

# Gleaning Facts about Ancestors from Historical German Legal Notices

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In a previous article I mentioned that Google Books has digitized 19<sup>th</sup> century German newspapers containing legal notices into fully searchable files that can be automatically translated to some extent. By entering an ancestor's name or the name of their village you might discover interesting facts about them that you cannot easily find elsewhere. This article will present another example of information discovered in these notices. Using two legal notices published four years apart I will show how the facts found in them can supplement existing knowledge about an immigrant family.

By searching on books.google.com for the terms "Intelligenzblatt Herschberg" I got results that included several names of interest in that village, including Gebhard Faul and his wife Margaretha Volz. I will present some facts I already knew about their lives and then show what I gleaned from the articles.

Heinrich Gebhard Faul was born in 1784<sup>1</sup> in the village of Ruhbank, on the southeastern outskirts of Pirmasens in the Rheinland-Pfalz. His wife, Margaretha Volz, was born in Herschberg in the same year<sup>2</sup>. That village is located about 12 miles northwest of Pirmasens. I have not discovered the date and place of their marriage, but it was probably in the early 1800s.

When this couple immigrated to the United States in 1824 they brought six children with them<sup>3</sup>. The eldest two children were baptized in 1815 and 1816 in Lemberg<sup>4</sup>, a village a few miles east of Ruhbank. The three youngest children were baptized in Herschberg between 1819 and 1823<sup>5</sup>. Gebhard Faul first appeared in the Herschberg church records as a baptism sponsor in 1817. From the evidence in these articles it appears that the couple lived in the Ruhbank area until about 1817 when they moved to Herschberg.

The 14 December 1819 (No. 94) issue of *Intelligenzblatt des RheinKrieses* (*Advertiser of the [Bavarian] District of the Rhein*<sup>6</sup>) announced property near the city of Pirmasens to be auctioned to satisfy a mortgage. The notice described a farm at Ruhbankerhof and several nearby parcels of land. It appears that Gebhard held the mortgage on the property and was auctioning it because the resident farmer could not satisfy the mortgage. Gebhard and his wife were described as residents of Herschberg. Could this property have been Gebhard's family home, and were they living here before moving to Herschberg?

Each parcel of land to be auctioned was described by a section and number, with a descriptive location and the type of land – such as arable, garden, or meadow. Many of the named locations can be found on a modern map, such as Google Maps. The Horbacher, Gutenbach, Bitschacker, and steinigten Biel (Bühl) names can be found in or near the village of Ruhbank. My favorite location is described as "auf der windig Höh" – on the windy height. Google Maps shows it as a winding road leading to a higher piece of ground.

The size of each parcel was described using the terms *Morgen*, *Viertel*, and *Ruthen*. A Ruthen was somewhat equivalent to an English rod – a basic unit of land measurement

equivalent to about 2.9 meters. For measuring land area it would represent a square rod. A Viertel was 10 x 10 Ruthen and a Morgen 20 x 20 Ruthen. A Morgen was traditionally the amount of land that a farmer could plow in one morning, although the size varied between ½ acre and 2 ½ acres across Germany. The parcels described in this notice ranged from several Ruthen to 5 Morgen.

