

# Hofgeschichten, Häusergeschichten, Bürgerbücher

## Local History Sources for German Genealogical Research

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#### What are they?

These sources deal with the histories of towns and villages. They can include genealogical data and provide social and historical context for your ancestors' lives.

#### *Hofgeschichten and Häusergeschichten*

- *Hofgeschichten* are farm histories or chronicles.
- *Häusergeschichten* are building histories.
- *Hofgeschichten* are published for farming village.
- *Häusergeschichten* often pertain to towns and cities and can focus on the histories of physical buildings.
- Both types of publications provide historical lists of the occupants of properties in succession. They can help link generations and can be especially useful if church records or an *Ortssippenbuch* is not available.

#### *Bürgerbücher*

- Bürgerbücher are registers of citizens or citizenship rolls.
- They feature yearly lists of persons admitted to the citizenship rolls in a town or city.

All of these publications can offer a variety of other information, such as histories of the local community and its institutions. They vary greatly in format and content.

#### Historical context

When using these sources, it is helpful to understand the historical, social, and economic contexts of the information. The publications often include helpful background chapters, although these will be challenging to access for non-German speakers.

#### *Farms and farming villages*

Villages were small communities whose economic life was based on agriculture. Until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, village life was controlled by the manorial system that developed out of feudalism. The system was governed by laws and customs that varied depending on the territory. Peasants had use of their farms in return for a portion their crops and produce, as stipulated in their leases. Landlords could also impose various rents, fees, and labor requirements. *Leibeigenschaft* (bodily servitude / bondage) was common. In this situation, the peasant was bound to a specific landlord who controlled almost every aspect of life from birth to death. Some peasants had the status of *Freieigene* (freemen or freeholders), meaning they were not in bondage to a landlord, but were still subject to the requirements of their lease. Reforms in

the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries eventually ended the manorial system, allowing farmers to own their land and begin to take control of their economic and personal lives.

### *Cities and towns*

Towns and cities were centers of economic and political activity. Towns had various privileges, including the right to operate a market. Their economies were based on trade and craft, as well as agriculture. Towns could control who lived within their bounds. Only property owners could become citizens with a say in local affairs. Others could apply for protection of the town and lease a property.

### **Finding Hofgeschichten, Häusergeschichten, and Bürgerbücher**

In order to find one of these publications, you must first know the village, town, or city of origin for you ancestor. In addition to stand-alone publications, they can appear as chapters in local history books or articles in regional historical or genealogical publications.

One tactic to finding them is to search for the place name at the [GenWiki website](http://genwiki.de/Hauptseite) <<http://genwiki.de/Hauptseite>>. Use the search box on the top left corner of the webpage under "Suche in GenWiki." A search should return pages with information about specific towns and village. Look for a bibliography under the heading, "Literatur." |

Another tactic is to search library catalogs. Searching the catalog of the German National Library (Deutsche National Bibliothek), the equivalent of the U.S. Library of Congress, may discover relevant titles. Search by place name. If the results are too numerous, you might include search terms such as "Hofgeschichte," "Häusergeschichte," "Höfefolgen," "Geschichte," "Ortsgeschichte," "Chronik," "Ortschronik," or "Bürgerbuch" to limit the results.

While you will not be able to request books from the German National Library, you might at least discover books for your village. Search U.S. library catalogs by title, or do a keyword search, as described above. St. Louis County Library has many of these publications. Search the library's [online catalog](https://iii.slcl.org/) <<https://iii.slcl.org/>>. If you get no results, try searching Worldcat <<https://www.worldcat.org/>>. Worldcat will not only allow you to search books, it will also list libraries that own a specific title.

Finding articles in regional journals will be more challenging. [The GenWiki website has a list of genealogical societies \(Vereine\) with links to their website](http://genwiki.de/Vereine) <<http://genwiki.de/Vereine>>. Visit the society websites and look for a list of publications. Search for the journal title in library catalogs. Once you find the journal of interest, examine the table of contents for each issue. Some societies publish tables of contents of their journals on their websites.

The staff of the St. Louis County Library History & Genealogy Department will be glad to assist you in locating possible publications.

### **Bibliography of works mentioned in this presentation**

Call numbers refer to locations in the St. Louis County Library History & Genealogy Department.

Thode, Ernest. *German-English Genealogical Dictionary*. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing, 1992.  
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## *Hofgeschichten and Häusergeschichten*

- Emmert, Hermann. *Burgbernheim: Orts- und Häusergeschichte bis ins 21. Jahrhundert*. Nürnberg: Gesellschaft für Familienforschung in Franken, 2008. R 943.32 E54B
- Gosmann, Hienrich. *Epe: Epe, Malgarten, Bühren: Chronik einer Landgemeinde*. Bramsche, Germany: Rasch Verlag, 1994. R 943.5911 G676E
- Greinwald, Hans. *Bayersoier Haus- und Hofgeschichte: Geschlechter, Hausnamen, Flurnamen*. Bayersoien, Germany: Gemeinde Bayersoien, 1988. R 943.36 G824B
- Hintner, Patricia. *Die Geschichte von Türkheim: Hausnamen und Häusergeschichte*. Türkheim, Germany: Marktgemeinde Türkheim, 1992. R 943.37 H666H
- Immerz, Hermann. *Schwaighausen: ein Dorf im Wandel der Zeit*. n.l.: Hermann Immerz, 2000. R 943.37 I33S
- Wagner, Jürgen. *Bäuerliche Besitzfolgen in Mokritz, Kreis Torgau*, 4. Auflage. Leipzig: Arbeitsgemeinschaft für mitteldeutsche Familienforschung, 2008. R 943.21 W133B
- Wiedemann, Ernst. "Hofgeschichte der Gemeinde Oberpreuschwitz." *Archiv für Geschichte von Oberfranken*, Band 47 (1967), 5–110.

## *Bürgerbücher*

- Barthel, Konrad. *Bürgerbuch des ehemaligen Marktflleckens Burgbernheim 1597–1840*. Nürnberg: Gesellschaft für Familienforschung in Franken, 2005. R 943.32 B285B
- Vanderhalven, Fritz. *Bürgerbuch der Stadt Detmold : von 1635 bis 1885*. Detmold, Germany: Naturwissenschaftlicher und Historischer Verein für das Land Lippe / Lippischer Heimatbund, 1977. R 943.565 V483B

## *Ortssippenbuch*

- Niemann, Udo. *Leben und Sterben im Kirchspiel Bramsche/Hase: ein Familienbuch*, Band 3: Epe. Berlin: U. Niemann, 2009. R 943.5911 N671L

## *Websites*

- GenWiki main web page: <http://genwiki.de/Hauptseite>
- GenWiki, list of genealogical societies: <http://genwiki.de/Vereine>
- German National Library: [https://www.dnb.de/EN/Home/home\\_node.html](https://www.dnb.de/EN/Home/home_node.html)
- St. Louis County Library online catalog: <https://iii.slcl.org/>
- Worldcat.org: <https://www.worldcat.org>



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