

German maps, gazetteers, etc.



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In this lesson you will learn about various German maps and gazetteers, especially where to find it and how to use it. It is not possible to cover everything, but we will speak about the most commonly used for German research.



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What are the most commonly known gazetteers for German research?

First Prussia, Prussia is the largest part of Germany. Prussia is not Germany, but Prussia is part of Germany. Prussia had 13 provinces. This gazetteer is very useful to find in easy way civil and ecclesiastical affiliation.

Mayers Orts- und Verkehrslexikon is very detailed (it lists more than we often want or need to know).

For the Austrian provinces (including the occupied south-east part of Europe), the Gemeindelexikon is useful, but rather hard to use (we will talk about it).

Several gazetteers listed on the Internet, you can browse which pages are useful for you.



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Start with the Prussian gazetteer. Printed in 1909, town names according to census data collected on Dec. 1, 1905.

A two-volume set with the Generalregister, the general index. And the actual gazetteer for every province one, together 13 of these books for 13 provinces.

You will find a copy of this gazetteer at the FHL in SLC and on Ancestry.com.

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How to find a town and its civil or ecclesiastical affiliation in this gazetteer?

Important to know is the town name. All records in Germany are stored locally. Town name is crucial for German research. Let's take one town that is today in Poland: Stahlberg (on the left side of the lower cut-out). It's located in the Schubin county [today Szubin, Poland], district of Bromberg [today Bydgoszcz, also Poland]. And it tells you where to find it: volume 5, page 170, entry line 2.

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This is the fifth volume, and under this it states that this is province Posen.

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Easy to find is the page number, in our case page 170.

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And also a piece of cake is to find the line number. The line number is recorded twice, for the convenience of better finding all these entries.

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Now we are in line two and there is no Stahlberg to be seen.

It does not mean that we did something wrong. The town Exin listed here under the number 2 is the seat of the town mayor and Stahlberg is just an affiliated village belonging to the community Exin.

The translation of the header you will find in the tool box. The table lists also the size of the community in hectare and in individuals. About 4 acre are 1 hectare. It lists how many houses are there, and it also lists the number of males (recorded for military purposes). Columns 12 to 16 only count Lutherans of this municipality. It lists the total number of Lutherans and which language was spoken by how many Lutheran people, including bilingual (in the case of this slide Germans who spoke also Polish and Poles that spoke German).



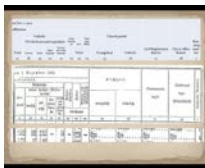
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On the bottom of each page are the villages listed that belong to the individual municipal offices. This is where you will find listed under number 2 the town Stahlberg among two other tiny villages / estates / farms. Usually every village bigger than 4 to 5 houses had a town mayor in the early 1900s.



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And as mentioned before, the line continues on the right side.



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If we continue on line 2 we get first these same columns, but this time for Catholics (column 17 to 21). Also the columns 22 to 24 are for a religious affiliation. If your ancestor would be a Methodist, he would be counted in column 22 under "other Christians". Jews came into column 23, and other non-Christians as well as people who did not report their religious affiliation would go into 24.

Now comes the important part, the four large columns on the right side. Here you see where the parish churches stood, then the civil registry district, and lastly the city or office district, which was usually also the town of the local court house.

These town names are those which are listed in the Family History catalog where you can pick your microfilm for that town. There are some exceptions for court records, which will also list the smaller village if one folder was originally created in the archive for that small village.



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Let's look at the other gazetteer, the Mayers Orts- und Verkehrslexikon des Deutschen Reichs.

If you need to know additional info not listed in the Prussian gazetteer, this is the place to go. Every little town is listed here, in the pre-WWI borders. Altogether 210.000 cities, towns, villages and settlements are mentioned here. This gazetteer is also available at the FHL and Ancestry.com.



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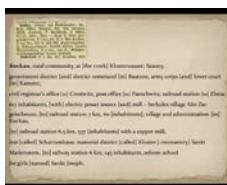
It contains very detailed info about every town. Each entry usually consists of three sections:

Topographical description (incl. main services, ...)

Population,

Civil and ecclesiastical offices as well as other institutions.

For small towns a "look at" is mentioned [red arrow in the middle of that slide]



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This is a translation example. This way you know what to expect from such a record.



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If you have ancestors from one of the provinces belonging to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, this might be the right gazetteer for you. Recorded in 1900, published 6 years later. It's not as easy to use as the German Meyers gazetteer. Available at the FHL and Ancestry.com.

