



Marienkapelle, Adenau, Rheinland-

Using Ortssippenbücher to Research Your Family

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Ortssippenbücher, also known as Ortsfamilienbücher, Familienbücher, Dorfsippenbücher and Sippenbücher, provide a printed abstraction of genealogical information from a village or group of villages comprising a parish or administrative unit. History & Genealogy at St. Louis County Library owns the largest collection of them in North America. They are an amazing resource for tracking your German ancestors.

The heaviest concentration of Ortssippenbücher can be found for Ostfriesland, Hessen, Baden, and the Rhineland although other areas are represented. In addition, the collection includes volumes from German-speaking parts of the Czech Republic, France (Alsace, and Lorraine), Poland, Romania (Banat), Russia, Serbia (Banat and Batschka), and Switzerland. The map in Figure 1 shows the distribution of the volumes held by History & Genealogy.² For a complete listing of available Ortssippenbücher, please see the History & Genealogy page on St. Louis County Library's website.³

Der Zentralstelle für Personen-und Familiengeschichte maintains standards for Ortssippenbücher. If a society or individual writes an Ortssippenbuch in compliance with the standards of the organization, they will include it in their series of Deutsche Ortssippenbücher. History & Genealogy has standing orders for these books. When one is published we receive a copy. History &

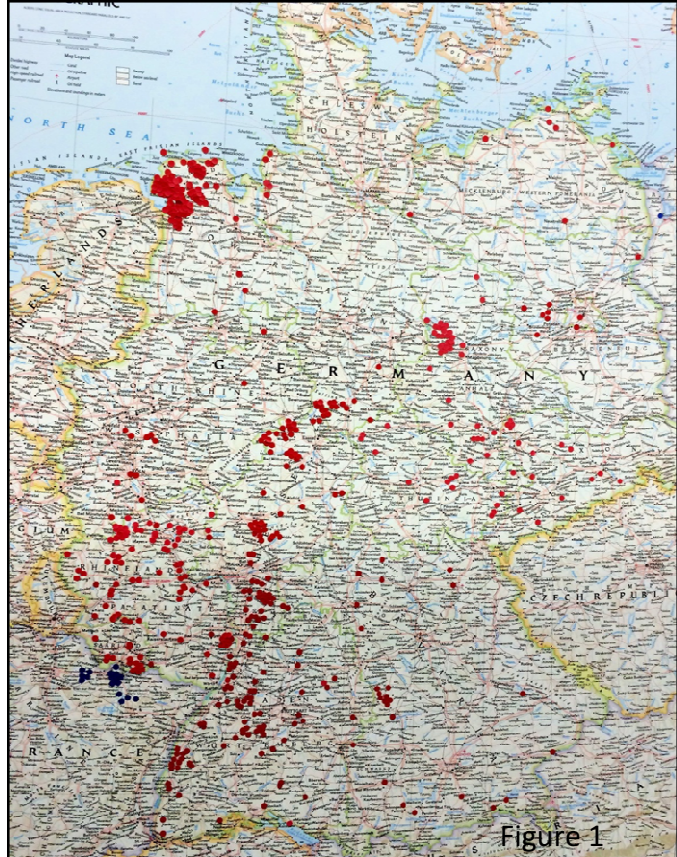


Figure 1



Genealogy is trying to obtain earlier books from this series and will do so as the budget (and monetary donations) permit.

Cardamina Verlag, Upstalsboom-Gesellschaft, and Arbeitsgemeinschaft für mitteldeutsche Familienforschung market themselves in Germany as publishers of Ortssippenbücher. In many cases, the books they are publishing are part of Der Zentralstelle für Personen-und Familiengeschichte series, but if they are not, History & Genealogy has a standing order for their books as well.

Other Ortssippenbücher have been privately published. These can be a little difficult to track down. Often History & Genealogy only becomes aware of them when one of our researchers lets us know the book exists.

Usually, the books are organized by surname. Families are grouped together and given a family ID number. The entry for the husband and wife lists the names of their fathers and the family ID number of their birth family [See Figure 2]⁵. Standardized symbols and abbreviations indicate birth, marriage, death, and other information [See Figure 3]⁶

Even if the book is organized in a non-standard way, there will be some method of identifying the previous generation such as first and last name of an individual's father or the surname and the date of marriage. Even if the organization is not standard, the symbols and abbreviations will likely follow the standard.

In addition to genealogical information, many Ortssippenbücher also offer histories about the locality, its churches and schools. They also often include lists of clergy, teachers, community leaders, and

3658: Schober Wilhelm Ludwig, Baumgärtner <3654>, *02.10.1833 Mö., †24.09.1888 Mö. (Magenleiden), *Alter*: 54J 11M 22 T, 1886 mit Kindern nach Amerika, kam 1887 allein zurück.
 oo 18.11.1860 Mö. **Eble** Rosine Sofie <805>, *20.09.1839 Mö., †08.07.1886 Mö. (Wassersucht), *Alter*: 46J 9M 18T.
*Kinder in Mö. **
 1) Christian Karl Wilhelm, *10.12.1860
 2) Karl Heinrich, *09.04.1862
 3) Sophie Karoline, *15.04.1863
 4) Sophie Bertha, *22.06., †15.10.1864 (Breachruhr)
 5) Luise Katharine, *21.10.1865, †16.05.1866 (rote Flecken)
 6) Rosine Luise, *05.12.1866
 7) Katharine Sophie, *31.01.1868, †22.11.1869 (Hirnentzündung)
 8) Wilhelm Karl, *08.06.1869
 9) Rosine Maria, *30.09.1870
 10) Anonyma, *†17.02.1872
 11) Anna Pauline, *17.05.1873
 12) Karl Gottlieb, *03.07.1875
 13) Emil, *08.01.1877. Q.: FR II S.356; III S.660

