

Finding German Records Using FamilySearch

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Map Guide to German Parish Register book series

To be successful finding your family in Germany or Switzerland, you need to know your ancestor's town of origin and which ecclesiastical district it is located in. The *Map Guide to German Parish Registers* book series can help you do this. Family Roots Publishing has published this series of 65 books covering Germany and the 14 books covering Switzerland. Some of the regions have multiple books in the series while others may only have one.

Once you know the state in Germany or Switzerland where your ancestor lived, you can order the applicable book. Go to the website <http://familyrootspublishing.com> and click on **German Map Guides** in the categories list on the left side of the screen. Then click on softcover to view the book series. If you click on a specific volume, you can view a list of the towns listed in that book.

The book is arranged with the Lutheran districts for each sub-district within that region in the front of the book and with the Catholic division at the back of the book. Keep in mind the Lutheran and Catholic ecclesiastical coverage is not the same. For example, the Sachsen-Meiningen Kreis in Thuringia has 44 Lutheran parishes, but only one Catholic parish.

Each Kreis will have a Parish Key that lists the larger parish that contains records for the smaller towns contained within that area. If you see a number after the name, it refers to the applicable starting microfilm number for that parish on FamilySearch. Not all parishes will have microfilm numbers listed. If you don't find a number here, you will need to try to find the church record on the Archion (Lutheran) or the Matricula (Catholic) websites.

<https://www.archion.de/en/>

<https://data.matricula-online.eu/en/>

Finding Records on FamilySearch

FamilySearch has indexed and unindexed collections from the massive microfilm and microfiche records. All of their microfilms have now been digitized and are being loaded to the website and can be found in the library catalog, historical records, or images. Some of these records may not be available online because of record restrictions.

There are four main areas of FamilySearch where you might be able to find these records:

- Historical Records
 - Browse All Collections. <https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/list>
 - Browse Places. <https://www.familysearch.org/search/location/list>
- Catalog <https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog>
- Images <https://www.familysearch.org/records/images/>
- Wiki https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Main_Page

Historical Records

Browse All Collections

Browsing all collections in the historical records is one of the best ways to find your ancestors, especially if their name is misspelled or mis-indexed. Click on SEARCH then select BROWSE ALL COLLECTIONS. This will then give you a list of topics for various locations around the world. This collection is continuing to grow, so check back often for updates.

To the left side you can **narrow** the number of collections **by clicking on the locality, time frame, or topic**. My favorite way is to search by locality, then narrow by topic. You can search either way and most of the time, you will get the same results.

If you see a camera icon next to a collections' name, you will be able to view digital image in this part of the website. If there is no camera icon, it is an index-only collection. Make sure to note the microfilm number source listed in the transcribed abstract page for your person. This number can be typed into the catalog to find the original image that was not found on the historical records part of the website. If it has "browse collection" instead of a number, you will not be able to search by name. Instead, you will have to search each image until you find the entry. Many of the browsable collection records have indexes for that specific record collection at the front or end of images, so look for these as they might save you some time.

Once you **choose the collection you want to view** (e.g. Continental Europe -> Germany -> Germany Births and Baptisms, 1558-1898, **search by name for your person**. If you are having trouble finding your person, try exact searching by location and a date range to see if your location for those specified years is included in the online indexed collection. Sometimes you can't find who you want because that location isn't indexed for that time. If it is not part of the record collection, search the catalog to see if the records for that time have been microfilmed. If so, you can browse the records just like if you were there or looking at the images on microfilm

Browse Places

This method of searching is helpful to see what is available for a specific country. Click on the map or dropdown list of locations. For Germany click on the map for the Continental Germany region, then choose Germany from the list of locations. This will re-direct you to the page with records for Germany.

To the left side of the page toward the top, there will be a list of free webinars from the Learning Center on researching in Germany or reading the handwriting.

As you scroll down, you will see the most popular collections for Germany listed under the box where you can type in your person's name. You will get better search results if you choose the specific database first, then type your person's name in the search box instead of typing it in the first search box you see. There are many other databases listed here. Some are indexed, while many are not.

Some Searching Tricks

Wildcards: helpful to find people with misspelled names

- *Asterisk (*)* allows you to search with spelling variations after the asterisk. On FamilySearch you only need one letter then the asterisk
- *Question mark:* allows you to replace a letter (i.e. Eli?abeth would search for Elizabeth and Elisabeth)
- Combination of the * and ? – helpful if name is hard to find

Unindexed Records – there are many un-indexed records in the catalog. Search by location and then the collection type to find the record you want. Then search the digitized microfilm until you find your entry. Remember to attach the record to the applicable person in the Family Tree.

