

German Research for Americans

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Finding a Hometown- This is the biggest challenge in German family history. You need to search everywhere. If you cannot find your ancestor's hometown, look into the records of their friends and family who immigrated with them. It was common for people to come in groups. Records that might not be available for your ancestors might be available for someone they knew.

One unique source for German immigrants is German-language church records. Many Germans settled in German communities, and German was spoken at church. A German-speaking pastor would be more familiar with specific German places and how to write them. The series *German Immigrants in American Church Records* by Dr. Minert and his students focuses on these German-speaking churches and extracts data for German immigrants who are listed with a place of origin.

Records of emigrants leaving a German state may also be available depending on the location. One example is the index of those leaving Baden, found on FamilySearch.org: <https://www.familysearch.org/en/search/catalog/258733> You will at least need to know which state your ancestors came from (Prussia does not count. There were several "states" within it.) in order to search for these groups of collections. You can check the FamilySearch Catalog under the state (Baden, Württemberg, Hessen, etc.) and then "Emigration and Immigration" and also do a Google search. Many archives have compiled indexes from the records they have.

Spelling Variations- Don't be surprised if your ancestor's name wasn't always spelled the way you spell it now. Spelling wasn't standardized until 1901, and any spelling that produced the right sound was a valid spelling. See *Spelling Variations in German Names* by Roger Minert for an in-depth explanation of spelling variations.

Reading the Old German Handwriting- See the Old German Handwriting handout.

Which City or Church is Responsible for the Records (Jurisdiction)- Once you have found your ancestor's hometown, you will need to know where to look for records. Very small towns may not have had their own church or civil registry, so it is important to know which ones to search. The website <https://www.meyersgaz.org/> is a free resource where you can search your ancestor's hometown and see nearby churches and civil registries. It was created based off of a certain time period (the hard copy books were published in 1912), and sometimes it does not have all of the information you need, but it's a great resource.

German Research for Americans Handout by Karynne Moses
Kevan M. Hansen's *Map Guides to German Parish Registers* are a series of book that show the jurisdictions for both Catholic and Protestant churches by State (or Kingdom, Province, Dutchy, etc.) They are great resources but are less accessible than Meyers Gazetteer.

Repositories for German Records- Church records are the “bread and butter” of German research, because they were responsible for recording all individuals and are available in many locations starting in the 1530s and spanning to the present. Privacy laws protect more recent records. Civil registration started across German speaking lands in 1876. In some locations, they were available in 1874. Many records can be accessed for free on FamilySearch.org. Protestant records can also be found on <https://www.archion.de/en/> for a monthly fee, and Catholic records can be found on <https://data.matricula-online.eu/en/> Great websites for the parts of Prussia that are now Poland are <https://www.basia.famula.pl/en/> and https://www.szukajwarchiwach.gov.pl/en/strona_glowna There is a marriage indexing project for the state of Posen available here <https://poznan-project.psnc.pl/> For some localities, special websites are available through the work of diligent volunteers or other organizations, such as <https://mypomerania.com/> To find out about these resources for your region of interest, check the FamilySearch wiki and search Google.

Verifying a Match- Make sure to consider everything you know about your ancestor when deciding whether or not you have found the correct individual in German records. Names and dates may not be exactly the same, but what about family relationships? Are there other more likely matches?

Additional Resources

- Gutzwiller, Hellmut. *Die Entwicklung der Schrift in der Neuzeit*. (n.p.: Böhlau Verlag, 1992, republished online, *Archiv für Diplomatik*, Vol.38, No. JG, January 2019).
- Hansen, Kevan M. *Map Guide to German Parish Registers*. (Family Roots Publishing, several volumes available). <https://familyrootspublishing.net/collections/map-guide-to-german-parish-registers>
- Minert, Roger P. *German Residential Records for Genealogists: Tracking your Ancestor from Place to Place in Germany*. (Orting, WA: Family Roots Publishing, 2018).
- Minert, Roger P. *German Census Records 1816-1916: the When, Where, and How of a Valuable Genealogical Resource*. (Orting, WA: Family Roots Publishing, 2016).
- Minert, Roger P. *Deciphering Handwriting in German Documents 2nd Edition* (Provo, Utah: GRT Publications, 2013).
- Minert, Roger P., editor. *German Immigrants in American Church Records* (Various volumes published by Picton Press and Family Roots Publishing). <https://rpmgrtpublications.wixsite.com/mysite/about-1>
- Riemer, Shirley J., et al.. *The German Research Companion*. (China : Lorelai Press, 2010).
- Schober, Katherine. *Tips and Tricks of Deciphering German Handwriting*. (n.p.: Katherine Schober, 2018).

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- Smith, Kenneth L. German Church Books: Beyond the Basics (Camden, Maine: Picton Press, 1989), 171-97.
- Thode, Ernest. German-English Genealogical Dictionary. Baltimore, Maryland: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1992. (FHL book 433.21 T352g 1992.)
- Learn how to use Hansen's Map Guides:
<https://www.familysearch.org/en/help/helpcenter/lessons/hansens-map-guides-finding-records-with-parish-maps>
- Family Search Wiki https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Germany_Genealogy
- Family Search Wiki - German Handwriting
https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Germany_Handwriting
- Sütterlin 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#schriftfeld>
- FamilySearch Community – German Group
<https://community.familysearch.org/en/group/88-germany-research>
- Fraktur Generator – <https://www.waldenfont.com/GutenbergPress.asp>
- Facebook – German Handwriting
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1454015278205406>