

## Germanic Genealogy on the Internet a Tutorial by Lyle G. Hartman

The Internet offers many benefits for genealogists and has helped to promote the popularity of genealogical research to the point that there are now large commercial genealogical sites on the internet. It is estimated that there are now about one million active genealogists worldwide. This growing market for genealogical software, publications and digital databases allows for-profit organizations to justify conversion of some archival information, such as the U.S. census, to online indices and scanned images. However, only a tiny fraction of the genealogical information of the world has been converted to machine readable text or image formats. Therefore, there is a very low probability that an individual genealogist will discover online a "silver bullet" that provides his ancestral information.

However, the Internet and the World Wide Web (WWW) give us access to online sources which (a) provide both background information and guidance which increase our competence in Germanic genealogy, (b) offer relevant online databases containing information about ship manifests, emigration lists, naturalization records, etc., and (c) help us determine what archival information exists and how to access it by ordering microfilms, CD-ROMs or paper copies which we need to solve our own particular genealogical problems.

Presented below, in decreasing order of importance for the typical Germanic genealogy researcher, is a tutorial on some useful sources of information..

### **THE GERMAN GENEALOGY SITE**

The newsgroup soc.genealogy.german has run a mail list for many years. Volunteers with expertise in various subjects have contributed information to the group's web site at

<http://www.genealogy.net/gene/>

This is the most important single site on the Internet for background information on Germanic genealogy. The initial page allows one a choice of German or English language.

On the initial page, click on "English" to view the English version of the home page and to see English versions of documents, when they exist. Some pages have only German versions. You'll see these when the English version does not exist.

Everyone should read the FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) list maintained by Jim Eggert of MIT. It has evolved over many years in response to questions asked in the mail list and now contains answers to the most common questions usually asked by those new to Germanic Genealogy. The FAQ also contains links to other important WWW pages. Click on FAQ or access the FAQ directly at the URL

<http://www.genealogienetz.de/gene/faqs/sgg-faq.html>

There is just a wealth of information at this site. One can literally spend days here looking at the information it points to. It covers not only what we now consider Germany, but other German-speaking areas, including Switzerland, Alsace-Lorraine (Elsass-Lothringen in German), Austria, areas of Russia to which Germans were induced to emigrate by Catharine the Great, the Donau Swabian areas in the old Austria-Hungary populated by Germans from Swabia who floated down the Donau (Danube) river, and parts of Poland which were formerly German.

Go back to the main page, then click on "Regional research" or go directly to

<http://www.genealogienetz.de/reg/regio.htm>

This is the entry point to roughly 2000 pages of information. If one clicks next on "Germany. 19th-Century" or goes directly to

<http://www.genealogienetz.de/reg/ger1871.html>

one can view the various kingdoms, principalities, duchies, grand duchies and free cities that made up the German empire of 1871.

Remember when you navigate this site that the unified country presently called "Germany" did not exist until 1871. Until then, there were many individual kingdoms, duchies and principalities. Therefore, one has to know where to look. Until approximately 1876, the churches were the record keepers except in some areas on the left bank of the Rhine where civil recordkeeping began when Napoleon occupied them. These church records are the primary sources most of us seek for BMD (birth, marriage and death) records because they cover the period when most of our ancestors emigrated.

A description of how to use a free translation service, TranServ, run by Arthur Teschler, can be reached by clicking on "TranServ" or going directly to

<http://www.genealogienetz.de/misc/translation.html>

It is recommended that if you want to write to German sources requesting information, but you do not know German, that you have your letter(s) translated to proper German. Although there are online translators, such as Babelfish, they generally butcher the language and produce results which will not be taken seriously by a German recipient of a request.

This free service is run by volunteers. If you use the service, thank the volunteer who does your translation.

A "Genealogical Symbols & Abbreviations" page is at

<http://www.genealogienetz.de/gene/misc/gensig.html>

The page contains lists of symbols and abbreviations frequently found in documents, along with the German word for them and the English equivalent.

### **THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER DAY SAINTS**

This name is often abbreviated to LDS when one is citing sources or they are referred to as the "Mormons".

The Mormons have the world's greatest collection of genealogical information. As of January 20, 2001 their collection included 2.16 million microfilms, 173,795 sets of microfiche, and 288,000 books. There were about 300 camera teams out around the world microfilming records in nearly 50 countries. They capture 75 to 80 million new images per year. The collection is housed in a large climate-controlled archive at Salt Lake City, Utah. A majority of the Germanic church records have been microfilmed. For many of us, the best way to obtain information about our Germanic ancestors is to check the LDS archives for microfilms of the German church records we seek. If we find them at their online site, then we can order them in to a local LDS Family History Center (FHC) and view them on a microfilm reader.

