

Using the *Register of Swiss Surnames*

Switzerland “How to” Guide, Beginning Level: Instruction

October 2015

GOAL

This guide will teach you to navigate the online version of the *Register of Swiss Surnames*, and how to utilize the Register to find towns of origin of Swiss people.

INTRODUCTION

Switzerland is the only country where an individual's citizenship in a town grants citizenship in the country. Every Swiss citizen, from the 1700s through today, is first and foremost a citizen of a specific town. This citizenship is inherited through the father, and is expensive and time-consuming to change. That means a family can live for generations in other places, but keep their citizenship in their original ancestral village. Additionally, each town is required to keep records of their citizens no matter where in Switzerland they lived. The *Register of Swiss Surnames* is a record of every town's citizens by surname as of the 1960s, and can be a very helpful tool for determining the town of origin for Swiss ancestors.

HOW TO

Accessing the *Register of Swiss Surnames*:

- Go to the website: www.hls-dhs-dss.ch/famn/?lg=e
- A Google search for the phrase “Register of Swiss Surnames” will also identify the website. The title of the website is “Register of Swiss Surnames” and should be the first hit on the Google search.
- The *Register of Swiss Surnames* can also be accessed from FamilySearch:
 - Go to FamilySearch.
 - Click on Search, then click on Wiki.
 - In the search box, type “Switzerland”.
 - Click on the Wiki page called “Switzerland Genealogy”
 - Under the section “Research Tools,” click on the second link.

Using the *Register of Swiss Surnames*

The image below shows a typical search result.

The screenshot shows the 'Register of Swiss Surnames' website. The header is dark green with white text. On the left, there is a search form with fields for Surname (filled with 'rohner'), Community, and Canton. There are also checkboxes for 'Exact Match' and three time periods: 'before 1800', '19th century', and '1901 - 1962'. A 'Search' button is at the bottom of the form. On the right, the search results are displayed in a table with the title 'Search results for rohner'. The table has five columns: Surname, Canton, Community, Citizenship obtained, and Place of origin. The results are as follows:

Surname	Canton	Community	Citizenship obtained	Place of origin
Rohner	AG	Böbikon	a	
Rohner	AG	Kaiserstuhl	a	
Rohner	AG	Kaiserstuhl	1900	(Böbikon AG)
Rohner	AG	Kaisten	a	
Rohner	AG	Lengnau	a	
Rohner	AG	Schneisingen	a	
Rohner	AG	Wettingen	a	
Rohner	AG	Wislikofen	a	
Rohner	AG	Zurzach	1918	(Böbikon AG)
Rohner	AI	Appenzell	b	(Oberegg AI)
Rohner	AI	Oberegg	a	
Rohner	AR	Bühler	1921	(Reute AR)

The search portion of the page is located on the left side of the page. Results are returned on the right side, divided into columns. The following items will help in understanding the columns:

- Under “Canton”, there is a two-letter code. Each Canton has its own code. Click on “Abbreviations,” located in the dark green section at the top of the page, for help with the Canton abbreviations.
- The “Community” is the town in which citizenship was held. This community can be but is not necessarily the same place as where the parish records were held.
- Under “Citizenship obtained” are letters and years.
 - The letter “a” indicates the surname held citizenship prior to 1800. It corresponds with the box to the left labeled “before 1800.”
 - The letter “b” indicates the surname gained citizenship between 1800 and 1900. It corresponds with the box to the left labeled “19th century.”
 - When a year is given, this indicates the year that the surname gained citizenship in the community.

- The “Place of Origin” indicates the origin of the surname. When the place of origin is given, it means that an individual with that surname gained citizenship in the town listed under “Community” and previously held citizenship listed under “Place of Origin”. Notice the two-letter Canton codes. Other codes indicate different countries of origin. Click on “Abbreviations” for help with the country abbreviations.

