TRACING YOUR GERMAN ANCESTORS

Cass County Public Library – Genealogy Branch

GETTING STARTED

Research your German ancestors the same way you would research any ancestor
- Start with yourself and work backwards
- Look for clues in basic American records (vital, military, census records, etc.)
- Determine your earliest German ancestor living in America
- Determine where to look for records in Germany
- Then use German records to continue your research

Common Challenges
- To use German records, you must determine a specific location in Germany, preferably a town
- German language and writing is difficult to discern for non-speakers
- Repetitive/confusing naming conventions
- Figuring out where records are kept in Germany

Search Tips
- Limiting your results with only "Germany" as a location may not help
- Use FAN research to trace relatives to their German place of origin

For Difficult Names
- Use wildcard searches by entering an asterisk (*) instead of letters
  - Entering surname as "V*nl*r" or "F*nl*r" to catch Vornlocker, Varnlochner, Fahrenlocher
- Determine equivalent or anglicized names
  - "Schwartz" may have become "Black"
  - Check alternative spellings: "Strübel, Strobel, etc."
- Search by criteria
  - Leave name blank
  - Search with birth date, location, age, occupation, and other details instead
- Lengthen and shorten names
  - "Weisenberg, Weisen, Wise, etc."

CLUES IN AMERICAN RECORDS

U.S. Census Records
- Consider how the *birthplace* is enumerated over time
  - "Prussia," "Germany," "Bavaria," "Württemberg," etc.
- Keep an eye on spelling variations to use when searching for other records
- Native tongue may be indicative
  - Birthplace is Germany, but native tongue is Polish or Czech, may be a clue to certain regions of the Kingdom of Prussia, if chronologically appropriate

Be sure to check, where applicable:
- Nativity columns
  - May provide ancestor's birthplace, their parents' birthplaces
- Citizenship columns
  - May provide dates of immigration and naturalization – may help locate related documents

Example: *1900 U.S. Federal Census*

Andrew Bates — Born April 1831 — Born in "*Germania*" / Both Parents born in "*Germania*" — Immigrated in 1848 / Naturalized

Vital Records
- Includes birth, marriage, and death records
- May include birthplace and parents' names and birthplaces
- Can inform you of spelling variations
- Only as accurate as the informant
- Most states have fairly strict regulations on who requesting vital records
  - Check with the Department of Public Health or Vital Records for that state

Birth Certificate

Name: Otto Albert Ahrendt

Birthdate: 24 Oct 1916

Father: Wilhelm Ahrendt, 47

Father's Birthplace: Germany

Mother: Louise Zeasemer, 36

Mother's Birthplace: Germany

Military Records
Always check for the individual's birthplace on any record, including:
- Registration
- Muster Rolls
- Pensions
- WWI & WWII Draft Cards

Cemetery Records & Obituaries
- Church-affiliated cemeteries are common, especially Lutheran
  - Check related church books for death & burial records
- German communities often buried in the same cemetery
- Obituaries are only as detailed and accurate as the informant

Newspapers
- Local news: "gossip section" often mentions visits to and by German family
  - These may include specific locations
- German community newspapers (in German) – in Missouri:
  - *Anzeiger des Westens*, St. Louis, 1835–1898
  - *Westliche Post*, St. Louis, 1857–1938
    - Death Notice Index available at St. Louis County Library
  - *Hermanner Volksblatt*, Hermann, c.1856–1928

Example: *29 Oct 1894 Death Notice Published in, "Abendblatt der Illinois Staats-Zeitung," Chicago, IL*
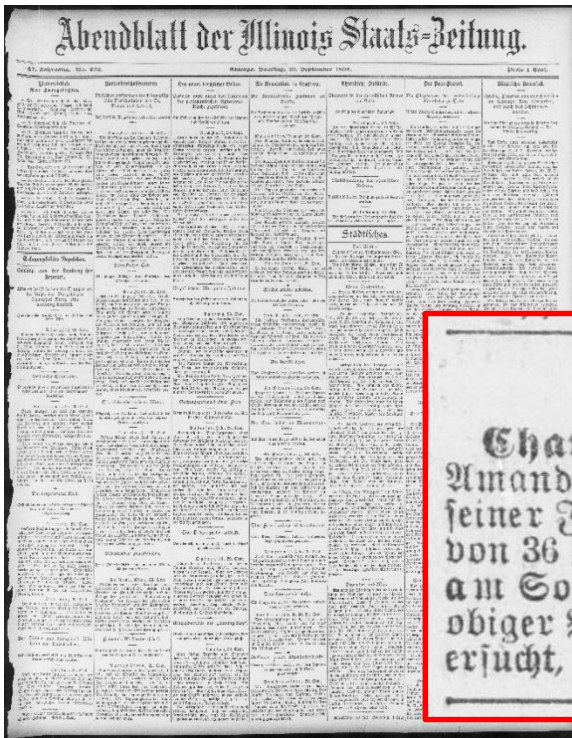
Name: Charles J. Bolehn
Wife: Amanda S. Baumgarten
Death Location: In his wife's parents' apartment at 629 Ogden Ave.
Date of Death: 28 Oct 1894
Age: 36 years, 10 months, 17 days
Funeral: 30 Sept 1894, 1 PM, at apartment mentioned above
Request to Also Publish in: Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Other Records
- St. Louis County Library Family Genealogies Collections
  - *Deutsches Familienarchiv*
  - *Deutsches Geschlechterbuch*
- *Registration Affidavit of Alien Enemies*, 1917-1918
  - During WWI, non-naturalized German males aged 14 and older who were classified as enemy aliens were made to register, providing information on their place of origin, family
  - American-born wives of non-naturalized Germans
  - Available for certain states on Ancestry (Kansas, digitized; Minnesota, indexed)

