Finding a German Parish and Online Parish Records
Hansen, Meyers Gaz, Kartenmeister,
Family Search, Ancestry, Archion, Matricula
Carol Whitton, CG®
Whittoncarolyn514@gmail.com

I. **Understand Germany Before Going There**
   A. Three basic steps for German Research
      1. Identify a German village using U.S. resources and learning all about U.S. ancestors.
      2. Then seek German parish records online to build the family as far back as you can
      3. Visit Germany, making appointments to see non-parish records that add more to the German ancestors.
   B. Learn state's: History, Geography, Civil Admin, Laws/Regulations, Religions, Wars, Disasters.
   C. Second German Empire Map.
      1. INDEPENDENT German states prior to 2nd Empire in 1871 unified by Prussia.
      2. 1850s-1860s the 13 states in dark gray on map allied with Prussia.
      3. Family History Library aka Family Search (FHL) organizes its German collection based on 2nd Empire map.
   D. Civil administration differed in each independent German country/state
      1. Possible Administrative levels: Village/Town (Dorf), District (Amt), County (Kreis), Prefecture (Regirungsbezirk), Province (Provinz) or State or Country (Land).
      2. Not all states had six levels of administration, but most states had more than three.
   E. German Archives in current 16 States; but contents cover former Country/States. Learn both States—current and historical.

II. **Before Seeking German Records, Check for an Ortsippenbücher (OFB) (aka Dorfsippenbuch, Ortsfamilienbuch, Familienbuch, Local Heritage Book)**
   A. What are Ortssippenbücher?
      1. Lists of all families in a German parish with dates of B/Bp, C, M, D/Bu arranged as family groups with references to earlier generation if they're also in that parish. Easier to read German parish records if you already have family names and dates!
      2. But=Second-hand source. Transcribing leads to errors! ALWAYS GET ORIGINAL DOCUMENT.
   B. Ortssippenbücher may NOT exist for a village (yet.) But, worth checking to see if there is one because it leads you back many generations quickly and gives you dates for all the records needed.
   C. Finding Ortssippenbücher—always search several aka title variations (see above).
      1. German genealogy web site: http://compgen.de/
         a. Online: http://www.online-ofb.de/
         b. Printed under Regional, Regionale Forschung, Deutschland, Ortsfamilienbuch.

2. FHL wiki: https://familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/ printed, mostly use only in Salt Lake City.
3. Library of Congress http://catalog.loc.gov/ printed; use onsite in D.C.
4. St. Louis County Library http://webpac.slcl.org/ has all currently in print; use there.
5. World Cat http://worldcat.org Make lists from above; seek book's closest location.
6. Also check online books at sites such as Google, FHL, BYU, and in .de, etc.

III. **Why Parish Records?**
A. Before research can be done in Germany, need to build a family.
B. Parish records BUILD a German family, as far back as a family remained in a parish!
C. Parish records began during Reformation, c1540.
D. Civil records began after unification, c1876.
E. Parish goes back MORE generations.
F. Most parish records are online at Family Search (FHL). If not, also try Ancestry and Archion or Matricula.
G. Parish Research can be done in the U.S!
H. Build the whole family first in the U.S.; then go to Germany to seek other German records or contact them there!

IV. **Find the Parish for the Ancestor's Village and its Church Hierarchy**
A. Kevan Hansen's, *Map Guide to German Parish Records, X State (Salt Lake City : Family Roots Publishing, 2004-2018), 61 volumes.*
   1. Buy print or electronic copy at https://www.familyrootspublishing.com/
   2. Also published here similar gazetteers for Switzeerland and other countries.
B. Meyers Gazetteer online in English: http://www.meyersgaz.org/ full administration, but names parish only if in village. If no village church, only lists possible parishes
C. Find individual State gazetteers listed online at FHL or FEEFHS
   1. https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Online_German_Gazetteers_and_Parish_Register_Inventories
   2. https://feefhs.org/resource/
D. Kartenmeister Polish gazetteer online: http://www.kartenmeister.com/preview/databaseuwe.asp
E. Find the parish's church hierarchy on the main German website, Compgen: http://gov.genealogy.net/search/name
   1. Later may need the location of the Kirchenkreis or Dekanat (church organizations between the parish and the state level)
   2. Or the location of the Bishopric or Archbishopric.

V. **Finding Parish Records Online**
A. Always start record search on FHL! Most parishes are in their catalog and images online. https://www.familysearch.org/en/
B. Next, try Ancestry ($ but free at Libraries) https://www.ancestry.com/
   1. Use the Card Catalog and filter for Europe, Germany.
   2. Recommend not narrowing filter further in this case.
   3. Instead use keyword, first trying the parish name.

4. If parish not found, then try the next higher church location, then the next higher location after that, only then try the State.
C. Archion ($) https://www.archion.de/en/ A German site for Protestant churches only.
   1. Free to search; downloading images costs. Check back frequently for additions or get on their newsletter list.
   2. Two ways to search for records: Search and Browse.
   3. Search only gives results if the parish is covered already.
   4. Browse needs the church hierarchy for the parish.
   5. Buy a "pass" only after you determine what you need is there.
D. Matricula (free) http://data.matricula-online.eu/de/. An Austrian site for Catholic churches only.
   1. Free to use; but copying images restricted to personal use with a citation.
   2. More being added; check back frequently.

VI. Can't Find Parish Records; What to Do?
A. Current Germany: Find a Protestant parish:
   1. http://wiki-de.genealogy.net/Evangelische_Kirche_in_Deutschland listed by state, then Kirchenkreis, then parish.
   2. https://www.ekd.de/en/Gemeindesuche-161.htm enter the location of the Kirchenkreis or Dekanat, then by parish; email.
B. Current Germany: Find a Catholic parish:
   1. http://wiki-de.genealogy.net/Katholische_Kirche_in_Deutschland listed by state, then Dekanat, then by parish; email.
   2. https://www.dbk.de/bistumskarte
C. Current Germany: Contact the State Archive by searching for Staatsarchiv (or Landesarchiv) + State. Email under Kontakt.
D. Other countries: find help on Familysearch's research WIKI and FEEFHS:
   1. Search for the country on https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Main_Page
   2. https://feefhs.org/resource choose the country needed.

VII. Conclusions
A. **Parish name** found in Hansen's books, Meyers Gazetteer, State Gazeteers online, or Kartenmeister for Poland.
B. **Parish's hierarchy** obtained on Compgen's GOV.
C. **Parish records online**:
   1. **Familysearch (FHL);** always search first!
   2. **Ancestry**
   3. **Archion:** Protestant parish records for Germany. Free to check if your parish is included, but Images cost.
   4. **Matricula:** Catholic parish records for Germany, Austria, and other countries. Free, but downloads restricted. Snip for personal use only and get the citation!
D. **No parish records?** Don't give up, seek alternatives.