U.S. census microfilms, many U.S. church records, and copies of the ship manifests on microfilm from the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) are also available from the LDS.

The Mormons maintain the International Genealogical Index (IGI), a collection of birth, marriage and death (BMD) data input from actual records by volunteers. This online database is always worth a search when one is seeking an ancestor. Additionally, they offer the "Ancestral File" database of genealogies volunteered by individuals.

In addition, one can purchase some information on CD-ROM, such as the complete 1880 census. Volunteers worked for thirteen years to input the 1880 census information. The collection of 50+ CD-ROMs of the U.S. 1880 census can be purchased by individuals for \$49. These are not census images, they contain machine-readable text. Consequently, one can search nation-wide for an individual. They also offer for purchase by individuals the CD-ROM set "Vital Records Index of Western Europe".

Personal Ancestral File, the LDS genealogical database program used by many individuals, can be ordered online for a nominal sum.

The main URL is

<http://www.familysearch.org/>

Click on "search" to get to the screen where one can search for an individual in the IGI and ancestral file.

Click on "Library" and then "Family History Library Catalog" to reach the screen where one can search on place, surname, subject, title, call number, or microfilm/microfiche number. If one wanted to determine what ship records were available for the port of New York, one would search on place = New York, and then work down to lists of microfilms of ship records and the periods they cover.

Click on "Library", then "Family History Centers" to find the FHC nearest to you.

Click on "Search", then "Research Guidance", to find a menu of areas for which research advice is available.

Click on "Search", then "Research Helps", then on "G" (for Germany) to find many resources. For example, Larry Jensen's book, "A Genealogical Handbook of German Research" is available for downloading in Adobe's Portable Document Format (PDF) format.

### **NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION (NARA)**

The NARA archives offer indices to ship manifests, the U.S. census microfilms, and other information. Consider it the first source to check for existence of ship arrival manifests and indices to ship arrival manifests.

The entry URL is:

<http://www.archives.gov/index.html>

Immigrant resources can be reached directly from the URL

<http://www.archives.gov/research/immigration/>

## **ROOTSWEB**

Rootsweb was originally the largest genealogical data cooperative funded entirely by contributions. It is owned now by Ancestry, Inc., which operates a separate for-profit web site. However, Rootsweb still operates separately with much of the original flavor and is a repository of huge amounts of information contributed by volunteers.

It hosts most of the discussion lists and mailing lists used by the genealogical community.

The main menu is at the URL

<http://www.rootsweb.com>

Click on

"Rootsweb's Guide to Tracing Family Trees"

then click on

"Numerical Index to Guides"

Of special interest are

1. Where to begin?
9. U.S. Census Records: Soundexes, Indexes and Finding Aids
15. Tracing Immigrant Ancestors
16. Naturalization Records
26. Germanic Ancestors (Plus: Austrians, Dutch, Belgians, Swiss, Luxembourgers, and Liechtensteiners)

The Immigrant Ships Transcribers Guild (ISTG) has transcribed the manifests of about 3813 ships. More will be added. One can search the lists several ways. It is hosted at Rootsweb at

<http://istg.rootsweb.com>

The names of mailing lists related to surnames, U.S. States, and foreign locations are summarized at

<http://lists.rootsweb.com/>

The names of mailing lists related to Germany are reachable by clicking on "Germany" or at

<http://lists.rootsweb.com/index/intl/DEU/>

or at John Fuller's list at

[http://www.rootsweb.com/~jfuller/gen\\_mail\\_country-ger.html](http://www.rootsweb.com/~jfuller/gen_mail_country-ger.html)

Click on the name of the list to receive instructions about how to subscribe.

Message Boards for Surnames, Localities and Topics are reachable by clicking the appropriate entry under "Message Boards".

## **SWISSGEN**

A very nice site for Swiss genealogy is maintained by Wolf Seelentag and a dedicated group of volunteers. If you have Swiss ancestors, be sure to visit at

<http://www.ey.ch/swissgen/>

A Swiss is citizen first of a Gemeinde (a community), then of a Canton, and finally, of Switzerland. His records are kept at the place where he holds citizenship, the Bürgerort, even though he may never have lived there. Thus, part of the game in Swiss genealogy is to find the place of citizenship. This site offers very helpful advice.