IMMIGRATION AND NATURALIZATION

Passenger Lists
- Not required prior to 1820
- Pre-1900s, most are handwritten, less detailed
- 1900s, universal forms, often typed, more detailed questions
- Varying levels of detail provided by immigrant and variation in questions asked over time

- Colonial immigration records available: *Passenger and Immigration Lists Index*, William Filby
- Finding a passenger list is often a brick wall for researchers

Example: *1925 Passenger List, Arriving at the Port of Honolulu, Hawaii*

Date of Arrival: 31 Jan 1925

Port: Honolulu, Territory of Hawaii ("T. H.")

Port of Departure: Wilmington, California

Ship: "City of Los Angeles"

Name: Hans Schmidt

Age: 59 (*born abt 1866*)

Marital Status: Married

Native Born: Hanover, Germany

Naturalization: Supreme Court, Buffalo, NY

Date of Papers: 6 May 1887

Address in US: Derby, Erie County, NY

Hamburg Passenger Lists
- Departure lists for those departing from the port of Hamburg, 1850-1934 (except 1915-1919)
- The port of Hamburg serviced Germans and Eastern Europeans
  - 1/3 of the passengers were German, nearly 2/3 of the passengers were from Eastern Europe, especially between 1880-1914
  - Some who left this port traveled indirectly to their destination, meaning that while some of the travelers stayed on the ship, others listed here transferred to another ship, often at English, French, Belgian, or Dutch ports
- *Bremen departures* exist for 1904-1914 (some available on FamilySearch)

Example: *1855 Hamburg Passenger List*

Residence: Birnbaum, Prussia

Port of Departure: Hamburg

Date of Departure: 16 Jun 1855

Destination: New York

Name: F. W. Schmidt

Age: 59 (*born abt 1796*)

Example: *1841 Bremen Departure Passenger List*

Date of Arrival: 16 Jan 1841

Port Bound for: New Orleans

Port of Departure: Bremen, Germany

Name: Johann Georg Peetz

Age: 39 (*born abt 1802*)

Native Born: Hainersreuth, Germany

Where Last Been: Schlackenau

Destination: St. Louis

Family: Elizabeth, 39; Margar. Sophie, 18; Margar. Barbara, 13; Andreas, 10; Andreas Conrad, 8; Joh. Conrad, 4

Determine German Language Place Names

These may show up on immigration and naturalization records over time:

- "Prußen" / "Pruessen" → Prussia
- "Bayern" → Bavaria
- "Niedersachsen" → Lower Saxony
- "Deutschland" → Germany
- "Hessia" / "Hessen" → Hesse
- "Westfalen" → Westphalia (North Rhine-Westphalia)
- "München" → Munich

Naturalization Records

*Records **before 1906** are much less detailed*

Pre-1906, naturalization records may include:

- Name, age of immigrant
- Port and date of arrival
- Place of residence
- Country of origin/allegiance

Post-1906, naturalization records typically include:

- Name, birth date and place
- Name of spouse and any children, their birth dates and places, marriage date
- Port and date of arrival, name of vessel
- Occupation
- Physical description
- Residence, last foreign address

The Naturalization Process

1790–1906: "Old Law" Period

- There was no federal oversight over naturalization, each state established its own process
- 5,000 federal, state, and county courts had the authority to grant citizenship, each with their own system

1906: Federal oversight of the process began, establishing the **C-File** (Certificate File) **series**
- Every person naturalized between Sept. 27, 1906, and March 31, 1956, has a Certificate File ("C-File") with USCIS containing a copy of their Certificate of Naturalization
- Beginning in September 1906, all naturalization courts were required to:
  - *Issue a Certificate of Naturalization to every naturalized* **person** (and name all members of the primary subject's family who derived citizenship from his or her naturalization);
  - *Create Certificates of Naturalization using standard forms*
  - *Submit a duplicate copy of every Certificate of Naturalization for filing*

