



Madison County Genealogical Society



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ALONG TINIUS FAMILY TRAILS by Bernice Walters

I decided to pursue our Tinius ancestry as well as our Richter-Arnold family lines after hearing mom's interesting stories and anecdotes of her life in Germany, and after my parents came to America in 1922.

Fortunately I can speak, read and write German well enough to research and travel in Germany, and began corresponding with cousins in west Germany. They gave me the first clues on one of mom's Arnold lines in the region of Zittau, which is located in southeastern Germany near the Czech border. Through the Dresden church archive I was able to correspond with a researcher who traveled to Belgern on the Elbe River and gave me the first information I had on grandfather Tinius' brothers and sisters, as well as on my Tinius great-grandfather and his family. I had a researcher verify and copy all of that data, and in later years did a lot of research from home and in traveling to Germany to personally inspect and take photos of the church records. All of my German research is in eastern Germany from Berlin south to the Czech border, but I have cousins all over Germany.

Initially after considerable correspondence with various Leipzig offices, in 1984 I wrote the East German Embassy in Washington, D.C., repeating my request for Leipzig vital records on my father and his Tinius family in Leipzig.

Months later after sending the requested payment I received original and certified documents on my grandparents and all of their children. The data included birth, marriage and death where dates were known. This was terrific and I was encouraged to write various archives and churches over the years. Altogether, I have spent the better part of 20 years and written dozens of churches and state and city archives for information on my various family lines.

The Belgern researcher who was an official archivist gave me the name of a researcher, also an official church archivist, in mom's region and over 10 years he dutifully copied word for word all the church book entries in all of the villages in the Zittau area, which takes mom's Richter-Arnold lines back to the 1500s. In later years I was able to firsthand visit the villages and personally look at and photo those 500 year old church books! I was amazed that I would be able to do that, and the Pastor seemed unconcerned about preservation of those valuable old books, saying they had held up 500 years and probably would survive another hundred years without being photographed.

Through Leipzig Church Archives I have learned a number of interesting details that bear on research. One such is that in Leipzig, and possibly most larger German cities, the city is divided into church districts bounded by specific streets and the residents in that specific area are automatically registered in the church located in that area. All I had to do was give this archivist the name of the street on which my relative lived in Leipzig and he could then easily tell me which church was the one with the records. It is quite important to learn as nearly as possible the exact region, village, or city street, in order to determine which church will have

the records. And many church districts overlap or were set up according to earlier political events.

Also in the 1800s at least in Saxony there were duplicate church records which were kept in a district or state office. However, through the war years, many of those no longer exist. Another interesting detail in research is that "Melde" records were kept, and are still maintained. Laws mandate that civil registration-- residents newly arriving in a village or city must register with civil authorities, also upon leaving the village, they must notify civil authorities. Locating earlier Melde records is indeed a great find, as they often give much background information on the resident.

My persistence paid off when a duplicate church book did turn up in Grosswig, a village near Torgau on the Elbe River, and gave much more detail on my paternal grandparents than the original church book I had been shown and photographed 2 years earlier. To me a photograph of the actual book or pages of entries is the best proof I can get for documentation. Also, I learned that not all archivists, however, conscientious and reliable, give precisely every word in the church entry--rather, what is thought is necessary or only most important. Again, a discovery I made because I could read the German in red ink in the margin, which the Pastor passed over, but which said the person had taken his own life. I already knew that and had to point it out--it was not going to be mentioned!

I have been told numerous times that many detailed types of records were kept by the Germans, (and still are) but one has to learn specifically what to ask for and where to ask. And it does require patience and persistence to secure results. I've probably written hundreds of letters in the 20 years I have been working on our family histories, and was fortunate to be able to go personally to the villages and churches, and have made 5 trips to Germany to visit relatives and do research.

All in all, searching for one's ancestors is a great adventure and to me it is well worth the time and effort. My searches are continuing.