

German Genealogy: What Do You Need to Know?

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- I. **GOAL of U.S. German Research=name of GERMAN VILLAGE of origin!**
- II. **Best U.S. Record to Identify the German Village?**
 - A. VILLAGE COULD BE IN ANY U.S. RECORD!
 - B. Minert's thousands of research hours suggest likelihood of records yielding a village=
 1. 65-76% church records
 2. 15-30% military pensions, death, news obits, passenger lists, histories & genealogies
 3. 5-15% State census, cemetery stones, naturalization/citizenship, marriage licenses
 - C. Earliest record in U.S. for whole family most likely names the full place administration.
- III. **Besides Origin, Which Other Questions Need Answering in the U.S. to Move Toward the Goal?**
 - A. Where did X live? Did X own or rent?
 - B. What was X's occupation? Church? Organization membership?
 - C. Who were X's parents?
 - D. When did family arrive? Did all arrive at once?
 - E. Prioritize questions. EG: Finding parents' names depends on who arrived:
 1. Parents' in U.S. may lead to origin place; but not if they remained in Germany.
 2. Unsure? Seek parents in U.S.; might find more family. Pay attention to witnesses.
- IV. **Organize the Ancestor; Consider What's Missing or Needed; Fill Gaps to Locate the Village.**
 - A. **Organize**
 1. Chronologically list what you already know about the chosen ancestor.
 2. Indicate sources already used on chronology.
 3. Ask questions!
 - B. **Review** all family documents carefully seeking village names. Do you already have it?
 - C. **Obtain** a comprehensive list of record types, such as on StLGS website:
<https://stlgs.org/media/freeforms/r114-source-checklist-2015.pdf>
 - D. **Pursue ALL record types:** Higher education, Military service, Occupation, Club membership, Court litigation, Land, or Business owned.
 - E. **Include all family members**—spouses, children, siblings, and associates (other people named as witnesses in any family member's US record.) Use the FAN principle.
 - F. IF THE DIRECT ANCESTOR DIDN'T NAME THE VILLAGE, A RELATIVE OR ASSOCIATE DID!
 - G. If new evidence learned changes a past assumption, **review** all conclusions **again!**
- V. **The Process—Be Thorough!**
 - A. **Choose one ancestral line**
 - B. **Organize a timeline** of the ancestor's life events starting with death and working back to the earliest record. Include sources!
 - C. **Pose & Prioritize Questions**
 1. Questions for each ancestor differ.
 2. Some must be answered before others.
 3. Church records are important, but the village could be in ANY U.S. record!
 - D. **Recheck and review** all already obtained records carefully, seeking place names. If you already have the village name, corroborate it with more evidence.
 - E. **Be thorough, collect: ALL records for ALL people!**

1. For each event ask, are there additional records available? Obtain more than one record for each piece of evidence.
 2. Collect relatives—parents, siblings, children—as well as friends, associates, neighbors (FAN); e.g.: anyone mentioned in any family record.
- F. Work toward **families' earliest U.S. record**. It is most likely to name the village with its full German administrative hierarchy.
- G. **Corroborate** with a second U.S. record.
1. Best is an original record containing primary evidence from an independent informant.
 2. Be certain before going to German records.
 3. Avoid time spent looking in the wrong German village.
- VI. Each Case Requires Different Questions and Approaches to Obtain More Administrative Detail**
- A. **Already know place?** John Schulz's family said he's from Issigau, Bayern. How did they know?
1. Records gathered confirm only Bayern.
 2. See alternative record types list because he's a member of Concord Farmers Club. Find records at local Historical Society! Second-hand record, but states "from Issigau."
 3. More confirmation needed.
 4. Overlooked any useful records?
 5. Adding church marriage confirmed Issigau.
- B. **Females had fewer individual records:** Henriette Klocke, b 1850 Prussia, arrived U.S. 1869.
1. Need her actual state, not just Prussia. By 1869 many German states already in "Prussia."
 2. Immigration ship list shows origin Detmold, eg: state of Lippe-Detmold
 3. Next earliest US record, her church marriage, gives origin Bentorf, Lippe.
 4. Think what's available? Lippe Emigration book confirmed Bentorf.
- C. **No information available and a very common surname:** Georg Meyer.
1. THINK! How did we learn his name? Must have a record!
Widow and heirs 1852-55 sold land in St. Louis "of Georg Meyer deceased;" but widow's remarried with a new surname, Greb.
 2. When & where were the Grebs' Meyer children born? (census 1850, 1840)
 3. If last Meyer child b Germany 1836 & US land bought Aug 1837, when & where arrived?
 4. When did Meyer's widow remarry Greb? Where is she from? Fröschwiller, Elsaß. NOT necessarily Georg's place of origin.
 5. When did Georg die?
 6. See children's records. Three Meyer daughters' church marriages say "dau of Georg Meyer of Nehwiller, Elsaß."
 7. Map = 2 miles Nehwiller to Fröschwiller! Was Georg born Nehwiller? Look there first.
- VII. What was Learned?**
- A. Questions helped move research along. Each ancestor's questions & approach differed.
 - B. Records contain differing information; need all records.
 - C. Church records are an important source; but all records are useful.
 - D. Families' records are essential to work around an ancestor's lack of records.
 - E. We're probably NOT stuck; we must THINK! U.S. RESEARCH MUST BE THOROUGH!
- VIII. What if NO Known U.S. Relatives?**
- A. **Questions prioritized** for Fred Straub.
1. Define time period=1830-1851.
 2. Are there any Straub relatives in St. Louis?
 - a. What do children add? Nothing to do with origins.
 - b. How about siblings? Did he have ANY siblings in the U.S?
 3. Did he marry in St. Louis or Germany? Where did the siblings marry?