1906–1941: Naturalization was a two-step process intended to take at least 5 years
- After living in the US for 2 years, an alien can file "first papers" or a *Declaration of Intent(ion)*
- After an additional 3 years, the applicant could then file a *Petition for Naturalization*
- Both steps did not have to be filed with the same court — typically, whatever court was most convenient
- From 1929-1941, the form also included a photo of the applicant

Example: *1912 Declaration of Intent*

Name: Albert Friedrich August Ramthun
Age: 36
Born: 1 Aug 1876 in Fitzmar, Germany
Last foreign Residence: Knurbusch, Germany
Port of Departure: Bremen
Port of Arrival: New York
Date of Arrival: 4 Apr 1884
Filed First Papers: 5 Sept 1912 in Los Angeles, California

Exceptions to This Process
"Derivative" Naturalization
- 1790-1922 – wives of naturalized men automatically became naturalized citizens
- 1790-1940 – children under 21 of naturalized individuals automatically became naturalized citizens
Minor Aliens
- 1824 to 1906 – minors living in the US for 5 years before 23rd birthday could file Declaration and Petition simultaneously
Veterans
- 1862 – Honorably discharged could file a Petition without Declaration after 1 year of residence
- 1894 – extended to 5-year veterans of Navy and Marines
- 192,000 veterans naturalized from May 1918 – Jun 1919 without filing Declaration or 5-year residence

Women's Naturalization Records

- **From 1907 to 1922:** "*…any American woman who marries a foreigner shall take the nationality of her husband…*"
    - *A native-born woman with American citizenship who had resided since birth in the US* could still lose her American citizenship if she married a foreign national who also resided in the US
    - However, just because the law said she "take(s) the nationality of her husband," that did not mean she was automatically given citizenship in his home country
        - It simply meant she was now legally considered an "alien" in her own country
- **From 1922 on,** a woman retained her citizenship unless she formally renounced it
    - Native-born women seeking to <u>regain</u> American citizenship filed a **Petition for Naturalization**
- **In 1936**, an act of Congress provided "marital expatriates" with the right to regain citizenship by filling out an application — *only for those who were now widowed or divorced*
    - A new form was used: *The Application to Take the Oath of Allegiance to the United States of America*
- **Starting July 2, 1940:** All women who lost their US citizenship by marriage could repatriate — *regardless of their marital status*
    - They still had to provide evidence that they had resided continually in the US since the date of the marriage

Colonial Naturalization

- British immigrants were automatically citizens of the colonies
    - All others had various ways of becoming naturalized citizens of the colonies with varying levels of rights
- The US Constitution allowed for the establishment of a uniform naturalization process, prior to that each colony had its own and the process and requirements varied from colony to colony

Most of these early records, if they still exist, are indexes in book format:

- ***Denizations and Naturalizations in the British Colonies in America**, 1607-1775; Lloyd DeWitt Bockstruck*

Passport Applications

- U.S. Government began issuing passports in 1789
- Passports were not <u>required</u> for foreign travel until WWI
    - Requirement was re-instated during WWII
- Foreign-born applicants had to submit proof of citizenship status and immigration information
    - Often an excellent source of information regarding the individual's immigration, providing the date of arrival, the ship's name, port of departure and arrival, etc.
- *May help locate passenger lists and border crossing records and may also include a photograph*

Information provided by passport applications includes:

- Name of applicant
- Birth date or age
- Birthplace
- Residence
- Date of application or issuance of passport
- Father's and/or husband's name
- Father's and/or husband's birth date or age
- Father's and/or husband's birthplace and residence
- Wife's name
- Date and place of immigration to the U.S.
- Years of residence in the U.S.
- Naturalization date and place
- Occupation
- Physical characteristics

BEFORE USING GERMAN RECORDS

When You Are Ready to Make the Jump to German Records, Keep in Mind…

- Only a fraction of German records is available online
    - *And only a fraction of those records have been digitized*

- Learning how to read German records *will be frustrating*
- Tracking down German records *will be frustrating*

Historical Context
- Educate yourself on the historical and geographic history of the area
- Borders can change for political, religious, and economic reasons over time
- Check to see if your ancestor was affected
- Know how the area was organized and what it was called at the time

Concerning German Geography
- German geography over time is complicated
- Google is your friend
- Maps and gazetteers are also your friends
  - Some may be in German

Meyers Gazetteer

www.meyersgaz.org

Gazetteers are encyclopedias of German place names
- A German gazetteer may provide the names and locations of towns, civil registry offices, parishes, provinces, states, and other geographical features
- Most gazetteers only provide *the places names as they were when it was published*
- **Meyers Gazetteer**, the most well-known gazetteer of the *German Empire*, is now fully digitized and available for search online (*and can also be searched on Ancestry and FamilySearch*)
  - Researchers can enter a place name into the search form and find its corresponding information
    - The database also features a historic map with a toggle to view the same area in modern Google maps for comparison

Example: *Meyers Gazetteer Entry for the Village of Egerndach, Bayern*

Translated & Transcribed Entry

Original Entry in German

Detail

Type D. u. LGem. - Egerndach is a Dorf und Landgemeinde (Village and Rural Community).