### **DETERMINING WHERE A TOWN IS LOCATED**

The recommended way to trace ancestors is to work backward, generation by generation, using available sources of information such as church records, census information, civil vital records (birth, marriage and death), military records, family bibles, family narratives and lore, newspaper accounts of births, marriages and deaths. Eventually we come to the emigrant, and the question is, "Where did he come from? Before 1871 Germany was not a unified country. Our German ancestors came from one of many small countries. A naturalization document may indicate which country he came from. Eventually, one may come up with the name of a town. Then the question is, "Where is it?"

There are several places to look online.

Mapquest

<http://www.mapquest.com/>

Click on "Maps", then choose a country, enter a city name, then click on "Get Map".

ShtetlSeeker at JewishGen

<http://www.jewishgen.org/ShtetlSeeker/loctown.htm>

Kartenmeister (works only for towns east of the Oder and Neisse rivers)

<http://www.kartenmeister.com/>

Expedia Maps

<http://maps.expedia.com/>

Arthur Teschler's GeoServ, (Germany only) with instructions at

<http://www.genealogienetz.de/misc/geoserv.html>

This is the most flexible town finder, because one can use wild cards searches, prefix searches, and soundex-like searches. One sends email and receives an email reply.

## **FINDING A WEB SITE FOR A GERMAN TOWN**

If you know where your German ancestors came from, you may be interested in determining whether the town has a presence on the Internet.

The web sites for many German towns can be found by pointing your browser at a string which contains the town name and the suffix "de". For example, my Hartman and Hammer ancestors came from the town of Knittlingen, about 30 miles northwest of Stuttgart. The URL for the town is simply <http://www.knittlingen.de/>

Another way to find a web site for a town is to go to the URL

<http://www.meinestadt.de/>

and search for the town there. Not all towns have web sites.

## **MID-ATLANTIC GENEALOGY SITE**

<http://midatlantic.rootsweb.com/>

"This site is dedicated to the genealogy, history and culture of the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. By our definition this region is made up of the states of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, North Carolina and the District of Columbia."

It includes links to state groups and includes the Delaware Archives in the Delaware information.

## **GERMAN ZIP CODES**

Five-digit Zip codes (PLZ codes, Postleitzahlen) in Germany can be found online at the following web sites:

[http://postalcode.globefeed.com/Germany\\_Postal\\_Code.asp](http://postalcode.globefeed.com/Germany_Postal_Code.asp)

## **NATURALIZATION**

Our German ancestors who emigrated in the 1800s and 1900s probably became naturalized citizens. Usually the father filed for naturalization and his wife and minor children automatically received citizenship when he did. A "Declaration of Intent" could be filed after about two years. A second paper, the "Petition for Citizenship", could be filed after five years in this country. Until 1940, minor foreign-born children under the age of 21 became American citizens when their foreign-born father did, and until 1922, married foreign-born women became US citizens when their foreign-born husbands did. The naturalization papers provide clues to where the emigrant came from (Kingdom, Duchy, etc), where they arrived in the U.S., and when (usually the month). Therefore, the naturalization papers are potentially an important link when we are tracing backward to determine the town of origin and trying to find the manifest for a ship on which they came. There are several informative sites:

Arnie Lang's Guide to Naturalization Research

<http://immigrantships.net/newcompass/imnat/guides/arnielang.html>

RootsWeb Lesson on Naturalization  
<http://www.rootsweb.com/~rwguide/lesson16.htm>

National Archives Guide to Naturalization Research  
<https://www.archives.gov/research/naturalization/>

National Archives article on Women & Naturalization  
<http://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/1998/summer/women-and-naturalization-1.html>

The complete Minnesota Naturalization Index is online at Ancestry.com. It can be searched as part of the subscription service. This is the only state naturalization index online that I know of.

### **CASTLE GARDEN**

Castle Garden was established as an immigrant processing center by the State of New York. It began operation on August 1, 1855. Before that, immigrants simply got off the boat. The Castle Garden facility allowed U.S. health officials to prevent people with contagious diseases from entering the country. It was also hoped that the station would prevent some of the horrors such as robbery, fraud, and kidnapping that afflicted immigrants when they reached land.

Castle Garden ceased operation on April 18, 1890 when the Secretary of the Treasury terminated the contract his department held with the New York State Commissioners of Immigration. New York refused to let the federal government continue to use the facility.

