

Okay, so now let's assume that we have the name of the ancestor, the year of emigration, and the village (or parish within a larger city) in which our ancestor resided at the time of their departure for America. How do we proceed from here? I recommend that you first determine what records are available through the Family History Library of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints in Salt Lake City. Go to familysearch.org and search for the individual to see if there are specific records that were compiled from things like the International Genealogical Index and the Ancestral Files. Then click on "Catalog" and enter the place of interest to see what information is available for that jurisdiction. For the most part it will be civil and ecclesiastical records. In some cases you may get lucky and find an entry for an Ortsippenbuch (a book about all the families of a particular town), or a Leichenpredigt (a pastor's collection of funeral sermons, summarizing the lives of those whose funerals he presided over).

In most parts of nineteenth century and earlier Germany, the BMD records were kept by the local church, along with other information such as marriage banns and confirmations. In the south and west, the predominant faith was Roman Catholicism, while in the north and east, it is more common to find records associated with the protestant German Evangelical Lutheran Church. Over the years, these official records would be copied and sent for safe keeping in a central archive. Many originals were lost in World War II, and so it is these archival Church Book Duplicates, or "Kirchenbuch Duplikates" that were filmed by the Genealogical Society of Utah which are now available to you as a researcher. You may now order these films online through the FamilySearch.org site. It takes about three weeks for your order to be processed and delivered on loan to your local Family History Library where you may view it on one of their film readers.

What type of information can you expect to find in a church book record? If a birth record is involved, you will typically find the parent's names, the child's full name and sex, the occupation of the father, the date of birth, the date of baptism, and sponsors for the baptism (indicating relatives and close friends). Many times there will be an indication of whether the birth was legitimate or illegitimate. Additional information that *may* be shown includes names of grandparents, the birth order number, and perhaps an indication that the child died in infancy.

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MESA DWELLERS

The Mesa County Genealogical Society, established in 1980, is a 501(c) 3 non-profit organization.

From the Editor

The Twelve Days of a Genealogy Christmas

On the Twelfth day of Christmas,
My true love gave to me,
Twelve census searches,
Eleven printer ribbons,
Ten e-mail contacts,
Nine headstone rubbings,
Eight birth and death dates,
Seven town clerks sighing,
Six second cousins,
Five coats of arms,
Four GEDCOM files,
Three old wills,
Two CD-ROMS,
And a branch in my family tree.

Author Unknown

May your year be filled with rich genealogy findings!

A Very Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

Kathie Vlahos
Editor

Karen Grew-Ellison
Assistant Editor

Have anything for the newsletter? Please contact Kathie Vlahos or Karen Grew-Ellison or go to: [REDACTED] to submit via-email directly to the editors.

Objectives:

1. To promote an interest in genealogy, to encourage and instruct members in the art and practice of genealogical research.
2. To maintain and elevate genealogical standards, to stress the importance of accuracy in research through careful documentation.
3. To locate, preserve and index public and private genealogical records and make such records available to members and the general public.
4. To assist and support any genealogical library in Colorado, which is open to the public.

Society meetings are held the 2nd Thursday of each month at the Commons of Hilltop Garden Room, located at 625 27 1/2 Road at 7:00 pm. The monthly Sack Lunch meeting is held in the 2nd floor Museum conference room of the C. D Smith Building at 5th & Ute Streets at 12 noon on the 4th Wednesday of each month. A Board of Directors meeting will often follow the Sack Lunch meeting from 1pm - 2pm.

Society Officers

President	Dennis Jenkins
Vice President	Vacant
Secretary	Donna Jackson
Treasurer	Anita Caldwell

Board Members

Jan Wilson	<u>3 year Term</u> 2011-2012-2013
Karen Grew-Ellison	2010-2011-2012
Jill Berthod	2012-2013-2014

Standing Committee Chairpersons

Historian/Archivist	Jan Wilson
Co-Genealogist/Librarian	Kay Oxer
Co-Genealogist/Librarian	Linda Garey
Newsletter Editor	Kathie Vlahos
Assistant Editor	Karen Grew-Ellison
Society Webmaster	Caley Gredig
Parliamentarian	Vacant
Program Director	Dennis Jenkins
Research Director	Bob Cress
Membership/Education/Outreach	Caley Gredig & Jill Berthod

Membership year: March 1 - February 28/29

Annual Dues: \$10 Single - \$12 Family (2 voting family members). Those with unpaid dues after April 30th of the membership year will not receive the newsletter.