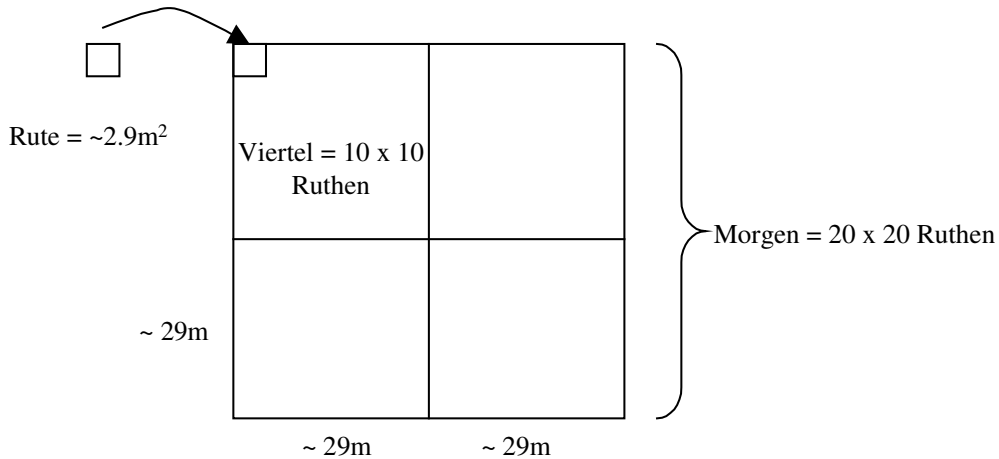


Figure 1 - Comparison of land measurement terms

A portion of the list is reproduced in Figure 2. It shows a few of the descriptive property names and sizes. Although the article does not contain a wealth of personal names, it does provide a perspective of the size and variety of land that a farmer might own in the early 1800s. It also provides proof that a person (Gebhard Faul) was in a particular place at a specific time.

Location				Size		
Section	Number on list	Name of parcel	Type [of land]	Morgen	Viertel	Ruthen

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Lage.			Natur.	Größe.		
Zeit.	Nummer der Rolle.	Benennung der Gewanne.		Morgen.	Viertel	Ruthen
F.	278	am rothen Wehber.	Wiese.	5	—	—
—	308	am feinsten Biel.	Ackerland.	—	2	6
G.	643	auf der windig Höh.	—	1	2	11 1/2
—	652	—	—	2	2	11 1/2
—	654	—	—	1	3	11 1/2
—	657	—	—	1	3	11 3/2
—	660	—	—	2	3	11 1/2
—	663	—	—	1	3	11 1/2
—	666	—	—	1	3	11 1/2
—	669	—	—	1	3	11 1/2
—	672	—	—	1	3	12 1/2
—	675	—	—	1	3	12 1/2
—	678	—	—	1	3	12 1/2
—	682	—	—	1	3	12 1/2
—	684	—	—	2	3	12 1/2
—	687	—	—	1	3	12 1/2
—	692	—	—	1	3	12 1/2

Figure 2 - Description of parcels for sale in 1819 article

The announcement of a foreclosure sale for property in the village of Herschberg owned by Gebhard and Margaretha Faul was published on 11 July 1823 (No. 218)<sup>7</sup>. It described 12 parcels of land by section and number, location, size, and type of land. The owners of land on both sides of the parcel were noted, clearly identifying many residents of the village. Finally, a starting bid was given, which was 1 Gulden for most of the parcels. This article also described the size of parcels using the term *Aren*, in addition to the measurements described above. An Are (plural Aren) was 10 x 10 meters.

The names of more than 20 residents of Herschberg were mentioned in this article. While none were my ancestors, all of the names were familiar to me, since I have conducted extensive research in Herschberg. Many of these people immigrated to the United States after 1830. This article establishes them in Herschberg shortly before their immigration.

Figure 3 shows one example of a parcel description from this article. Each of the 12 descriptions mentioned one or two landowners next to the Faul property.

*3. Section U. No. 1453. Twenty-nine Ruthen, or 6 Aren of meadow land in Bright Meadow Point on the Kneisper Mill Way, on the one side Ottilia Volz and on the other Peter Stahl, opening bid 1 Gulden.*

**3. Section U. No. 1453. Zwanzig neun Ruthen oder sechs Aren Wiesen, in der Breitwieser-Spiz, am Kneisper-Müller-Beg, einseits Ottilia Volz, und anderseits Peter Stahl, angeboten zu ein Gulden**

Figure 3 - Description of meadowland from 1823 article

The final parcel, shown in Figure 4, described a 2-story house, barn, stalls, and farmyard in the village of Herschberg on the main street (Hauptstraße). Adam Stoffel lived on one side and on the other side was the Jewish congregation (Judengemeinde). The amount of land was 17 ½ Ruthen and the opening bid was 100 Gulden. The sum of the opening bids for all parcels was 111 Gulden.

