

Jumping the Pond

Discovering your German ancestor's place of origin

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Introduction

Ortsblätter des 19. Jahrhunderts, Bayerische Landesbibliothek (19th Century Maps, State Library of Bavaria Online)—<https://www.bayerische-landesbibliothek-online.de/ortsblaetter>. Features maps of Bavarian villages, including those in the historical area of Rhenish Bavaria, showing location of individual buildings and property boundaries.

Start at home

■ *Check family collections for the following documents:*

Family letters and documents—check for mention of locality

Photographs—look for location of professional photographer or writing on back

Obituaries and death notices

Family Bibles & prayer books—look for genealogical information written inside

Hymnals published in Germany—State churches in each province published their own hymnals

Artifacts / souvenirs

Talk to relatives.

Original records and published sources

■ *No magic formula exists for finding your ancestor's village. Check all available records that might pertain to your ancestor as you would in the course of any kind of genealogical research. The following is a list of possible sources.*

Census records—Censuses are available on various databases. Check all available, pertinent years.

Church records, especially marriage records. German-American Protestant records often list the hometowns of the bride and groom. Published church record indexes and abstracts are available for many localities. *German Immigrants in American Church Records* (Roger Minert, Rockport, Me.: Picton Press, 2005) is an ongoing project to index German immigrants in microfilmed copies of Protestant church records.

Civil death records

German newspaper obituaries

Passenger lists—Passenger lists, including New York, New Orleans, Hamburg and Bremen lists, are online at Ancestry. See also Ira A. Glazier and P. William Filby, *Germans to America*, Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 1988-2002, which extracts German names from passenger lists, 1850-1897.

Passport applications—Available online at Ancestry. If your ancestor traveled back to Germany, he may have applied for a passport.

Naturalization records—Naturalization records created after Sept. 27, 1906 list the place of origin. Those created before that date may or may not include the information but should be checked.

Military pensions—Revolutionary War and War of 1812 pensions are online at the Fold3 database. Civil War Union pension index is at Ancestry. If your ancestor was a veteran, it is possible he or his widow applied for a pension and listed his place of birth.

Probate records

Digitized records online—FamilySearch.org and the Ancestry database has a growing collection of digitized church and civil records.

WWI Enemy Alien Registrations—All non-naturalized Germans were required to register with the U.S. Marshall in their counties of residence, 1917 – 1918. Besides name and address, the forms asked for detailed personal information (including place of birth), names of parents and siblings, a photograph, physical description and finger prints. **Files exist only for those who registered in Kansas.** Records for all other states were destroyed. The records are available on Ancestry.

Surname research

■ *Researching the geographical origins of a surname is more successful if the surname is relatively uncommon.*

Geogen website—A tool for creating a surname distribution map based on current German phone directories. Online at <http://legacy.stoepel.net>.

Hans Bahlow. *Dictionary of German Names*, Edda Gentry, tr. Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002.

Deutsches Geschlechterbuch. Compiled genealogies of non-noble German and Swiss families in 220 volumes. Vols. 1 – 119 were published under the title *Genealogisches Handbuch Bürgerlichen Familien* (Görlitz: C.A. Starke Verlag, 1911 – 1943). Later volumes were published as *Deutsches Geschlechterbuch* (Limburg an der Lahn: C.A. Starke Verlag, 1955 - Vols. 1 – 143 have been digitized and issued on CD-ROM. An online guide to this source is at <https://www.slcl.org/content/guide-using-deutsches-geschlechterbuch>.

Consult published family histories and surname association newsletters related to the surname you are researching.

Surname email discussion lists and forums, such as those at <https://rootsweb.com/> may yield clues.

PERSI (Periodical Source Index) <https://www.findmypast.com/persi> —An index to genealogical publications. Search the index for your surname.

Der Schlüssel: Gesamtinhaltsverzeichnisse mit Ortsquellennachweisen für genealogische, heraldische und historische Zeitschriftenreihen [The Key: Cumulative Index, including Local History Sources, for Genealogical, Heraldic and Historical Periodic Literature], 9 Vols. Göttingen: H Reise, 1950 – 1986. As the title indicates, this source indexes genealogical journals published in Germany. Includes surname and place-name indexes. An introduction to the source was published in the April 2010 issue of *PastPorts*, available at https://www.slcl.org/sites/default/files/04_2010.pdf.