[REDACTED]

You can also go to newsletter@mesadwellers.org to contribute to the newsletter. Contributions are encouraged and appreciated and should be neatly typed or written stories, queries, articles and/or other information applicable to genealogy research. Contribution (deadlines): March issue (Feb 15), June issue (May 15), September issue (August 15), December issue (November 15).

December 2012 – March 2013 ~ Upcoming Programs and Events

- 7 December 2012 Friday Help Session: 1-3 p.m. at the Palisade Library Branch.
- 13 December 2012 Thursday: Noon Annual Christmas Pot Luck meeting at Donna Jackson's.
- 4 January 2013 Friday Help Session: 1-3 p.m. at the Fruita Library Branch.
- 10 January 2013 Thursday Evening Meeting at The Commons: 7 p.m. – *Land Records by Dennis Jenkins.*
- 23 January 2013 Wednesday Noon Sack Lunch at the Museum: Class from Familysearch.org
- 1 February 2013 Friday Help Session: 1-3 p.m. at the Main Library, (1st and Gunnison).
- 14 February 2013 Thursday Evening Meeting at The Commons: 7 p.m. – Election of Officers and Share Session.
- 27 February 2013 Wednesday Noon Sack Lunch at the Museum: Class from Familysearch.org.
- 1 March 2013 Friday Help Session: 1-3 p.m. at a Library Branch to be determined.
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President's Message

Another year has gone by and by now everyone has been able to check out the 1940 census. I hope you are all using it to further your research. Keep in mind that you can still access it for free at some subscription websites through next spring. You can always access it for free on Ancestry.com at the Mesa County Public Libraries, the Family History Center and the Loyd Files Research Library.

A reminder about the help sessions we offer at Mesa County Public Library branches. I encourage you to sign up at the library for these one-on-one help sessions. We intend to offer these on the first Friday of each month from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. However, you need to sign up at the library so they will know that there is interest. If no one signs up that month's session may be cancelled.

As always we need ideas for programs for both the Thursday evening and Wednesday noon meetings. If you have an idea for a topic or speaker please let me know [REDACTED] or call me at [REDACTED]

Note that our 2nd Thursday evening meetings are no longer held at Cross Orchards. We will be meeting at The Commons of Hilltop Garden Room beginning with our January 10th meeting. The Commons is located at 625 27½ Road. We will put out more information in the January meeting reminder

I hope many of you will be able to attend our annual Christmas Pot Luck meeting to be held at Donna Jackson's home at noon on December 13th. Directions to her home will be given in the meeting reminder.

You are encouraged to contribute articles and stories about your ancestors to the Mesa Dwellers. For the March 2013 issue let Kathie Vlahos know by February 15th.

Hope you all have a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

Dennis Jenkins, President, MCGS

Continued from page 1

In the case of marriage records, you will typically find the names of the couple, their ages, usually the name of the bride's father, and sometimes the name of her mother and the names of the groom's parents. The groom's occupation is typically shown. Sometimes the bride's father's occupation will be indicated and the village he lives in. Sometimes there will be witnesses, who, as in the case of baptismal sponsors, may be relatives. With death records, the name of the deceased is given, and in the case of married women, their maiden name as well as the name (and sometimes occupation) of their spouse. The date of death and the cause of death will be given. Usually, it will also give a date of burial, and sometimes a list of surviving relatives. This latter fact can be helpful in determining the number of minor children and those who have attained their majority. In many records, the age at death is given in years, months, and days which in combination with the date of death will allow you to calculate a date of birth.

In addition to birth, marriage, and death records, many of the films contain copies of confirmation records as well. These often indicate the date of birth, father, and place of birth for the person being confirmed. In Mecklenburg and Pomerania, where I have done much of my own German research, the Lutheran Church confirmation typically took place at age 14.