Lvl I Bay. - Level I shows which Kingdom or State the place is located in. Egerndach is located in Bayern.

RB OBay. - The Regierungsbezirk for Egerndach is Oberbayern. The Regierungsbezirk is a government district that is in hierarchy between the State and Kreis level.

BA Traunstein - The Bezirksamt for Egerndach is Traunstein. The Bezirksamt is the District Office.

AG Traunstein - The Amtsgericht for Egerndach is in Traunstein. The Amtsgericht is where the Lower District Court is located.

BKdo Rosenheim - The Bezirkskommando for Egerndach is in Rosenheim. The Bezirkskommando is the District Military Command. You can look in the BKdo to find military records.

StdA Grassau - The Standesamt for Egerndach is in Grassau. The Standesamt is where the Civil Registration Office is located.

kath. K. 1 - Egerndach has 1 katholisch Kirche (Catholic Church).

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What to Know First
- Name (full)
- Town (exact)
- Dates (general time frame works)
- Religion / denomination

Keep in mind – you may want to consider hiring a professional, German-speaking genealogist to help with research and correspondence

Tips for German Record Collections
- Determine which locations and years are included in the collection
  - Don't waste time looking for someone who, by virtue of location of time frame covered in the collection, will not be found in the records
- Most available records are handwritten and untranslated, even civil registers
- Check for any specific search tips provided by the database in the collection summary

German Civil Registration Records
Civil registration only became mandatory in all German states in January 1876
- Several states and regions had been keeping civil registers already by then
  - Forms used for records can vary from state to state
- There may be periods of time when an area temporarily ceased civil registration
  - Or periods when the records are in French

Example: *The map to the right shows a map of the German Empire (1871-1918), including parts of what was previously the Kingdom of Prussia and what is now Poland. The color coding indicates the year that area began Civil Registration.*

Finding Civil Records
Civil records are publicly accessible to all after a privacy period:
- **Births:** 110 years
- **Marriages:** 80 years
- **Deaths:** 30 years

For Civil Records Still in the Privacy Period:
- You must have a direct relationship to the subject of the record
- All "*participating parties*" have died at least 30 years ago (this may vary)
- "*Participating parties*" are both parents and the child in birth records, and both spouses in marriage records

Civil registers are kept by a town's Civil Registration Office
- Often called "***Standesamt***" or "*Bürgerbüro*" in German
- Officials typically respond to correspondence from research that is *written in German*
- Their records may have been sent to an archive or central repository for the area