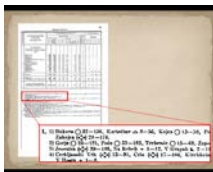


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You need to know the Austrian province, or look through the index until you find the correct town in one of the provinces and it tells you the volume and page number.

In bold always in the first position is the town where the seat of the town major is found. Also civil records about the community were usually stored there. On right you find church affiliation (Catholic in Bukovo and Kirchheim, Gorje went to Trebenča to church, in Novake was an administrative church office). You can see where the tax office was (under 4), the notary, the court, and other offices.

And there is an explanation found in each volume about all the signs and symbols they use. But for the small towns you can only guess where they went to church. In case of doubt, check all the parishes listed. You can see which religion was pre-dominant, how many houses per village, which languages spoken



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Like in the Prussian gazetteer it lists all the small affiliated inhabited places. This info is found on the right page of this gazetteer. It also lists how big (in hectare) the towns were.



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It contains an extensive abbreviation index. Since everything is in Gothic, translations of various gazetteers terms are found in tool box.



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Another source to find something out of the ancestral town is "Der Schlüssel".

Der Schlüssel or "The Key" is the German equivalent to the Periodical Source Index or PERSI. Maybe someone researched a specific family related to your ancestry and published it.

Der Schlüssel includes three indexes: location, surname and subject. The location index offers a means to find information on ancestral villages. About the others we will talk in about one hour. The genealogy article itself will not be found here, but the exact citation, including the library that owns the publication. It has information on more than ninety genealogical and heraldic publications for the German speaking areas in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. Could include some subjects on former German provinces in Poland.



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As already mentioned, some of the gazetteers you might find online on Ancestry.com, like the Prussian gazetteer or Mayers Verkehrslexikon spoken of a few minutes ago. How to go there is also mentioned in syllabus.

Unfortunately Ancestry.com is a subscription website and not all the digitized books are free to use, even though no copyright – free to use at the Family History Library (FHL) in Salt Lake City or any LDS Family History Center.



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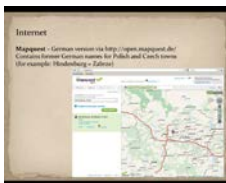
Kartenmeister.com is partially useful since it does not list every single town, just the bigger towns. Only useful for locations east of the Oder and Neisse rivers, which are Poland today. Enter for a search as many info as you want or how much makes sense to you.



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Mapquest a helpful tool if used the version of the country.

The finds are more exact than the U.S. version – but the entry requires the diacritics.



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The German version has one specific function other versions do not have. If you have German ancestry of what is today Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, or Hungary, you can enter the former German town name and it will show you where the town is today and how it's called. Unfortunately: it only works for the bigger towns, not for small villages.



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Look what happens if you try the very same search in the US version. When I tried it, it showed me the Brandenburg gate in Berlin under #1 and a Burger King place in SLC under #10. Maybe they fix this in the US version one day, but right now it's not working.



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Wikipedia is also of help if you want to know which churches to write to or if interested in history. Check both versions of Wikipedia, the common one and the genealogy wiki – depending on the town one might be more useful than the other.



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A search tool for towns if you are uncertain with the spelling is Shtetl Seeker a.k.a. Shtetl Finder.

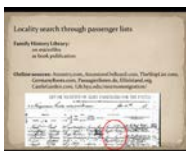
Enter the name as you think it might be spelled. You can, but not have to, enter a present-day country and hit enter. In this example I entered the Slovakian town Bytca, ignored the diacritics, and pressed enter.



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As a result it lists all the possibilities in various spellings. If I would reduce it to Slovakia only the list would be shorter. Bytča is on top since this is the closest spelling to my entry.

Third column leads to a site where JewishGen lists what they have in their database about that town – Jewish related material only. In the fourth column are links to various maps (Expeditamaps, Mapquest, Multimaps, GoogleMaps).



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Passenger lists may contain the town of origin, especially those after 1900. Might not be always the exact town, especially if the ancestor was from a small town. But better a wider area than no area at all.

FHL has a ton of the passenger lists on microfilm, many people extracted those and published it as a book (before the Internet age). In the mid-nineties those passenger lists found their way to various online databases.

If you do not find it online, please check the Klüber file at the FHL.



