Using Digital Libraries to Find Your German Ancestors

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The Internet has become indispensable to the serious family historian. Digital libraries offer access to obscure books, maps, and other materials. Improved search engine functionality offer access to source material that has never before been available to most genealogists. This presentation will explore some major digital libraries and their usefulness to the German genealogist.

DIGITAL PUBLIC LIBRARY OF AMERICA

Found at http://dp.la/, this library allows access to a plethora of historical information, including many early 20th Century genealogical journals. For example, a search for "German immigration" yields results like "Geographical origin of Germans in Wisconsin", an article published in 1898. Usage rights vary. The site includes various filter and search options. It's a wonderful place to find helpful historical background material written in English and images to enrich a family history.

U.S. ONLINE NEWSPAPER COLLECTIONS

Historical U.S. newspapers, including German-language ones, are available on both free and commercial Websites. The largest free collection is found at http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/ . The "Advanced search" options allows searches by state or name of the newspaper, along with other search terms like names or towns, and specific time periods. Some good strategies for effective newspaper research are found at http://www.theancestorhunt.com/newspapers.html .

TRANSLATION HELPS

GoogleTranslate (https://translate.google.com/) is useful in navigating foreign-language websites. Choose the "from"" and "to" languages and "copy and paste" the Web address or a text segment into the box to be translated. CAUTION: Do not use electronic translators to write requests for information!

THE DIGIBIB – DIGITAL LIBRARY FOR GENEALOGY

The DigiBib, part of http://compgen.de/, makes digital images of important genealogical resources, such as gazetteers, address books, compiled genealogies, available online. Each month new projects are added in various categories, including parish register inventories, local and regional history, heraldry, and many other topics. The collection even includes some original records. Projects are at various stages of completion. Publications can be accessed by title, category, or author. A sidebar on the homepage lists the latest available titles.

The Digibib uses so-called DjVu files for many of its digitized materials, which may require the installation of a special free reader. A free plug-in for the operating systems Windows, Mac OS-X, and Linux can be downloaded at https://www.cuminas.jp/en/downloads/ . Transcribed and

corrected publications can also be opened as E-books in PDF-format for comfortable reading and printing. Originals can be read page-by-page as soon as the images have been published.

Links to other digital libraries are listed in the bottom section of the DigiBib portal page. Click on the word "*mehr*" (= more) to access the complete list.

DigiBib Categories:

- Top: Links to all books and E-books in the DigiBib, and to cooperative projects with other institutions, like the Stoye Foundation.
- Name-based collections: address books, parish registers, government directories, other name listings
- Genealogy: published genealogies, genealogy how-to books
- Related disciplines: heraldry
- Church and Religion: church history, parish directories, parish register inventories, parish registers
- Government publications: official newspapers, government directories
- Geography, maps, topography etc.: gazetteers, historical maps and atlases, local history, descriptive works
- Other: devotional works, military-related material, encyclopedias, diaries, manuscripts

DEUTSCHE DIGITALE BIBLIOTHEK

The German Digital Library allows access to almost seven million digitized publications and images at https://www.deutsche-digitale-bibliothek.de/ . Results can be filtered by various categories and include a wide variety of historical publications and images.

EUROPEANA

The European Digital Library (in English), found at http://www.europeana.eu/portal/ is another good resource for historical material. Results can be filtered by language, location, holding institution, collection agent and more. This is another good place to find historical images, maps, and pictures of artifacts.

PRIVATE DIGITAL LIBRARIES

Several excellent private digital libraries provide excellent resources. Example http://www.rambow.de/ . The collection includes some citizens' lists, address books, church record transcripts, pastors' books, historical material etc., from various locations. The collections can typically be found by search engines.

Family genealogy websites may also include useful links, example: http://www.rainer-doerry.de/Ahnenforschung/html/fundstucke.html . The link list found here include information about emigrants and regional research in various parts of Germany.

WIKISOURCE

Just like the other Wiki components, Wikisource is available in different languages from the portal page at www.wikisource.org. Choose the language (German); then enter specific search terms. For instance, "*Lausitz*" brings up slightly different results than "*lausitzisches*". This website is very useful for locating out-of copyright printed resources that have never been

accessible outside of a library before.

To illustrate: The "*Neues Lausitzisches Magazin*" ("New Magazine for Lusatia"- Lusatia was a region between Sachsen and Schlesien where most church records were lost after WWII) was published beginning in 1822. It includes personal, professional, and family news about public figures such as pastors, teachers, officials etc. On occasion (i.e. professional promotions) fairly detailed biographies may be found. Many volumes also include an index of personal names. ***Wikisource* listings includes links to the digital collections where each volume is found.**

GOOGLE BOOKS

Better online indexing has opened up a whole new world for the genealogist. When dealing with a family of pastors, merchants, teachers or other public figures, Google Books allows easy access to printed out-of copyright information. It also makes available books on a variety of other topics, like local history. A problem dealing with Baptists in East and West Prussia was solved by using a book that discussed the faith's early history in that area. Old books are good, because they can be read online, but modern publications may also be useful and worth pursuing. For instance, a search for "Baptists + Westpreussen" actually brought up a brand-new inventory of Baptist archival material from the area east of the Oder and Neisse rivers held in state and church archives.