The filmed records typically run from 1824 through 1874. In some cases, the records go back into the 1700's or even earlier. But, even for records beginning in 1824, you can sometimes get information that goes back as far as about 1750. For example, a record of death for 1824 for an individual who is 75 years old at their death will provide a calculated birth date of about 1749.

Not all of the villages that still have records were filmed, but of those that were, an increasing number of them are directly accessible on-line through Family Search. In addition to the steps I mentioned earlier regarding the introduction to research pages, you can also browse individual databases. Scroll down about 2/3 of the way on the home page to "Browse by Location", click on "Continental Europe" and scroll down to the individual databases for Germany. Some of these have not been indexed, but you can browse the individual pages. Sometimes you will find an internal index for the collection that can be used instead of a search engine.

The records themselves will typically be in German, sometimes with a smattering of church Latin. This brings us to the third great challenge in doing German family history research.

Step 3: What do you do if you don't speak German?

German is one of the world's major languages, is derived from the Germanic branch of the Indo-European language family, and is written using the Latin alphabet. In addition to the 26 standard letters familiar to us in English, German has three vowels with umlauts ((Ä/ä, Ö/ö, and Ü/ü) and the letter ß (Eszett or double "s"). In addition to the standard, or "High German", there are a number of dialects that are spoken and written in various parts of what is today Germany, Austria, Switzerland, etc. More information on dialects can be found at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_dialects. Documents may be printed in a letter form called "Fraktur" or German block print. As you progress back in time, the script handwriting style may change to include letter forms such as Kurrent and Sütterlin. If you can't make out individual letters, you will probably need some assistance. However, a very nice chart of the various letter forms can be downloaded in PDF format here: <http://www.familytreemagazine.com/article/Germanic-Alphabet-Chart>. While initially frustrating, over time, and with practice, you will find that you can improve your language skills. The good news is that things like BMD records are typically presented in tabular form. You can generally get a sense of the words' meaning by looking at the type of document and its lay-out. Then you can proceed to use key word lists to make out the meaning.

See page 5 for the German Alphabet Chart showing the different letter scripts and prints of the referenced German letter styles.

Germanic Alphabet Chart

1. Modern	2. Fraktur	3. Sütterlin	4. Kurrent	5. Old Handwriting Styles
A	a	A	a	A A a
B	b	B	b	B B B
C	c	C	c	C C C
D	d	D	d	D D
E	e	E	e	E E E
F	f	F	f	F F
G	g	G	g	G G G
H	h	H	h	H H H H
I	i	I	i	I I
J	j	J	j	J J
K	k	K	k	K K K R
L	l	L	l	L L
M	m	M	m	M M M
N	n	N	n	N N N
O	o	O	o	O
P	p	P	p	P P P
Q	q	Q	q	Q Q Q Q
R	r	R	r	R R R R
S	s	S	s	S S S
T	t	T	t	T T T
U	u	U	u	U U
V	v	V	v	V V V
W	w	W	w	W W W
X	x	X	x	X X X
Y	y	Y	y	Y Y
Z	z	Z	z	Z Z Z
Ä	ä	Ä	ä	Ä Ä Ä
Ö	ö	Ö	ö	Ö Ö Ö
Ü	ü	Ü	ü	Ü Ü Ü

Surprisingly, you don't need to be fluent in a language to do family history research in that language. The vocabulary of most documents and source records is limited. People have assembled key word lists to help you. In the case of the German language for family research purposes...

Family Search presents their list here:

https://familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/German_Word_List

Judith Rempel presents a nice summary list of illnesses and causes of death here:

<http://www.odessa3.org/collections/articles/link/illness.txt>

A list of German Archaic Medical Terms is given by Rudy Schmidt here:

<http://www.antiquismorbus.com/German/German.htm>

If you are going to be working with a lot of German documents, I recommend you invest in at least a pocket German-English/English-German dictionary. I have used Langenscheidt's Compact Dictionary German and also Cassell's German and English Dictionary. I prefer the Langenscheidt's.

