

German Genealogy: What Do You Need to Know?

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- I. **GOAL of U.S. German Research=name of GERMAN VILLAGE of origin!**
- II. **Best U.S. Record to Identify the German Village?**
 - A. VILLAGE COULD BE IN ANY U.S. RECORD!
 - B. Minert's thousands of research hours suggest likelihood of records yielding a village=
 - 1. 65-76% church records
 - 2. 15-30% military pensions, death, news obits, passenger lists, histories & genealogies
 - 3. 5-15% State census, cemetery stones, naturalization/citizenship, marriage licenses
 - C. Earliest record in U.S. for whole family most likely names the full place administration.
- III. **Besides Origin, What Needs Answering in the U.S. to Move Toward the Goal?**
 - A. Where did X live? Did X own or rent?
 - B. What was X's occupation? Church? Organization membership?
 - C. Who were X's parents?
 - D. When did family arrive? Did all arrive at once?
 - E. Prioritize questions. EG: Finding parents' names depends on who arrived:
 - 1. Parents' in U.S. may lead to origin place; but not if they remained in Germany.
 - 2. Unsure? Seek parents in U.S.; might find more family. Pay attention to witnesses.
- IV. **Organize the Ancestor; Consider What's Missing or Needed; Fill Gaps to Locate the Village.**
 - A. **Organize**
 - 1. Chronologically list what you already know about the chosen ancestor.
 - 2. Indicate sources already used on chronology.
 - 3. Ask what's missing? What sources have not been used that might confirm or add info?
 - B. **Review** all family documents carefully seeking village names. Do you already have it?
 - C. **Obtain** a list of record types, such as on StLGS website: <https://stlgs.org/media/freeforms/r114-source-checklist-2015.pdf>
 - D. **Pursue ALL record types:** Higher education, Military service, Occupation, Club membership, Court litigation, Land, or Business owned.
 - E. **Include all family members**—spouses, children, siblings, and associates (other people named in any family member's US record.) Use the FAN principle.
 - F. IF THE DIRECT ANCESTOR DIDN'T NAME THE VILLAGE, A RELATIVE OR ASSOCIATE DID!
 - G. If new evidence learned changes a past assumption, **review** all conclusions **again!**
- V. **Each Case Requires Different Questions and Approaches to Obtain More Administrative Detail**
 - A. **Already lots of info:** J Schulz's family says is from Issigau, Bayern, b 1833. How did they know?
 - 1. Family assumed place because letters sent to U.S. from there. Although primary letters sent from Issigau, don't confirm born in Issigau. Other records confirm only Bayern.
 - 2. More records or more people or both?
 - 3. Alternative record types list: He's a member of Concord Farmers Club. Find records at MO History Museum Library! Second-hand record, but "from Issigau."
 - 4. Two records together support Issigau as origin place.
 - 5. Overlooked records? Church marriage confirms Issigau. As does baptism of first child.
 - B. **Relatively straightforward:** Henriette Klocke, b 1850 Prussia, arrived 1869 age 19.
 - 1. More records or more people? Need her actual state, not just Prussia.

2. Immigration ship list = Detmold, eg: state of Lippe-Detmold
3. Next earliest US record = church marriage. It gives Bentorf, Lippe.
4. Emigration confirms Bentorf.
- C. **No information available and a very common name:** Georg Meyer.
 1. THINK! How did we learn his name? Must have a record!
 - a. Widow and heirs 1852-55 sold land "of Georg Meyer deceased," but she's remarried with a new surname, Greb.
 - b. Georg purchased same land Aug 1837.
 2. Needs? More family records between 1837 and 1852.
 - a. Census 1850: when & where were Grebs' Meyer children born?
 - b. When did Meyer widow remarry?
 - c. If last Meyer child b Germany 1836 and land bought Aug 1837, when arrived?
 3. Still don't know Georg's German origin. Continue using family records:
 - a. Widow's church remarriage gives her origin: Fröschwiller, Elsaß
 - b. Three Meyer daughters' church marriages give origin: Nehwiller, Elsaß
 - c. Map= 2 miles! Is Georg from Nehwiller? Need more to be certain, but likely.

VI. Understand German Research Before Going There

- A. Learn state's: History, Geography, Civil Admin, Laws/Regulations, Religions, Wars, Disasters.
- B. Second German Empire Map.
 1. c1800-1815 Napoleon aggregated hundreds of German states to 30+ INDEPENDENT States.
 2. 1850s-1860s the 13 states in dark gray on map allied with Prussia.
 3. 1871 Prussia unified the Second German Empire (1871-1918).
 4. Family History Library (FHL) ORGANIZES its GERMAN COLLECTION based on 2nd Empire map.
- C. Civil administration differed in each independent German country/state
 1. Possible Administrative levels: Village/Town (Dorf), District (Amt), County (Kreis), Prefecture (Regierungsbezirk), Province (Provinz) or State or Country (Land).
 2. Not all had six levels of administration, but most states had more than three.
- D. German Archives in current 16 States; but contents cover former Country/States. Find both States—current and historical.
- E. First German records sought=parish registers. Because:
 1. Vital records were kept by parishes.
 2. Parish records began in Reformation, c1545, and go back generations BUILDING families!
 3. Civil records began in 1876 (except a few earlier)
 4. Parish records are mostly online; research at home! (see key resources below)

