

# Researching German Ancestors

## *Class 4: More German Records*

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Once you start to identify the origins of your German ancestors, it's important to understand the types of records you want to use and how best to go about finding them. It's also important to remember that while many records are making their way online, when working in German records, the bulk of the resources are unlikely to be available through the Internet.

### Primary Records

The records that family historians turn their attention to when working on German genealogy are original or primary records, including:

- Civil Registration
- Church Records (Kirchenbücher)
- Family Registers (Familienregister or Familienbücher)
- Census Records (Volkszählungen)
- Emigration Records
- Occupational Records
- Military Records

Civil and church records were discussed in the second class, as were the family registers. These are the most common records used by those researching their family history. However, much information may be gleaned from these other records.

### Census Records

Because Germany was not a single country for much of its history, researchers need to keep in mind that census records tend to be regional. What may be available for one locality in say Baden, may not have even been taken anywhere in Württemberg. Your best resource for census records is Roger P. Minert's *German Census Records, 1816-1916: The When, Where and How of a Valuable Genealogical Resource* (see the Bibliography).

### Emigration Records

Emigration records vary in type and information provided. Many communities required that male citizens serve in the local military for a specific period of time. As such, if a family wished to leave the area, they often had to request permission. Such lists are often known as *auswanderunglisten*. The resident registration lists (*einwohnermelde Listen*) may include valuable information as well. If you have located the arrival of your ancestor on an incoming U.S. Passenger List, do not assume that the same information will be found on the emigration passenger list (*passagierlisten* or *schiffslisten*). Often there may be a clue to the town origins of your ancestor in the emigration list not included in the U.S. passenger lists.

*Tip: Always work in the emigration passenger lists if available.*

The *auswanderunglisten* may not exist for your ancestor. Many families did not get the proper permission to leave Germany, especially if they had a son who should be entering the military at the time. However, if available, these records should always be investigated.

## Emigration Passenger Lists

Emigration passenger lists are available for the port of Hamburg for those who were both traveling directly to the foreign country and those who had an indirect voyage—they had to go to another port, say, Hull, England, and then change ships.

Hamburg's lists between 1850 and 1854 are arranged alphabetically. There is a 15-year index to the Direct lists for the years 1856-1871. Regular indexes, by year or part of a year, exist as well:

- Direct lists – 1854-1934
- Indirect lists – 1854-1910

The passenger emigration lists for the port of Bremen do not exist for very many years. Unfortunately, many of the lists were destroyed. The lists between 1832 and 1872 were burned. Then, as a result of lack of space for storage, those for 1874-1907 were destroyed every two years. And while this ceased in 1907, the lists for 1907-1945 were destroyed in an air raid during World War II. Copies of lists for 1920-1939 were later found and exist. You will want to visit DIE MAUS (<http://www.passengerlists.de/>) for available Bremen lists.

## Occupational Records

Occupational records can be in the form of apprenticeship records or guild lists. It could be the character book (*dienstbuch*) that a servant was required to get from the local police authorities. Guilds were intended to ensure that the tradesmen were upstanding citizens. Applications, if found, can hold useful information including place of birth, names of parents, last residence, and the family state of the applicant. The *dienstbuch* was given to a servant girl when she entered service and much information is included in this book. It showed information identifying her as well as information about the job she was leaving. There is a wealth of information in such books, but unfortunately, they were held by the servant herself, so unless passed down in the family, they may be difficult to find.

Guild records (*Zunft*) may be more easily available, as these may have been deposited in local and state archives. You will also want to look for apprenticeship records which may be identified as *Lehrzeit* or if they had a service book, it would be known as a *Wanderbüch*.

It's also a good idea to seek out histories of the various guilds as they may hold clues or source citations that could lead you to original records.

## Military Records

Because most males were required to render military service, such records can prove useful. The downside is that they are often difficult to locate. In many instances you must know the unit an ancestor served with to locate a record.

## Town Lineage/Family Books

These *Ortsfamilienbücher* include information such as births, marriages, and deaths for individuals in a specific town and year range. They are arranged by families. The information found in them has been taken from sources including parish registers, civil registration, court records, land records, and other resources. When printed in a book they follow a standard format. Online versions may vary.

## Working with Online Records

Online records, because of the variety of places where they may be located, will vary dramatically in search abilities. Many of the records that are available through regional archives may be “browse only” in which you must look image by image (much like researchers in the past would go page by page using microfilm or an original register volume).

Because you must often look page by page, it is important to understand everything you know about your ancestor, to help minimize the number of images you may need to wade through, especially if your internet connection is not the fastest. The more you know about your ancestor before you go looking in such records will also reduce the frustration levels inherent to German research.

