Researching German Ancestors
Class 5: Research Strategies and Case Studies

Rhonda R. McClure, rhonda.mcclure@americanancestors.org

Determining Origins: Common Scenarios

Determining the town of origin in Germany is key to continuing the search for German ancestors. Based on the type of information collection at the time of an immigrant's arrival to the United States, it may be quite easy to learn the town of origin or more difficult. Some common scenarios are outlined below:

1. "Best case" scenario: the town name has been passed down through generations or appears on a document already in the researcher's possession
2. "Minimal research" scenario: the town name is initially unknown but is found on a reliable, easy-to-locate document with minimal research, such as a vital record, naturalization record, or immigration record
3. "Lost in translation" scenario: a town name appears on a document, but that town does not seem to exist
4. "Worst case" scenario: an exhaustive search of records does not reveal a town name

Research Strategies

In scenarios 2, 3, and 4 above, research will need to be done to determine the town of origin. This may necessitate ruling "in" or "out" possible candidates. For example, if there is not enough matching information to immediately confirm that an individual found in American records is the same as an individual found in German records (such as matching parents' names and/or date of birth), you will need to sufficiently prove that there is no further record of the German individual.

In place-of-origin brick walls, FAN or cluster research can be incredibly useful. This type of research expands beyond your immediate ancestor to examine their social network. This research focuses on family and friends (including children, siblings, and spouse(s) as well as extended family like in-laws and cousins), associates (such as business partners, colleagues, classmates, or members of the same religious institution), and neighbors (such as people living in the same building or on the same street).

Another similar type of cluster research focuses on the surname. If there are several families with the same surname living in the same town or, better yet, the same neighborhood, researching those families can yield new clues about the direct ancestor's origins.

Consider second or later marriages for your immigrants, as these records may supply information not asked for or included in earlier civil records. Also, if your immigrant arrived married, then a subsequent marriage could be the first clue to working backwards.

When it comes to marriages and births in the United States, do not stop with just those civil records. See if you can find church records of marriage and baptisms. Many of the German-speaking churches brought the old record keeping with them, which could supply place of birth for spouses or parents.

Creating spreadsheets, timelines, or comparison charts can be useful in these instances. For example, creating a spreadsheet is a good way to keep track of a timeline for your immigrant as well as records examined in a review of church book entries. Programs like Word or Excel will allow you to sort the data in a variety of ways. Timelines illustrate movement and actions over the course of a lifetime and can allow for easy comparison of two individuals. Examples of two charts are shown below:

Date	Event	Details	Record	Notes
ca. 1890	Birth	Age 33 in 1923, b. in Germany	Certificate of Naturalization, No. 1926812, 5 Nov. 1923	Residing in Brookline, Mass., references Petition of Naturalization No. 57897, listed wife Oliva, b. 1893
23 Jan 1890	Birth	Born 23 Jan. 1890 at Reutlingen, Württenberg, Germany	Petition of Naturalization No. 57897, 29 March 1921	
3 Dec 1907	Arrival	Arrived at New York, *S.S. Vaderland*	Petition of Naturalization No. 57897, 29 March 1921	
3 Dec 1907	Arrival	Curt Wandel, age 17 yrs. 10 mos., student, left mother Emilia Wandel, Reutlingen, Germany	Passenger list, *S.S. Vaderland*, arriving NYC, 3 Dec. 1907, manifest 3, list 15	Indicates he is traveling "with his brother Otto" who was found on the page before, age 26 yrs. 7 mos. And mentioned mother Emilia Wandel.
25 Aug 1913	Marriage	Kurt Wandel, age 23, son of Christian and Emily (Schwarzmann) Wandel, b. Germany and Eloise Rowe, age 18, dau. of John Charles and Louise (Schafer) Rowe, b. Buffalo, N.Y.	Certificate of Marriage, no. 20155, Manhattan, New York	*Is this Kurt born in 1890?*
5 Jun 1917	WWI Draft Registration	Kurt Wandel, b. Reutlingen, Germany, 23 Jan. 1890, indicates he has a wife	World War I Draft Registration Card, Manfield, Massachusetts	Supports a marriage before Kurt's marriage in 1919 to Olivia LaVaine

American Ancestors.
A NATIONAL CENTER FOR FAMILY HISTORY, HERITAGE & CULTURE

| 1919 | Marriage | Kurt Wandel m. Olivia LaVaine, New Jersey | Bride's index to New Jersey Marriages, 1915-1919, Surnames I-L | No marriage record available, but this fits with the Naturalization Petition |
| 1934 | Residence | Living at 340 Park, Manhattan, with a Denyse Wandel. Lists his place of Nativity as Germany, cites Naturalization at District Court at Boston, date "11-5-23" | Manhattan Voter Registration, 1934 | Indicates that Kurt has another wife by this point, but the naturalization date matches his certificate of naturalization. |