The Year German Civil Registration Began

1876	1809
1874	1808
1866	1803
1850	1792
1811	

Example: *1886 Civil Register for District of Steinburg, Schleswig-Holstein*

Location: Sankt. Margarethen, Steinburg, Schleswig-Holstein, Germany
Date of Record: 7 Aug 1886
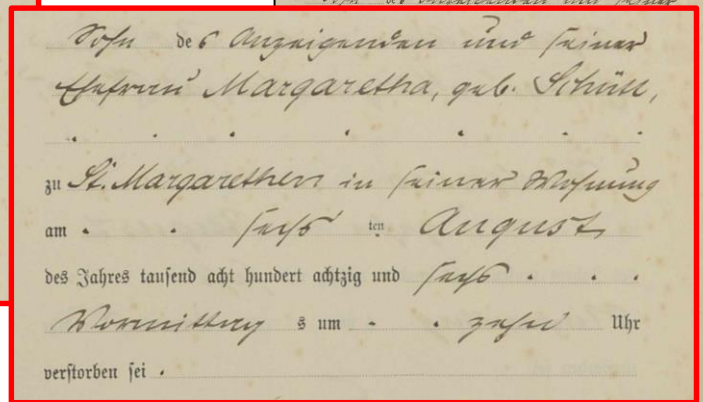**Father:** Carsten Jurgen Friedrich Langbehn
Name: Heinrich Daniel Langbehn
Age: 22
Religion: Evangelical (Lutheran)
Birthplace: Sankt. Margarethen
Mother: Margaretha Schütt
Death Date: 6 Aug 1886
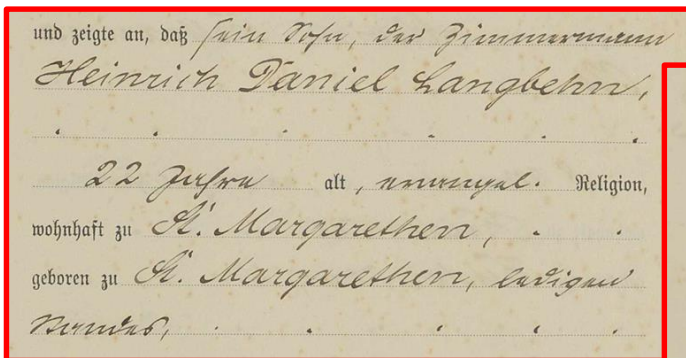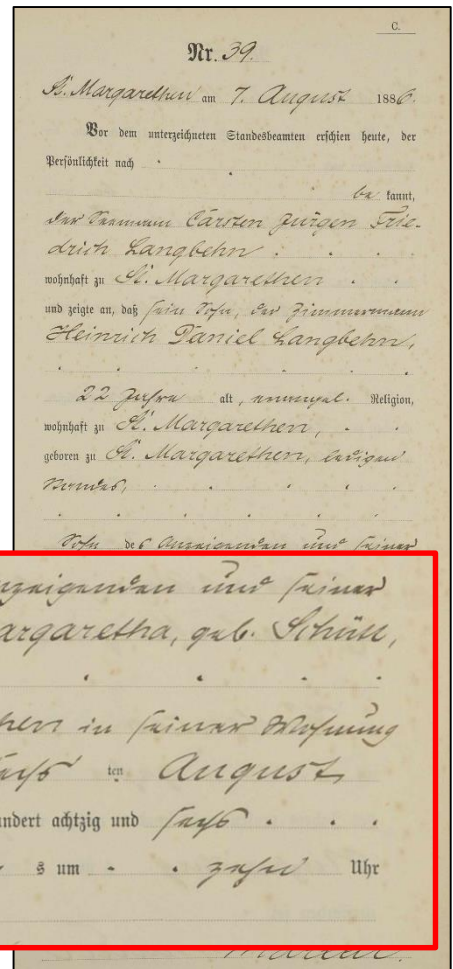
Ortssippenbücher

"Town Lineage Book"

- The information is organized by family
- Generally includes the birth, marriage, and death data for all residents of the town
  - Can help connect you to the original records in parish and civil registers, court and land records
- Limited availability, especially online, but an excellent resource

Online Heritage Book Database (in German): www.online-ofb.de

- Volunteer project – transcribed information from hundreds of Ortsfamilienbücher, Adressbücher, and more

Example: *Bindlach, Bayreuth (Stadtkirche), Bayern, Family Database Family Report*

Name: Ursula Kolb
Date: 14 Feb 1604
Residence: Bindlach, Bayreuth, Bayern
Spouse: Eberhardt Bernreuter
Father: Hans Kolb, also in Bindlach
No kids, no siblings recorded

German Census Records, 1816-1916

- These records are subject to the same potential inaccuracies and varied information as US Census records
  - Done every ten years
  - May not be as helpful as civil registration or church records — but these records can help direct researchers to those records
  - Shows the names of members of the household records their information separately
- Area of coverage varies
  - 1819, 1867,1890, 1900 Census for Mecklenburg-Schwerin
  - 1835-1860 Schleswig-Holstein Census conducted by Denmark
  - 1807-1880 City of Lübeck Census
  - 1852 Kingdom of Hanover Census
- Census records for some towns and regions may be accessible at various state and local archives
- Some digitized collections available online in databases like Ancestry and FamilySearch
  - Also check the Family History Library's catalog for microfilm or bound records available offline

Example: *1867 Census of the Grand Duchy of Mecklenburg-Schwerin*

Date: 3 Dec 1867

Names: Heinrich Meier

Household: Elise Meier, wife

Residence: Gothmann, D.A. Boizenburg, Mecklenburg-Schwerin

Birth Year/Age: Heinrich: 1802/65; Elise: 1815/52

Religion: Lutheran (Evangelical)

Marital Status: married

Occupation: "Altentheiler" – retired

Citizenship: Mecklenburg-Schwerin

GERMAN CHURCH RECORDS

The Basics of German Church Records

- Level of detail provided varies over time and by denomination
- Church book duplicates are most widely available
- Many churches and their records were destroyed during the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648)
  - This also applies to other wars
- *Most records are still maintained by the local parish*
  - Online availability varies by location and denomination
  - Parish directories are available for both Evangelical and Catholic parishes in *In Search of Your German Roots*, by Angus Baxter (available at the CCPL Genealogy Branch)

Kirchenbücher

Kirchenbuch/ "Church books"
- Books generally include records of births, baptisms, marriages, deaths, and burials
- May also contain receipt books, lists of confirmation, and penance registers
- Some parishes have family registers similar to an ortssippenbücher (*see civil records above*)
- Church records are the most comprehensive coverage of Germans before 1876 (when civil records begin)

