German Town Genealogies on the Internet
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German town genealogies, in German known as Ortssippenbücher or Ortsfamilienbücher, are a genealogist's dream come true! First published in the early 20th Century, several thousands have already appeared in print, and many more are in preparation. In recent years the Internet has enabled both low-cost publication of traditional town genealogies and the worldwide gathering and presentation of genealogical information in a standard format.

WHAT IS AN *ORTSSIPPENBUCH* OR *ORTSFAMILIENBUCH*?
An *Ortssippenbuch* (literally:"town clan book", original name for this type of compilation) or *Ortsfamilienbuch* ("town family book", the modern nomenclature) includes birth, marriage, and death data for all persons found in the local records during a specified time period, lineage-linked by family groups. Sources may include the local parish registers, civil registration records, court- and land records, and sometimes published material. In the printed book, this information is arranged in a standardized format, usually alphabetically by surname and chronologically by marriage date. Family entries are identified by sequential numbers. Town genealogies are known by various names, including "town lineage book," "local heritage book," "one-place-studies," "Ortssippenbuch (OSB)," and "Ortsfamilienbuch (OFB)." In this handout **the term "town genealogy" and the abbreviation" OFB" will be used when referring to compilations that include all or a large part of a town's population.**

"Häuserbűcher" or house books constitute a unique version of a town genealogy. These books are usually arranged by house number or address and list the successive home owners and their families. Renters and others who did not own their homes may not be included in such a compilation. A few house books have also been published on the Internet.

WORD OF CAUTION
Town genealogies are a good "starting point" for research, but whenever possible they should be used in conjunction with the original parish registers and other original sources. One weak spot is that often the compiler only has access to the local parish registers, but not those from neighboring towns. This may lead to erroneous family linkages. Sometimes material from an earlier publication is incorporated into an OFB without a prior critical review. In other words, as convenient as it is, an OFB is still a derivative source, and any information gleaned from it requires additional documentation.

TWO TYPES OF ONLINE RESOURCES AVAILABLE

1) **Regional bibliographies** of printed and digital town genealogies and parish register indexes. Several major collections, grouped geographically, are listed below under "bibliographies".

2) **Town genealogies and parish register indexes** fully searchable online**.** Some are digital versions of previously printed books; but most were created for the Internet.

USING TOWN GENEALOGIES HOSTED ON WWW.COMPGEN.DE

The German Society for Computer Genealogy (CompGen) hosts the largest collection of German online town genealogies. Books for over a thousand communities containing about 17 million names are currently accessible at https://ofb.genealogy.net/ .The "meta-search" function found on the bottom of the main home page allows the user to the user to search all titles in the collection simultaneously for a surname and/or town. These publications follow a standard format. Books published on other websites are often laid out differently, so the reader needs to study each individual publication. Usually, minimal knowledge of German words is required.

Step-by Step User Guide

- Access the home page on https://ofb.genealogy.net/ .
- Choose the locality. Localities are listed from north to south, with separate sections for German communities in other countries, such as Hungary.
- The main page includes geographical and historical information, a list of sources used, and a tool bar with three different search options:
    1. Gesamtliste der Familiennamen – List of all surnames
    2. Geburtsorte auswärtiger Personen- Birthplaces of persons from other localities
    3. Sterbeorte weggezogener Personen – Death places of those who moved away
- Click on a surname. A list of people with birthdates (if known) comes up.
- Click on a person of interest. This brings up the individual or family page.
- Some entries may show cross-references to other online OFBs with a red notation "Es gibt (eine) ähnliche Person (en) im OFB (town name)."
- "Keine Angaben!" means "no information given."
- A family page may include spouses, parents, children, other spouses, and additional information.

The German Society for Computer Genealogy maintains numerous helpful databases on its website. Many can be searched in one step using the "Metasuche/ meta search" feature.

The Metasuche/Meta-search engine at https://www.compgen.de/recherchieren/#datenbanken on the Compgen.de Website is very exact. Searches for "Ober Roden" (no hyphen), "Ober-Roden", and "Oberroden" all yield different results, as do names spelled with dissolved diacritics (ae, oe, ue) compared to their conventionally spelled counterparts. It may be best to copy the properly spelled word from another document and paste it into the search box.

DATA COLLECTIONS

An online town genealogy may be a **work in progress** rather than a complete reconstitution of all local families. The preface usually explains the status of each compilation. Some books (i.e., the OFB Memelland) have been created to provide a gathering place for information about families from a certain locality where few primary sources, such as parish registers, exist today. In this case they function more like a database than a traditional town genealogy book. Users can add information to a book or make corrections by contacting the book administrator. The

Familienbuch Euregio is an example of a multiregional family data collection. (see http://familienbuch-euregio.eu/)

FINDING TOWN GENEALOGIES ON THE INTERNET
A link list of town genealogies, parish register inventories, and –indexes is found at
https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Germany_Town_Genealogies_and_Parish_Register_Inventories_on_the_Internet .
One easy way to find town genealogies online is to use a search engine, for example
www.google.de with German search terms (Ortsfamilienbuch, Ortssippenbuch, Familienbuch, Häuserbuch) or http://www.google.com with English language equivalents. Results may include online town genealogies, announcements of new publications, lists of available books, and other bibliographies, both for Germany today and for German settlements in formerly German areas. However, results will depend on the language used in the publication. Another option are regional and society web sites, which often provide links to online publications dealing with their respective areas.