OCCUPATIONAL BOOKS

Some compiled books of pastors called "Pfarrerbuch" are also available online. Similar volumes have been published for artists, doctors, and other occupations. Google Books only shows snippets of books still under copyright, but usually provides enough information to enable the reader to buy a print copy. Older publications can often be downloaded in their entirety.
Example: Sächsisches Pfarrerbuch" digitized on www.rambow.de , found by searching for "*Pfarrerbuch*".
Example: Article "Pfarrerbuch" found on the German Wikipedia at https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pfarrerbuch through Google.de, The article includes a bibliography [with links when available] to pastors' books by German state/region.

DIGITIZED GOVERNMENT NEWSPAPERS

Government newspapers list all kinds of official business, along with the names of the affected parties. They may include names of young men who failed to show up for muster, legal and illegal emigrants, probate notices, and more. Newspapers have various names such as *"Post, Abendpost, Zeitung, Presse, Kurier, Nachrichten, Rundschau, Anzeiger etc."* The WikiSource pages for many German states include links to digitized government newspapers. Example: The link list titled "*Amtsblätter der preussischen Bezirksregierungen*" (Official papers of the Prussian regional governments) includes links to various 19th Century online editions of official papers from most regional capitals. The lists keep on growing, and better search engines yield many a fortuitous find.

For links to lists of digitized newspapers, see the lists provided in the German WikiSource article *"Zeitung"* (newspaper) at http://de.wikisource.org/wiki/Zeitungen#Listen_digitalisierter_Zeitungen_.28WS.29 and the associated web links near the bottom of the article.
Other key words, possibly combined with "digitalisiert":
- *Amtsblatt/Amtsblätter* (official newspaper/s)

- *Polizeiblatt/Polizeiblätter* (police newspaper/s)
- *Intelligenzblatt/ Inteligenzblätter* (intelligence paper/s)
- *Gesetzblatt/ Gesetzblätter* (law paper/s)
- *Kurier/ Amtskurier*
- *Rundschau*
- *Presse*

Some newspaper collections
- http://zefys.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/list/ - List of digitized newspapers in the Berlin State Library
- http://www.many-roads.com/libraries/prussia-histories/old-german-newspapers-digitalized/ - Links to newspapers collected on the "Many Roads" website by Mark Rabideau
- http://home.arcor.de/fritigern/ostpreussen/ztg/ZtgenBibl.htm - Bibliography of newspapers for East- and West Prussia and the Baltic states {just titles and approximate years of publication, arranged by town of publication}. This helps in locating the newspapers in a digital library.
- http://anno.onb.ac.at/ - Digitized newspapers for parts of the Austrian Empire in the digital reading room of the National Library of Austria. Can search for names.

HISTORICAL DIGITAL LIBRARIES
Historical libraries may offer access to address books (useful for locating families in larger towns), historical images, histories, plat maps, historical gazetteers and descriptions, and many other tools for aiding in genealogical research and breathing life into a family history. See http://wiki-de.genealogy.net/Portal:DigiBib/Andere_Digitale_Bibliotheken for a listing of digital libraries with historical material. Following are two regional examples from today's Germany.

Dilibri.de – Digital Library of Rheinland-Pfalz

A collection of digitized local history and geography material for the modern German state of Rheinland-Pfalz is available at http://www.dilibri.de/. All material appears to be out of copyright and can be viewed and/or downloaded. Contents options shown in the toolbar at left include various categories, with the number of items in each listed in parentheses.
Holdings off special interest to family historians include:

- Address books [digital images]
- Books (various histories, descriptions etc.)
- Illustrated works, usually with old lithographs, for different towns and regions
- Maps, mostly from the 16th to 20th Centuries. About half are from the 18th Century.

LAGIS - Hessian Regional History Information System
The Hessen Regional History System (LAGIS) is a resource found at http://lagis.online.uni-marburg.de/ . It includes historical material for the Grand Duchy of Hessen and Hessen Nassau and is divided into several sections.
- **Lexica and Dictionaries** include a historical gazetteer, a biographical dictionary, several "field name" dictionaries, and a historical dialect dictionary of Hessen-Nassau.

- **Atlases and Maps** include a historical Atlas of Hessen, historical topographic surveys, plans and blueprints, and a historical town atlas. :
- **Views and Images** include various historical image collections and photographs
- **Topics** include a database with approximately 17,000 descriptions and images of tombstones in 70 Jewish cemeteries and several themed bibliographies
- **Sources** include links to these major collections:
    1. Hessian troops in America (HETRINA) database
    2. Digitized civil registration records searchable by *Standesamt* (civil registration office)
    3. Historical material and documents related to WWI

CONCLUSION

Digital libraries offer online access to a variety of resources useful to the German family historian. Available tools range from essential reference books, such as gazetteers, to "golden nuggets" like descriptive texts and images of towns and landscapes. Published names of emigrants, heirs, land owners, military recruits, and others may be found in official government newspapers. Magazines and journals may contain biographical details pertaining to local leaders and their families. **These gold mines are worth a dig!**