The Catholic Church (*Katholische Kirche in Deutschland*)
- There are 27 church archives that hold parish registers, confirmation & communion records
- The Church is organized in ecclesiastical provinces, bishoprics, and local parishes
  - The headquarters of a bishopric or *bistum* is typically located in the largest city in the area
  - The post-WWII division of Germany did not affect the boundaries of dioceses, neither did reunification

Catholic Records
- Records start in the early 1560s and were compulsory until 1918
- Confirmation and communion lists along with baptism, marriage, and death records
- Also may have family books, which started in 1614 and contain detailed accounts of each family belonging to the parish
- May be written in both German and Latin
- Most early registers are still kept at the parish level, later records are in state archives
  - i.e. the Catholic church book duplicates at the Baden-Württemburg State Archives (digitized, available through *FamilySearch*)
- The addresses for the various Catholic Archives can be found at www.katholisch.de

Example: *Church Book Duplicate from Baden-Württemberg Online Archives, transcribed by database*
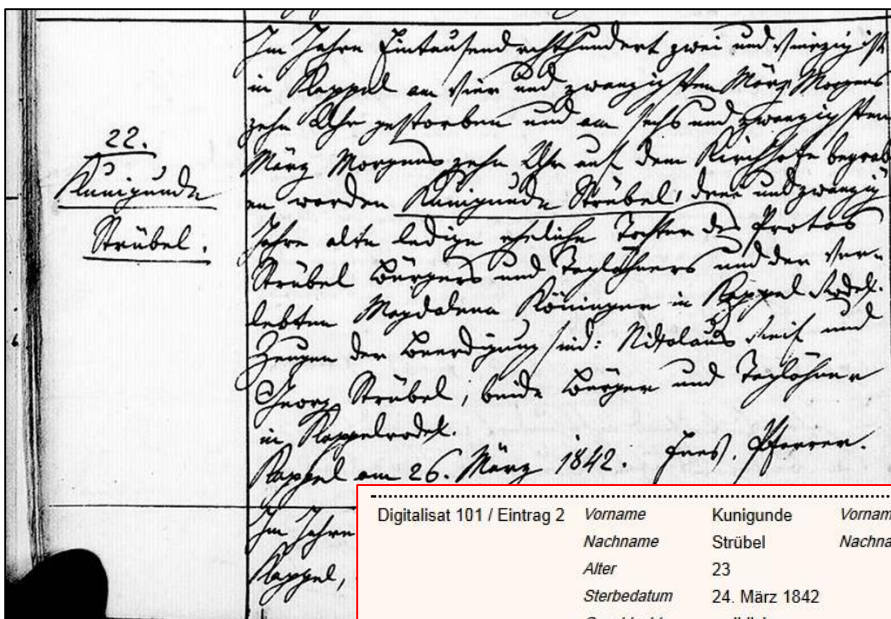
Name: Kunigunde Strübel
Age: 23 (born about 1819)
Death Date: 24 March 1842
Gender: Female
Denomination: Catholic
Father: Protos Strübel
Mother: Magdalena Köninger

Note: *Later in this guide, we will cover how to read German records like this one!*

Digitalisat 101 / Eintrag 2	Vorname	Kunigunde	Vorname	Protos	Vorname	Magdalena	FamilySearch
	Nachname	Strübel	Nachname	Strübel	Nachname	Köninger	
	Alter	23					
	Sterbedatum	24. März 1842					
	Geschlecht	weiblich					
	Konfession	Katholisch					

The Evangelical Church (*Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland*)
- A union of 26 independent Lutheran, Reformed, and United churches (and some Protestant)
  - 17 in western Germany, 9 in what was formerly East Germany, each with their own headquarters
  - When Memel Territory, Prussia, (Klaipėda Region) was transferred to the USSR in 1945 all parish records were essentially lost – records *may* be held by Lithuania

The Central Archives for the Evangelical Church holds:
- o Registers for former parishes in Eastern Prussia, Western Prussia, Farther Pomerania, Posen, eastern territories of Mark Brandenburg and Silesia
- o 750 Protestant military church registers of the former Prussian army and the German Wehrmach

Lutheran Records (Evangelical)
- Began keeping baptism, marriage, and death records around 1540
- Lutherans a more predominant in the northern Germany than southern
- There is a large presence of German Lutheran communities in America, especially in the Midwest – their records are also written in German
- To request records from one of these churches, first make sure you are contacting the correct one for where your ancestors lived
- They are usually eager to help when contacted by mail for records unavailable online, but you must have a succinct inquiry, preferably written in Germany

