Finding German Places of Origin

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Identifying German immigrant origins can be a challenge. The following list provides United States sources as well as German sources that may lead to locating the German hometown of your immigrant ancestor. This list does not represent all the sources that may provide information.

United States Records

Family Records: may include birth, marriage, and death certificates, as well as family bibles, hymn books, prayer books, old letters, postcards, family heirlooms, and interviews with older relatives.

Church Records: are a valuable source for locating the German immigrant's hometown. Christenings, marriages, deaths, and burials recorded in church records may provide the German place of origin.

- Check the Family History Library Catalog (FHLC) for church records in the area where your ancestor settled.
- *FamilySearch*.org has a collection of church records. The following article provides information about online resources for each state as well as contact information for each denomination.
    - https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/United_States_Church_Records
- *Ancestry.com*
    - http://search.ancestry.com/search/category.aspx?cat=137
    - *U.S., Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, Records, 1875-1940*
        - *http://search.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=60722*
- *German Immigrants in American Church Records* edited by Roger P. Minert is a multi-volume collection that contains the names of German, Austrian, and Swiss immigrants who are included in the records of German-language churches in the United States; most have home towns in Europe.

Immigration Records: or ship passenger arrival records may provide your immigrant ancestor's place of birth as well their last residence. Search the Family History Library Catalog (FHLC) by U.S. port city to find records.

- *United States Germans to America Index, 1850-1897*
    - https://familysearch.org/search/collection/2110801
- *New York Passenger Lists, 1820-1957*
    - http://search.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=7488
- Ellis Island Arrivals, 22.5 million names to New York between 1892 and1924.
    - http://www.libertyellisfoundation.org/passenger
- Castle Garden, 10 million immigrants from 1830-1892.
    - http://www.castlegarden.org/
- *U.S., Atlantic Ports Passenger Lists, 1820-1873 and 1893-1959*
    - http://search.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=8758

Newspaper Obituaries: Obituaries found in local German-language newspapers may provide information about the immigrant ancestors' life in Germany, including their hometown.

- Chronicling America is a collection of historical American newspapers from 1789-1924.
  - http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/
- Newspapers.com ($) has over 5,000 newspapers from the 1700's to 2000's.
  - https://www.newspapers.com/
- GenealogyBank ($) contains historical newspapers from 1690 to today.
  - http://www.genealogybank.com/
- Digital newspaper collections from libraries, universities, and archives may also lead you to your ancestor's obituary. Search online for digital newspaper collections in the state you are researching. Searching "Illinois Digital Newspapers" in Google will lead you to archives and libraries that have published digital newspaper collections.

Death/Burial: Death and burial records may provide information about the birthplace, which could lead to the German hometown.

- Search the FHLC for records in the county your ancestor died in.
- *FamilySearch.org*
  - https://familysearch.org/search/collection/list/?page=1&region=UNITED_STATES&recordType=Vital
- *Ancestry.com*
  - http://search.ancestry.com/search/CardCatalog.aspx#ccat=hc=25&dbSort=1&sbo=1&filter=1*2%7C0*34%7C0*125&
- *Find a Grave* contains over 159 million grave records. Images of grave markers and additional biographical information may be included.
  - https://www.findagrave.com/
- *Billion Graves* is another resource for locating your ancestor's burial records.
  - https://billiongraves.com/
- State archive websites may contain information on how to access death and burial records in the state your ancestor died in.

Naturalization: Naturalization papers (declaration of intent, petition, and certificate) may provide information about German place of origin.

- Search the FHLC by the county your ancestor settled in.
- *FamilySearch.org*
  - https://familysearch.org/search/collection/list/?page=1&recordType=Migration&region=UNITED_STATES
- *Ancestry.com*
  - http://search.ancestry.com/search/CardCatalog.aspx#ccat=hc%3D25%26dbSort%3D1%26sbo%3D0%26filter%3D0*40|0*115|1*2%26

Censuses: Federal census records show the immigrant's country of birth starting in 1850. They also include the year of immigration in the 1900, 1910, 1920, and 1930 censuses. State censuses usually provide information about birthplaces, too.

- *FamilySearch.org*
  - https://familysearch.org/search/collection/list/?page=1&region=UNITED_STATES&recordType=Census

- *Ancestry.com*
  - http://search.ancestry.com/search/group/usfedcen
- List of state and territorial census records
  - https://www.census.gov/history/www/genealogy/other_resources/state_censuses.html

County Records: Local county histories often include information and accounts of families within the area. Biographical information about your immigrant ancestor, including where they emigrated from may be listed.

- Search the FHLC by the county your ancestor settled in for available county histories.
- Google Books, libraries, and other online repositories may contain county histories. Search by the counties your ancestor lived in for available holdings.

Military: Military records may contain vital information about your German immigrant ancestor including their place of origin. Pension files and service records may list the German hometown. For more information on these military records and their availability online refer to these wiki articles:

- Pension Records :
  - https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/US_Military_Pension_Records
- Service Records:
  - https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/US_Military_Service_Records
- *Ancestry.com* contains a variety of military records from U.S. wars.
  - http://search.ancestry.com/search/category.aspx?cat=39
- *FamilySearch.org* also contains many different types of military records for the United States.
  - https://familysearch.org/search/collection/list/?page=1&recordType=Military
- Fold3 ($) contains a large collection of military records from the Revolutionary War to WWII.
  - https://www.fold3.com

German Records

Passagierlisten (passenger lists): usually include place of last residence, which is usually the hometown.

- Hamburg Passenger Lists, 1850-1934
  - http://search.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=1068)
- Bremen Passenger Lists
  - http://www.passagierlisten.de/
- German immigrants : lists of passengers bound from Bremen to New York, with places of origin
  - https://familysearch.org/search/catalog/295798?availability=Family%20History%20Library

Auswandererlisten, Auswandererakten (emigration lists/records): usually provide the date and place of emigration as well as the place of residence.

- Search the FHLC by province.
- German Archives sometimes post indexes and other finding aids online, which may contain emigration information. These sites vary in ease of accessibility for non-German researchers.

Newspapers: may provide information about individuals moving to the United States, thus providing hometown information.

- *Historic German Newspapers Online* by Ernest Thode lists over 2,000 online German newspapers, most of which are fully searchable. This is a great resource to locate your German ancestor within Germany.

- Historic German Newspapers and Journals Online is a directory of online German newspapers with links.
  - https://eudocs.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Historic_German_Newspapers_and_Journals_Online

General Resources

These FamilySearch Wiki articles provide helpful information about researching German immigrant ancestors. These articles contain research strategies as well as links to online searchable record collections.

- Search Strategies for Finding Immigrant Origins
  - https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/Tracing_Immigrants_Search_Strategies
- Tracing German American Immigrants
  - https://familysearch.org/blog/en/tracing-german-american-immigrants/
- Tracing Immigrant Origins
  - https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/Tracing_Immigrant_Origins
- Resources for finding 19th century German Emigrants
  - https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/Internet_Resources_for_Finding_19th_Century_German_Emigrants
- Germany Gathering Information to Locate Place of Origin
  - https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/Germany_Gathering_Information_to_Locate_Place_of_Origin

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