16. Useful Tools for Those with German Ancestors

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You don't have to be a professional genealogist or expert at understanding German to be able to decipher what is in your ancestor's records. There are many tools that can help you figure it out. Many of these are free downloadable resources. The best resource for free German handwriting help can be found on the FamilySearch Wiki.

Helpful German Research Books
- Edna M. Bentz, *If I Can, You Can: Decipher Germanic Records* (San Diego, Calif.: E.M. Bentz, 1982).
- Roger P. Minert, *Deciphering Handwriting in German Documents 2nd Edition* (Provo, Utah: GRT Publications, 2013), 271 pages
- Kenneth L. Smith, *German Church Books: Beyond the Basics* (Camden, Maine: Picton Press, 1989), 171-97.
- Thode, Ernest. *German-English Genealogical Dictionary*. Baltimore, Maryland, USA: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1992. (FHL book 433.21 T352g 1992.)

Where is It? Finding Your Town in Germany

If you don't know where your German ancestor came from prior to immigrating to America, then you need to start looking at records where they settled to help determine their origins. Obituaries, naturalization records and ship passenger lists are some of the best resources for finding their origins.

Once you know the town name you will need to determine exactly where it is and where the records are kept. There are three main resources for determining what records exist for your town.
1. *Map Guide to German Parish Registers* book from Family Roots Publishing
2. Meyers Gazetteer
3. *Ancestors in German Archives: A Guide to Family History Sources (2 volumes)* by Raymond S. Wright III

Map Guide to German Parish Registers book series – Family Roots Publishing has a series of 61 books covering Germany and 14 books covering Switzerland. Some of the regions have multiple books in the series while others may only have one. Once you know the state your ancestor lived in you can order the applicable book. Go to the website http://familyrootspublishing.com and click on German Map Guides in the categories list on the left side of the screen. Then click on softcover to view the book series. If you click on a specific volume you can view a list of the towns listed in that book. The book is arranged with the Lutheran districts for each sub-district within that region in the front of the book and with the Catholic division at the back of the book. Keep in mind the Lutheran and Catholic ecclesiastical coverage is not the same. My ancestors lived in what was Sachsen-Meiningen in Thuringia. Historically, there were 44 Lutheran parishes in Sachsen-Meiningen but only one Catholic parish for the same area in the Kreis.

Meyers Gazetteer – This useful resource is now online at http://meyersgaz.org . Once you type in the name of your town, you'll get a list of all the locations in Meyers Gazetteer for that name. Choose the applicable one. You will then be directed to the page for that town. The original entry in the Meyers Gazetteer book can be found on the left side of the entry page. To the right side of the page are details on what all the abbreviations and words from the original entry mean and what repositories might have records for that town. Clicking on the map tab will show where the town was located historically next to other towns. The ecclesiastical tab shows nearby towns and how close they are to the town you have listed. It also details what churches exist for each of those towns (Lutheran, Catholic, Jewish or Other). The "Related" tab shows where the town is listed in other references.

Ancestors in German Archives – This is the most comprehensive book about finding records in Germany that exists. It is divided by each state in Germany. A brief discussion of the development of the region is covered and who had control of the region over time. A map showing the division of each county within the state is included. Then each state archive is covered in depth explaining what records they have in their collection such as emigration, religious, town/city/district records, census, military and other similar records. The archive location and the applicable website and email for it are also listed.

Reading the Records

The FamilySearch Wiki not only helps you determine where your ancestor came from, but also has many online tools to help you read the record. The sütterlin handwriting tool allows you to type in a name or word and see what it looks like in script. Keep in mind that the actual record will probably vary in how it looks depending on the time period and handwriting variation. Although most letters are fairly similar among people recording the entry, there are distinctive ways letters were written which varied over time. Also handwritten letters are very different than the Fraktur typeface font used for published books and newspapers. Check out the downloadable handout pages that not only list the German word in English and German, but have examples of what the word looks like in German script.

