Finally! German Church Records and How to Use Them on FamilySearch

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Catholic Church Records

FamilySearch has published several collections to date of indexed German Catholic Church records using images from historical microfilm created by FamilySearch. These collections contain baptisms, marriages, and burials. The range of parishes included in the collections were selected geographically and are organized geographically as well.

These include indexed collections such as:

- ◦ Germany, Baden, Archdiocese of Freiburg im Breisgau, Catholic Church Records, 1678–1930
- ◦ Germany, Diocese of Augsburg, Catholic Church Records, 1615–1939
- ◦ Germany, Rhineland, Diocese of Trier, Catholic Church Records, 1704–1957

Protestant Church Records

In late 2018, FamilySearch published almost 80 million indexed records from various German Evangelische and Reformiert parishes. The bulk of these records are found in the FamilySearch collection called "Germany, Lutheran Baptisms, Marriages and Burials, 1500–1971" (https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/3015626). This collection will provide record hints delivered to the Tree for users to review and attach. The purpose of this collection to help grow the trees by building families of those with German ancestors.

Some of the records come from "Kirchenbuchduplikat," or church book duplicates, which are the copy of the records sent to the government by the parish, and are usually organized by event and year, as opposed to more extensive volumes covering several decades at a time. There is no difference in the contents of each record between the church copy and the church book duplicate, just a difference in where FamilySearch obtained the microfilm image.

This background information covers the Germany, Lutheran Baptisms, Marriages, and Burials collection:

- • This project was a joint collaboration with Ancestry.com, and the work was started in 2014.

Ancestry did microfilm conversion from FamilySearch microfilm kept in the Granite Mountain Record Vault to create digital images. Then, Ancestry created indexes from these digital images and published them to Ancestry's website, primarily in 2016. Ancestry has the same records published in 23 records collections on their website, generally grouped geographically by the archives where the records were microfilmed. Before the collection was published on FamilySearch in late 2018, the localities were reworked by FamilySearch to improve findability and accuracy for the parishes included.

- The "Lutheran" Church is actually known as the *Evangelische* church in Germany, but it is more often referred to as "Protestant" in the FamilySearch catalog. The records in the project include the Protestant denominations after the Reformation.

Frequently Asked Questions

Researching Immigrant Ancestors

- *How will I know if my immigrant ancestor was Lutheran, Catholic, or another denomination?* Often, records within the United States will not make it clear if the ancestor was a certain denomination in his or her home country. Here are some basic guidelines to help you guess the denomination. Then use original records (like those indexed on FamilySearch) to verify them in German records.
   - Catholics living in Bavaria and the Pfalz more likely immigrated to the United States in the 1760–1820 time period. Please see FamilySearch Historical Records for additional content being published for German Catholic parishes (baptisms, marriages, and burials).
   - A later immigration included *Evangelische* or Lutheran Germans who lived in some northern areas (including areas now in Poland), and they came to the United States in the 1820–1880 time period.

- *How can I find the hometown of my German ancestor so I can use these records?* In general, a birthplace of a German ancestor will be mentioned directly or indirectly in the records of their country of arrival (United States), and more research in the country of arrival can help narrow down possible birthplaces. Some US records will only mention the German state where an ancestor was born. Please be diligent in comparing U.S. information on immigrant ancestors with their proposed German birth or baptism records—be clear that the relationships (wife and children's names), historical states mentioned in US records, and other known information matches before adding a hinted record with German birth or baptism information.

- *How can I learn more about the parish shown on my ancestor's record? Why doesn't it match a modern location I can find [in Google Maps, for instance]?* The localities in the collection are based on the localities used in the FamilySearch catalog. The FamilySearch catalog based the locality place-names on the book series *Meyers Orts*, a German gazetteer covering the time period of 1871–1912 during the German Empire. The free website https://www.meyersgaz.org/ provides a searchable version of the *Meyers Orts* gazetteer. Some parishes no longer exist. Most towns or municipalities will be findable on a modern mapping system, but there is often more information needed from a gazetteer to understand the relationship between the parish and the town.

Collection Coverage

- *Does FamilySearch have all the Lutheran parish records for Germany?* No, not at all. Over the years, FamilySearch has been able to acquire many parishes of Lutheran records, but FamilySearch's collection contains less than half of the total Lutheran parishes that exist in Germany.

- *Does the collection contain every record from the parish included in the collection?* No, the FamilySearch collection doesn't contain every record from each parish. There are also parishes where microfilmed records were not indexed and published because the records are past the data privacy date.

- *Does this collection contain ALL the Lutheran Church records in FamilySearch's collection or on microfilm at the Family History Library?* No, there are parishes and areas that were not included in this project at all because of limited rights from the record custodians where the original images were microfilmed.

- *Will additional records be added to this collection?* The joint project with Ancestry will be the only indexed records published in this collection. Any additional German church records will be published in separate collections on the FamilySearch website.

- *I found a similar indexed record on Ancestry.* Yes, the collaboration on the indexing of these records is now published on both FamilySearch and Ancestry.

- *Why can't I see the image on all index entries?* FamilySearch did many of these microfilms between the 1940s and 1990s in Germany, long before digital images and access were contemplated by record custodians or by FamilySearch. Some of these microfilms and images are not viewable on the website because of FamilySearch's agreements with the record custodian at the time of the microfilm creation.

- *Does this project include microfilms that were originally produced with left side and right side images?* Yes, some of the earliest microfilms FamilySearch produced in the 1930s in Germany were filmed so that the left page of the historical book was on one microfilm and the right page of the book was on a separate microfilm. A large portion of the left side and right side parishes that were included in the project were stitched together so that both sides of the book could be viewed consecutively.

- *Is a higher quality copy of the image available if I can't read what I see on the image?* Many of the converted microfilm were created so early (1930s) that the microfilming process was done before FamilySearch put higher microfilm quality standards in place. Some of these parish books no longer exist, and some of them are held in German archives. In general, no better copy of image is available at FamilySearch than what is being displayed on the website.

- *Are there Lutheran records that FamilySearch is still planning to index? What can I do to help?* There is an ongoing indexing project for Baden church books, in connection with the Landesarchiv Baden-Wuerttemberg in Stuttgart, Germany. Please check the Indexing tab on the top of the FamilySearch home page for current indexing projects.

OTHER RESOURCES

- ◦ Archion $ (https://www.archion.de/) has many Protestant Church records for many areas of Germany.

- ◦ Matricula (http://data.matricula-online.eu/de/deutschland/) contains images but no indexes of Catholic parish records.

- ◦ The Evangelische Zentralarchiv in Berlin (EZA) (http://www.ezab.de/kirchenbuecher/provinzen.html) has church records from the areas of the German Empire that are now in Poland, including Ostpreußen, Westpreußen, Brandenburg Ost, Pommern, Posen, and Schlesien.

- ◦ The FamilySearch wiki has a lot of helpful information about German church records and how to use them (https://www-a1.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Germany_Church_Records).