

Of non-noble lineage

Deutsches Geschlechterbuch as a German genealogical source

Scott Holl

Manager, History & Genealogy

St. Louis County Library

<https://www.slcl.org/genealogy> | genealogy@slcl.org

Deutsches Geschlechterbuch (DGB), German Lineage Book in English, is a secondary source for genealogical research published in 221 *Bände* (volumes). Each volume features compiled genealogies of non-noble, primarily middle-class German and Swiss-German families¹.

Publication history

F. Mahler began publishing the series in 1898 under the title *Genealogisches Handbuch bürgerlichen Familien* (Genealogical Compendium of Middle-Class Families). Bernhard Koerner (1875-1952) became editor beginning in 1900 with Vol. 7, and Hans Kretschmer's publishing company, C.A. Starke Verlag, produced and sold the volumes. Publication halted with Vol. 119 in 1943 due to supply shortages. On 8 May 1945, the Soviet Army confiscated the publishing house, destroyed the presses, and turned inventory into fuel and waste paper. Kretschmer fled to the West in 1948 and eventually re-established the company in Limburg an der Lahn, Hesse. The first post-war issue, Vol. 120 became available in 1955 under the new title, *Deutsches Geschlechterbuch*. The destruction of printing plates in 1945 meant that the first 119 volumes became unavailable for purchase until the company began selling digitized versions on CD-ROM beginning in 2000.² Vol. 221, issued in 2012, was the last volume published. C.A. Starke entered bankruptcy in 2018. Stock and publication rights were sold to Geschichtlicher Büchertisch (<https://www.geschichtlicher-buechertisch.de/>), which continues to sell DGB volumes.

Contents and organization

The entire series is commonly referred to as *Deutsches Geschlechterbuch*. Vols. 1 – 119, published as *Genealogisches Handbuch bürgerlichen Familien*, are known as the “Old Series” (*alte Reihe*) and Vols. 120 and later as the “New Series” (*neue Reihe*). Some volumes were issued in sub-series based on geographical region.³

DGB volumes are in German, and those belonging to the Old Series were printed using *Fraktur* typefaces. The genealogies follow a standard format that non-German speakers can easily decipher with a word list and key to the symbols and abbreviations. The main body of each volume features lines of descent for specific families. These typically begin with a narrative section that can include a description of the family's origin, meaning of the surname, illustrations of coats of arms with descriptions, and other information about the lineage. Researchers who do not know German may want to have these sections translated.

Following the narrative is a brief overview chart outlining the generations and the various branches described in the genealogy that follows. Roman numerals indicate generations and letters denote individuals within a generation (Ia or Xb, for example). Although the charts do not include names (only Roman numerals and letters denoting generations), they provide a map whereby one can understand the relative position of an individual within the family tree. The also correspond to individual entries in the lineage that follows. The remaining text provides basic genealogical information about individuals. For women marrying into the line, the name of her parents and place of birth is usually provided. Each generation is presented in its entirety, followed by the next generation.

Other features

Besides genealogies, each volume also includes front material, an appendix, and an index to surnames mentioned in the volume. Front material typically includes memorial pages and introductory essays on history, culture, genealogical sources, or some other related topic. Researchers who know German may find the essays in the New Series to be of interest. Volumes in the Old Series also include cumulative surname indexes of lineages published up to that point and lists of subscribers. Appendixes typically include additional information about the lineages featured in the main text, including biographies of important members, *Ahnentafel*, and pedigree charts for females who married into a line. Errata and additions to previous volumes are often found in the appendix, as well.

Indexes

DGB indexes list surnames only, although one may (rarely) find an index to first names or place names in individual volumes. Names beginning with “von,” “zu,” etc. are indexed by the main word in the name. “Von der Aue” would be indexed under “Aue,” for example. Indexes list volume numbers but not the pages where surnames can be found. This makes it necessary subsequently to consult indexes in individual volumes to find the exact page. The following is an overview of the various surname indexes available.

■ ***Deutsches Geschlechterbuch: Gesamtnamenverzeichnis der Bände 1—216* [Cumulative Index, Vols. 1 – 216]**
Issued on CD-ROM by C.A. Starke Verlag in 2003.

■ ***Stammfolgen-Verzeichnisse* [Index to Lineages]**

C.A. Starke Verlag issued several cumulative indexes in print. The first part of the print indexes pertain to volumes of *Genealogisches Handbuch des Adels* (Genealogical Handbook of Nobility), another C.A. Starke publication. An index for DGB volumes through Vol. 170 appear in another section, followed by an appendix expanding coverage up to the point of the indexes publication.⁴

■ **Indexes in individual DGB volumes**

Each DGB volume includes an every-surname index for that volume.

■ **DGB CD-ROMs (Vols. 1–143)**

Each CD in the set includes the following indexes:

- Index to all surnames mentioned in volumes on the CD
- Overview of all lineages included on the CD
- Cumulative index to lineages issued in CD format up to that point.

Online guides

A guide to holdings at St. Louis County Library, a lexicon of common words and symbols found in the DGB, and a guide to using the volumes on CD-ROM can be downloaded as PDFs from <https://www.slcl.org/content/guide-using-deutsches-geschlechterbuch>.

Finding DGB volumes

Many genealogical libraries have at least some DGB volumes. Search the title in WorldCat (<http://www.worldcat.org>) to find repositories, and then search individual library catalogs for holdings. View St. Louis County Library holdings at <https://bit.ly/2AUvOTC>. The Family History Library in Salt Lake City has volumes in print and on microfilm. The GenWiki website (http://genwiki.de/Deutsches_Geschlechterbuch) provides a list of published volumes with links to digitized copies available online.

Notes

1. C.A. Starke Verlag published a similar resource for noble families between 1951 and 2015 titled *Genealogisches Handbuch des Adels*.
2. Hans Kretschmer, “Zum Geleit” in *Deutsches Geschlechterbuch*, Band 120 (Dritter Badischer Band) (Glücksburg/Ostsee: C.A. Starke Verlag, 1955), xix ff.
3. Shirley J. Riemer, Roger P. Minert, and Jennifer A. Anderson, “Deutsches Geschlechterbuch (German lineage books)” in *The German Research Companion*, 3rd ed. (Sacramento, Cal.: Lorelei Press, 2010), 370–371. The article provides a list of *Bände* (volumes) pertaining to a specific geographical region.
4. For more information about indexes, see Riemer, p. 370.



St. Louis
County
Library

History & Genealogy

St. Louis County Library
1640 S. Lindbergh Blvd.
St. Louis, MO 63131

314-994-3300

genealogy@slcl.org

www.slcl.org/genelaogy