TOWN GENEALOGIES ON SOCIETY WEB PAGES

- The "societies" tab on www.genealogy.net/genealogy offers easy access to the web sites of many major German genealogical societies at https://wiki.genealogy.net/Portal:Vereine . The website of "Die Maus", the Society for Family History in Bremen, is a good example of various compiled genealogies and indexes available on the Internet. The tab "Online-Databases" provides access to several indexes that simplify access to various microfilmed and digitized records. Included are Bremen funerary books, an index to several thousand pedigrees compiled from official records in the 1930s, donations for the poor made at wedding parties, and requests for town citizenship. The "donations at weddings" collection, for instance, provides the parish and the marriage year, which greatly simplifies the process of locating a marriage entry in a Bremen church book. These parish registers have been microfilmed. The town genealogies that used to be hosted on the society's server have recently been integrated into the https://ofb.genealogy.net/ collection.

- The Trier section of the West German Society for Family History has posted numerous parish register indexes online at https://www.wgff.de/trier/# , tab: "Regionales", under the inconspicuous title "ABC- Lists". These indexes can be used to locate ancestors in church records. Printed town genealogies may also be available for some of these towns. The "Aachen" section offers over 600,000 indexed and scanned funeral cards online zt https://www.wgff-tz.de/ .

These examples show that it may be well worth the effort to check out the websites of genealogical societies active in your area of interest. Keep in mind that society members often have access to additional helpful resources.

COMPILED GENEALOGIES ON PRIVATE WEB PAGES

Persons with a special interest in a particular region or locality often extract the local parish registers and other records and may then publish the index online.
Example:

- Tom Pick's Eifel Region collection includes over 557,000 names in 680 town and villages. (See https://freepages.rootsweb.com/~pick/genealogy/). This data has become even more useful through a master index that eliminates town-by town searches found at (https://freepages.rootsweb.com/~eifel/genealogy/pick/pickindex.html).

PUBLISHED TOWN GENEALOGIES AT THE ST. LOUIS, MO COUNTY LIBRARY

The History and Genealogy Department of the St. Louis, MO, County Library holds a large collection of printed town genealogies for communities in Germany, France, and formerly German-speaking areas in Eastern and Southeastern Europe. A lookup service is also available. See the homepage https://www.slcl.org/content/ortssippenb%C3%BCcher-familienb%C3%BCcher-held-history-and-genealogy-department for details. An inventory of available volumes is found here:
https://www.slcl.org/sites/default/files/HG_OSB_geographic_9_16.pdf

BIBLIOGRAPHIES OF TOWN GENEALOGIES

General

- https://wiki.genealogy.net/Kategorie:Ortsfamilienbuch –Large alphabetical listing of town genealogies for Germany and former German settlements in other countries

Baden

- https://www.badische-ortsfamilienbuecher.de/ - List of town genealogies published since 1951, with availability and ordering information.

Bayern (Bavaria)

- https://www.blf-online.de/schlagworte-themen/ortsfamilienbucher – Bibliography of town histories/ genealogies and histories of specific occupational groups in Bavaria
- A bibliography of literatutee pertaining to millers and heir families in the Palatinate region of Bavaria is found at https://www.eberhard-ref.net/pf%C3%A4lzisches-m%C3%BChlenlexikon/literaturverzeichnis/a-l/

Hannover

- https://www.ogsa.us/cpage.php?pt=11 – This website includes a bibliography of Ostfriesland OFBs with purchasing information in the U.S. . This is done in partnership with the German Upstalsboom Society.

Hessen

- A list of town genealogies and indexes available in the library of the Hessen Society for Family History https://www.hfv-ev.de/archivbestande/ortsfamilienbuecher/

Oldenburg
- https://www.familienkunde-oldenburg.de/recherche/ortsfamilienbuecher/ - Publication information for several OFB's on CD-Rom

Ostfriesland – see Hannover

Posen
- http://poznan-project.psnc.pl/ - Marriages extracted from Lutheran and Catholic parish registers 1820-1889 statewide

Rheinland (Rhineland)

- The digital library of the West German Society for Family History at https://wgff.de/digibib/Ext/Frame-Quellen.php includes numerous online town genealogies, census lists, and other helpful publications. Some are only accessible for society members.

Schlesien (Silesia)
- http://www.vogel-soya.de/ortsfamilienbuecher_schlesien.htm - Includes links to some online publications
- http://meine-ahnen.eu/ - Several data bases of names and digital documents from Schlesien

Waldeck
- https://wiki.genealogy.net/Waldeckische_Ortssippenb%C3%BCcher - List of town genealogies for the Waldeck region

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