

Sept 2014

If you have German ancestors, you may be very lucky to find that their town had a "Familienbuch" (family book) which compiled birth, marriage and death records over a period of time, AND which has been transcribed and put online by German volunteers at the website **www.online-ofb.de**. This site has Familienbuch records for only a couple hundred German towns (out of hundreds of thousands), but you could get lucky.

In German research, you usually must know the name of the town before you can find information on your ancestor who lived there. If you **do** know the name of the town, skip down to Search Type Two on the next page.

If you do **not** know the town name, you might be able to find it by using the unique power of Google to search the entire website for your ancestor's name(s), thus discovering the name of the town, as follows:

### **Search Type 1 (searching the entire site with ancestor's name; to find the town)**

1. Go to [http://www.google.com/advanced\\_search](http://www.google.com/advanced_search).
2. In the first section ("Find pages with..."), in the first box "all these words," enter the family surname of a German ancestor. (Entering only a surname works best if it's an unusual name, but start here anyway. You'll find out right away if anyone by that surname has had a Familienbuch record transcribed onto this site.)
3. In the second section ("Then narrow your results by..."), in the fourth box "site or domain," type in **www.online-ofb.de**.
4. Click the blue "Advanced Search" button at the bottom of the page.
5. If you get no results, try again with any alternate spellings of the surname.
  - a. If you try all possible spellings and get no results, you can stop here. Enter into your Research Log for that surname that you tried this site and got no results.
6. If you get many pages of results, search again to narrow your results to only those people that you are looking for:
  - a. Click your browser's back arrow to start again on the Advanced Search page. Delete the surname in the first box, and in the second ("this exact word or phrase") box, enter the full name of an ancestor (first and last name).
  - b. Again, click the blue Advanced Search button at the bottom of the page.
7. If you get no results this time (compared to many results on the surname-only try), that could mean that your particular ancestor does not have a record on this site, but maybe you've found his or her family. Try another combination of first and last name, such as for a further-back ancestor, or sibling, etc.
8. When you get a list of results that looks manageable, click on a result. You should see a page that lists family information for that person, in a particular town listed at the top of the page as "Local heritage book [name of town]." Click the English flag in the left margin to have the page appear in English.

9. You'll see dates, towns, relatives' names with links, and more. But if your ancestor had a common name ("Johann Georg Mueller" for example), this may not be him. Be sure to check all your Google results. You could find many men with this name who lived in different towns. None of them may be the your ancestor. But if you have any other clues (birth or death date; spouse name; siblings' or parents' or children's names), you may be able to pinpoint one who is your ancestor.

## **Search Type 2 (when you know the name of the town)**

1. Go to <http://www.online-ofb.de/>
2. You'll see many town names, grouped by the German state where they are located.
  - a. The fastest way to find your town on this page (to see if it had a Familienbuch that's been transcribed on this site) is to do a "Find" on this page. Do "Edit/Find" from the top menu bar, OR use your keyboard to do a Control+F (Command+F on a Mac) and type the town name into the search box. Try all possible spellings. If the town name appears on the page, it will be highlighted.
  - b. If you get no results, stop here. Your ancestors' town, IF it had a Familienbuch, has not had it transcribed by the Germans who contributed to this site. Remember, the town may still have had a Familienbuch. It just hasn't been transcribed on this site.
3. If you DO find the town name on the site, click on it.
4. You should see a page entitled "Ortsfamilienbuch [name of town]." Click on the word "English" (next to the UK flag) in the left column, and the page might be translated into English with a history of the town. (If you get a "Sorry, not translated yet" message, you can copy the German text and use Google Translate to get a decent translation of the town history.)
5. The link to family names is near the top of the left column.
  - a. If you're on the English-language page, click "-> Complete List of Surnames."
  - b. On the German-language page, click "->Gesamtlste der Familiennamen."
6. You'll see a list of letters of the alphabet, along with columns of family surnames in the town that start with "A." Using the A-through-Z alpha list, click on the first letter of your ancestor's surname. If you're lucky, you'll see his or her surname on the list. Click the surname, cross your fingers and maybe you'll get lucky and find your ancestor!