In the early days of the Internet, I used Alta Vista's Babelfish Translator. The nice thing about it was that you could feed in a URL and it would attempt a literal translation of the entire page. It was acquired and sold a number of times and is still available here: <http://www.microsofttranslator.com/> But, most of the time now, I simply go to www.google.com, click on "More" in the toolbar and select "Translate" from the pull down menu. It attempts to detect what language you enter, will look for possible spelling errors and make suggestions for corrections, and automatically defaults to the language of your browser for the translation. You can over ride those settings. In many cases you can also hear an attempted pronunciation by clicking on the speaker icon that appears with the translation.

Step 4: Other Places to Look

German State Archives: If you really want to get aggressive, you may wish to conduct research in person at any one of a number of German official archives. A partial list of their locations and fees is given here: <http://wikide.genealogy.net/DAGV/Archivgeb%C3%BChren>, some of these archives now also support on-line searches. Typical information found in these archives includes various legal documents, emigration records, land records, and disputes.

Genealogical and Historical Libraries: A domestic facility is the Allen County Library in Ft. Wayne, Indiana. Their guide to doing German research is here: <http://www.genealogycenter.org/Pathfinders/Guides/German.aspx> Also, don't forget your MCGS stacks at the Loyd Files Library associated with the Museum of Western Colorado right here in Grand Junction, Colorado. There are a number of books on Germany in our collection, as well as some at the local Family History Center, and the Mesa County Public Library.

YouTube: YouTube has many videos on various aspects of German customs, dances, folk songs, national anthems for the former states, tourist sites, and history. This also applies to other European countries that you may be researching.

Societies Interested in German Family History and Culture: Here are some sites that relate to specific problems or areas of German research:

Germans from Russia Heritage Society, www.grhs.org

Immigrant Genealogical Society, www.immigrantgensoc.org

Die Pommerschen Leute, www.pomeraniannews.com

Palatines to America, www.palam.org

Federation of East European Family History Societies, www.feefhs.org

Los Angeles Donau Schwabian Dancegroup, www.donau.org

Christmas Traditions in Germany

Christmas, or Weihnachten, is considered by Germans to be the most important of the major holidays. The German holiday season is a time for introspection, celebration, family and friends. Not only the holiday itself, but also the weeks leading up to the celebration of Christmas involve many traditions and customs of diverse origins.

Advent:

The German Christmas season officially begins with the first Sunday of Advent. Stollen, the oldest known German Christmas treat, and Christmas cookies (plätzchen) are often baked during this time. Gingerbread houses, nativity scenes, hand-carved wooden Nutcracker figures, Christmas pyramids (Weihnachtspyramiden), and lighted city streets and homes are all signs that Christmas is on its way.

Advent Wreath – Der Adventskranz:

The Advent wreath is adorned with four candles, one of which is lit on each of the four Sundays preceding Christmas. The first Advent wreath, which appeared in the mid-19th century, had 4 larger candles and 19 smaller ones. Each day one additional candle was lit to help the children count the days until Christmas. Today, only 4 larger candles remain.

The Advent Calendar – Der Adventskalender:

The Advent calendar is a German invention that was originally designed to involve children in the festivities leading up to Christmas. The calendars are usually made of cardboard and have 24 small windows or flaps, one of which is opened on each day leading up to Christmas. Behind each window is a Christmas scene or motif. Nowadays, calendars may contain chocolate or candy behind each window, and sometimes small toys. Originally, families would mark the 24 days of December preceding Christmas with a chalk line on the wall. The first printed calendar appeared in Munich in 1903.

Christmas Markets – Weihnachtsmärkte:

Almost every German City celebrates the holiday season with a traditional Christmas market. The fairs, which date back to the 15th century, originally provided food and practical supplies for the cold winter season, but soon the markets became a beloved holiday tradition and a great way to get into the Christmas spirit.

Saint Nicholas – Sankt Nikolaus:

St. Nicholas Day is celebrated on December 6th in Germany as well as in other European countries. On the evening before the 6th, children place their newly cleaned shoes in front of the door in the hope that Nicholas might fill them with nuts, fruits, chocolate, and sweets. If the children have behaved well, their wishes will be fulfilled. Children, who have caused mischief, will receive only a switch, which symbolizes punishment for their bad deeds.

