



Incorporating Surname Maps into Your Research

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Terminology and Some Resources:

Onomastics, or onomatology, is the study of the etymology, history, and use of proper names.

A *One-Name Study* is a collection of vital and other biographical data about all persons worldwide *sharing a particular surname; not necessarily a common ancestor!*

Organizations:

- [International Council of Onomastic Sciences](#)
- [Guild of One-Name Studies](#)
- [The Surname Society](#)
- [American Name Society](#)
- [Society for Name Studies in Britain and Ireland](#)

On Facebook: [Surname Distribution Maps Group](#)
[Irish Surname Maps](#) | [Ulster Surname Maps](#) Groups

Surname Maps

- Surname maps depict the concentration of residents with a particular surname, or set of surnames.
- Many surnames have regional distribution patterns. Regions where a surname, or combination of surnames, is relatively high can be a focus for genealogical research.
 - This technique works best for less-common surnames and for families that have stayed in the same location for many years. Farmers, in particular may remain in one place for many generations
- Some surname map Web sites suggest alternate spellings of the name.
- Surname maps can also be used to confirm the spelling of the surnames of **F**riends, **A**ssociates and **N**eighbors (FAN Club) who appear on records related to your ancestors.

What to Consider Before Using a Surname Map

Data Source:

- Type – telephone book, census, vital records, tax records, voter list?
- Time period – recent or historic? User selectable?
- Spatial resolution – state/province, county, city, postal/area code?
- Data quality – only family names, or are business names included?
- How are name variants processed?
 - Are Meisner, Meissner, Misner, Mizner grouped together, or treated separately?

What to Consider Before Using a Surname Map (cont.)

Data Depiction

- *Absolute* frequency (urban areas can dominate) or *relative* frequency?
- Colors, circles, 3D bars, name listings?
- Is a legend available?

German Surname Map Web Sites

- *Geogen* – Geogen stands for "geographical genealogy", location-based genealogy. Two versions are available both in German and English. Both versions produce colored area fill maps. Version 4 also generates interactive 3-D bar maps. Wildcards can be used, e.g., ".*berg" or "Ober.*"

<https://christoph.stoepel.net/ViewSoftware?id=200>

- *Namensforschung* – Ancestry.de – Maps the geographical distribution of names based on the 2002 telephone books. Also provides the meaning and the origin of your family name as published in "Duden Familiennames" (see *Reference* section below). A subscription to Ancestry.com or Ancestry.de is NOT required.

https://www.ancestry.de/namensforschung?o_xid=33516&o_lid=33516

- *Digital Dictionary of Surnames in Germany* – "This research project explores the current inventory of surnames in Germany and makes the findings easily accessible to users in digital form. All surnames currently found in Germany – including names from foreign languages – are lexicographically recorded, mapped and etymologized (taking into account recent insights into the names' geographical distribution). Every surname with ten or more phonebook entries, a substantial core of about 200.000 surnames, is included." <https://www.namenforschung.net/en/dfd/dictionary/list/>

- *Surname Maps of Germany, Karte zum Namen* – "This Web site was created under the inspiration of the Italian project "Mappa Dei Cognomi". The goal of the project is to allow the user to see the distribution of the surname on a map of Germany. The data were obtained from the phone books of the 1990's. The decision not to use the latest data is largely due to the fact that in recent years mobile phone traffic has taken precedence, so phone books are not the richest data they once were."

<http://www.kartezumnamen.eu/en/>

- *Name Distribution Map, Society for Computer Genealogy* – "For each family name that appears in the loss lists of the First World War, the georeferenced hometowns of the soldiers are localized on a map of the German Empire from 1914. Calculations show that the median date of birth of the soldiers is 1890 - hence the first date for the name spread."

You can compare this with the distribution of surnames based on telephone books from 1996. The distribution map shows the significant shifts, which are mainly a result of the Second World War. Several names and times can be selected at the same time. Each will appear in a different color. <http://nvk.genealogy.net/map>

Surname Web Sites for Neighboring Countries

- Surname Web sites are available for every neighboring country: Poland, Czech Republic, Austria, South Tyrol, Italy, Switzerland, France, Belgium, The Netherlands and Denmark. They vary in quality and utility.
- Please refer to the accompany handout *Surname Map Web Sites* I have compiled for links and additional information.

Types of Surname Maps

- Area Fill Maps are easier to interpret as each shade or color represents a specified range of values. However, they don't necessarily provide a sense of the variation in the intensity of a distribution.
- Proportional Symbol Maps portray distributions well, but the values are often more difficult to interpret.

Applications of Surname Maps

- Determine whether a name is a German surname.
- Ascertain the most likely spelling of an ancestor's surname.
- Suggest the location of an ancestor's hometown.
 - The coincidence of a husband's and wife's surnames can be of particular value.
- Depict the regional distribution of surname variants.
- Confirm the spelling of **F**riends, **A**ssociates and **N**eighbors names in an ancestor's records.

References

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Origin and meaning of 20,000 family names, including the 10,000 most common. Around 300 illustrations of famous namesakes. Coats of arms of numerous families. Maps for regional distribution of individual names. References to the common linguistic origin of different names, e.g. Albers and Brechtel. Language: German.

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Matheson, R.E., 1894. *Special report on surnames in Ireland, with notes as to numerical strength, derivation, ethnology, and distribution; based on information extracted from the indexes of the General Register Office*. Appendix to the twenty-ninth detailed annual report of the Registrar-General of Marriages, Births, and Deaths in Ireland. Her Majesty's Stationery Office, London, England. <http://archive.org/details/cu31924029805540>

Meitzler, Leland, 2016. *The Genealogical "Hail Mary!" Search*. Your Genealogy Today, May/June 2016, pp 7-10. Moorshead Magazines Ltd., Ajax, Ontario, Canada. In a somewhat dated review Leland Meitzler looks at German surname distribution maps for locating where your family may have lived. (NOTE: Use the updated URL given in the German Surname Map Web Sites section above for the Namensforschung Web site, in place of the URL printed in this article. Also, the Verwandt.de service is no longer available.)

<http://www.kolpingcincinnati.com/Genealogy/German%20Internet%20Resources/4-Germanic%20Research.pdf>

Wykes, Harry J F, 2003. *Surname Distribution Analysis*. "This site does NOT contain data for surname distributions. You must upload your own data which is then plotted. Your data can be extracted from the UK 1881 Census or the US 1880 Census CDs, published by the LDS, or can be an extract from your own collection of Surname data." <http://www.wykes.org/dist/>