



Newsletter #16
November 2007

Adelaide Northern Districts Family History Group

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Meetings are held on the third Thursday
of each month at 7pm at
The Old Police Station, Ann Street, Salisbury.

\$2 entry fee for non-members

YOUR COMMITTEE

President:	Peter Applebee
Vice President:	Bev Burke
Secretary:	Margaret Flaiban
Treasurer:	Tammy Martin
Membership Coordinator:	Helen Stein
General Committee:	Sandie Francis Colin Withall Ivan Randall

RAFFLE

Congratulations to Janice Everett who won our last raffle.
Thank you to all who supported us.

MEETINGS

Tonight is the last meeting for 2007, there will be no meeting in December.

As our last speaker for the year, we have Anne Beadell sharing with us the adventures of accompanying her husband Len as he explored the rugged Australian Outback. Len has been named the "Last True Australian Explorer" for the exploratory work that he did. It is quite an amazing story, made even more amazing by the fact that they were accompanied by their children on the trip.

Our next meeting will be on Thursday 17th January at 7pm, when we hope to have Errol Chinner from the Port Adelaide Historical Society as a guest speaker.

This will be the last newsletter for this year, as we will be entering our Christmas break. Once again, we have had a very successful year, adding several new members, and broadening our services by providing open days for the public to use our facilities for their own research. Our collection of books, CDs and Microfiche continues to grow, and we can now boast a total of four computers for public use. More activities are planned for New Year, including another Cemetery Tour.

We would like to thank you all for your support, and hope to see you all back again in the New Year.

Our next Open Day will be on Saturday 12th January 2008 from 1 – 4pm

*The group will not be held responsible for any statements or opinions expressed in this Newsletter.
All submitted articles and advertised offers of services are printed in good faith of accuracy.
The Editor reserves the right to edit articles for grammatical purposes if necessary.*

"Ash Wednesday"

Our Meeting on Thursday 18th October 2007 brought one of our favourite speakers, David McGowan back to our group – this time talking on his fire-fighting days with the CFS during one of the worst fires in South Australian history – 16th February 1983 - famously called "Ash Wednesday".

David showed some slides of fires taken early 2007, as a guide on how the fires began back in 1983. Everyone was too busy fighting the fires to take photographs but we did see one of David in 1983 wearing a shirt and tie underneath his overalls, which he was still wearing 12 hours later! David said there were more fire fighters than anywhere else in the world to fight the Ash Wednesday fires.

The first fire started around 9.00 am on Wednesday at Mount Osmond, near the Freeway. There had been some back burning a few days earlier in the area, but unknown to the fire fighters, a tree root had smouldered for over a week, with the fire running underneath the ground and rekindling further along.

The second fire started near Perseverance Road Tea Tree Gully which was deliberately lit. At least four people witnessed a young chap throwing lighted paper from a car window, which did result in a conviction.

The manned Look-Out Tower near Mount Lofty which stands 35 metres high monitored the fires daily and relayed important information to the fighters.

The third fire began south of the Freeway near Scott Creek and continued through to Mylor. The first and second fires met up near Norton Summit. This larger fire moved onto Lenswood, Carey Gully and jumped 7 kilometres in minutes to join up with another fire around Mount Barker.

David outlined how fires start as well as going through the Fire Danger index formula. He finished by telling us a great story about a goat tethered in the centre of a paddock during the fires. The goat had eaten most of the grass around its tethered area. The fire approached the paddock and burnt most of the grass around the goat and moved on, leaving the goat intact, panicked but alive!

RESEARCH BEHIND THE IRON CURTAIN

by Detlev Papsdorf

1995

Note: Detlev Papsdorf, a pharmacist in former West Germany has provided this account of his activities prior to the re-unification of Germany which outlines the trials and tribulations of compiling his unique collection of Saxon Church Records. Detlev still continues his international research, and has visited Australia several times, photographing headstones in German Lutheran Cemeteries.

Getting Started in Genealogy

I started genealogical research on Easter Sunday, 1978, after my father, Herbert Papsdorf (died 1984) presented his three volume chronicle of our family to my older sister and me. I started to read it in the evening and continued all night long. When I had finished, I was in turmoil like never before in my life. To think, Papa was injured seven times during World War II – and lucky enough it was that he had been wounded, because all of his comrades went to Stalingrad and none of them survived, while he was lying in a lazarette (Military Hospital)! Then... to think about myself... born in 1944.

Most family chronicles, such as my father's, end quickly with the great-grandparent's generation, because verbal family tradition does not preserve very much about former ancestors. It was the same with my father's chronicle. The next day, Easter Sunday, I wrote letters and letters – exactly 14 – to mostly Saxonian parishes. That meant fourteen letters to the German Democratic Republic – then East Germany ruled by the Communists.