## Online Emigration Resources

- Internet Resources for Finding 19<sup>th</sup> Century German Emigrants  
[https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Internet\\_Resources\\_for\\_Finding\\_19th\\_Century\\_German\\_Emigrants#Regional\\_Lists\\_and\\_Indexes\\_of\\_Emigrants](https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Internet_Resources_for_Finding_19th_Century_German_Emigrants#Regional_Lists_and_Indexes_of_Emigrants)
- FamilySearch – German Emigration and Immigration  
[https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Germany\\_Emigration\\_and\\_Immigration](https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Germany_Emigration_and_Immigration)
- Deutsche Auswanderer-Datenbank <http://www.deutsche-auswanderer-datenbank.de>
- DIE MAUS Gesellschaft für Familienforschung e. V. Bremen <http://www.die-maus-bremen.de>
- Ancestry.com (must have World Subscription) <http://www.ancestry.com>

## Online Church & Civil Records

- Evangelisches Zentral Archiv in Berlin <https://www.ezab.de/>
- Archion – Kirchenbuch Portal <https://www.archion.de/de/>
- Matricula – The Online Church Registers Database <https://www.icar-us.eu/en/cooperation/online-portals/matricula/>
- FamilySearch.org – Church Records from Marburg State Archives , 1701-1875  
<http://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1768560>

- Oberelaß (Elsaß-Lothringen), Present Day Department of Haut-Rhin <https://archives68.alsace.eu/page/numerisation-des-registres-paroissiaux>
- Unterlaß (Elsaß-Lothringen), Present Day Department of Bas-Rhin <http://archives.bas-rhin.fr/rechercher/>
- Lothringen (Elsaß-Lothringen), Present Day Department of Moselle [www.archives57.com](http://www.archives57.com)

### Online Town Lineage/Family Books

- Town Histories Hosted at Online Ortsfamilienbücher <http://www.online-ofb.de/>
- Germany Town Genealogies and Parish Inventories on the Internet [https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Germany\\_Town\\_Genealogies\\_and\\_Parish\\_Register\\_Inventories\\_on\\_the\\_Internet](https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Germany_Town_Genealogies_and_Parish_Register_Inventories_on_the_Internet)

### Efficiently Searching Records

It's always a good idea to see if the information you need has been abstracted online, such as FamilySearch.org, Ancestry.com, or another website devoted to German genealogy. If you can get page numbers or exact dates of events, it makes working in the online digitized images much easier.

*Tip: Exact dates of events mean you can search common words in documents.*

Once you have isolated family members in a particular parish—then use some of the online resources to see if the original records have been digitized and placed online.

*Tip: Consider searching just the root word of the record of interest.*

When looking in online catalogs for specific records consider using the root word, rather than the full word for the type of record:

- *Einwohner* (resident) instead of *Einwohnermelde* (resident list)
- *Bürger* (citizen) instead of *Bürgerbuch* (citizen book) or *Bürgerlisten* (citizen list)
- *Militär* (military) instead of *Militärunterlagen* (military documents)
- *Steuer* (tax) instead of *Steuerlisten* (tax lists) or *Steuerbüch* (tax books)

### Contacting Archives and Others Abroad

Just as it is true that not everything has been put online, so too is it true that not everything of genealogical interest has been microfilmed. As a result, it is possible that you may need to reach out to an archive, town hall, or church via email or more traditional means of communication.

It is always good to send your first request in German. Even if you do not write German, it is possible to use the German Letter Writing Guide at FamilySearch.org ([https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/German\\_Letter\\_Writing\\_Guide](https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/German_Letter_Writing_Guide)) to assist you with your request.

While not as accurate, Google Translate can also be used. However, it is always a good idea that you alert the recipient of your communication to the fact that you have relied on Google Translate and that you apologize for anything that is not clear or could be misinterpreted.

You will also want to use Meyers Gazetteer (<https://www.meyersgaz.org/>) to ensure you have identified the correct place and the correct state.

Resources for finding contact information can be found in such volumes as:

- Ernest Thode's *Address Book for Germanic Genealogy*, 6th edition (Baltimore, Maryland: Genealogical Publishing Company, Inc., 1997)
- Raymond Wright's *Ancestors in German Archives, A Guide to Family History Sources* (Baltimore, Maryland, Genealogical Publishing Company, Inc., 2004)

Wright's volume offers information about the types of records held at the various archives. Some of those records may now be available digitally. The key is to identify the name of the correct archive and then do an online search for their website. Most archives have online catalogs.

Also search online for current town halls and churches using Google or another search engine as this may supply you with more information and possible online resources.

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