

Tips for Finding Your German Immigrant Ancestor's Hometown in Germany

compiled by Joe Beine

Before taking your genealogy research back to Germany you will need to find the name of the specific place (city, town or village) where your immigrant ancestor lived. Here are some suggestions where you might find the German place of origin for your ancestor who came to America from Germany.

Ship Passenger Records (arrivals)

o "Last residence" (name of town) for each passenger is usually given on U.S. passenger arrival records starting about 1893 (this varies by port). All New York passenger arrival records starting with June 1897 and later should have this information for each passenger. Earlier passenger records (beginning with 1820) sometimes list the town of residence for the passengers, but most do not.

o *Finding Passenger Lists from 1820 to the 1940s* lists many of the available indexes and where to find them: <<http://www.germanroots.com/passengers.html>>

o *Finding Passenger Lists before 1820* lists many sources for finding immigration related material before 1820: <<http://www.germanroots.com/1820.html>>

o *Germans to America* indexes German passengers for the major ports (New York, Baltimore, Philadelphia, Boston and New Orleans).

+The original series covers 1850 to 1897 <<http://www.germanroots.com/gtoa.html>>. Series II covers the 1840s <<http://www.germanroots.com/gtoa2.html>>. The 1850-1897 period can be searched online at: <<http://aad.archives.gov/aad/>>.

o The Ellis Island online database covers New York arrivals 1892-1924: <<http://www.ellislandrecords.org/>>

The Hamburg Passenger Departure Lists 1850-1934

If your ancestor's ship departed from the German port of Hamburg then you may be able to find the departure list for that ship. These records usually give the last residence for each passenger. <<http://www.germanroots.com/hamburg.html>>

Other Sources - Death Certificates, Obituaries, Naturalization Records, Biographies, more...

o American church records sometimes give the place of origin of immigrant families - the Family History Library (FHL) in Salt Lake City might have some of these on microfilm - check their catalog <<http://www.familysearch.org/>>

+ Sometimes church records for German churches in America will list the German place of birth of the parents in the baptismal records of their children (try the FHL).

+ If you don't know which church your ancestor attended look for churches near the address where he or she lived - you can sometimes find addresses in census records and city directories.

o Death Certificates usually give place of birth (sometimes just the country, but

sometimes the town is given).

+ Online Finding Aid: Online Searchable Death Indexes for the USA

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

o Obituaries - search the local newspaper(s) where your ancestor died a day or more after the date of death

+ For some suggestions for finding obituaries see the above website's obituaries section

o Obituaries in American German language newspapers - try checking at a library in the area your ancestor lived

o Naturalization Records (especially if naturalized September 27, 1906 and later; Naturalization records before Sept. 27, 1906 generally do not name the town, but a few occasionally will have this) <<http://www.germanroots.com/naturalizationrecords.html>>

+ The 1900-1930 federal censuses tell whether a person was naturalized. The 1920 census gives year of naturalization.

+ Types of Naturalization Records: <<http://www.genealogybranches.com/naturalization.html>> describes declarations of intention, petitions, certificates, etc.

+ Suggested Book: *Guide to Naturalization Records of the United States* by Christina Schaefer

o County Histories and Biographies

+ Online County Histories, Biographies and Indexes:

<<http://www.genealogybranches.com/countyhistories.html>>

o Family tradition - talk to your relatives

o Family documents, photo albums, family Bibles...

o World War I Draft Registration Cards (for men born from Sept 11, 1872 to Sept 12, 1900) - nearly 11 million (men born about June 1886 to June 1897) of the 24 million total draft cards asked for location of birth (town, state, nation).

<<http://www.genealogybranches.com/worldwaronedraftcards.html>>

o *International Genealogical Index* (IGI): <<http://www.familysearch.org/>> (click on the "search records" tab)

o German Emigration Lists (records of people who applied to leave Germany)

<<http://www.germanroots.com/emigration.html>>

o *Determining a Place of Origin in Germany* from the FHL is a helpful resource:

<http://www.familysearch.org/eng/Search/RG/guide/help-determining_place_of_origin_in_germany.asp>

This outline was derived from the "Find Your Immigrant Ancestor" section of <<http://www.germanroots.com/outline.html>>. It was created for the Germanic Genealogy Society of Colorado. This document can be freely shared as long as no changes are made and this notice is included. You may print copies for personal use or for use by a genealogy society as a handout to members. Disclaimer: you might not find the place name in any of the records listed here; these are merely suggestions.

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