Fourteen days later one of the most important answers came, the reply of Minister Müller in Pomssen near Leipzig. He "presented" four or five Papsdorf generations to us.

Visits in Saxony

Most of my fourteen letters were answered, only a few failed. So I went to Saxony with my parents and visited one of the "non-replying" villages east of Leipzig – tiny Mölbis. I learned why the minister did not reply – he could not read the old German handwriting in the church books! Neither could I – *then*. It was hard to learn it, especially because I never learned the old German "Sütterlin Schrift" in school. But due to my profession, I have a lot of experience with bad handwriting of doctors, and so I learned to read Old Script step-by-step, word-by-word. My ability improved year by year.

At first I wrote down church book entries by hand. But, when I started to work on them at home, doubts started. Did I read it in the right way? So, I began to think about the possibilities of taking photographs of the records.

Filming Experiments

The next journey into Mr. Honecker's Paradise (East Germany), I went alone in my motor home, only accompanied by my Japanese camera and a few rolls of colour slide film. I planned to take slides, which are cheaper than paper photos. Everything had to look "tourist like". A copying machine in my motor home would be inconceivable to East German guards. So, I took photos of all the entries which seemed important to me. But, I wrote down the entries too. When I was back home again, I waited impatiently for my slides to come back from the developing company. When I put them into the projector, they were quite good, very sharp – only a little too dark. So, I did a "test production" at home to ascertain the best aperture when pages were white, yellow or brown. Later I could adjust for these conditions by experience.

Then I went back again to the German Democratic Republic, sometimes as often as eight times in one year! Thus I did my genealogical research, and was happy to "exhume" generation by generation.

Papsdorf Research

One day I happened to find a Papsdorf in one of the parish books. How interesting, I thought, and leafed along. It happened in Trages, near Leipzig too, when I had not been able to reach my genealogical destination. I had to leave the GDR the next day and I could not find the ancestor for whom I was looking because the handwriting in the church book was very poor. At that time I needed a visa to enter the GDR. It was valid for only a certain time and normally could not be prolonged. So I weighed up the two possibilities – plan a second trip to Trages or

to take photos of the whole book now. I fortunately had enough film, so I started to photograph the entire book, a small one, which took only about 12 rolls of film. When I passed the German-German border the next day with all the “nice guys” on the eastern side, I started to feel not very self-assured. But nothing happened. A few days later I was able to continue Trages research at home.

In the meantime, I bought a special slide projector with different magnification lenses. I was very glad to be able to solve genealogical problems at home, with the help of records which were reproducible and original. So, I avoided having to pay Mr. Honecker 25 Deutschmarks, the cost per person per day to visit Mr. Honecker’s “most expensive zoo in the world” (a bitter saying of East German citizens). It was compulsory to exchange 25 West German DM for 25 East German DM at the border.

Photographing Becomes Standard Procedure

So I continued to photograph complete parish books just because I found the first experiment successful. When I found one ancestor in a book, I could be sure to find more later on the same book. I did not cause any confusion to the ministers at all. I came along with my big red RV, had some presents such as chocolate and coffee, and soon I became known locally. Often I was allowed to take the books down into my comfortably heated bus, so that I was not forced to sit in the cold offices. I took photo after photo by day and by night.

When I had a good day and when the pages were easy to turn, I managed to take up to 12 films per hour – which means about 400 slides. This was much, much more than any copying machine could produce. I closed all the windows of my RV so nobody could notice the flash-flash-flash of my camera. Silly enough, I always forgot to cover the two skylights of my bus, which were made of transparent plastic, so the flashes of light must have been visible all around me!

I do not understand how it could happen that the East German Stasi (police) did not keep it’s eyes on me. Maybe they did – but I never had problems caused by my photography. When I came back to the German-German border after photographing the gigantic parish books of Borna, I thought I MUST have overstepped the mark with my 189 rolls of film! That was about 8,000 slides that I had taken in five days.

One day I could hardly take my shower because I was hardly able to keep the soap in my hand after having photographed all day long. Of course I had no tripod in my bus – everything had to look amateur. I only needed my camera – the third one was a German Leica, because No. 1 and No. 2 soon went to Japanese camera heaven. Later on I made a “staatlich patentierter Kirchenbuchhalter” (patented church book holder), a primitive but effective plywood table holder with two clothespins and a rubber band to help keep the pages open. Not least of all was my supply of rolls of film – rolls and more rolls.