Figure 2

Common symbols and abbreviations used in *Ortssippenbücher* and other German genealogical sources

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| * | Date of birth |
| R | Baptismal date |
| ∞ | Marriage |
| ∞ I | First marriage. Other Roman numerals following the symbol (which are sometimes in parenthesis) indicate successive marriages: ∞ II, ∞ III, etc. |
| o/o | Divorced (<i>geschieden</i>) |
| o—o | Unmarried couple |
| + | Death date |
| ■ | Date of burial |
| # | Date of burial |
| *+ | Died on day of birth |
| +* | Stillborn |
| o | Confirmation |
| acath. | Non-Catholic (<i>acatholicus</i>) |
| erw. | Mentioned (<i>erwähnt</i>) |
| ev. / evg. / evang. | Protestant |
| gef. | Fallen person (<i>Gefallen</i>), indicates someone killed in battle |
| isr. | Jewish (<i>Israelisch</i>) |
| jüd. | Jewish (<i>jüdisch</i>) |
| ledig | Single, unmarried |
| luth | Lutheran |
| N.N. | Name unknown (<i>nomen necio</i>) |
| rk, kath. | Roman Catholic |
| so. | Son (<i>Sohn</i>) |
| s.v. / s.d. | Son of (<i>Sohn von / des</i>) |
| to. | Daughter (<i>Tochter</i>) |
| t.v. / t.d. | Daughter of (<i>Tochter von / des</i>) |
| Wwe. | Widow |
| Wwer. | Widower |

Figure 3

soldiers who died while serving in the military. Some of them include lists of emigrants from the village with their destinations.

Typically the biggest difficulty in using the *Ortssippenbücher* comes not from the books themselves but rather discerning the town or village where the family originated in Germany. As with all European research, if the town is unknown, it is impossible to proceed. With *Ortssippenbücher*, if the researcher does not know the name of the town there will be no way to even determine if a book exists.

While a discourse on finding a village in Germany is well beyond the scope of this discussion, History & Genealogy staff members have come up with 18 sources for finding this crucial information:⁷

- Information provided by family members
- Family papers or artifacts
- Passenger lists
- Naturalization records
- U.S. church records (including marriage, death, and baptisms of immigrants' children)
- Birth records
- Civil marriage records
- Death registers and certificates
- Obituaries and death notices
- Wills and probate records
- Tombstone inscriptions
- World War I draft registration records
- U.S. Census records
- Published family histories and family trees found on the Internet
- U.S. Army Register of Enlistments, 1798–1914

(Ancestry database)

- Geographical surname sites
- Contemporary online telephone books
- Location-specific publications, such as *Men of Bern*, *The Alsace Emigration Book*, and *The Wuerttemberg Emigration Index*. See also “Passenger Lists and Other Sources Pertaining to 19th-Century German Emigration and Immigration (Bibliography)” on the library’s website.⁸

The list is not exhaustive, and there is no guarantee that you will discover the name of your ancestral village in any of these sources. Finding the village or town name is the key to doing research in Europe.

Besides Ortssippenbücher, other locale-specific sources are available. These include:

- *Hofgeschichten* (farm histories)—include lists of farm occupants within a village back to the beginning of available recorded history. The information is usually extracted from tithe and tax lists. Because farm leases were usually inheritable, *Hofgeschichten* can offer help connect one generation to the next.
- *Häusergeschichten* (building histories) and *Bürgerbücher* (citizen rolls)—similar to *Hofgeschichten*, these books include lists of occupants (usually leaseholders) of houses in a town over numerous generations.



History & Genealogy has a small collection of these available. Sometimes others can be found on the internet.

Many researchers find it is significantly easier to research in typed volumes rather than in copies of the original records written long ago in the old German script. A serious researcher, however, will check to see if the records have been filmed, or digitized and search for a copy of the actual record. Even the most diligent transcribers can make mistakes that somehow survive extensive proofreading. Also, they probably will want an actual copy of their 3rd great-grandparent's marriage, their 4th great-grandmother's baptism, or a similar document.

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NOTES:

¹Reinhardhauke, "Marienkapelle, Adenau ", https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/00/Adenau_Marienkapelle6689.JPG, (accessed 8 September 2016).

²Map showing distribution of History & Genealogy's Ortssippenbücher created by Scott Holl. Photo by the author.

³A current list of Ortssippenbücher held by History & Genealogy can be found at www.google.com/r13YxB.

⁴Thomy3k, "Kirche in Buchenau" https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/82/Kirche_in_Buchenau_5.JPG, (accessed 8 September 2016).

⁵Clausecker, Heide, *Ortssippenbuch Möckmühl, Landkreis Heilbronn : 1558-1930* (Ehen). Plaidt: Cardamina, 2013, p358, Entry for Wilhelm Ludwig Schober Family. Call no. R 943.471 C6160

⁶"Ortssippenbücher and other locale-specific sources are rich in genealogical data." *Pastports* 3 (August 2010):10. <https://www.slcl.org/sites/default/files/08-2010.pdf> (accessed 18 September 2017).

⁷"Finding Your Ancestors in German Church Records." *Pastports* 9 (June 2016):1. https://www.slcl.org/sites/default/files/06_2016.pdf (accessed 18 September 2017).

⁸Found at <https://tinyurl.com/y95j5s3a>. (accessed 18 September 2017).

⁹Rauenstein, "L'église luthérienne (1833) à Keskastel, Bas-Rhin," https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/6d/Keskastel%2C_%C3%89glise_luth%C3%A9rienne.jpg. (accessed 8 September 2016). (Photographed Cropped by D.R. Lilienkamp)