Germany: Jewish Family History Research Guide

Brief Historical Background

The earliest record of a Jewish community in German lands is from 321 C.E. in Cologne. Documentation of Jews in German lands increases in the early Middle Ages. The Jewish community was peripatetic, as persecutions and expulsions, along with economic opportunities, caused them to move from city to city and state to state. During the 14th century most Jews were expelled from German lands after being blamed for the Black Plague, only to return later. After the Reformation of the 16th century, Jews were caught in struggles between Protestants and Catholics and between the emperor and princes. After the French Revolution in 1789, Napoleon captured several German states and extended emancipation to the Jews there. When Napoleon was defeated, each German state independently determined the status of the Jews residing there.

In 1871, the German states outside of Austria united under the Prussian king, adding Alsace-Lorraine, Baden, Wurttemburg, Bavaria, and other states to the lands that had previously been held by Prussia, including Silesia and Posen. After losing WWI, Germany ceded Alsace-Lorraine to France; Upper Silesia, most of Posen, and West Prussia to Poland; and other areas to Denmark and Belgium. After WWI Germany developed a new constitution—the Weimar Constitution—which strengthened the central government. The Weimar period lasted only until the early 1930's. The subsequent history of the Third Reich, WWII, and the Holocaust is well known. Most German Jews fled or were deported to labor and death camps. After Germany's defeat in WWII, the country was divided into Western and Eastern zones, which became the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic, respectively. The wall between the two fell in 1991.

Finding Your Ancestral Town

The name of the town where ancestors were born often appears on immigration, naturalization, marriage, death, and Social Security records. See our fact sheet on Finding an Ancestral Town for further details. The following references will help you find your town on a map when you are unsure of the spelling or name changes. See also **www.jewishgen.org/infofiles/faq.html#Towns**.

Mokotoff, Gary and Sallyann Amdur Sack. *Where Once We Walked: A Guide to the Jewish Communities Destroyed in the Holocaust—Rev. Ed.* (Avotaynu, 2002). Lists towns according to variant spellings and provides the map coordinates of the town, the country where the town is currently located, and an estimate of the pre-WWII Jewish population.
Genealogy Institute DS 135 .E83 M65 2002

ShtetlSeeker Database (**www.jewishgen.org/ShtetlSeeker**). Allows you to search for towns using either the exact spelling or the Daitch-Mokotoff Soundex. Soundex searches find similar sounding names with variant spellings. Links on the database connect each town name to MapQuest.com, where the town location is identified with a red star on the map.

Primary Records

In Germany

Since there is no central archive for German records, it will be necessary to first determine where your ancestors lived and when they lived there. You can then contact the relevant archives that hold records for that town. There are several different types of archives in Germany: Staatsarchiv (national), Staatsarchiv or Landesarchiv (provincial), Bezirkarchiv (district), Stadtarchiv (city), Dorfarchiv (village). Records such as address books, citizenship lists, emigration lists, and family registers are usually found in the Stadtarchiv. Since 1874, German civil records (birth, marriage, and death records) have been held at repositories called Standesamter. Records for direct ancestors only may be obtained from these offices for a small fee. A detailed list of repositories with mailing addresses is provided in Ernest Thode's *Address Book for Germanic Genealogy* (see below). It is also recommended that you contact the local library where your ancestors lived, since many have extensive histories of the Jewish communities, especially in the larger towns.

Family History Library (FHL) of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS)

The FHL in Salt Lake City has microfilmed vital and other records from around the world and made them available through its network of Family History Centers. To identify the relevant films do a "Place Search" at **https://familysearch.org/#form=catalog.** Choose Place –names in the Search box, and type the town's name in the search string.

For a list of microfilms on long-term loan at the Ackman & Ziff Family Genealogy Institute, see **www.jgsny.org/microfiche.htm**. Additional films are available through our short-term loan program.

Leo Baeck Institute

The Leo Baeck Institute (LBI) was founded in 1955 to document the history and culture of German-speaking Jewry, a remarkable legacy the Nazis sought to destroy. Its Archives and Library offer the most comprehensive collection of documents, memoirs, photographs and books dealing with the life and history of Jews in German-speaking lands from earliest times until the present. The materials are mostly in German, with some in Hebrew, and many in English.

LBI collections are bountiful sources of material for German-Jewish genealogical research. Archival holdings include family collections as well as larger genealogical collections put together by historians. Almost all include family trees, vital records, community histories, and other materials relevant to family and community research. The library collections include biographical dictionaries, biographies, and surveys of archives in Germany. All sources may be identified by using CJH's online catalog at **http://search.cjh.org**. For more information, see our family history research guide on LBI.

Suggested Resources

Baxter, Angus, *In Search of Your German Roots*, (Genealogical Publishing, 2001). Has a separate chapter on Jewish records. **Genealogy Institute CS 614 .B39**

Ellmann-Krüger, Angelika and Dieter Ellmann. *Bibliography on German-Jewish Family Research and on Recent Regional and Local History of the Jews (Bibliographie zur deutsch-jüdischen Familienforschung und zur neueren Regional- und Lokalgeschichte der Juden)* (Harrassowitz, 2006). **Genealogy Institute and LBI (CD-ROM)**

Ellmann-Krüger, Angelika and Edward David Luft, *Library Resources for German-Jewish Genealogy*. (Avotaynu, 1998). Information on the collections and access for German libraries with holdings related to Jewish genealogy such as published genealogies, family histories, biographies, and regional literature. **Genealogy Institute Z 6373 .G3 E55**

Germans to America: Lists of Passengers Arriving at U.S. Ports, 1850-1897, v. 1-67, Ira Glazier, ed. (Scholarly Resources, 1988-). A surname index to passenger arrivals from Germany to the US, 1850-1897. Includes age, gender, occupation, province or country where the individual resided, village or town of origin, destination, date of arrival, ship name, and ports of embarkation and arrival. **LBI E 184 G3 G47 1989 (Vol. 6, October 1853-May 1854)**

A Guide to Jewish Genealogy in Germany and Austria. (The Jewish Genealogical Society of Great Britain, 2001).

Minert, Roger. *Deciphering Handwriting in German Documents*. (GRT Publications, 2001).

Stammbaum: The Journal of German-Jewish Genealogical Research.   **http://www.lbi.org/Stammbaum.html**
A semi-annual journal published by the Leo Baeck Institute. **Genealogy Institute**

Thode, Ernest *Address Book for Germanic Genealogy, 6th ed.* (Genealogical Pub., 1997) **Genealogy Institute CS 611 .T48**

Family Archives German Genealogy Research Guide:*German English Genealogical Dictionary, German-American Names*, *Address Book for Germanic Genealogy,* and *In Search of Your German Roots*. **Genealogy Institute (CD ROM)**

Family Archives Passenger & Immigration Lists: Germans to America 1875-1888. (Vol. 32-56 of *Germans to America*) **Genealogy Institute (CD ROM)**

Web Resources

German-Jewish Special Interest Group: **www.jewishgen.org/GerSIG/**.

JewishGen Eastern Europe Frequently Asked Questions: **www.jewishgen.org/infofiles/eefaq.html#GERMANY**.

Cyndi's List: **www.cyndislist.com/germany.htm.** Websites related to German genealogy.