

GERMAN CHURCH RECORDS HANDOUT

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Challenges of using German church records:

- Identifying and locating the church within the German Empire.
- Determining if the records still exist.
- Reading archaic forms of handwriting.
- Regional variants in records.
- Lost or destroyed records.

Common Terms Found in German Church Records

- Taufen = Baptisms
- Geburten = Births
- Heiraten or Trauungen or Hochzeiten or Copulations = Marriages
- Toten or Beerdigen = Burials
- Sterben or Sterbefälle = Deaths
- Auszug = Excerpt
- Konfirmationen/Firmungen – Confirmations
- Witwer/Witwe or Viduus/Vidua (Latin) = Widower/widow
- Zeugen or Patrini = godparents

Identifying the Right Parish

- Determining the “exact” place of birth.
- Use American sources fully...
- Marriage and burial records, obituaries, family Bibles.

Doing “Whole Family” Research and Other Tips

- Look for church marriage and burial records as well as obituaries of ALL of your immigrant ancestors’ siblings.
- Search godparents and other friends.
- Study ethnicity of the immigrant church. (Some were dominated by immigrants from a particular area).

Ancestry’s German Databases (www.ancestry.com)

- Germany, Select Marriages, 1558-1929 (28 million records)
- Germany, Select Deaths and Burials, 1582-1958 (7.1 million records)
- Germany, Lutheran Baptisms, Marriages, and Burials: 2 databases: 1518-1921 and 1567-1945 (27 million records with some overlap)
- Germany, Select Births and Baptisms, 1558-1898
- Germany, Select Marriages, 1558-1929
- Many others – few Catholic records here

Familysearch's German Databases

- Germany Births and Baptisms, 1558-1898 (15 million names)
- Germany Deaths and Burials, 1582-1958
- Germany Marriages, 1558-1929
- Civil registrations for specific areas
- Most German Catholic Church records not on Ancestry

Caution Using Databases of German Church Records

- False positives: Same name, different person
- Selected indexed records from town or church
- Abstracted information is wrong
- You may not have the right town or parish

Steps in Identifying Parishes

- "Daughter" villages near the parish church.
- Church of your ancestor's denomination may be in a nearby town.
- Meyers Orts und Verkehrs Lexikon
- Kevan Hansen's *Map Guide to German Parish Registers* series - indispensable source

Using the Familysearch Catalog for German church records www.familysearch.org

Using Archion for Lutheran parish records www.archion.de

Using Matricula for German Catholic records <https://data.matricula-online.eu/en/>

Special Problems with Using Pre-1800 German Parish Registers

- Peculiarities of organization in the church book.
- Misspellings, variants, and archaic spellings.
- Abbreviations
- Dialectic words
- Illegible script or damaged records
- Dates in church records

Organization and Factual Issues

- Know arrangement of book - a table of contents in front, AND the Family History Library catalog can help.
- Usual arrangement is by Baptisms (Taufen), Marriages (Heiraten), Deaths or burials (Toten), Confirmations (Konfirmation), and then within these groups, chronological.
- Look for special problems: records in the wrong sections, and missing sections.
- Look for separate city and country parish registers in some large parishes.
- Consider that the information recorded may be wrong.

Misspellings and Archaic Spellings of Surnames and Town Names

- Have a detailed map of the area to look for nearby villages that may be misspelled.
- Consider misspelled surnames, Latinized names, names with regional variants.
- Some surnames vary in spelling in the same parish register. Think of German phonetics.
- (Danner = Thanner; Baetz = Paetz)

Coping with Abbreviations and Other Tips

- Town names and the importance of having a good map close at hand
- “Style of the scribe” - look at other records in his handwriting.
- Look for widow/widower in marriage records and legitimate or illegitimate in baptismal records.

Dialectic Words and Status Words as well as Occupations

- Variations in occupational or social status terms, often regional. surname variants, Hochdeutsch versus Plattdeutsch

Farm Names and Patronymics

Strategies for Finding Lost Records

- Strategies for narrowing the search
- Examine nearby parish registers, especially for additional baptisms and listings as godparents
- Carefully examine earlier registers of the parish, if extant, for surname.
- Google names of missing parishes to see if records exist in German or Polish archives.

German Archaic Months, Found in Some German and Many Swiss Records

- Januar = Hartung
- Februar – Hornung
- März = Lenzmonat
- April = Ostermonat
- Mai = Wonnemonat
- Juni = Brachmonat
- Juli = Heumonat
- August = Augstmonat
- September = Erntemonat = 7ber = 7bris
- Oktober = Weinmonat = 8ber = 8bris
- November = Wintermonat = 9ber = 9bris
- Dezember = Christmonat = 10ber = Xbris

French Republican Calendar Under Napoleon

- Affected civil records more often than church records, but given names were changed.

Strategies for Viewing Parish Records if not Indexed

- In the Baptismal register, go directly to the date of birth, if you know it.
- The date you have may be off, so you may need to search a block of years in either direction... Search at least five years both ways.

Contents of a Typical Nineteenth Century Baptismal Record

Child's name
Date of birth and baptism
Father's name
Sometimes father's occupation or status
Mother's given name, sometimes with surname
Place of birth
Names of godparents

Contents of Earlier Parish Baptismal Records

- Name of the father
- Date of the event
- Names of godparents
- Child's name was optional, esp. in 17th century
- Mother's name was optional and sometimes omitted in early 17th century

Next Steps: Two Options

- Continue searching baptismal registers for siblings, or...
- Go directly to the marriage register and look for the marriage of your ancestor's parents.

Special Symbols and Circumstances in the Records

- Crosses marking deceased children
- Illegitimate children
- Children of the same name born close together with different parents

Strategies for Searching Marriage Records

- Most informative type of church record.
- Typically, they will give names of bride and groom, their places of birth (at first marriage), and date of marriage. Some Catholic registers will show witnesses.
- Sometimes shows ages of bride and groom.
- Sometimes parents or fathers are shown.
- Records improve greatly in 19th century all over German Empire, with birth dates often given.
- Extract all entries for persons of the same surname.
- Begin building family groups.

Strategies for Searching Death Records

- Look for the deaths of the immediate parents of your ancestor and determine their ages at death.
- Make careful notes of occupations and/or status information.
- Causes of death, if given, are worth investigating.
- Make note of whether or not widowed, if indicated.

Archion www.archion.de

- Protestant parish registers only
- Fees are \$22.38 for a month pass or \$201.07 for a year pass (gives you 600 digital downloads)
- Get registration information when you subscribe. Establish login and password.
- No indexes. You have to download and read the original handwritten records in German.
- Some overlap with Ancestry's Lutheran registers (which are indexed), but many more are found here not available elsewhere.

Matricula

- Arranged by Catholic Diocese, then by Parish within Each Diocese
- Free

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Lower case Gothic characters:

u l r d n f v f i j k
l m n o p q r s t b ß
4 ñ w w e q z ō ē ù

Ligatures and abbreviations:

ch (ch), ck (ck), ll (ll), mm (mm),
nn (nn), St (St), tz (tz).

Upper case Gothic characters:

U L L d f F G G J J
K L M N O P Q R S
T U W W X Y Z ō ō
ŭ