

Germany Beginning Research Series—Handout

Lesson 3: Using Maps, Gazetteers and Websites



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Overview

Germany as a country did not exist until 1871. Prior to that time it consisted of many large and small independent entities, including states, kingdoms, duchies, principalities, and others. Each entity was a separate “country” with a unique government, laws, money, measures, and so on. These various geographic areas are called jurisdictions. Record-keeping jurisdictions are places where a government or church has authority. Jurisdictions are used to identify a given locality and find records.

Jurisdictions

Government jurisdictions in Germany from large to small include:

- State or Prussian Province
- Region
- County
- Parish
- Village or Town

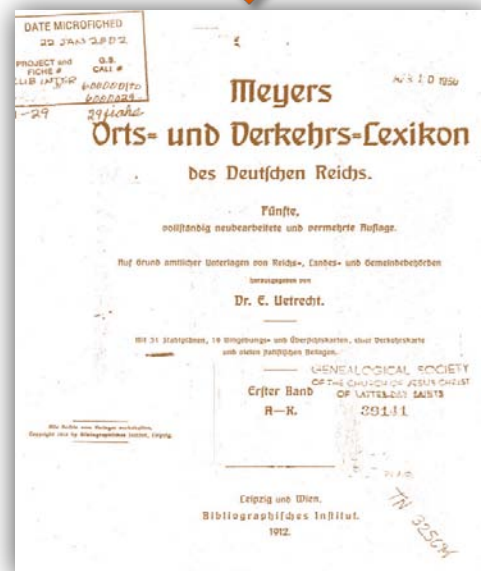
Many place-names occur multiple times within Germany and even worldwide. Therefore, each place must be described in such a way that the description points to one specific, unique locality. Places are generally listed in order from the lowest to the highest level of jurisdiction. The village is the lowest level and the country the highest. For example:

Hamburg, Hamburg, Germany = the City of Hamburg in the city state of Hamburg, Germany.

Most genealogical records in Germany are kept on a town or parish level. Thus identifying a locality and its associated jurisdictions is crucial to finding records. This is done by using gazetteers and maps.

Gazetteers

Gazetteers are place-name dictionaries that describe towns and villages, population sizes, and jurisdictions. Many reflect the boundaries as they existed at a specific time. Some, like Meyers Ort und Verkehrslexikon (Meyers Gazetteer of the German Empire), cover the entire German Empire. Other place-name books exist for various historic states and territories. Most are written in German. Many gazetteers are available online. Some are more complete than traditional books.



Websites

Here are some useful websites:

Germany gazetteers on the FamilySearch Wiki

https://www.familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/Germany_Gazetteers

Links to online gazetteers

https://www.familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/German_Research_on_the_Internet_-_an_Overview_-_complete_handout

The GOV genealogical Gazetteer

<http://gov.genealogy.net/search>

German GenWiki

<http://wiki-de.genealogy.net/Hauptseite>

Digitized historical gazetteers

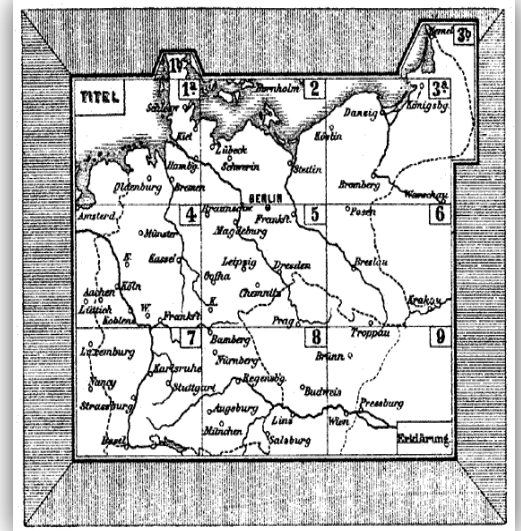
<http://wiki-de.genealogy.net/Portal:DigiBib>

Several transcribed gazetteers

<http://www.progenealogists.com/germany/gazetteersmain.html>

Gazetteer for localities East of the Oder–Neisse line

<http://kartenmeister.com/preview/databaseuwe.asp>



Maps

Once you have learned something about an area, you can go to a map. A good resource is Ravenstein's Atlas des Deutschen Reiches (Atlas of the German Empire), found at <http://www.library.wisc.edu/etext/ravenstein/home.html>

If you know your ancestral town and know the respective parish, you can then check the Family History Library Catalog for available records.

Summary

1. Verify the location with maps and gazetteers.
2. Use the Family History Library Catalog to locate records.
3. Find the record.
4. Search for your ancestor.
5. Document your findings by recording this information on your pedigree charts and family group sheets.

