

# Germany Beginning Research Series - Handout

## Lesson 2: Learn about Historical Background



With Baerbel Johnson, AG®

### Overview

Understanding the historical background of Germany:

- Enables you to put your ancestor in a historical context
- Helps you find records
- Helps you interpret the information found in these records correctly

Without historical background you only have a name, a place, and possibly a few dates.

## Using a Timeline to Understand Family & German Historical Background

### Step 1: Prepare a Family Timeline

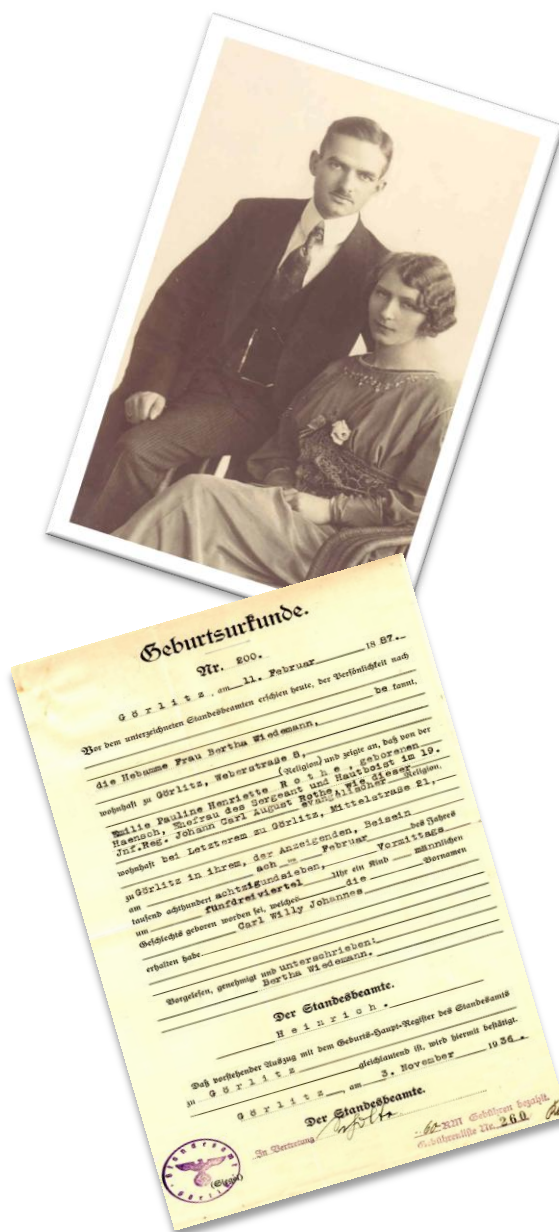
Timelines are useful tools for analyzing the lives of a family. Matching a family timeline with a German historical timeline can help you determine the likelihood of a family's involvement in historical events, such as wars and migrations. Knowing this will help you locate and interpret records.

To create a family timeline, gather family group records and any other home-or family source information you may have.

Keep in mind that you can always add additional information to the timeline as you find it, such as census data, vital records, church records etc.

Create the timeline by adding all the events for a person or family that you are able to obtain from your sources.

Here is an example:



## LIFE EVENTS OF HANS

1887 Born in Görlitz  
1904–1907 Technical school  
1908 Works for railroad  
1918 Married  
1921 & 1923 Children born  
1933 Another child born  
1943 Retires  
1945 Wife is killed at end of the war  
1950 Death



## Step 2: Prepare a Germany–Specific Historical Timeline

### GERMAN HISTORICAL EVENTS DURING HANS' LIFE

1889 Wilhelm II becomes German Emperor  
1890's–1910 Railroad expansion  
1914 –1918 World War I  
1923 Hyperinflation  
1933 Hitler  
1939 WWII begins  
1945 WWII ends  
1950 West Germany

## Step 3: Compare Life and Historical Events

By doing so, you can understand what life may have been like for your ancestors, and the types of pressures which may have caused them to emigrate and/or make other major changes during their lives. Try writing a narrative by combining information from the timelines.



## Additional Resources

German History in Documents and Images Website found at:

<http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/home.cfm>

This is a good resource for learning about the development of Germany and German history from the 1500s to the present. Each section includes an explanation of major events, period documents, pictures, and maps.