VII. Key Resources for German Research

- A. **Best foreign research site=Family History Library (FHL)**(free) <https://www.familysearch.org/>
 1. START with "Search, Research WIKI;" type Germany (or any other State or Country.) https://familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/Germany_Genealogy Learn German research.
 2. Type parish name in "Search, Catalog" place field.
 - a. Icons: Online=camera. Indexed=magnify glass. Not online=film roll.
 - b. Camera icons=(1) open or (2) locked. Locked=(a) at FHC or Library, (b) LDS members only
 3. Try "Books" for online publications.
- B. **Ancestry** (\$; free at Libraries) <http://home.ancestry.com/> specific databases in card catalog
 1. Hamburg Passenger Lists, 1850-1934, and Index 1855-1934
 2. Emigration indexes for some States, eg: Württemberg, Baden, Brandenburg.
 3. Original German records, some from FHL and some unique!
- C. **German Genealogy Web Site** (free) <http://compgen.de/>
 1. LEXIKA: vocabulary on occupations, diseases, and other.

2. GOV: place finder—both current and historical administration diagramed & listed
<http://gov.genealogy.net/search/index>
3. OFB: Ortsfamilienbücher online
4. Regional: each State's history; printed OFB.
5. DIGIBIB: digital books online.
- D. **Kevan Hansen's, *Map Guide to German Parish Registers of X State***, 58 volumes at Libraries. =All village parishes. <https://www.familyrootspublishing.com/store/category.php?cat=163>
- E. **Meyers Gazetteer** (free) English. <https://www.meyersgaz.org/index.aspx> full administration, but names parish only if in village. If no village church, only lists possible parishes.
- F. **Kartenmeister**(free) Polish gazetteer <http://www.kartenmeister.com/preview/databaseuwe.asp>
- G. **Archion** (\$) <https://www.archion.de/en/> German Protestant records.
- H. **Matricula** (free) <http://data.matricula-online.eu/de/> Austrian & German Catholic records.
- I. **More German State Gazetteers:** (free)
https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Online_German_Gazetteers_and_Parish_Register_Inventories

VIII. Before Seeking German Records, Also Check for an Ortssippenbücher (OFB) (aka Dorfsippenbuch, Ortsfamilienbuch, Familienbuch, Local Heritage Book)

- A. What are Ortssippenbücher?
 1. Lists of all families in a German parish with dates of B/Bp, C, M, D/Bu arranged as family groups with references to earlier generation if they're also in that parish. Easier to read German parish records if you already have family names and dates!
 2. But=Second-hand source. Transcribing leads to errors! ALWAYS GET ORIGINAL DOCUMENT.
- B. Ortssippenbuch may not exist for your village (yet), but worth looking to see if there is one.
- D. Finding Ortssippenbücher—always search several aka title variations—Dorfsippenbuch, etc.
 1. German genealogy web site: <http://compngen.de/>
 - a. Online: <http://www.online-ofb.de/>
 - b. Printed under Regional, Regionale Forschung, Deutschland, Ortsfamilienbuch.
 2. FHL wiki: <https://familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/> printed, mostly use only in Salt Lake City.
 3. Library of Congress <http://catalog.loc.gov/> printed; use onsite in D.C.
 4. St. Louis County Library <http://webpac.slcl.org/> has all currently in print.
 5. World Cat <http://worldcat.org>. Make lists from above, seek book's closest location.
 6. Also check for online books at sites such as Google, FHL, BYU, etc.

IX. Find Your Germans in U.S. Records First! Then Research in or Visit Germany.

- A. The FHL is best place to learn.
- B. Goal=name of German village found in a U.S. record, preferably with its higher administration.
- C. Before 1871 Germany=many INDEPENDENT countries with differing administrations.
- D. RESEARCH U.S. THOROUGHLY!
 1. Ask and Answer many questions to build the U.S. family. Each ancestor differs.
 2. Find the earliest U.S. record created by the whole family.
 3. Organize ancestor chronologically with sources.
 4. Review timeline for all missing records and people. You may already have the village.
 5. Obtain all sources! You never know where you'll find the village.
 6. Add people to the timeline too—children, siblings, associates.
 7. CONFIRM village with a second U.S. record. Avoid seeking the wrong family in Germany!
 8. Don't quit! Think! Who or what record may help get around each problem.
 9. Many brick walls reflect insufficient research!

Checklist of Common U. S. Records to Use as Genealogical Sources (Use one checklist per ancestor/family.)