4. How long was he in St. Louis prior to 1849?
 5. Are some Straubs unconnected and can be eliminated?
 6. Are other Straubs connected?
 7. Do they add clues to follow?
 8. Only then can we answer: Arrived When? With Whom? From Where?
- B. **No known U.S. siblings?** Are you sure? Find Potential Siblings:
1. Potential U.S. sibling=persons of same surname in same place at same time.
 2. Find potentials in census (males) and civil marriage index (males & females).
 3. Pay ATTENTION to everyone's place of origin and CONNECTIONS to ancestor or each other!
- C. **Organize a Spreadsheet. Or use whatever organization method suits your skills.**
1. **Top:** Years 1850 back-US arrival
 2. **Down:** given names of Straubs found
 3. **Blocks:** key CLUES
 4. **Colors:** code different records in different colors
 5. Enter the ancestor in Black and the earliest record you have for him. (census 1850)
- D. **Add Family, Friends, Associates, Neighbors** to timeline and prioritize.
- E. **Eliminate** some by following them until clearly not connected with the ancestor.
- F. **Continue** following the more promising, making sure they **connect** with the ancestor.
- IX. Still No Origin Village in U.S.? THINK! Follow the Unique Already Known!**
- A. Where are the associates from in Germany?
1. In same State, but different towns, are they nearby? A German neighborhood?
 2. Plot origin villages on a current German map.
 3. Are places close enough together—within 10 or so miles—to indicate a chain migration of relatives or friends?
 4. Find the parish for each village using Hansen's multi volumes: *Map Guide to German Parish Registers for X State*.
 5. If a neighborhood is several parishes, search each for the ancestor and associate.
- B. Try Emigration records of that State at FHL <https://www.familysearch.org/en/>.
1. Seek references from FHL at worldcat <https://www.worldcat.org/> for closest library location or
 2. At online book sites, such as Google.
- C. Is the surname unusual? Current phone books or sites like <http://geogen.stoepel.net/> may get you started.
- D. Is a place near a border? Try spellings in other languages of both name and place.
- E. Was the place name reported or spelled incorrectly?
1. Do siblings, parents, etc. name the same place using same spelling? Find in U.S!
 2. Convert eastern Second Empire German place names into the current language at:
 - a. <http://www.jewishgen.org/communities/loctown.asp>
 - b. <http://isodp.hof-university.de/fuzzyg/query/>
 - c. https://familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/Germany_Gazetteers
 3. Check gazetteers for Poland, Czech Republic, France, etc.
- F. Was his/her religion other than Lutheran or Evangelical? EG: Mennonite, Amish, Dunker, Schwenkfelder, Hussite, Moravian, Pietist, Huguenot—try websites on these religious groups' history and migration.
- G. Were the ancestors from Eastern Europe?
1. Try websites on settlement in Poland, Czech Republic, Galicia, Russia, etc.
 2. Also see Foundation for East European Family History Studies <http://feefhs.org/>
- H. Review German history for useful clues to what was happening at the time.

1. Google the places' history. [Use Google translate for German.]
 2. FHL WIKI: <https://familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/Germany>
 3. German Genealogy web: <http://compngen.de/> under Regional drill down to village.
 4. GHDI: <http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/home.cfm>
- I. When all else fails, ask a knowledgeable English-speaking German genealogist for help. They can be found at FHL, IGGP, and online.

X. Key Resources for German Research

- A. **Best foreign research site=Family History Library (FHL)**(free) <https://www.familysearch.org/>
 1. START with "Search, Research WIKI;" type Germany (or any other State or Country.)
https://familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/Germany_Genealogy Learn German research.
 2. Type place name in "Search, Catalog" place field.
 3. Try "Books" for online publications.
- B. **Ancestry** (\$) free at Libraries) <http://home.ancestry.com/> specific databases in card catalog
 1. Hamburg Passenger Lists, 1850-1934, and Index 1855-1934
 2. Emigration indexes for some States, eg: Württemberg, Baden, Brandenburg.
 3. Original German records, some from FHL and some unique!
- C. **German Genealogy Web Site** (free) <http://compngen.de/>
 1. LEXIKA: vocabulary on occupations, diseases, and other.
 2. GOV: place finder—both current and historical administration diagramed & listed
<http://gov.genealogy.net/search/index>
 3. OFB: Ortsfamilienbücher/Ortssippenbücher online
 4. Regional: each State's history; printed OFB.
 5. DIGIBIB: digital books online.

XI. Be Exhaustively Thorough in the U.S. First!

- A. Organize timeline and pose Questions.
- B. Review all records you have.
- C. ADD MORE PEOPLE: children, siblings, associates. Connect to ancestor or eliminate.
- D. ADD MORE SOURCES: More than one record per piece of evidence.
- E. Corroborate village with 2nd U.S. record!
- F. Still Not Found?
 1. Map associates' origin villages.
 2. Try emigration records of the German State.
 3. THINK! Follow whatever's UNIQUE!

Family History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, Research Outline: Germany (Salt Lake City, UT: Family History Library, 1997), p. 8

