



Researching Your German Roots in Church Records

By Sue Schlichting, Professional Genealogist

Getting Started – Once you know the location of the parish where your family attended church, you're on your way to making some interesting discoveries about their lives.

German church records are one of the major sources of family information. They are accessed through several on-line sources and through contact with local churches and church archives. For this webinar, we're focusing these major sources:

[FamilySearch.org](https://www.familysearch.org) – FREE – create an account to access records – use the Card Catalog to find records

[Ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com) - \$\$ - use the Card Catalog to find records

[Archion.de](https://www.archion.de) - \$\$ - Lutheran Church Books

[Matricula Online](https://www.matricula-online.eu) – FREE – Roman Catholic Church books

Hint - Using the exact German spelling with special characters will give you better results in most of these apps. "Google it" to find the correct spelling, then copy and paste it into your search box.

Parish Locators – both in the US and in Germany can be helpful in narrowing down the records you will want to access. (See books section for links to these resources found in many larger libraries)

Languages – You will find records written in Latin, German and French as you research. Consult the FamilySearch wiki for word lists to help guide you in deciphering your documents.

[Latin Genealogical Word List](#)

[French Genealogical Word List](#)

[German Word Lists](#)

[Baptism \(Taufen\)](#)

[Marriage \(Trauungen\)](#)

[Death \(Todten\)](#)

[Occupations \(Beruf\)](#)

[Common Illnesses](#)

[Given Names](#)

[Dates and Numbers](#)

[German Abbreviations and Acronyms](#)

[Common Symbols found in Church Records](#)



What's in a Name?? Spellings weren't standardized until more recent times. Local dialects can also play a role in spelling variations. Be open minded to all possibilities. A person's name may show up spelled in numerous ways in the records (sometimes even within a single record). In German records, the following letters are sometimes used interchangeably:

- | | |
|----------------------|---------------------------|
| • p used for b | • v used for w or f |
| • a used for e | • k used for g |
| • t used for d or dt | • tz used for z |
| • s used for z | • ig used for isch or ich |
| • ck used for k | • t used for th |
| • y used for i or j | • u used for i |

Watch for special characters – ä (ae), ö (oe), ü (ue), ß (ss), =, -

Script Generators & Handwriting Aids – There are many tools to help you decipher the handwriting. Print out a script “cheat sheet” and keep it handy as you work with the records.

- Alpha Chart - <https://script.byu.edu/00000184-0b45-daad-a9e7-4b5f4a670001/german-english-alphabet-chart>
- Tutorials - <https://script.byu.edu/german-handwriting/introduction>
- [Handwriting Helps](#)
- <https://stevemorse.org/german/germanprintcurs.html> - Check stevemorse.org for other time saving tools!
- Script Generator Tool - <http://www.deutsche-handschrift.de/adsschreiben.php#schriftfeld>
- [WordMine.info](#) – Use the German language option.

Translation Tools – Use the built-in translation tools on the website, if available. Add a “translation extension” to your web browser, or copy and paste text into one of these sites.

- [Deepl.com](#)
- [Transkribus.org](#)
- [Google Translate](#)

Transcription / Translation Strategies –

- ✓ Start small. Practice identifying the name of your ancestor in Kurrent script.
- ✓ Use a script generator to see what the word looks like.
- ✓ Trace the Kurrent script letters with a pen to get a feel for the letters.
- ✓ Pay attention to the placement of the letters. Do they extend below the baseline? Do they extend tall above the base line? Only certain letters have these characteristics. Thinking about placement will help you narrow down the letter possibility.
- ✓ If you are “stuck” on identifying a letter, write out the letters that you do know. Does a word start to make sense to you? Put an * in place of the letter that you are unsure of and try one of the word lists or the tools suggested here.
- ✓ Type the word in a translation tool. Does it translate?

Record Formats – Handwritten (one entry per page), Handwritten (multiple entries per page), Column Headers (Handwritten), Column Headers (Pre-printed), Single Page (Pre-printed) (more common in civil records)



FamilySearch Resources

[FamilySearch.org](https://www.familysearch.org)

[Research Wiki](#) ~ [Catalog](#)

Other Record Sites

- [MyHeritage.com](https://www.myheritage.com) - \$\$ - Connect with German cousins, find German records
- [Compugen.de](https://www.compugen.de) – Society for Computer Genealogy in Germany
- Ortssippenbücher (Community Family Books) - <https://ofb.genealogy.net/>

Search Strategies

- ✓ Utilize built-in hint generators.
- ✓ Consider all name variants.
- ✓ Start with less information and add a little bit of new information each time you search to generate more refined results.

Mapping Aids

- [Kartenmeister](#) – Former Prussia land now in Poland – Help with German and Polish names of places
- [Meyersgaz.org](https://www.meyersgaz.org) – Historical Maps and Parish information for places in Germany based on 1871-1918 data
- [University of Alabama Historical Map Collection](#) – Germany and Prussia Maps

Books

- German Immigrants in American Church Records by Dr. Roger Minert 40 volume series
- [Map Guide to German Parish Registers by Kevan Hansen](#) 55 volume series
- [German-English Genealogical Dictionary by Ernest Thode](#)
- [Deciphering Handwriting in German Documents: Analyzing German, Latin, and French in Historical Manuscripts by Dr. Roger Minert](#)
- [Tips and Tricks of Deciphering German Handwriting: A Translator's Tricks of the Trade for Transcribing German Genealogy Documents by Katherine Schober](#)
- [The Family Tree German Genealogy Guide by James M. Beidler](#)
- [Deciphering Gothic Records by Fay S. Dearden](#)

Try this @ home. . .

- ✓ Find your family's parish in Germany. Locate an ancestor on a church record.
- ✓ Select a church record. Transcribe and translate the column headings. Then you're ready to tackle to record entries!
- ✓ Find an ancestor's name on a record. Use a German script "cheat sheet" to translate a word or entry on the document. Work letter by letter, word by word to translate the entry. Don't be afraid to ask for help.

Be patient with yourself. This will get easier the more you do it. Each recorder had a different style. The more you work with a set of documents, the easier it will get.

All links active as of 20 July 2026

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