Border Crossing

On one occasion, having come to the border with my two well-hidden plastic bags full to the brim with celluloid information, I was forced to get out of my RV. I had never had to do that before. Being together with one or two East German customs officers inside your own camper, you can try to deflect their interest from the “hot zones” and to make them look at the “colder ones”. But this time – they told me to get out of my mobile home and let them enter. I thought, “This is the end!” I feared it would be the end of my photographing records! It was a young and pretty female officer who had given the order, but her older superior officer said, “No, its OK. Please go ahead with us for customs clearance”. So, I went back with them into my bus and helped then “not to see...”

When I was once again across the border into West Germany, I nearly kissed the ground. Our green uniformed customs officer laughed when I said to him “I don’t like uniforms, but today I am really happy to see yours!”

What persons like me had to “swallow” at this terrible border crossing, no-one can understand. Even nowadays when passing the invisible borderline, it’s a shock for me, and it will stay so during my lifetime. They have changed one of the most modern border complexes into a super modern Texaco filling station. Sorry, but I cannot buy gasoline there!

More Smuggled Film

Back to my smuggling. Slowly my archives grew and grew... and took more and more space at home to the great pleasure of my wife, Claudia. Next I found a way to get even with Mr. Honecker. I used most of the 25DM Zwangsumtausch (compulsory exchange sum) and bought East German films for that amount.

One year I went to Leisnig, a nice mountain town east of Leipzig, and convinced it's minister to allow me to take photos. He did so, but asked me not to copy the entire book. What I did after that apparently did not have the benediction of the good Lord. When I got home, all my hard won slides showed the same thing – the inside of my chimney by night!

I thought at first that this was the vengeance of Mr Honecker., They had sold rotten films in a drugstore in Liebertwolkwitz – perhaps they had stored them in on the hot water heater, I thought. After that I bought West German films, which of I course had to “import” into the GDR, which meant redoubling the risk. (“What are you going to do with all these films in our socialist paradise?”)

When I went back to Leisnig, God was with me. The minister was on vacation and I copied all of the oldest books. I came home again and had the film developed. My slides on West German film showed – a West German chimney by night! I'm really not fooling! I concluded that the shutter of my Minolta camera was broken.

I went back to Leisnig and tried it again, a third time! After a week of work the minister noticed that I was copying all of his books. He threw me out. Fortunately he did so after I had copied the last page! This time, the film and the camera were both in good shape, and the Leisnig films are one of my “special kids”!

My Papsdorf Archive

During my “ancestor-shooting”, I happened to stumble over Papsdorf members in the parish books again and again. I started to take photos of these entries “en passant” (as they occurred), until the idea struck me to start researching Papsdorfs all over the world. It eventually meant that I had to leave my research of other ancestors because the Papsdorf families all over the world took all of my time. Suddenly lots of church books which I had photographed without very much interest, became very important because they contained only a few of my ancestors but a lot of Papsdorfs!

Border Trouble

In 1984 my coming and going to and from East Germany by motor home suddenly came to an end when East German authorities refused to let me pass the border. “It's a new law, and motor homes are no longer welcome” So I turned around – but then came back – this time with a West German television crew who were eager to broadcast a program about the latest GDR despotisms. Of course, the TV crew had to stay within the security of West Germany, while lonesome me in his motor home drove to Honecker's “anti-fascist border wall”. Oh yes – you are very lonely during such minutes! Believe it or not, the same officer who turned me back the day before met me. “Didn't I tell you yesterday that you are not allowed to pass with this type of truck?”

In the meantime I had learned my story well, and I contradicted the guard with a few paragraphs from West German – East German transportation Treaties. But he could not follow my explanations. I stood there for about an hour until two higher, decorated officers came and asked me to get out of my rig. I was sure I would be arrested now! But they only told me that the Government of the German Democratic Republic does not allow me to enter with this vehicle. I asked them if it were really a matter of my bus – not my person. I protested, but finally turned around. I came back the next day with a small rental car.

One-half year later, getting an official entry permit for RV's was no longer a problem because of a new treaty between the two German states. Incidentally, the GDR guard was correct, because the old treaties did not talk about motor homes. In the early 1960's nobody thought about touring the GDR with an RV. It was later that I learned this.

Arrested

At the end of October, 1984, I finally was arrested in East Berlin by the Stasi. They put me in prison for the “nicest 30 hours of my life”. The reason for my arrest was that I had my legal gun with me. I had forgotten to leave it at home and had it with me when I passed that awful border. I was surrounded by four or five 6-foot-tall officers inside four fourteen foot walls. Since I am only 5.5 feet tall, one of these boys said to me, “Widerstand ist zwecklos” (resistance is useless). They interrogated me until deep into the night. If you remember the poorest, hackneyed TV crime movie you have ever seen, believe me - word-for-word it was the East German Stasi that night. When they finally allowed me to “go to bed” (bed?), I astonished them when I cleaned my teeth with soap. They had never seen this before! My answer – “I never did it before.”