**12. Section U. No 293, 294, 295. Ein zweistöckiges Haus, Scheuer, Stallungen und Hofraiche, im Dorf Hersberg an der Hauptstraße, einseits Adam Stoffel, und anderseits die Judengemeinde, siebenzehn eine halbe Ruthen oder drey Aren haltend, angeboten zu einhundert Gulden**

**100 —**

**Summa des Angebots: einhundert elf Gulden**

**111 —**

Figure 4 - Description of house and barn from 1823 article

Unfortunately, the article does not offer any indication of what precipitated the foreclosure on the property. It obviously caused the Faul family to leave the country for the United States. They arrived in New York City on 23 September 1824 aboard the Brig George. They settled in Franklin Township, York County, PA. Gebhard and Margaretha were enumerated there in every federal census between 1830 and 1860<sup>8</sup>. They both died before 1870 and were buried at St. John's (Franklin) Lutheran Church Cemetery<sup>9</sup>. Their children married and remained in that area.

These notices published in the *Intelligenzblatt* supplied some additional interesting facts about the lives of Gebhard Faul and his wife before they immigrated. I learned precisely where they lived in Germany and what property they owned. Fully searchable images of the *Intelligenzblatt* can be found on Google Books at <http://books.google.com>. To see the specific articles above, enter the search term (quotes included) "Gebhard Faul" for the first article and "Gebhardt Faul" for the second. Whether an article is specifically about your ancestor, or the ancestor was merely mentioned, the details can give you a greater appreciation of how they lived and the challenges they faced. American sources do not offer the same perspective.

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<sup>1</sup> Larry K. Knarr, *Descendants of Eberhard Faul*, OneWorldTree, On-line Database, Ancestry.com, www.ancestry.com. (Provo, UT: The Generations Network, Inc., 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Church records, film #0193887, Herschberg, Germany Evangelical Church records, LDS Family History Library, Salt Lake City, UT, in possession of Family History Library, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, 33 N. West Temple St., Salt Lake City, UT.

<sup>3</sup> Passenger list entry, *New York Passenger Lists, 1820-1957 (Original electronic data from: New York. Passenger Lists of Vessels Arriving at New York, New York, 1820-1897. Micropublication M237. Rolls # 95-580. National Archives, Washington, D.C.); Passenger and Crew Lists of Vessels Arriving at New York, New York, 1897-1957; (National Archives Microfilm Publication T715, 8892 rolls)*, On-line Database, Ancestry.com, www.ancestry.com. (Provo, UT: The Generations Network, Inc., 2011).

<sup>4</sup> Church records, film #0193027, Lemberg, Germany Evangelical Church records, LDS Family History Library, Salt Lake City, UT, in possession of Family History Library, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, 33 N. West Temple St., Salt Lake City, UT.

<sup>5</sup> Church records, film #0193887, Herschberg, Germany Evangelical Church records, LDS Family History Library, Salt Lake City, UT, in possession of Family History Library, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, 33 N. West Temple St., Salt Lake City, UT.

<sup>6</sup> Bayerischer Rheinkreis, *Intelligenzblatt des Rheinkreises*, Volume 2, 1819, p. 653, original from the Bavarian State Library, books.google.com

<sup>7</sup> Bayerischer Rheinkreis, *Intelligenzblatt des Rheinkreises*, Volume 6, 1823, p. 955, original from the Bavarian State Library, books.google.com.

<sup>8</sup> Individual entry, *1830 - 1860 United States Federal Census*, On-line Database, Ancestry.com, www.ancestry.com. (Provo, UT: The Generations Network, Inc., 2011).

<sup>9</sup> York County PA cemetery records; York County Heritage Trust, York, PA.