Batch searches allow you to find all the names in a specific batch or microfilm. Saves a lot of time because all the surnames on that film or batch can be quickly found using a batch search. You then can go to the catalog and click on microfilm / microfiche / image group number (DGS) and type in the corresponding number to view the original record in the catalog.

Family Tree can be very useful to find clues to track your family or if you're lucky, might even have records attached in the sources. Make sure to merge duplicates and add all family members. The more information you put in the vital records part of a person's detail page, the greater the chance FamilySearch will hunt for a corresponding record and put it in the Hints. If a record doesn't show in the hints, you will have to find it manually by searching the Historical Records, Catalog, or Images.

Catalog

The Family History Library Catalog is a compilation of all the books, microfilms, microfiche, and other records available in the family history center located in Salt Lake City. Copies of original records (vitals, census, church, tax, court, etc.) from around the world are stored on microfilm or microfiche. Searches to the catalog can be made by selecting one of the following filters: Place, Surnames, Titles, Author, Subjects, Keywords. Additional searches can also be done by typing in the Call Number or Film / Fiche / Image Group Number (DGS).

Search by Location

Searching by location within the catalog is a great way to see what records are available for a specific area. Choose the method you want to search. Type in the applicable data in the search box and click SEARCH. You'll then get a list of categories. Choose the applicable one.

How to search by place:

- Select **Place** in SEARCH box
- **Type in your locality** (e.g. Heilbronn). This will bring up any locality in the world matching that name. Select the corresponding location you want and hit SEARCH. *(Remember that in the U.S. most records are organized on the county level. In the New England states, many records are stored at the town level, so searches should be done by typing in the town name. Records overseas are often organized by the town or parish name. Smaller towns' church records might be contained within a larger town, which is why it is helpful to use the Map Guide books.)*
- A list will then appear with categories for the location you entered. The number next to each category is the number of collections for that specific topic. **Select the applicable category** (e.g. Church Records).
- Click the dropdown arrow and **choose the title** relevant to your search. (e.g. Kirchenbuch, 1567-1953). Click the link and you will be directed to the page that contains information on the microfilm / microfiche.
- Scroll down to the list of microfilms / microfiche until you find the applicable one.
 - If there is a magnifying glass on the far right, you can type your given name or surname and search the indexed part of the collection. This can save a lot of time, because you can then make a list of where the people appear in the records and be able to find them more quickly when viewing the image. Keep in mind the magnifying glass may not cover all the dates or facts on the microfilm, so if you don't find it, check it manually by searching the pages of the digitized collection by clicking on the camera icon.
 - If there is a camera icon next to the microfilm, then it is available to view online. To view, **click the camera icon**.
 - If there is a lock next to the camera icon, then those records can only be viewed at a family history center or family history center affiliate. (Make sure you are logged in. Sometimes those locks will disappear if you are logged in.) Bring a USB thumb drive with you when you go to the FHC so you can download the image for your personal records.

Record collections with authors who are County Courts, Probate Courts, Clerk of Courts, District Courts, and the Health Department have the original documents in their collection, not just an abstract. Collections with an author's name are usually abstracts or typed indexes. Although the abstracted indexes are immensely helpful, original records should always be checked.

Search by Microfilm / Microfiche / Image Group Number (DGS)

If you find a microfilm, microfiche, or image group number (DGS) in the historical records on FamilySearch, but no record image appears in your search result, go to the catalog and type in that number to view the original record. Follow the same steps as you would for searching by location when the category list appears.

Images

FamilySearch has developed technology to digitize microfilms, microfiche, and books and load the records via computer imaging. Many of these records can be found in the “Images” category of SEARCH on FamilySearch. These are different than the records filed in the “Records” and “Catalog.”

Type in your place name into the Place search box. (e.g. Saxony). You will get a list of search results which can be narrowed by place or life events. For the specific place, dates for the records might be listed as well as record type, and the number of images for that category.

Viewing these records is similar to what you would do if you went to a repository and wanted to view books. They may have indexes within that specific collection, but there will not be an index in this part of the website done by FamilySearch. To find your applicable person, you may have to browse many pages until you find them.

Wiki

FamilySearch’s Wiki can be used to search by key word or topic to help you be successful researching a specific location or topic. External website links to databases or archives can often be found using the Wiki for a specific locality. The FamilySearch Wiki is extremely useful to help you determine what exists, where the records can be found, and if any part of the collection is online. Understanding how to find records using the resources in the Wiki will save you many hours in your search. For countries outside the U.S.A. - genealogical word lists, handwriting helps, letter writing guides, and beginner’s getting started tools are available. Best of all – it’s free!