Castle Garden's foundations stand today in Battery Park. Information about it can be found at  
<http://www.nps.gov/cacl/>

### **ELLIS ISLAND**

In "They Came in Ships", John P. Coletta estimates that of the 17 million persons who passed through Ellis Island, New York, during its period of operation (1892-1924), 12 million became permanent residents of the United States. The first Ellis Island structure burned. It was rebuilt. After Castle Garden was closed, the periods of operation and locations were:

April 19, 1890-December 31, 1891: Barge Office  
January 1, 1892-June 13, 1897: Ellis Island  
June 14, 1897-December 16, 1900: Barge Office  
December 17, 1900-1924: Ellis Island

The story of Ellis Island and a searchable database of immigrants who passed through it are at  
<http://www.ellislandrecords.org/>

A history of Ellis Island can be found at  
<http://www.history.com/topics/ellis-island>

## **THE HAMBURG EMIGRATION LISTS**

This resource is slowly coming online with data on about five million emigrants who went through the port of Hamburg. From the online description:

"The Hamburg Emigration Lists are a data bank which includes the personal data of 5 million people who emigrated via Hamburg from 1850 to 1934. It is now available for your personal use, starting with the years 1890-1893.

This data bank will then grow, on a regular basis, year by year. The first phase will include the data on emigrants from 1890 to 1914. At a later date the years 1850 to 1934 will be included and all of it will be accessible on the internet as well. As soon as you've found the name you are looking for you may obtain complete details (where they came from, profession, age, etc.)."

The English-language version can be accessed at

<http://www.hamburg.de/LinkToYourRoots/english/welcome.htm>

## **SHIP INFORMATION**

Michael Palmer has constructed a remarkable collection of information about merchant vessels over the years. The home page is at

<http://www.oocities.org/mppraetorius/>

Anthony Cimorelli has a collection of 15,367 unique ships, 14,476 unique ship biographies, and between 500,00 and 1,000,000 records at

<http://www.cimorelli.com/safe/shipmenu.htm>

The series of books "Germans to America", lists ship manifests in chronological order, beginning in 1850, for ships arriving in the U.S. with at least 80% of the passengers of Germanic origin. Therefore, this list is not exhaustive. However, it is a good source to check if you are trying to determine when your ancestor arrived.

A list of the currently available volumes is at

<http://www.genealogienetz.de/misc/emig/GermansToAmerica.html>

The latest book, Volume 66, was published in August 2001. It covers the period July 1894 - October 1895. The collection keeps growing.

A list of libraries known to hold the volumes is located at

<http://www.genealogienetz.de/misc/emig/gta-holdings.html>

Note that the University of Delaware is listed as holding the first 60 volumes. It may simply be that the list is not current, and that they actually have all 66.

A review of Germans to America written by Michael Palmer after the first nine volumes were published is available at

<http://www.genealogienetz.de/misc/emig/gta-revu.html>

## **EMIGRATION FROM WUERTTEMBERG**

The Hauptstaatsrchiv Stuttgart site lists some of the emigrants from the former Kingdom of Wuerttemberg archived at the old capitol, Stuttgart. The URL is

<http://www.auswanderer.lad-bw.de/>

Click on the binoculars, then on "Suchformular", type a surname in the box labeled "Name, then click on "Abschicken". Results are returned 10 at a time. Click on the number at the left of a name to see more detail. The number after "Seite" (page) is the page number of the currently displayed records, 10 per page. The symbols ">" and "<" take one forward or backward, respectively, through the pages.

Different from the above list of emigrants is the Wuerttemberg Emigration Index, a collection of seven volumes listing emigrants from Wuerttemberg. It is online as part of the subscription service at Ancestry.com and is also available in many libraries.

## **EMIGRATION FROM BADEN**

The original copies of the Baden Emigration Index are archived at Karlsruhe, the former capitol of the Old Grand Duchy of Baden, at the Baden Generallandesarchiv (Baden state archive). A rather new and limited web page is available at:

[http://www.auswanderer-bw.de/sixcms/detail.php?template=a\\_artikel&id=6615&sprache=en](http://www.auswanderer-bw.de/sixcms/detail.php?template=a_artikel&id=6615&sprache=en)

The postal address is:

Generallandesarchiv Karlsruhe  
Nördliche Hildapromenade 2  
76133 Karlsruhe  
Germany/DEUTSCHLAND

E-Mail: [generallandesarchiv@glaka.lad-bw.de](mailto:generallandesarchiv@glaka.lad-bw.de)

The microfilms of these records can also be found at the LDS site previously discussed, i.e., at

<http://www.familysearch.com/>

Part of the Baden Emigration Index is apparently now available at the Ancestry.com site, again by subscription.