Thirty hours later, after having to give up my gun and all the money I had with me, they let me go with only enough for one tankful of gasoline. I was not allowed to enter the GDR, but must leave on the so called "Transit Route" to Hesse, my homeland. During this nightmare 300-mile trip of boring highways, I HAD to sleep a little while, not having slept too well the night before, as you can imagine. When I came to the final GDR checkpoint between Thuringa and Hesse, they accused me that I had left the official transit route, because of being so late. I was arrested again – this time only for two hours.

Typical Crossing Events

What happened to me, and other border-crossing people, surely could fill thick books. Most of the happenings have been terrible, some funny, most ridiculous. Situations like these occurred:

Officer: "Lets look under those RV berths."

Papsdorf: "Will you please hold this panelling for a moment?"

Officer: "No."

Officer: "How can I know that there's water in your fresh water tank?" (The 40 gal. Tank in my RV)

Papsdorf (after a moment of being baffled): "We could open the faucet and let it flow out."

Officer: "Why are you riding in a motor home and don't use a normal car?"

One time I was touring the GDR with my wife, Claudia. At the border I had to open all the outside covers of my rig as usual. When they concluded that everything was ok, I was allowed to enter my RV and drive to the final checkpoint before entering West Germany. Suddenly my wife came hurrying on foot. While I was outside opening and closing the covers, the officers had told her to get out of the bus. At that moment I entered it, too jittery to notice the absence of my wife, and drove off leaving her alone in "Niemandland" (No-man's-land).

Results

Between 1978 and 1990 I collected 65,000 slides of about 120 towns and villages in the triangle Leipzig – Döbeln – Altenburg. This is the largest collection of genealogical slides of Saxonian parish books in the world. I am very happy and proud to keep it. But – what happens to this treasure in the future? Colour slides do not last forever – and neither do !! Even in normal times these documents are hard to collect, and it was not during normal times that I collected them. My hair is getting a little grey now. I will be 50 years old in December, and there are most certainly a few grey hairs caused by my border-crossing experiences in securing slides of the original church records.



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Genealogist's Christmas Eve



'Twas the night before Christmas
When all through the house
Not a creature was stirring,
Not even my spouse.

The dining room table with clutter was spread
With pedigree charts and with letters which said...
"Too bad about the data for which you wrote;
Sank in a storm on an ill-fated boat."

Stacks of old copies of wills and such
Were proof that my work had become too much.
Our children were nestled all snug in their beds,
While visions of sugarplums danced in their heads.

And I at my table was ready to drop
From work on my album with photos to crop.
Christmas was here, and such was my lot
That presents and goodies and toys I'd forgot.

Had I not been busy with grandparents' wills,
I'd not have forgotten to shop for such thrills,
While others bought gifts to bring Christmas cheers,
I'd spent time researching those birth dates and years.

While I was thus musing about my sad plight,
A strange noise on the lawn gave me such a great fright.
Away to the window I flew in a flash,
Tore open the drapes and yanked up the sash.

When what with my wondering eyes should appear,
But an overstuffed sleigh and eight small reindeer.
Up to the house top the reindeer they flew,
With a sleigh full of toys and 'ole Santa Claus, too.

And then in a twinkle, I heard on the roof
The prancing and pawing of thirty-two hoofs.
As I drew in my head, and bumped it on the sash,
Down the cold chimney fell Santa--KER-RASH!



"Dear" Santa had come from the roof in a wreck,
And tracked soot on the carpet, (I could wring his short neck!)
Spotting my face, good 'ole Santa could see
I had no Christmas spirit you'd have to agree.

He spoke not a word, but went straight to his work
And filled all the stockings, (I felt like a jerk).
Here was Santa, who'd brought us such gladness and joy:
When I'd been too busy for even one toy.

He spied my research on the table all spread
"A genealogist!" He cried! (My face was all red!)
"Tonight I've met many like you," Santa grinned,
As he pulled from his sack a large book he had penned.

I gazed with amusement--the cover it read
Genealogy Lines for Which You Have Plead.
"I know what it's like as a genealogy bug."
He said as he gave me a great Santa hug.

"While the elves make the sleigh full of toys I now carry,
I do some research in the North Pole Library!
A special treat I am thus able to bring,
To genealogy folk who can't find a thing."

"Now off you go to your bed for a rest,
I'll clean up the house from this genealogy mess."
As I climbed up the stairs full of gladness and glee,
I looked back at Santa who'd brought much to me.

While settling in bed, I heard Santa's clear whistle,
To his team, which then rose like the down of a thistle.
And I heard him exclaim as he flew out of sight,
"Family history is Fun! Merry Christmas! Goodnight!"

--Author Unknown

HAPPY XMAS

To all our Members