Information that __may__ be included in these records:
- *Baptism:* name, sex, date, names of parents, residence, father's occupation, place of birth, names and residence of godparents
- *Marriage:* name, ages and residences of the bride and groom, occupation of the groom, names and residences of parents (sometimes just fathers) and occupation of fathers
- *Burials:* name, age, place of death, cause of death, names of parents, name of spouse if still living, date and place of burial, surviving children

READING GERMAN RECORDS

The Basic Strategy
- **Step One:** *Familiarize Yourself with German Script*
- **Step Two:** *Determine the Format of the Record*
- **Step Three:** *Focus and Filter*

Reading German Records for Beginners
You don't have to speak German to research Your German Ancestors
- Use Google Translate – even for entire websites
- Look for a link to the English version of a website
- Utilize transcribed indexes for digitized images (*both Ancestry and FamilySearch have them*)
- Memorize specific vocabulary

Step One: *Familiarize Yourself with German Script*
- Keep a cheat sheet of examples
- Match the time frame with the lettering style used at the time
  - o *Fraktur*: 15th century – WWII
  - o *Sütterlin*: taught in school 1915 – 1941
  - o *Kurrent:* 16th – 18th centuries, "Old German"

Note: *Other Languages in Records*
- Latin was regularly used for Roman Catholic church records
- French was often used in Elsaß-Lothringen and during the French domination of the area west of the Rhein.
- Danish was used in much of Schleswig-Holstein until Preußen annexed that area in 1864
- Polish may also appear in the databases or records from the area of the German Empire or Kingdom of Prussia that later became Poland

German Script Cheat Sheet

MODERN	FRAKTUR	SÜTTERLIN	KURRENT	OLD HANDWRITING STYLES
A a				
B b				
C c				
D d				
E e				
F f				
G g				
H h				
I i				
J j				
K k				
L l				
M m				
N n				
O o				
P p				
Q q				
R r				
S s				
T t				
U u				
V v				
W w				
X x				
Y y				
Z z				

From *The Family Tree German Genealogy Guide*, James M. Beidler; page 178

NUMBERS

numeral	cardinal (one, two ...)	ordinal (first, second...)
0	Null	
1	Eins	erste
2	zwei, zwo	zweite
3	drei	dritte
4	vier	vierte
5	fünf	fünfte
6	sechs	sechste
7	sieben	siebte
8	acht	achte
9	neun	neunte
10	zehn	zehnte
11	elf	elfte
12	zwölf	zwölfte
13	dreizehn	dreizehnte
14	vierzehn	vierzehnte
15	fünfzehn	fünfzehnte
16	sechzehn	sechzehnte
17	siebzehn	siebzehnte
18	achtzehn	achtzehnte
19	neunzehn	nehnzehnte
20	zwanzig	zwanzigsten
21	einundzwanzig	einundzwanzigsten
22	zweiundzwanzig	zweiundzwanzigsten
23	dreiundzwanzig	dreiundzwanzigsten
24	vierundzwanzig	vierundzwanzigsten
25	fünfundzwanzig	fünfundzwanzigsten
26	sechsundzwanzig	sechsundzwanzigsten
27	siebenundzwanzig	siebenundzwanzigste
28	achtundzwanzig	achtundzwanzigsten
29	neunundzwanzig	neunundzwanzigste
30	dreißig	dreißigste
31	einunddreißig	einunddreißigsten
40	vierzig	vierzigste
50	fünfzig	fünfzigsten
60	sechzig	sechzigste
70	siebzig	siebzigsten
80	achtzig	achtzigste
90	neunzig	neunzigsten
100	hundert	(ein)hundertstel

From *The Family Tree German Genealogy Guide*, James M. Beidler; pages 181-182

Basic German Vocabulary for Genealogy
If you can memorize (or refer back to) the following 37 terms, you can manage basic German records.

General Vocabulary
   "am _____ jahr(en)" – date
   "monat und tag" – month and day
   "ort und staat" – place and state
   "alter (in jahren)" – age (in years)
   "wonhaft zu _____" – residing(/born) at _____
   "vorename" – given name
   "zurname/familienname" – surname
   "geschlect" – gender
   "männlich" – male
   "wieblich" – female
   "staatsangehörigkeit" – nationality
   "beruf" – occupation
   "stellung" – position
   "familienstand" – family/marital status
   "ledig" – single
   "verehelict/verheiratet" – married
   "geschieden" – divorced
   "verwitwet" - widowed
   "ehemann/ehefrau" – husband/wife
   "kinder" - child
   "tochter" – daughter
   "sohn" – son

Birth/Baptism
   "geb./geboren" – birth/born
   "get./getauft" – baptism
   "taufe" – baptism

Marriage
   "trauung" – marriage
   "heirat(en)" – marriage
   "copulation/kopulierte" – marriage
   "ehe" – marriage
   "ehelich/ehel." – legitimate (child of the father named)

