



German Genealogy Research

The **key moment** in German genealogy is **finding the exact place in Germany** - from where the immigrant ancestor originated - it may be a village or a neighboring parish (baptismal record). Knowing the closest town helps in finding other records, such as emigration permits.

1. Where to find the place of origin? – Research in the US - Locate the first church they attended in the US – there is a high probability - it was a German church (if church does not exist, records could be in the higher level of the church or neighboring parish). Locate gravesites and examine tombstones. Track siblings of your ancestor and their descendants; who were the witnesses of the event - relatives & neighbors in the old country; research friends, associates, and neighbors (FAN); check land, municipal, & court records (tax list, probate, will). Read county histories, biographies, check local genealogical and historical societies, occupation records, ethnic insurance companies, and other societies' membership. In addition, the military records (WWI draft cards), passport applications, and a social security application may list the birthplace. Check the local church, library, and archives, for their unique local collection, such as manuscripts, newspapers in German, and obituaries. Search passenger list records (see the white handbook in the Passenger List Area at MGC, for some online emigration links) and naturalization records. Research other passengers on the same ship. The Hamburg passenger lists give the last residence. From Sept. 1906, as federal government took over the naturalization process, the last residence is listed (USCIS website).

2. Locate the place on a map. Many places have the same name, even in the same German state (there are 16 states, including three cities - states).

Type the place name in Meyers Ort Lexicon (German gazetteer) – to locate the closest church, civil registry office, military district, court, postal office and railroad station <https://www.meyersgaz.org> . For former German places and their current names in former Prussia, check Kartenmeister.com <http://www.kartenmeister.com> . On the largest German genealogy site, **CompGen.de** or **Genealogy.net**, check places here: <http://gov.genealogy.net/search/index>

3. Church records are most helpful (started in the 16th cent.). Later, civil records, recording birth, marriage, and death – in all Germany from 1876 are very helpful as well. They are in the closest town and later stored in city archives and regional archives.

The *Map Guide Series*, by Kevan Hansen, give the radius view of neighboring villages – you will find other relatives in these nearby places! If the records are on microfilm – the film number is listed in the series.

Check FamilySearch.org website <https://www.familysearch.org/en/> to find if church and civil records are online. Click at *Search*, then *Catalog*, and type the place name. Create a free account or sign in to see the records. MGC has some German village records in microform.

Records were written in the **old German script**. For helpful books, check the [MCPL online catalog](#) and search by keywords, such as *How to read German Records*, *Translation Guide*, *Deciphering Handwriting*, *German Genealogical Dictionary*, and other.

For practicing handwriting, check <http://www.suetterlinschrift.de>. Find other tools and video lessons online at Family History Library (FHL) <https://www.familysearch.org/en/> .

4. If you cannot find any church and civil records at <https://www.familysearch.org/en/> or Ancestry LE (free at all MCPL branches), check the *Matricula Online* <https://data.matricula-online.eu/en/> for **Catholic records** (free), and *Archion.de* <https://www.archion.de/> (\$\$) for **Protestant records** (Evangelische Kirche).

5. There is a possibility that you need to **write to the Archives** in Germany. MGC has the book *Ancestors in German Archives*, by R. Wright, for a scope and collection in many German Archives. For Archives addresses, websites, email, church and society addresses, check *In Search of Your German Roots, A Complete Guide to Tracing Your Ancestors in the Germanic Areas of Europe*, by Angus Baxter.

6. **Secondary sources** may serve as a substitute for church and civil records, such as the *village lineage books* – Ortsfamilienbücher (OFB) or *Ortssippenbücher* (OSB), singular Ortsfamilienbuch, Ortssippenbuch, usually published at the village's anniversary. MGC has a growing collection of these books which can be found in the MCPL online catalog. Also, some of these books are online at <https://ofb.genealogy.net/>, <https://www.genpluswin-database.de/nofb/index.php> and <https://www.familysearch.org/library/books/>. The data in these books is taken primarily from church records. Each person has a specific number. You can track the person by this number to his or her parents and children. The Württemberg (now state of Baden-Württemberg) has Family Registers on Ancestry website (*Family Tables*), which usually list three generations on one page, including notes about adoption, illegitimate children and other remarks.

Other Notes

Records from former German territories and settlements - check in current countries and their archives.

Surnames: Map <https://geogen.stoepel.net/>, Dictionary <https://www.namenforschung.net/dfd/woerterbuch/liste/>

Last name change: In some cases, Germans changed *last names* after coming to America, to hear the same or similar sound as in their old country, shortened long names, translated them, or a teacher could have even encouraged changing the spelling for easier pronunciation. The names might have also been changed because of the political and social events in the 20th century.

MGC has a rich collection of books and other resources for German genealogy. Check the MCPL online catalog and type keywords, such as *German Research*, *Germanic Genealogy*, *German Immigrants*, *German Professions*, *Research in Germany*, for village lineage books - *Ortsfamilienbuch (OFB)* or *Ortssippenbuch (OSB)*, and other keywords.

Current German map

<http://mapsopensource.com/images/germany-states-map.gif>



German Empire (1871-1918)

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Deutsches_Reich_\(1871-1918\)-de.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Deutsches_Reich_(1871-1918)-de.svg)