Santa Claus – Der Weihnachtsmann:

The figure of Santa Claus, known in Germany as der Weihnachtsmann, (literally, “The Christmas man), is a direct descendant of Saint Nicholas, which can be seen from the derivation of the name “Santa Claus”. Many of the characteristics attributed to the modern-day Santa Claus are easily recognizable in both the St. Nicholas and the personality descended from old Germanic folklore. The Weihnachtsmann is depicted as a jolly old man with a long white beard in a red fur suit, with a sack of presents and a switch. On Christmas Eve he leaves gifts for the well behaved children and punishes those who have been bad.

The Christmas tree – Der Tannenbaum:

The first known Christmas tree was set up in 1419 in Freiburg by the town bakers, who decorated the tree with fruits, and baked goods, which the children were allowed to remove and eat on New Year’s Day. The town guilds and associations first brought evergreens inside their guild houses and decorated them with apples and sweets, candles were eventually added to the decorations. Since the Middle Ages, ordinary Germans had been bringing yew, juniper, mistletoe, holly, evergreen boughs – any plant that maintained its green color through the lifeless and dreary winter months, into their homes. The Tannenbaum is taken down on New Years Day or on January 6th, Three Kings Day, at which time the children can ransack the tree for the sweets and treats that decorated it.

Christmas Eve - Heiliger Abend:

December 24th begins as a regular workday, but by 2:00 p.m., or earlier, businesses close in preparation for the holiday celebration, a large part of which occurs on Christmas Eve in Germany. The traditional evening meal includes carp and potato salad. Families sing Christmas carols together and may read the story of Christ’s birth aloud. Family members exchange gifts; children are typically the focal point of the gift exchange. On Christmas Eve many people often attend mass or a church service.

Christmas Days – der erste und zweite Weihnachtstag:

Both December 25 – 26 are legal holidays in Germany and are known as the First and Second Christmas Day respectively. What originally started out as a church celebration of Christ’s birth has gradually become a family celebration. Businesses are closed, and time is spent visiting with extended family. Goose is traditional fare on the First Christmas Day, or perhaps rabbit or a roast. These are accompanied by apple and sausage stuffing, red cabbage, and potato dumplings. The second Christmas day is usually a quieter time, a day for peaceful contemplation.

Dresdner Stollen:

This famous fruitcake – is closely associated with the Christmas holiday because it was originally produced as food to be eaten during the Advent fast. Stollen has been sold at the Dresden Christmas market since the 15th century. Each year the city of Dresden puts on a Stollen Festival to celebrate the food that takes its name from the Saxon City.

Hot Mulled wine – Glühwein:

Literally, “glow wine”, this hot, mulled wine is a favorite beverage at the Christmas markets. It is often served in commemorative mugs that you can optionally purchase as a souvenir of your visit to the market. Europeans have been drinking mulled wine since the 15th century. The beverage consists of red wine and spices heated to just below boiling point before drinking.

German – style gingerbread – Lebkuchen:

Gingerbread, also called Pfefferkuchen (pepper cake) due to the pungent, oriental spices it uses, is baked without the use of yeast and is sweetened with honey. Lebkuchen has existed in German-speaking regions since at least the turn

of the 14th century. Because its production required the use of ingredients that had to be imported, the first Lebkuchen was baked in cities that were centers of trade. Until the advent of industrialization, Lebkuchen was made by hand. Even today, many bakeries hand-create these specialties. The recipes used have been passed down from generation to generation. Lebkuchen also takes the form of the edible Hexenhaus (witch's house), also known as Hansel and Gretel's house after the famed Grimm's fairy tale of the same name.

Christmas Carols - Weihnachtslieder:

Dating back to medieval times, German Christmas carols have a long tradition. These early tunes normally integrated well-known folk melodies with lyrics written by local clergymen and they were sung in churches or performed in religious Christmas plays. The oldest known song is "Nun sei ums willkommen, Herre Christ" from the 11th century. Some of the oldest German carols such as "Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland" and "Mein Geist erhebt den Herren mein" are translations of Latin Christmas hymn. These songs became part of the church rituals surrounding the observance of Christmas. They were solemn and humble tributes of reverence to an almighty, powerful God. Under the influence of Reformation, the celebration of Christmas extended outside of the Church into the family domain. It was in the 19th century that many of the festive German Carols known today arose. Older carols were adapted and modernized; new lyrics were supplied for familiar folk tunes. The tone of the new German Christmas Carols was lighter and less ritualistic than the Church songs.