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Immigration records can tell you a town of origin. After Sep. 1907 everyone applying for citizenship had to specify the town of birth. Before 1907 it was not handled as strict, but you had a general area. Unfortunately some recorders were very general and wrote down "Prussia" (13 provinces, happy hunting). Look for it in the "Petition for Naturalization", not in the "Naturalization Certificate" record



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If you have a town name and you are not sure about the correct spelling start typing it into the search box of Family Search. If recorded there it will give you suggestions while you type.

You should use the Place-names option for this. The "Keywords" option is only if you are sure about the town name and want to reduce the options to e.g. only tax records, or only records from the 1800s.

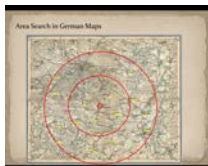


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Next big subject: German maps. If you put the German and the Austrian Empire together, you cover almost 40 % of Europe. Through the last two world wars Austria lost more than Germany, percentage-wise, not size-wise. Germany lost only about 35% compared to the pre-WWI borders, in black what is

left today, plus the colonies in Africa were lost. And Austria, you can see in the left part of the smaller image of what is left from this great Empire. In all these areas you might find records recorded in German.

We will talk about how to use maps to find your ancestry and where to find these old maps.

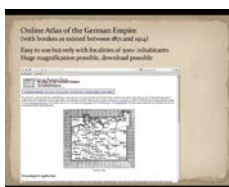


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Let's say you know that your ancestor was baptized at the parish Günthersdorf, Silesia (today Poland – red line). And you can't find the christening records of his parents there. You take a detailed map and draw around Günthersdorf a circle of about 5-10 miles. Mark all parishes of the same religion that are in that circle, search there. Usually people did not move too far prior to the 1850s.

If not found, open the circle to 10-15 miles, do the same. If your ancestor lived in a town on or near a wider river that was used for traffic, stretch your circle to include the towns along that river. Search until you find the records.

That how you use maps for an area search.



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The University Library of Wisconsin has a map collection that can be downloaded in parts. As you can see, only towns with about 500 plus inhabitants are recorded there. You might miss some of the smaller parishes.



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Posselt Landkarten, a German company offers maps to look at, but these are not possible to download. However, more detailed than the previous maps shown, but still the chance to miss some small town



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The David Rumsey Map Collection is not mentioned in your syllabus; please write down the website address.

Over 34,000 maps from all over the world, for Germany currently 1910 maps, for Austria only 260 – some are very general but some are very detailed and even lists the towns where churches are found (yellow underlined). Search the map collection for present country name or even by the county name. Online very high resolution possible, but for download you need to register. It is free but there are some copyright restrictions in place for professional use.



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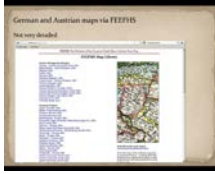
Ancestry.com has some good German maps – it's a subscription website – free for FHL and LDS FHC. Very detailed, every German town is listed. The map does not contain marks on those towns where churches are found. You cannot download the map.

To search for a specific map you first go to the so-called "Übersichtsblatt" in the drop-down menu (the arrow). You pick a number where the town should be. You then choose the range where your map number is included, click on it.



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A new drop-down box opens and you choose the exact number, choose the year, and open the map. The right image is not even the largest magnification possible (from left to right is about 7 miles).



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Also FEEFHS has some maps online for free download, but those I looked at are very general. For a useful area search use the other maps suggested.



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The same situation here – very general maps. BUT if you want to find a map with boundary changes, this would be the first place to go.



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Sometimes are specific maps needed, like predominant religion in a specific area. The best way to search existing map collections is through a browser (firefox or chrome are recommended) since Microsoft Explorer is very slow to build in new features.



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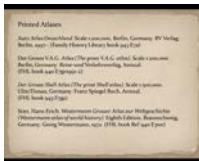
All the maps that Ancestry.com has are also available on microfilm. If you think you need the Prussian one, the film number is in your syllabus.



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The same applies to the Austrian map, film number is printed in the syllabus.

The link to the wiki page is also in your syllabus, which explains something more about these numbers in the lower left since the index in the map collection is rather complicated.



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FHL has several maps and atlases if you need a copy of a specific area. Since the Internet started to be useable for genealogy folks like us these atlases are almost obsolete.



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If you want the area of your ancestors as a nice map at home, this is one place to get it. Address is also in the syllabus.



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Any questions to what we covered?

If you have a question later, write an e-mail. I am not the fastest to answer, but eventually I answer. Don't forget the useful material in the tool box I mentioned a few times.