Ancestor's Name _____

Birth/Death Years: _____

TWENTIETH CENTURY

Personal/Family Records

- _____ Bibles
- _____ Journals/Diaries
- _____ Letters
- _____ Baby/Wedding/Scrapbooks
- _____ Photo albums
- _____ Original documents
- _____ Interviews with relatives

State/Local Records

- _____ Birth certificates or registers
- _____ Marriage certificates or registers
- _____ Divorce records
- _____ Death certificates or registers
- _____ Wills/Probates
- _____ Land records (Deeds)
- _____ Tax records
- _____ Voter Registration records
- _____ Court cases
- _____ Cemetery records/Tombstones
- _____ Funeral Home records
- _____ State/Territory censuses
- _____ Maps
- _____ Business records/Publications
- _____ School/University records (applications, yearbooks)
- _____ City directories/Phone books
- _____ *Who's Who*/Biographical/Historical books
- _____ Printed and digitized family histories

Newspapers (Local/Ethnic)

- _____ Obituaries and burial permits
- _____ Articles
- _____ Announcements (marriages, births, deaths, special occasions)

Federal Records

- _____ Social Security Death Index (SSDI) and/or applications

U.S. Census:

- _____ 1940
- _____ 1930
- _____ 1920
- _____ 1910
- _____ 1900

Immigration:

- _____ Naturalizations (after 1906)
- _____ Passenger ship manifests (after 1906)

- _____ Passports and applications (after 1906)
- _____ Immigrant Aid societies
- Military:**
- _____ World War I draft cards
- _____ World War II enlistment
- _____ World War II draft cards (Old Men's Draft)
- _____ Miscellaneous available records
- _____ Vets. Administration & organizations

Religious Records:

- _____ Births
- _____ Baptisms/Confirmations
- _____ Marriages
- _____ Deaths/Burials
- _____ Membership lists/church or synagogue publications

NINETEENTH CENTURY

Personal/Family Records

- _____ Bibles
- _____ Journals/Diaries
- _____ Letters
- _____ Scrapbooks
- _____ Photo albums
- _____ Original documents

State/Local Records

- _____ Birth registers
- _____ Marriage registers/Bonds/Returns
- _____ Divorce records
- _____ Death registers
- _____ Wills/Probates (inventories/sales/distributions, guardianships)
- _____ Land/Homesteading records (deeds, surveys, patents, grants)
- _____ Tax lists
- _____ Court cases
- _____ Claims for Civil War losses
- _____ Court Order and Minutes books
- _____ Cemetery records/Tombstones
- _____ Funeral Home records
- _____ State/Territory censuses
- _____ Maps
- _____ Business records/Publications
- _____ School/University records (applications, yearbooks)
- _____ City directories



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- _____ County histories/Biographies
- _____ Printed family histories
- Newspapers (Local/Ethnic)**
 - _____ Obituaries and burial permits
 - _____ Articles
 - _____ Announcements (marriages, births, deaths, special occasions)
- Federal Records**
 - U.S. Census:**
 - _____ 1890 (Union veterans & widows)
 - _____ 1880
 - _____ 1870
 - _____ 1860
 - _____ 1850
 - _____ 1840
 - _____ 1830/1820
 - _____ 1810/1800
 - _____ Special censuses (vary by decade: Agriculture, Manufacturing, Mortality)
 - Immigration:**
 - _____ Naturalizations/Declarations of Intention/Oaths of Allegiance
 - _____ Passenger ship lists
 - _____ Immigrant Aid societies
 - Military:**
 - _____ War of 1812 records
 - _____ Civil War enlistment
 - _____ Civil War troop records
 - _____ Civil War pensions
 - _____ Bounty land warrants & patents
 - _____ Southern Claims Commission
 - _____ Books/articles
 - _____ Veterans organizations
 - Religious Records:**
 - _____ Births
 - _____ Baptisms/Confirmations
 - _____ Marriages
 - _____ Deaths/Burials
 - _____ Membership lists/religious publications

EIGHTEENTH CENTURY & EARLIER

Personal/Family Records

- _____ Bibles
- _____ Journals/Diaries
- _____ Letters
- _____ Original documents

State/Local Records

- _____ Birth registers (eastern states)
- _____ Marriage registers (eastern states)
- _____ Death registers (eastern states)
- _____ Wills/Probates (inventories/sales/distributions, guardianship)
- _____ Deeds/land patents/grants
- _____ Tax lists
- _____ Court cases
- _____ Court Order or Minutes books
- _____ Militia records
- _____ Tombstones
- _____ Printed family histories

Newspapers (Regional)

- _____ Articles
- _____ Ads
- _____ Announcements

Federal Records

U.S. Census:

- _____ 1790

Immigration:

- _____ Oaths of Allegiance
- _____ Published passenger ship lists

Military:

- _____ Revolutionary War records
- _____ Revolutionary War pensions
- _____ War claims for damages
- _____ Bounty land warrants and sales of these
- _____ Books/articles
- _____ Veterans organizations

Religious and Business Records:

- _____ Whatever still exists

For all centuries, be open to looking everywhere for records that can assist you in your own search. Everyone's family is different; what works for one person may not work for another. *Remember to always look at documents for siblings, neighbors, and cousins; be alert to friends or relatives who served as witnesses.* You never know where the information is going to turn up. Study your family in the context of its neighborhood. Know the history of the area and of the people who lived there. Look for unique records wherever you can find them; don't be afraid to explore unusual sources to find what you need. Leave no stone unturned when it comes to doing thorough genealogical searches.



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