

Familienforschung Family Research

Take Me “Home”

BY JAMES M. BEIDLER

Visiting the *Heimat* (home village) is looked upon as the culmination of genealogical research for virtually every descendant of an immigrant, but many people—including quite a number of German Life readers, if my mailbag is the judge—do not have the confidence to go about planning such a trip themselves.

That has usually left people with the options of joining a larger group trip—and, in turn, having to accept whatever itinerary is chosen for them—or paying high prices for a third party to custom-design a trip for them.

Thanks to a relatively new business called The German American Connection, a happy medium between those alternatives is now available. The business is run in Germany by Ute Boese and in America by Jo Ann Wolf.

Boese says that what makes the service special is both the custom trip planning as well as offering assistance in family history research in Germany: “We search for living relatives and contact them, find church records, arrange family get-togethers and meetings with local historians,” she said. “Every tour is different and individually tailored to the needs, wishes, and budget of the group.”

Groups can come to Boese and Wolfe whether they have already found the ancestral hometown or not. “We recommend to start planning a German ancestry trip at least eight to nine months in advance, not just for planning the trip itself but also to have enough time for the family research in Germany, since that determines also where to go and how long to stay,” Boese said.

While there is no minimum number of participants, Boese said that her experience is that an escorted group tour becomes financially feasible with ten to twelve people or more.

“We usually agree on an hourly rate starting at \$30 an hour depending on the service,” Boese said. “If the geneal-

ogy service is part of the tour preparation, we agree on a flat fee starting at \$500 plus expenses which is built into the tour price and therefore as shared trip costs (are) much more feasible for each participant.”

The tours use a private bus, either for transfers or throughout the trip, depending on the itinerary and group size. “We cooperate with a reliable bus company and we know the drivers,” says Boese. “For groups of six people maximum, I have a license to chauffeur guests in a car/minivan.”

One of the recent trips planned by TGAC was for three generations of the Eschberger-Ihlo family. A member of the family met Wolf at the German Texans Heritage Society annual meeting, and planning began from there. About ten weeks before the trip, there was a kick-off get-together in a Texas pub.

Mikki Meyer Eschberger, the family contact person, was pleased with TGAC’s services. “We all had a wonderful time because of Ute Boese and The German American Connection!” she said. Boese “contacted a lot of people and checked out our hotels to be sure they were just right!”

Eschberger said the family wanted to visit the town their ancestors left in 1852 to come to Texas. “My Eschberger ancestors came from Wörlitz and my mother’s family came from Serno about twelve miles from Wörlitz.”

The tour included places of interest in Germany and concluded with visits to Wörlitz and Serno. “In planning our trip, I had told Ute that we would like to visit smaller towns instead of the larger ones,” Eschberger said. “She planned some really neat places to visit and some really great guest houses/hotels for us to stay in with a lot of wonderful people.”

In Wörlitz, the group received a wonderful welcome from Uwe Kettmann, who has a guesthouse. “He had a lunch for us with food that our ancestors would have eaten while in Germany and he took us on a slow carriage ride to Rehsen, a neighboring town where we met some of our relatives that were still in Germany. The carriage ride was to let us experience the mode of travel in the mid 1800s,” Eschberger said.

In addition to several of the “German Ancestry Tours,” the business has also planned Christmas market and porcelain art tours around Germany.

More information is available on TGAC’s website, www.tgac-us.com, or by telephoning Wolf at 281-630-6764 **GL**

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Members of the Eschberger-Ihlo family examine a church register in Wörlitz, an immigrant village of origin.