<u>Helpful German Websites</u>
- Family Search Wiki
  https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Germany_Genealogy

- Family Search Wiki - German Handwriting
  https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Germany_Handwriting

- Family Search Wiki - German Languages
  https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Germany_Languages

- Suetterlin Handwriting
  http://www.suetterlinschrift.de/Englisch/Sutterlin.htm
  http://www.suetterlinschrift.de/Lese/Kanzlei1.htm

- German handwritten and Fraktur script generator
  http://www.deutsche-handschrift.de/adsschreiben.php#schrifftfeld

- Fraktur
  https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fraktur

Another challenge with reading German handwriting is the vocabulary and knowing what the word is and means. FamilySearch Wiki has free word lists specific for genealogy to help you understand what is in the record. Many times short hand symbols are used to save space in records to indicate births, marriages, burials and other events.

<u>Word Lists</u>
- German   https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/German_Genealogical_Word_List
- Latin   https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Latin_Genealogical_Word_List
- French   https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/French_Genealogical_Word_List
- Danish   https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Danish_Genealogical_Word_List
- Portuguese   https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Portuguese_Genealogical_Word_List
- Polish   https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Polish_Genealogical_Word_List
- German Symbols   http://wiki-de.genealogy.net/Genealogische_Symbole_und_Zeichen
- Month Names in German   https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Month_Names_in_German
- Spelling Variations   https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Spelling_Variants_in_German_Documents
- Google Translate   http://translate.google.com

German Handwriting Webinars

FamilySearch Webinars

https://www.familysearch.org/en/help/helpcenter/lessons/old-german-script-part-1
https://www.familysearch.org/en/help/helpcenter/lessons/old-german-script-part-2
https://www.familysearch.org/en/help/helpcenter/lessons/old-german-script-german-church-and-civil-records-part-3
https://www.familysearch.org/en/help/helpcenter/lessons/german-paleography-seminar-introduction
https://www.familysearch.org/en/help/helpcenter/lessons/german-paleography-seminar-the-alphabet

https://www.familysearch.org/en/help/helpcenter/lessons/german-paleography-seminar-paleography-websites
https://www.familysearch.org/en/help/helpcenter/lessons/german-paleography-seminar-key-words
https://www.familysearch.org/en/help/helpcenter/lessons/german-paleography-seminar-key-abbreviations
https://www.familysearch.org/en/help/helpcenter/lessons/german-paleography-seminar-process-of-deciphering-records
https://www.familysearch.org/en/help/helpcenter/lessons/german-paleography-seminar-practice-reading-a-german-church-record
https://www.familysearch.org/en/help/helpcenter/lessons/german-paleography-seminar-practice-reading-a-german-civil-record
https://www.familysearch.org/en/help/helpcenter/lessons/german-paleography-seminar-spelling-variations-names-and-places
https://www.familysearch.org/en/help/helpcenter/lessons/german-paleography-seminar-practice-reading-using-familysearch-community
https://www.familysearch.org/en/help/helpcenter/lessons/germany-research-with-the-wiki-part-1-of-14-the-germany-genealogy-main-page
https://www.familysearch.org/en/help/helpcenter/lessons/germany-research-with-the-wiki-part-9-of-14-reading-original-german-records

BYU- Independent Study - German Research Course - FREE
https://isreg.byu.edu/courses/pe/999022071006/public/start.htm

Other German Handwriting Helpful Tools
- **BYU Script Tutorial** – this free website offers help in learning the handwriting or alphabets for other languages. They currently offer help for the following languages: English, German, Dutch, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian and Latin documents. Go to http://script.byu.edu

- **German Genealogy Records Transcription Closed Facebook Group** – this group assists in free transcription of records from Germany. It's a closed group so you'll have to join if you want to post images of the records you need help with. http://facebook.com/groups/1454015278205406/

- **Family Search Community Group - German Genealogy Research Group** – you'll have to be signed in to FamilySearch to access the Community pages. Go to the upper right corner and click on HELP. Select COMMUNITY. Once you are on the community page select GROUPS at the top of the screen. You can then join a specific group such as the German Genealogy Research group. Go to: http://community.familysearch.org/s/workgroup/Workgroup_c/Default

- **Google Translate** – This free tool is a quick easy way to help you figure out words in other languages or translate foreign words into English. The translation is not perfect but it is still useful. Go to: http://translate.google.com You can also paste a website address and it will translate the webpage. *(Although I find it easier to just use the Chrome browse because it will do the same things without having to paste each new page into Google Translate).*

