

German Family History: Where do I begin?

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What makes German Family History different?

In the United States, researchers are often able to use the census as a starting point to identifying ancestors. The census gives a precise place of residence, which is vital in tracking an individual. For the whole of Germany, we have no such known resource.

Before Starting with the German Research

Preliminary Research

1. Determine known information from compiled family sources
 - a. FamilySearch Family Tree, other online trees, GEDCOMs kept by other relatives
 - b. Note that you may have to first set a goal to clear out all the unreliable sources from these compiled sources before setting out on your own research.
2. Talk to relatives
 - a. What has already done? What has been documented?

Understand the Three Biggest Challenges for the German Family Historian

The primary purpose of this class is to serve as an introduction to the three biggest challenges in German family history research. This is not to scare off researchers but to inform. Researchers armed with this information before beginning research, will be better prepared to start looking for their German ancestors.

1. *Explaining variations in spelling of names*
 - Is it natural?
 - Is it logical?
 - Is it predictable? (To a great degree)
 - What impact do these various spellings make on my family history research?
2. *Identifying the home town*
 - Start from present, work back in time
 - For research in Germany, knowing the hometown is *necessary* for detailed research
 - Start from U.S. and go back to Europe
 - Find town name in U.S. source (majority of the time)
 - Find town name in German source (rare)
3. *Reading the original record*
 - Learn the old alphabets
 - Fraktur
 - Deutsche Schrift* (German Gothic)
 - Become acquainted with principal languages of the records
 - German
 - Latin
 - French

Learning More About the Basics of German Family History Research

If you want to continue learning about German family history research, getting assistance from experts at the Family History Library and using resource guides can be very helpful. While a one-hour class is only enough to give this basic overview, some useful resources are listed below to continue learning about German family history research:

1. FamilySearch Wiki
 - a. https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Main_Page
 - b. Look here for handwriting guides, locality guides, and record type guides. It is updated frequently—check back regularly.
2. Handwriting Help
 - a. Image of basic *Deutsche Schrift* letter examples online:
https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/File:S%C3%BCtterlin_Gothic_script.png
 - b. *Deciphering handwriting in German documents: Analyzing German, Latin, and French in vital records written in Germany*—Written by Roger P. Minert
 - i. Look for this book being sold at conferences—will be cheaper than anything you find on unofficial websites! (During certain semesters, it can be purchased from the BYU Bookstore.)
 - ii. Look for the second edition—it contains more examples and helps.
3. Language Help
 - a. *German-English Genealogical Dictionary*—Written by Ernest Thode
 - i. Helpful for genealogical terms and terms that are no longer frequently used in German but still appear in the records.
 - b. <https://dict.cc>
 - i. Online dictionary
4. Spelling Variations Help
 - a. *Spelling Variations In German Names: Solving Family History Problems Through Applications Of German And English Phonetics*—Written By Roger P. Minert
5. Gazetteers and Parish Identification in Germany Help
 - a. *Meyers Gazetteer of the German Empire (otherwise known as Meyers Orts- und Verkehrs-Lexikon des Deutschen Reichs. 5th Edition)*—Searchable version can be found at <https://www.meyersgaz.org>.
 - b. *Map Guide to German Parish Registers, Volumes 1-57*—Written By Kevan Hansen
 - c. *Alphabetical & Reverse German Place Name Indexes, Books 1-27*—Compiled by Roger P. Minert
6. Other Helps
 - a. *The German Research Companion, Third Edition*—By Shirley J. Riemer, Roger P. Minert and Jennifer A. Anderson
 - b. *Researching in Germany: A handbook for your visit to the homeland of your ancestors*—By Roger P. Minert and Shirley J. Riemer
 - i. Useful if you are planning a trip to your German hometown