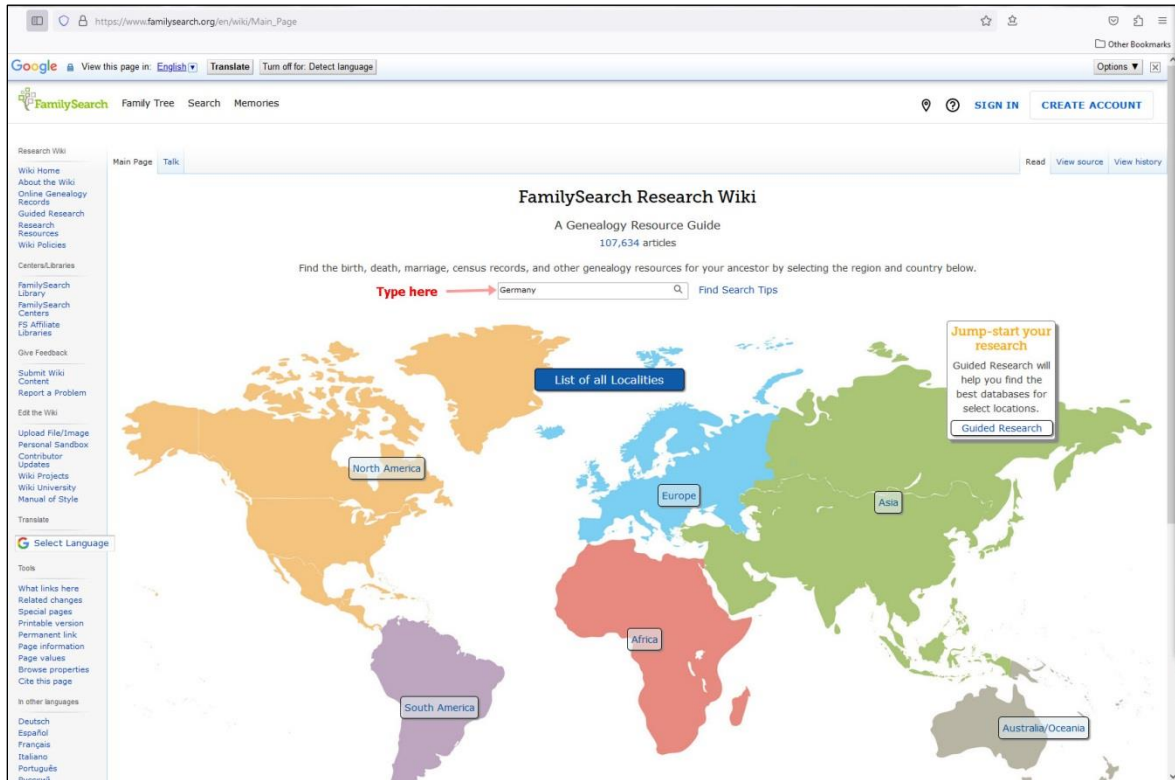


So you want to trace German ancestors...

2 Nov 24

The best advice is on https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Main_Page. Type “Germany” into the search box:



This will bring up a list of choices:



The first topic “Germany Genealogy” will tell you that if you are looking before 1945, see “German Empire”. Both the Germany Genealogy and German Empire pages will give you maps that show the organization of Germany before and after it was a country. The after 1945 map is good for showing the current states comprising Germany.

Since most of us have ancestors who arrived in the 1800s, the main map on the German Empire page, showing the German Empire in 1871, is the most useful as a first step in where our ancestors may have come from. It will have the area often named on census records or ships’ lists as a point of origin. **To find vital records (births, marriages, deaths) in what is now Germany, you generally need to know what town or village your ancestors came from.** Without this, the best you may find is the kingdom, duchy, free city, etc. of origin. If you have a distinctive name and/or exact dates, search engines are useful, but always check back to the original records to make sure you have the correct person.

The right sidebar on either Germany or German Empire wiki page has all sorts of additional help topics, which I will not repeat here. The only additional advice I’ll pass on is from personal experience.

FINDING THE TOWN OF ORIGIN

The wiki gives good advice and sources under this topic. The most helpful sources I found were my grandmothers, one who remembered the towns her parents came from and the other who knew only that they were from Alsace (found them in the Alsace Emigration Index). Next was a fourth cousin who had records in his family for another immigrant. Talk to anyone in your family, old or young, who can provide insight. As a caution, I had one grandfather who told me his family was from Berlin – not so – I found them in West Prussia through county immigration records. Don't give up on unlikely sources. I obtained the thick NARA file for a Civil War ancestor and found a penciled note in the margin of the widow's pension application that gave the town where they were married.

ONLINE RECORDS

My opinion is that familysearch has the most extensive set of useful records. Again, the wiki has a long list of useful places to search and search engines. It also indicates with a \$ which are pay sites. On a personal level, I have had little luck with Ancestry except for the "cousins" I found through Ancestry DNA matches, a few of whom had very useful information. The best sites I have found for German vital records, when I can't find them on familysearch, are <https://data.matricula-online.eu/en/> for European Catholic records and <https://www.archion.de/en/> for German Protestant (Lutheran) records. I have a separate handout for those two sites with more information. Note that German privacy law excludes access to more recent vital records: births 110 years, marriages 80 years and deaths 30 years.

WRITING

There are two downloadable handouts (second one is better) on the familysearch wiki. I have my own favorites as a separate handout. Kurrent or Sütterlin script is not difficult to teach yourself but the state of preservation and style of the recorders' handwritings can be a challenge. I am available for help most Fridays at the Conroe Family Search Center from 3-6 p.m.

There are word lists available on the wiki for German, Latin and French, the most common languages you will encounter in Germanic church records. A resource I find invaluable is my copy of Ernest Thode's *German-English Genealogical Dictionary* (available from Amazon for about \$45), which has not only German archaic terms but also many common Latin and French churchbook terms.

ARCHIVES

This is under Archives and Libraries on the wiki. If you get heavily into German record searches you will probably find yourself wanting records beyond what the Church has filmed at the various archives. Some of the records are online but most are not. Some archives must be visited in person and some will offer the services of a local genealogist to search for you, both of which I have done.

LOCAL HELP

My name is Jan Stringer. I speak limited German and very badly, so please don't ask me to make phone calls to Germany. But - I can read most Kurrent script records if they are not too badly corrupted and have done on-the-ground research in Germany as well as worked with professional genealogists there. I am at the Conroe Family Search Center most Fridays from 3-6 p.m. so please come visit.