

Building a Family to Find a German Village in U.S. Records

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I. Understand “Germany”

- A. Before 1871 Germany=many Independent States
- B. Germany unified 1871 by Prussians; some states allied with Prussia earlier (gray)
- C. Family History Library (FHL) uses 2nd German Empire map to organize catalog.
- D. Three basic steps for German Research:
 - 1. Identify a German village by learning all everything you can about U.S. ancestors.
 - 2. Then seek German parish records online to build the family as far back as you can
 - 3. Visit Germany, making appointments to see other records that add more to the German ancestors.

II. The Process

- A. **Organize a timeline** of the ancestor’s life events starting with death and working back to the earliest record. Include sources!
- B. **Pose & Prioritize Questions**
 - 1. Questions for each ancestor differ.
 - 2. Some must be answered before others.
 - 3. Church records are important, but the village could be in ANY U.S. record!
- C. **Recheck and review** all already obtained records carefully, seeking place names. If you already have the village name, corroborate it with more evidence.
- D. **Be thorough, collect: ALL records for ALL people!**
 - 1. For each event ask, are there additional records available? Obtain more than one record for each piece of evidence.
 - 2. Collect relatives—parents, siblings, children—as well as friends, associates, neighbors (FAN); e.g.: anyone mentioned in any family record.
- E. Work toward **families’ earliest U.S. record**. It is most likely to name the village with its full German administrative hierarchy.
- F. **Corroborate** with a second U.S. record.
 - 1. Best is a second primary record from an independent informant.
 - 2. Be certain before going to German records.
 - 3. Avoid time spent looking in the wrong German village.

III. Example—Straub

A. Questions prioritized.

- 1. Are there any Straub relatives in St. Louis?
 - a. What do children add?
 - b. How about siblings?
 - c. Did he have any siblings in U.S?
- 2. Did he marry in St. Louis or Germany? Where did the siblings marry?
- 3. How long was he in St. Louis prior to 1849?
- 4. Do his St. Louis relatives add anything?

5. How about Friends, Associates, Neighbors? What do they add?
 6. Only then can we answer: Arrived When? With Whom? From Where?
- B. **No U.S. siblings?** Are you sure? Find Potential Siblings:
1. Potential U.S. sibling=persons of same surname in same place at same time.
 2. Find potentials in census (males) and civil marriage index (males & females).
 3. Pay ATTENTION to Everyone's place of origin and CONNECTIONS to ancestor and to each other!
- C. **Organize a Spreadsheet**
1. **Top:** Years 1850 back-US arrival
 2. **Down:** given names of Straubs found
 3. **Blocks:** key CLUES
 4. **Colors:** code different records in different colors
 5. Enter the ancestor in Black and the earliest record you have for him.
- D. **Add Family, Friends, Associates, Neighbors** to timeline and prioritize.
- E. **Eliminate** some by following them until clearly not connected with the ancestor.
- F. **Continue** following the more promising, making sure they **connect** with the ancestor.
- VI. **Still No Origin Village in U.S.? THINK! Follow the Unique Already Known!**
- A. Where are the associates from in Germany?
1. In same State, but different towns, are they nearby? A German neighborhood?
 2. Plot origin villages on a current German map.
 3. Are places close enough together—within 10 or so miles—to indicate a chain migration of relatives or friends?
 4. Find the parish for each village using Hansen's multi volumes: *Map Guide to German Parish Registers for X State*.
 5. If a neighborhood is several parishes, search each for the ancestor and associate.
- B. Try Emigration records of that State at FHL <https://www.familysearch.org/en/>.
1. Seek references from FHL at worldcat <https://www.worldcat.org/> for closest library location or
 2. At online book sites, such as Google.
- C. Is the surname unusual? Current phone books or sites like <http://geogen.stoepel.net/> may get you started.
- D. Is a place near a border? Try spellings in other languages of both name and place.
- E. Was the place name reported or spelled incorrectly?
1. Do siblings, parents, etc. name the same place using same spelling? Find in U.S!
 2. Convert eastern Second Empire German place names into the current language at:
 - a. <http://www.jewishgen.org/communities/loctown.asp>
 - b. <http://isodp.hof-university.de/fuzzyg/query/>
 - c. https://familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/Germany_Gazetteers
 3. Check gazetteers for Poland, Czech Republic, France, etc.
- F. Was his/her religion other than Lutheran or Evangelical? EG: Mennonite, Amish, Dunker, Schwenkfelder, Hussite, Moravian, Pietist, Huguenot—try websites on these religious groups' history and migration.
- G. Were the ancestors from Eastern Europe?

1. Try websites on settlement in Poland, Czech Republic, Galicia, Russia, etc.
 2. Also see Foundation for East European Family History Studies <http://feefhs.org/>
- H. Review German history for useful clues to what was happening at the time.
1. Google the places' history. [Use Google translate for German.]
 2. FHL WIKI: <https://familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/Germany>
 3. German Genealogy web: <http://compgen.de/> under Regional drill down to village.
 4. GDHI: <http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/home.cfm>
- I. When all else fails, ask a knowledgeable English-speaking German genealogist for help. They can be found at FHL, IGGP, and online.
- VII. Be Exhaustively Thorough in the U.S. First!**
- A. Organize timeline and pose Questions.
 - B. Review all records you have.
 - C. ADD MORE PEOPLE: children, siblings, associates. Connect to ancestor or eliminate.
 - D. ADD MORE SOURCES: More than 1 record per piece of evidence.
 - E. Corroborate village with 2nd U.S. record!
 - F. Still Not Found?
 1. Map associates' origin villages.
 2. Try emigration records of the German State.
 3. THINK! Follow whatever's UNIQUE!