Heymel Baptism Extracts from *Fambach ev. Lut. Kirchenbücher, Tauf 1830-1867*

Tauf 1830-1867						
Page/ Entry #	Birth Date	Child's Name	Baptismal Date	Parents' Names	Godparents' Names	Notes
004/#19	8 Jan 1831	Johannes Carl Heymel	16 Jan 1831	Friedrich Heymel, day-laborer and his wife Charlotte Sophia Heller	Johannes Amborn, laborer	Died 1 May 1832
008/#51	21 June 1832	Anna Margaretha Heymel	1 July 1832	Johannes Heymel, ploughman, and his wife Maria Zinn	Anna Margaretha oldest daughter of Wilhelm Heymel	Died 27 March 1833
008/#53	9 Aug 1832	Eva Barbara Wilhelmine Heymel	19 Aug 1832	Wilhelm Heymel, tenant at ____, and his wife Eva Barbara Heymel	Wilhelmine, daughter of Wilhelm Heymel, tenant in Winne	Died 15 April 1834
012/#74	17 March 1833	Eva Catharina Heymel	24 March 1833	Jacob Heymel, day-laborer, and his wife Eva Elisabetha Reinhardt	Eva Catharina nee Schmidt wife of Armus Heymel	Died 30 April 1833
013/#79	20 April 1833	Johann Caspar Heymel	3 May 1833	Johann Wilhelm Heymel, ploughman, and his was Dorothea Elisabetha Heller	Johan Caspar Heller (church treasurer?)	Died 23 Feb 1859
019/#100	2 Feb 1834	Johannes Ludwig Heymel	10 Feb 1834	Johannes Heymel, ploughman, and his wife Catharina Zinn	Jacob Ludwig Petter, plowman	Died 13 Dec 1916

Once you have your timeline and/or abstracts you will have a better understanding of your immigrant ancestor or of those who share a surname with that of your ancestor.

Tip: It is important to move slowly and evaluate every document for every piece of evidence.

Resources
Books
Bentz, Edna M., *If I Can, You Can Decipher Germanic Records* (San Diego, Calif.: Edna M. Bentz, 1982)

Hansen, Kevan M., *Map Guide to German Parish Registers*, 68 vols., (Orting, Wash : Family Roots Publishing Co., 2004-2022)

American Ancestors.
A NATIONAL CENTER FOR FAMILY HISTORY, HERITAGE & CULTURE

Minert, Roger P., *Deciphering Handwriting in German Documents: Analyzing German, Latin and French in Historical Manuscripts*, 2nd ed., (Provo, Utah: GRT Publications, 2013)

Minert, Roger P., *Spelling Variations in German Names: Solving Family History Problems Through Applications of German and English Phonetics* (Provo, Utah: GRT Publications, 2000)

Riemer, Shirley J., Roger P. Minert, and Jennifer A. Anderson, *The German Research Companion*, 3rd ed., (Sacramento, Calif.: Lorelei Press, 2010)

Smith, Clifford Neal and Anna Piszczan-Czaja Smith, *Encyclopedia of German-American Genealogical Research* (1976; reprint, Baltimore, Md.: Clearfield Company, 2011)

Smith, Kenneth L., *German Church Books, Beyond the Basics* (Camden, Maine: Picton Press, 1989)

Thode, Ernest, *German-English Genealogical Dictionary* (Baltimore, Md.: Genealogical Publishing Company, Inc., 1992)

Church Records

Ancestry.com, http://www.ancestry.com

Archion, http://www.archion.de

FamilySearch, http://www.familysearch.org

Matricula, http://data.matricula-online.eu/en/

German Town-Name Resources

Kartenmeister, http://www.kartenmeister.com/preview/databaseuwe.asp

Meyers Gazetteer, https://www.meyersgaz.org/

Server for Digital Historical Maps, https://www.ieg-maps.uni-mainz.de/map1.htm

Anna Sluskiewicz, "Index of German-Polish and Polish-German names of the localities in Poland & Russia," http://www.atsnotes.com/other/gerpol.html

List of German names for places in the Czech Republic, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_German_names_for_places_in_the_Czech_Republic

Cluster Research Resources

Lindsay Fulton, "Creating a Research Plan for Cluster Research," 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pFA_IfMsThg

Research Methodology: FAN Club or Cluster Research, https://www.cyndislist.com/research-methodology/fan-club/