

The German Collection of the Texas General Land Office

German Texas Genealogy Research

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19th Century Germany

In the 1830's through the late 1870's the population in Germany was living under the rule of the German Confederation, a loose association of 39 German states or principalities. Created by the Congress of Vienna in 1815, it acted as a buffer between the powerful states of Austria and Prussia. For those in this region in the late 18th century society was at a low boil, influenced by political, economic, intellectual, and cultural change and reforms.

Many Germans would immigrate to Texas from the 1820s – 1840's. In 1842 a group of nobles at Biebrich Germany organized under the charter known as the Adelsverein, or the Society for the Protection of German Immigrants. This was the earliest push of German immigration in Texas and it is estimated that over 7000 men, women and children would come and settle in Texas under the Adelsverein, or later the Fisher Miller Company. In Germany, as the social, intellectual and political climate changed across the region, many grew tired of the fragmented system of rule and sought national unity and a constitutional form of government. Tensions would continue to build to the point of anger resulting in the revolution of 1848 when the political and noble classes barely remained in power while many others lost their lives and the liberal minded under classes were driven from the country. Immigration would come in waves in the early 1900s with many leaving due to religious and political hardships between the world wars.

German Collections of the Texas General Land Office:

German immigrants typically arrived in Galveston or Indianola after a three-month voyage from Germany. From Indianola, the German immigrants followed a predetermined route, with stations such as Agua Dulce, Victoria, Gonzales and Seguin along the way. The most prominent destinations for the German immigrants were New Braunfels, in Comal County, and Fredericksburg in Gillespie County. Smaller German communities developed in towns such as Industry, Round Top, Castel, Boerne, Walburg, Schulenburg and Weimar.

German Immigration Contracts (1844-1845):

German Immigration Contracts (Agreements) were made between individuals immigrating to Texas and the "Society for the Protection of German Immigrants in Texas" (*Verein zum Schutz Duetscher Einwanderein Texas* or *Adelsverein*). Contracts are indexed alphabetically by surname of grantee and apply to the Fisher-Miller Colony. These records show the date and place of departure, place where immigrant was from and original signatures. None of the contracts are associated with an original Texas Land Grant.

Fisher Miller Transfer (Agreements) (1842-1856):

These contracts split half the land granted between settler and company to pay expenses. This stipulation was later overturned and withdrawn. Fisher Miller Transfers show the name of the colonist, the date and place of arrival in Texas, and the name of the ship they arrived on.

Fisher Miller Colony Grants (Typically in the form of Third Class Headrights):

Heads of families were eligible for 640 acres of land, while single men were eligible for 320 acres. Land had to be located within the boundaries of the colony, and settlers were required to cultivate at least 15 acres to receive a patent.

The age old question...Where did my family come from?

For any genealogist regardless of skill level, it is best to start simple, with what you know. Start by systematically tracing your line back with your Fathers or Mothers line with the best possible records that are available. Gather whatever evidence you can find from family photos, correspondence, birth records, deed records, death records and marriage records. Pay special attention to census records, naturalization records, probate records. The following is a list of resources to help you discover links to your German ancestors and perhaps avoid the pitfalls and frustrations along the way.

Death / Grave Records in the United States:

<http://www.deathindexes.com/>

<http://www.findagrave.com/>

18th Century Naming Conventions:

Probably the single most frustrating thing is understanding the German naming customs you find prior to the 1880's. At the time of Christening or Baptism, if two names were given to the child, the first given name is often a saint's name, with the second name or secular name, being the name by which the person was known. You may find names such as: Johan Adam Klein, Johan George Klein, or Johann Caspar Klaus, Johann Heinrich Klaus. For females it may be: Anna Barbara Klein, Anna Margaret Klein, or Maria Elizabeth Klein. Johann/Johan, Mary/ Maria refer to the spiritual name given. The internet and computer databases have compounded this confusion by picking up the first names only in some cases. There could also be naming patterns in families. For instance, in some German families the first born son was named after the child's paternal grandfather and the second born son after the maternal grandmother. Be sure to look at children and see if the names are repeated over generations. This may be clues to names of earlier family members. See the links below for more information.

<http://www.kerchner.com/germname.htm>

https://www.genealoger.com/german/ger_names.htm

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_name

Passenger Lists:

These are very helpful in your search for ancestors to discover when they arrived. There are a series of records from Hamburg covering 1850-1934, much of this is available online from *Familysearch.org* or *Ancestry.com*. These lists will give you information on names of individuals, gender, age, occupation, last place of residence, and destination. The lists for those leaving Bremen have been destroyed except for those after 1920. For those that departed from Antwerp, much of those records have been lost or destroyed except for 1855. Below are useful websites for passenger lists:

<http://libertyellisfoundation.org/>

Ellis Island Passenger lists

www.stevemorse.org Website provides passenger lists, and databases.

www.castlegarden.org Passenger lists from 1820-1913

<http://aad.archives.gov/aad> Passenger lists from 1892-1924

www.passengerlists.de Passenger lists from Bremen, 1920-1939

<https://felixarchief.antwerpen.be/> Passenger List from Antwerp, only covers 1855, but contains valuable information.

<http://www.galvestonhistory.org/attractions/maritime-heritage/galveston-immigration-database>
Galveston, Texas migration database covers from 1871-1894.

Church Records:

Very important sources of Genealogical information in Germany to trace your ancestors, especially prior to 1876 when most people in Germany were recorded in Church records. These records are sometimes referred to as Church Books, and contain records of births, baptisms, marriages, deaths, and burials. The link below provides more in-depth information on Church records, what is contained in them and how to locate them. By 1875 and after a wealth of records were kept by the civil officials at the local "Rathaus" or town hall if you can determine the town where your ancestors may have lived.

https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Germany_Church_Records

German Historical Record Collections (Familysearch.org)

<https://familysearch.org/search/collection/list/?page=1&countryId=1927074>

Other German Resources Online:

https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Germany_Genealogy

Association of German-Speaking Professional Genealogists:

<https://berufsgenealogie.net/english/start.html>

Early German script or Fraktur:

The early script or Fraktur you may find on German documents can either be hand written calligraphy or typeface print. Fraktur can vary from the Latin alphabet of northern European texts and is sometimes called the "German alphabet". Besides the more common 26 letters of the Latin alphabet, Fraktur includes the ß (Eszett [es'tset]), vowels with umlauts, and the ʄ (long s). Many of the Fraktur fonts were carved and generally used in much of the German speaking world or areas under German influence at the time. Below are helpful websites to help you decipher Fraktur script.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fraktur>

<http://www.library.yale.edu/cataloging/music/fraktur.htm>

Katherine Schober, SK Translations – Translating German script documents:

<https://sktranslations.com/>

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Houston, Tex.: The author, 1913

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Texas General Land Office Research - Land Grant Search:

<http://www.glo.texas.gov/history/archives/land-grants/index.cfm>

Map Store:

<http://www.glo.texas.gov/history/archives/map-store/index.cfm#search>

Other resources for German-Texan research in Texas:

Sophienburg Library:

401 West Coll St. New Braunfels, TX 78130 (830) 629-1572

Briscoe Center for American History:

2300 Red River St. Austin, TX 78712 (512) 495-4532

Pioneer Museum:

325 West Main St. Fredericksburg, TX 78624 (830) 990-8441