

## Reading Old German Church Records

Early German church records (*Kirchenbuch*) contain a wealth of family information for those who have ancestors from that country. Many of these records are preserved on microfilm, particularly in the LDS archives at Salt Lake City. Volunteers at the LDS Church are in the process of digitizing these films and indexing the contents. Some of this information is currently accessible on-line at the FamilySearch Labs website (<https://www.familysearch.org/>). What is available on this site depends on what films have been digitized and, in particular, which of them have been indexed. In some but not all cases, an image of the page on which the entry was recorded can also be viewed on-line if a particular name has been indexed. The indexed records contain as much of the contents of a given entry as could be interpreted by the indexer. By looking at the page image, one can sometimes extract more information.

Because this is a work in progress, many of the records are not yet indexed and even more are not available on-line. An alternative is to borrow copies of the microfilms. One is able to obtain copies of these films on loan at a local Family History Center (FHC).

While it is nice to locate these old books, it can be a challenge to interpret their contents. The entries are handwritten. In the case of the older German records, they are in the old style script (*Alteschrift*) which is somewhat difficult to interpret, even if the handwriting is good. Even if one is familiar with this script, variations in individual handwriting and crammed entries make the job time-consuming. The clergy that entered the data seem to alternate between standard *Kurrent* characters and Roman characters, even within individual words, perhaps because they were used to reading Latin texts.

The first step in extracting information from the old church records is to understand the columns of data on the pages. In the early records, the column headings are also handwritten. Later books may have used preprinted forms with the headings in *Fraktur* type, which is easier to read. The books are organized by year with cumulative numbering for that year and separate sections for births/baptisms, marriages, and deaths. The following is a guide to the columns of information in each of these sections.

*Geborne und Getaufte im Jahre \_\_\_\_* (Births and Baptisms in Year \_\_\_\_).

The columns on these pages are as follow:

1. No. – Cumulative total for that year
2. Male – Cumulative number of male children born that year
3. Female – Cumulative number of female children born that year
4. Baptized name of the child – Given name(s) of the child
5. Day/month and place [i.e. village] of birth (day in written and numeral form)
6. Whether legitimate or illegitimate
7. Given and surname of the father, also status of the same
8. Given and surname of the mother
9. Residence of the parents [i.e. village]
10. Day/month of the baptism
11. Name of the pastor who performed the baptism
12. Name of the sponsor(s)

*Aufgebotene und Getraute im Jahre \_\_\_\_* (Banns of Marriage and Marriages in Year \_\_\_\_).

The columns on these pages are as follow:

1. No. – Cumulative total for that year
2. Given and surname of the bridegroom – Usually includes home village
3. Status and residence [village] of the father of the groom
4. Age of the bridegroom/years – Also gives birth date
5. Whether parents or guardians gave permission and such occurred – This column is normally used to include the maiden name of the groom's mother
6. Whether previously married and how the marriage terminated
7. Given and surname of the bride – Usually includes home village
8. Name, status and residence [village] of the father of the bride
9. Age of the bride/years – Also gives birth date
10. Whether parents or guardians gave permission and such occurred. – This column is normally used to include the maiden name of the bride's mother
11. Whether previously married and how the marriage terminated
12. Date of ceremony (day in written and numeral form)
13. Name of the pastor who performed the ceremony

*Gestorbene im Jahre \_\_\_\_* (Deaths in Year \_\_\_\_).

The columns on these pages are as follow:

1. No. – Cumulative total for that year
2. Male – Cumulative number of male deaths in that year
3. Female – Cumulative number of female deaths in that year
4. Given and surname of the deceased (For children also name and status of the father)
5. Place of death [i.e. village]
6. Age (years, months, days)
7. Whether the deceased left a spouse and older or minor children – usually gives name of spouse and number of surviving children
8. Day and hour of death, in written and numeral form
9. Cause of death
10. Whether the deceased had been sick or in the last 48 hours received the help of a certified doctor or physician
11. Day/month of the burial
12. Church [cemetery] at which he/she was buried