Information from: http://vistawide.com/german/christmas/german_christmas_traditions.htm, German Christmas Traditions – Weihnachten in Deutschland – Christmas in Germany, 22 July 2012

Tis' the Season for Family History

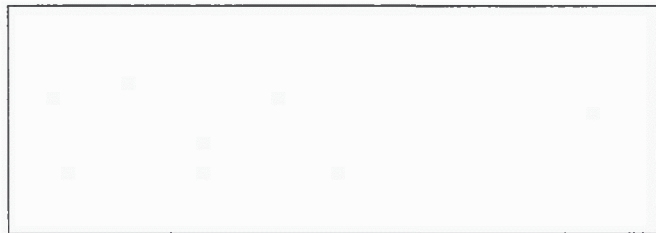
This is the time of year that brings families together from all over the U.S. and other countries to visit and celebrate the holiday season. It is a time of celebration and family gatherings, where the young and elder family members are all gathered and enjoying each others company. What a wonderful time of year if you are a genealogist or just wanting to know more about the family history, it is the perfect time to ask those questions! You will find families are usually very eager to tell the stories of their childhood, weddings, or life, and even some off colored stories about members of the family. It is a good time to ask about some of the departed members of the family, great-grandma and great-grandpa, their children, their siblings, where they came from, what they worked at, how they lived, maiden names of the women. Ask away, but make sure you write it down! You do not know how much information I have missed because I thought I could remember it, was I wrong! You might even ask permission to record the conversation, and then you will surely not miss anything. Write down the person's name who is giving you the information and the date you received it, also write down where the interview was at.

We have all heard stories in the family that may make us wonder if it really happened. Don't believe every story that is told you, stories have a way of changing and there may have been some embellishment over the years. Do use them as clues however, carefully note the stories and then make the effort to document them before you record them. Don't interrupt or correct the story teller during their presentation even though you may know the information is questionable, this could deter the storyteller or others from relating further information.

Do watch for signs that a relative may be reluctant to give details, don't press the fact if they do not want to talk about certain information, pressing may silence them for good. The older members of the family grew up in a different time and behavior that is tolerated now, may have been shameful then, respect their feelings. If it is information you feel could be important to your research, you might try to ask a number of family members the same question and they may know some information about it.

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P.O. Box 1506
Grand Junction, CO
81502-1506



Continued from page 9

Bring out the family photo album, or bring some of those photos that you need identified. People love to look at photos and if one person does not remember a name, place or person, another family member may. Photos can also jog memories, so you may find out more than you even hoped for. Have a pencil and paper handy to record the names, dates and stories about that photo, remember to associate the photo and information with a number, letter or some kind of matching code.

Here are some suggestions of questions that may be helpful:

Ask about your grandparents, great-grandparents, their aunts and uncles, cousins and even earlier generations. Who were these people, where did they come from? What was their nationality? How did they earn their livings? Where did they live? Did they own land? What were their hobbies? Were they religious? If so, what church did they attend? What did they look like? What family stories and traditions do they remember?

Make sure to find out the maiden names of the women of the family. Where were they married? Were they married more than once? How many children did they have?

So, this holiday ask away! It could lead you to some wonderful discoveries and your very own stories to relate of your own.