Death/Burial
   "gestorben" – died/dead
   "tod(es)" – death
   "starb" – died
   "verstorben/bestorben" – the deceased
   "begräbni(ß/s)" – burial
   "beerdigt" – buried
   "hinter(bliebenen/lassen)" – left behind, survivors

Resources for Reading German Script
- *The Family Tree German Genealogy Guide*, James M. Beidler; pages 177-182
- *German Church Books*, Kenneth L. Smith; pages 171-197
- *Genealogical Handbook of German Research*, Larry D. Jensen; pages 111-131

FamilySearch Learning Center:
- Old German Script (3-parts) www.familysearch.org/help/helpcenter/lessons/old-german-script-part-1

FamilySearch Wiki
- German Handwriting: https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/Germany_Handwriting
- German Word List: www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/German_Genealogical_Word_List
- French Word List: www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/French_Genealogical_Word_List
- Danish Word List: www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Danish_Genealogical_Word_List

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Step Two: *Determine the Format of the Record*
Most records tend to follow one or a combination of three main formats
- *Form* – universal form with filled blanks
- *Columns* – fixed, fillable columns
- *Narration* – paragraph, handwritten

Determine which format the record has and proceed scanning through it accordingly
- For each format, information is typically (but not always) organized in the same way with details provided in a similar order as you read through the record
  - In *narrative* records, the name of the individual the record is for is often underlined, as seen below

o Take your time as you scan through the *pre-printed* sections of a form, especially those with many blanks, to ensure that you are able to determine who all the individuals listed are and which dates and information go with which person

Examples of Standard Record Formats

Column and narration format

Universal form format

Step Three: *Focus and Filter*
- **Focus** on the words you recognize and build from there
  - o Rely on finding names and basic vocabulary from the list above as you scan through the record
- **Filter** out any unnecessary text

"Berstorbene"
The Deceased

"Geburtstag"
Birth date

"Todestag"
Death date

"Begräbnistag"
Burial date

"Hinterbliebenen"
Survivors

Example: *Lutheran death register from Lohman, Cole County, Missouri (column format): Frau Kunigunde Thueroff, born 30 July 1837, died 3 July 1926, buried 5 July 1926, survived by 4 sons, 1 daughter*

DATABASES AND REPOSITORIES

Ancestry – *Over 900 German Record Collections*
Collections can be found with the *Card Catalog* (type "Germany" into the Title and Keyword search), these include:
> *Germany, Select Births and Baptisms, 1558-1898; Select Marriages, 1558-1929*
> *Germany, Lutheran Baptisms, Marriages, and Burials, 1500-1971*
> *Hamburg Passenger Lists, 1850-1934*
> *Eastern Prussian Provinces, Germany [Poland], Selected Civil Vitals, 1874-1945*
> *Meyers Gazetteer of the German Empire*

FamilySearch – *Over 57 million indexed records and 11 million digitized images*
German record collections can be found by selecting Europe, then Germany on the *Search* page, these include:
> *Germany, Bavaria, Nuremberg Civil Registration, 1803-1886*
> *Germany, Bremen Passenger Departure Lists, 1904-1914*
> *Germany, Mecklenburg-Schwerin Census, 1867, 1890, 1900*
> *Germany, Prussia, Brandenburg and Posen, Church Book Duplicates, 1794-1874*
> *Germany, Hesse, Frankfurt, Civil Registration, 1811-1814, 1833-1928*

German Federal Archives (Bundesarchiv)
Home Page (English): www.bundesarchiv.de/index.html.en
Genealogy: www.bundesarchiv.de/benutzung/sachbezug/personenbezogen_genealogie/index.html.en
Other Archives: https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/Germany_Archives_and_Libraries

Evangelical Church of Germany Records
Central Archives of the Evangelical Church of Germany Home Page: www.ezab.de/english/index.html
Archion Digital Database: www.archion.de/en

Catholic Church of Germany Records
Home Page (in German): www.katholisch.de
Catholic Archives (in German): www.katholische-archive.de/Home/tabid/38/Default.aspx

German Genealogy Resources
FamilySearch Wiki: https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/Germany_Genealogy
Cyndi's List: www.cyndislist.com/germany
Foundation for Eastern European Family Studies – German Resources http://feefhs.org/resource/germany

Recommended Reading
The Family Tree German Genealogy Guide, James M. Beidler
In Search of Your German Roots, Angus Baxter
A Genealogical Handbook to German Research, Vol. 1-2, Larry D. Jensen
German Church Records, Kenneth L. Smith

Visit the library's locations page (www.casscolibrary.org/locations) for CCPL Genealogy's location, contact information, and hours of operation.

Information regarding our digital collections, access to online databases, submitting inquiries, and more, can be found on Cass County Public Library's Genealogy Resources page, located here: www.casscolibrary.org/genealogy

Send Research Inquiries to:
askgenealogy@casscolibrary.org

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