Carla Heller has advice on using the Baden Emigration Index at

<http://www.oocities.org/wingedpig.geo/>

## **THE BLACK FOREST SITE**

The Black Forest (Schwarzwald) is an area of southwest Germany which includes parts of the old Baden and Wuerttemberg. A particularly nice site devoted primarily to the Baden part of this region is at

<http://www.websters.net/blackforest/>

## **ECCLESIASTICAL CALENDARS**

The German church records frequently record dates, such as those for reading the "Proklamations" (marriage Banns) on three Sundays before a wedding, relative to days such as Trinity Sunday ("nach Trin."). It is also desirable to know the day of the week on which an event occurred. Therefore, it is useful to be able to generate the Gregorian calendar for a particular year. The online sites which provided more information are no longer available.

## **JULIAN AND GREGORIAN CALENDARS**

The original Roman (Julian) calendar began the new year in March. It also did not handle leap year properly. Pope Gregory instituted the corrected, so-called Gregorian calendar in 1582. By that time the Julian calendar was off by ten days.

Not all the world changed to the Gregorian calendar at the same time. It is best to record dates as they are found in the original source records. Some genealogy programs, such as Family Tree Maker, will automatically convert a date to the English "double dating" system unless the feature is turned off. My advice is to turn it off. The dates at which the various kingdoms, duchies and principalities of the Germanic areas converted to the Gregorian calendar is fairly complicated. For example, the Protestant cantons of Switzerland did not all convert at the same time.

## **READING OLD GERMAN RECORDS**

If one is really serious about reading old German records, then one should purchase the following book:

Thode, Ernest. "German-English Genealogical Dictionary", Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1992  
ISBN 0-8063-1342-0

It is available at many genealogical supply houses

## **GERMAN TELEPHONE DIRECTORY**

The German telephone directory, including an English-language version, is available at

<http://www.teleauskunft.de/>

Sometimes, if one is searching for the origin of an uncommon surname, it is possible to find only a few locations where the name still exists, and thus obtain a clue as to where an emigrant ancestor came from. Also, if you know the location where an ancestor came from, one can obtain names, addresses and telephone numbers of individuals with that surname still living at that location and contact them to determine if they are relatives. When contacting them, one should write in German and tell them, succinctly, about your ancestors at that location. Remember that not everyone is interested in genealogy.

## **Cyndi Howell's GENEALOGY SITES ON THE WEB**

The most extensive compilation of genealogy sites on the web is the one created and maintained by Cyndi Howell at

<http://www.cyndislist.com/>

The German subset is at

<http://www.cyndislist.com/germany.htm>

## **PRINTED MODERN MAPS**

If one is doing research in a particular Germanic area, it is useful to have detailed maps. 1:200,000 scale is equivalent to 1 centimeter = 2 kilometers. 1:25,000 scale maps, such as those produced by the Swiss Topographic Bureau, even show individual houses. One source I have used for such maps is Omni Resources, on the web at

<http://www.omnimap.com/>

## **COMMERCIAL SOURCES OF GENEALOGY INFORMATION.**

Ancestry.com is located at

<http://www.ancestry.com/>

One can do free searches here up to a point. If you search for an ancestor, some of the results will be free, but some cannot be viewed unless you have paid a membership subscription fee and log in. This organization is also bringing the census images online. There is an additional membership subscription fee to view the census images. Take a look and explore the various databases available, then judge whether it is worthwhile to pay a membership fee.

The well-known Family Tree Maker genealogy program, many CDs, proprietary databases available by subscription, and other genealogical information are offered for sale at

<http://familytreemaker.genealogy.com/?Welcome=1002667838/>

There are many other commercial sources. The two above seem to have the most online information.

## **GERMAN LIFE MAGAZINE**

This English-language magazine provides information about German customs, food, travel, and some historical information of interest to genealogists, such as forms of currency in earlier times. There is a searchable archive of past articles. The home page is at

<http://www.germanlife.com/>

## **PLANNING A RESEARCH TRIP TO GERMANY**

Some advice can be found at DearMYRTLE's DAILY GENEALOGY COLUMN

Planning a Research Trip to Germany I

<http://www.dearmyrtle.com/00/0226.htm>

Planning a Research Trip to Germany II

<http://www.dearmyrtle.com/00/0227.htm>

Planning a Research Trip to Germany III

<http://www.dearmyrtle.com/00/0228.htm>

Planning a Research Trip to Germany IV

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