

Zigzagging Through German Church Records

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Outline:

I. What type of records are we talking about?

- Baptisms
- Marriages
- Burials
- Confirmations
- Communicant records
- Family registers
- Alms lists
- Minutes and treasury reports

II. Applies to German-speaking people in both Europe and America – at least those with traditions of record-keeping (and infant baptism):

- Roman Catholics
- Lutherans
- Reformed (many now United Church of Christ)
- Moravians (Unitas Fratrum)
- Anabaptists – many fewer records
- “Evangelicals”

III. Also should consider ‘Church-adjacent’ materials

- Diaries of ministers or other church officials
- Lebensläufe* (Moravians)
- Private Bible records
- Taufscheine* and other *Fraktur*

IV. Sources of German church records online

FamilySearch.org
Archion.de
Ancestry.com
MyHeritage.com
Matricula.eu

V. Who had original custody of the records

Individual congregations
One congregation in a charge or parish
Pastors

VI. Where the records are kept now

By individual congregations
In a denominational archives
In a special collections library or university archives
Occasional attics!

VII. Terminology

Original: The contemporaneous register entries, usually separated by the type of pastoral act and ordered chronologically.

Recopied: A new handwritten version of the Original registers, scribed in the hand of a later priest, pastor or other official (usually to account for fading ink or other material defects in the Original).

Indexes: Usually in the back (but occasionally found in the front) of the Original register and usually compiled at a later date. Sometimes only semi-alphabetical (e.g., all the listings for “A” surnames are arranged chronologically). Once in a while only the index to the record has survived!

Duplicates: Generally refers to the *Kirchenbuchduplikate* that many German states began requiring in the first half of the 1800s as an early form of civil registrations (i.e., a second set of baptism/marriage/burial records were required to be forwarded to the state for use as birth, marriage and death registers).

Transcripts: Sometimes are another name for Duplicates but the Transcripts might also be published; a true Transcript will be a word-for-word rendering of the Original register.

Abstracts: Often are published summaries of the Original registers, theoretically containing all useful genealogical information (and summarizing all the records in a particular register) but should be rigorously checked against the Original registers.

Extracts: Sometimes interchangeably used with Abstracts but may indicate that only a fraction of the records (say, of particular surnames or a particular time period) from a register are included.

VIII. “Zigzag” scenarios – Note that each type of record has different bits of genealogical information that has an impact on what record we will look for next ...

- a. Marriage date known
- b. No baptism records
- c. Common names
- d. Proving immigration

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