- **Google Translate App** – this is an app for your smart phone that uses your phone's camera to instantly translate words. You can speak, tap, write or hover to translate from another language to English. We used the hover feature when we visited Germany to see what the German printed words said so we could pay the parking meter, read the menus at restaurants and read unfamiliar words. This is a super useful tool. Go to: http://translate.google.com/intl/en/about or http://apps.apple.com/us/app/google-translate/id414706506

Finding the Records

Many records in Germany are now available as digital images online. For areas not online you will need to use *Ancestors in German Archives* to determine which archive has the record you want and then find a local researcher to copy the records for you. I like finding researchers using Linked-In. Use the filters to find a researcher in Germany who resides in a town close to the repository needed. This will keep your travel charges smaller than hiring someone who lives in a different state or county to obtain the records.

How do I find online records:
- **FamilySearch catalog** – type in the town or larger ecclesiastical district to the search bar then click the applicable link. Choose church records or vital registration. Click on the applicable title and then the camera icon to view the image. If the camera icon has a lock next to it, you'll have to go to your local Family History Center to view the image.
- **Archion** – This pay site contains church registers of baptisms, marriages and burial for the Lutheran Churches in Germany. The record pages are in German script, so you will need to be able to read the German script to find your ancestors in these records. Go to: http://archion.de.en/
- **Matricula** – For those with Catholic ancestors, make sure to check out this website for the archdiocese church registers for births, marriages and deaths for European countries such as Austria, Germany, Poland and Serbia. Go to http://data.matricula-online.eu/en/
- **Archives** (church, local, town, etc.) – some repositories have their records available on their website. Pages dealing with original records will not be in English but in the German script. Use the Ancestors in German Archives books to find specific websites or go to the FamilySearch Wiki and search for archive links for the specific state in Germany desired.
- **Town websites** – sometimes towns have their church records or some of their church records on their website. Use Wikipedia to find the link to you town and then search the town website.

German Genealogy Relationships & Vital Event Words

English Word	German word / variant
Birth	Geburten, Geborene, geboren, Geburts
Burial	Beerdigung, begraben, Begrabnisse, vergraben
Child	Kind, Kinder
Christening	Taufen, Getaufte
Confirmation	Konfirmationen, Firmungen
Death	Tote, Tod, sterben, starb, verstorben, gestorben
Father	Vater
Husband	Mann, Ehemann, Gatte
Index	Verzeichniss, Register
Marriage	Heiraten, verheiratet, Trauungen, Gertraute, Kopulation, Ehe, kopulieren, Verehelichungen, Eheschliessungen
Marriage banns	Proklamationen, Aufgebote, Verkundigungen
Mother	Mutter
Wife	Frau, Ehegattin, Weib, Ehefrau, Hausfrau, Gattin
Given Name	Vorname, Name
Surname	Zuname, Familienname, Getschlechtsname
Parents	Eltern
Son	Sohn
Daughter	Tochter
Brother	Bruder
Sister	Schwester
Grandfather	Großvater
Grandmother	Großmutter
Aunt	Tante
Uncle	Onkel
Niece	Nichte
Nephew	Neffe
Cousin	Kusine

Common German Records

German Word	English
Adressbücher	City Directories
Auswandererlisten, Auswandererakten	Emigration lists / records
Begräbnisse	Burials (church)
Bürgerbücher, Bürgerbücherlisten	Burger rolls, citizenship registrations
Dorfsippenbücher, Ortssippenbücher	Local Histories
Familienbücher	Family registers (church)
Geburtsregister	Birth register (church)
Gildenbücher, Zunftbücher, Innungsbücher	Apprentice and guild books
Grundbücher	Land books
Hausbücher	House books
Kirchenbücher	Church books
Kirchenbücher Zweitschriften	Parish register transcripts
Konfirmationsregister	Confirmation registers (church)
Kriegslisten, Militärakten	Military records
Leichenpredigten	Funeral sermons
Passagierlisten	Passenger lists
Polizeiregister, Einwohnermeldelisten	Police registers, citizen registration lists
Sterberegister	Death register (church)
Steuerlisten, Steuerbücher	Tax lists, tax books
Taufregister	Christening / baptism registers (church)
Testamente, Testamentsakten	Wills
Trauregister	Marriage register (church)
Volkszählungslisten, Bauernverzeichnisse, Einwohnerlisten	Census records (originally called Tax & Tithing Records)

Fraktur Alphabet