When you have an approximate location

■ *Narrow your search:*

Wendy Uncapher. *Lands of the German Empire and Before*. Janesville, Wis.: Origins, 2000. This guide is helpful for locating a historical kingdom or principality, such as “Hesse-Darmstadt.”

Check for emigration & immigration lists for specific provinces—See the bibliography, “Passenger, emigration and immigration lists pertaining to 19th-century German emigration” at <http://bit.ly/2hoM0Sn>.

You’ve discovered the village name! Now what?

■ *Things to know about your village name:*

- Is there more than one village with the same name? If so, which one is yours?
- Has the village name been transcribed correctly?
- Know the state, the nearest large town, the religious parish, and the governmental district (*Amt* or *Kreis*)

■ *Cartographical aids are useful for identifying a village, its location and other information.*

Gazetteers (geographical dictionaries)

E. Uetrecht. *Meyers Orts- und Verkehrs-Lexikon des Deutschen Reichs* [Meyer’s Locality and Transportation Encyclopedia of the German Empire], 3 vols. Leipzig: Bibliographisches Institut, 1912; reprint, Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing, 2000. R 943 M613. The online version makes consulting this source easy: <https://www.meyersgaz.org/>.

Wendy K. Uncapher. *How to Read & Understand Meyers Orts- und Verkehrs-Lexikon des Deutschen Reichs*. Janesville, Wis.: Origins, 2003. R 943 M613H

Genealogisches Ortsverzeichnis (GOV): <http://gov.genealogy.net/>

Wikipedia: <http://www.wikipedia.org>. The German version is at <http://de.wikipedia.org>. Both are useful for finding information about your village.

Place name indexes

Place name indexes by Roger Minert—issued for various German provinces, will help determine the correct spelling of a village when it is transcribed incorrectly or partially illegible.

Each volume includes a reverse index that allows you to look up a village name by the ending of the word. Volumes are titled *[Name of province] Place Name Indexes: Identifying Place Names Using Alphabetical and Reverse Alphabetical Indexes*.

Atlases

Richard Andree. *Andrees Allgemeiner Handatlas* [Andree's Comprehensive Hand Atlas].

Leipzig, Germany: Verlag von Velhagen & Klasing, 1899. R 912 A558A (located with map and atlas collection). Also available on CD-ROM.

Google Maps: <http://maps.google.com>

■ Find original records

Kevan M. Hansen. *Map Guide to German Parish Registers*, 38 vols. North Salt Lake, Utah:

Heritage Creations,

2004—. Each volume provides a guide to locating villages within their corresponding Catholic and Protestant parishes. The Family History Library film number is included if the records for a parish have been filmed. Also includes information for contacting archives, finding Jewish records, and locating records for churches in denominations outside of the official state churches.

FamilySearch.org offers digitized records for many German church records, although many of them are restricted to members of the LDS Church.

The Archion website provides access to many digitized Protestant Church records in Germany for a fee. See <https://www.archion.de/en/>. The Matricula website (<https://data.matricula-online.eu/en/>) provides free access to many digitized Catholic records).

■ When no microfilm or digitized records exist, locate the appropriate archives

Raymond S. Wright, III, et al. *Ancestors in German Archives: A Guide to Family History*

Sources. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 2004. Volumes in *Map Guide to German Parish Registers* (see above) also has contact information for archives.

Other helpful sources

Ortsippenbücher / Ortsfamilienbücher—Genealogical information extracted mainly from church registers about families within a specific village or parish. St. Louis County Library has one of the largest collections in the U.S. A list of holdings is available online at

<http://bit.ly/2u5IOSR>.

Locale-specific emigration lists—See “Passenger, emigration and immigration lists pertaining to 19th-century” at <http://bit.ly/2hoM0Sn>.

Subscription information for *PastPorts*, the History & Genealogy Department's monthly electronic newsletter, and links to past issues is at <https://www.slcl.org/pastports/>. Each issue includes information about H&G resources and a listing of new items added to the collection.



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