Idea and Source:

Thanksgiving in the U.S. is a Great Time to Talk to Your Relatives

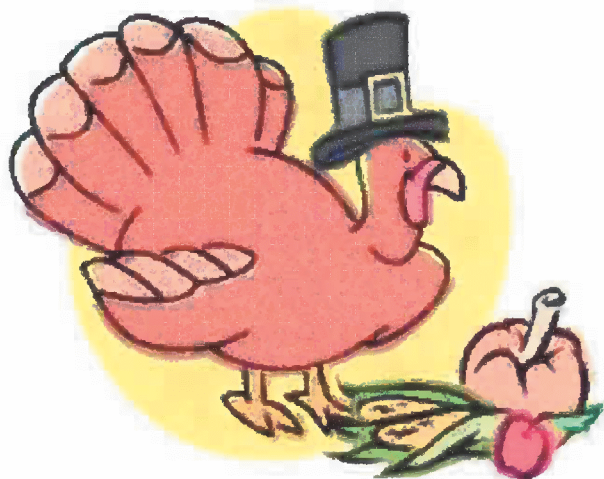
Posted by Dick Eastman on 21 November 2012

The following article is from Eastman's online Genealogy Newsletter and is copyright 2012 by Richard W. Eastman. It is re-published here with the permission of the author. Information about the newsletter is available at <http://blog.eogn.com>

November 21, 2012

Thanksgiving in the U.S. is a Great Time to Talk to Your Relatives

 Listen



Those of us who are in or from the United States will be celebrating Thanksgiving this week. We don't usually think of this as a genealogy holiday. However, when you think about it, there is a strong "ancestral" connotation involved, even for those of us whose ancestors did not travel on the Mayflower in 1620.

Thanksgiving is a time when we pay homage to all our ancestors who traveled to a strange land to find a better life for themselves, for their children, and for succeeding generations. This is equally true for ancestors who arrived in the twentieth century as well as earlier years. We should all give thanks to our ancestors for helping to establish our American way of life and ensuring that we are a part of it.

I would also suggest that Thanksgiving is a perfect time to ask family members what they remember about departed ancestors. This is especially true if there are elder family members at your Thanksgiving table. Ask them about your grandparents, great-grandparents, their aunts, uncles, and cousins, and maybe even earlier generations. Who were these people? Where did they come from? How did they earn their livings? Where did they live? What were their hobbies? Were they religious? If so, where did they go to church or to a synagogue? What family stories and traditions do they remember? Ask lots of questions!

Oh yes, write it all down. You might want to even ask permission to record the conversations. You may learn more across the Thanksgiving table than you could glean in a dozen visits to a local Family History Center. Best of all, you can learn the personal stories and other tidbits that were never recorded in public records.

I hope you have a great Thanksgiving, genealogically speaking and otherwise.

by hand. Even today, many bakeries hand-create these specialties. The recipes used have been passed down from generation to generation. Lebkuchen also takes the form of the edible Hexenhaus (witch's house), also known as Hansel and Gretel's house after the famed Grimm's fairy tale of the same name.

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Information from: http://vistawide.com/german/christmas/german_christmas_traditions.htm, German Christmas Traditions – Weihnachten in Deutschland – Christmas in Germany, 22 July 2012

Tis' the Season for Family History

This is the time of year that brings families together from all over the U.S. and other countries to visit and celebrate the holiday season. It is a time of celebration and family gatherings, where the young and elder family members are all gathered and enjoying each others company. What a wonderful time of year if you are a genealogist or just wanting to know more about the family history, it is the perfect time to ask those questions! You will find families are usually very eager to tell the stories of their childhood, weddings, or life, and even some off colored stories about members of the family. It is a good time to ask about some of the departed members of the family, great-grandma and great-grandpa, their children, their siblings, where they came from, what they worked at, how they lived, maiden names of the women. Ask away, but make sure you write it down! You do not know how much information I have missed because I thought I could remember it, was I wrong! You might even ask permission to record the conversation, and then you will surely not miss anything. Write down the person's name who is giving you the information and the date you received it, also write down where the interview was at.

Bring out the family photo album, or bring some of those photos that you need identified. People love to look at photos and if one person does not remember a name, place or person, another family member may. Photos can also jog memories, so you may find out more than you even hoped for. Have a pencil and paper handy to record the names, dates and stories about that photo, remember to associate the photo and information with a number, letter or some kind of matching code.

Do watch for signs that a relative may be reluctant to give details, do not press the fact if they do not want to talk about certain information, pressing may silence them for good. The older members of the family grew up in a different time and behavior that is tolerated now, may have been shameful then, respect their feelings. If it is information you feel could be important to your research, you might try to ask a number of family members the same question and they may know some information about it.