Tips for searching the *Register of Swiss Surnames*

- Diacritical marks (including umlauts such as ü or accent marks such as é) are treated as straight characters. A search for “Muller” will return results for Muller and Müller.
- The search is exact. A search for “Mueller” will **not** return any results for Müller. A search for “von Tobel” will **not** return results for “Vontobel.”
- Partial spellings are accepted, unless the “exact match” box is marked. Thus a search for “Näf” will return the surname Näf, as well as Naftule, Nafzger, etc.
- In Switzerland, the initial letter of the surname is never umlauted, but spelled out. Thus, a search for the surname Äppli should be entered as “Aeppli.”
- The results are alphabetized, with any umlaut letters occurring after the letter z. Thus, the surname “Müller” is listed after “Muller,” “Kägi” follows the surname “Kyburger,” and the town “Bäretswil” will come after “Birmensdorf.”
- The search results are alphabetized first by canton, then by location.
- Results can be limited by canton by selecting the two-letter canton code from the drop-down menu.
- If the location of an ancestor is known, but the spelling of the surname is unclear, a “Community” search can also be performed. Type in the name of the town under “Community.” There is a dropdown menu for choosing the Canton if necessary. The results of this search will be alphabetized by surname, not by location.
- Results can be limited by time period. There are three checked boxes below the search entry form labeled “before 1800,” “19th century,” and “1901 – 1962.” If searching for ancestors in the 1800s or prior, de-select the boxes that do not apply to your search for better results.

Uses for the *Register of Swiss Surnames*

- If the exact community of citizenship is unknown, a search for the surname can help to identify the pertinent parishes for an area search. This works particularly well for unusual surnames.
- Analyze the results list. Any surname who has a citizenship date of “a” (before 1800) or “b” (19th century) indicates that the family has lived in the parish for hundreds of years, rather than a surname who acquired citizenship in the 1900s. If the home parish is unknown, always begin your search with the “a” and “b” parishes first.

- A partial name search (i.e. “Sturz”) will return all results beginning with the letters entered. This can assist in surnames that may have been Americanized.
- If the surname originates from another town or country, this is indicated on the register.
- By searching for a specific community, all surnames will be returned in the results. This can aid research when surnames are difficult to read, but the location is known.
- When using a surname search, any pertinent biographical entries will be listed at the bottom of the page. The subject of the biography is given, followed by three columns labeled D, F, and I, under which a blue “X” is shown. The columns indicate the language the biography is available (D = German, F = French, and I = Italian); by clicking on the blue “X” under the specific language column, the biography will be shown in that specific language. The Specifications column show the birth and death year of the individual.

Limitations of the *Register of Swiss Surnames*

- The *Register of Swiss Surnames* does not allow for wild card searches.
- There is no complete alphabetical list. This may be found by accessing the print version.
- The surnames recorded are for the most part a snapshot of surnames in Switzerland as of the year 1962, meaning that:
 - Surnames that died out or ‘daughtered’ out before 1962 do not show up.
 - Municipalities annexed to others before 1962 or created after 1962 will not show up in the community search.
 - Citizenships acquired after 1962 are not listed.

PRACTICE

1. Go to the *Register of Swiss Surnames* website. The website address is www.hls-dhs-dss.ch/famn/?lg=e or do a Google search for the phrase “Register of Swiss Surnames.”
2. Click on the word “Abbreviations.” Identify the two-letter code for the canton of Zürich. This code is ZH.
3. Under “Surname,” type in the surname “Meyer.” Click on “Search.” Scroll down and notice how many results were found.
4. Click on the drop-down menu under Canton. Select the code ZH, indicating Zürich. This will limit results to only those found in the canton of Zürich. Click on “Search.” Scroll down; notice that the results list is much shorter, but still fairly long.
5. Under the search section, click on the boxes next to “19th century” and “1901 – 1962” so that there is not a check mark in these boxes. Click on “Search.” Notice that the results

list for the citizenship now fits on the screen. This shows that the surname “Meyer” held citizenship in only 21 towns prior to 1800, and that these communities are listed alphabetically. Also notice that the surname Meyer shows up four times in the city of Zürich – once anciently, and three separate acquisitions of citizenship from three different towns in the 1600s and 1700s. Notice also that at the end of the first list, the surname “Meyerhofer” was also returned, as it begins with the search term entered, “Meyer.”

6. Look underneath the results listed by town. Notice that the surname list in the Biography section is still extensive. The biographies will not change regardless of the geographical limitations entered in the search section.
7. Now erase the surname “Meyer” from the search box, and leave the box blank. Under “Community,” type in the town name of “Wald.” Click on the drop-down list next to “Canton.” Scroll to the very top of the drop-down menu and select the blank space above the code “AG.” This will search all cantons. Click on “Search.”
8. Notice that the search results are now alphabetized by surname rather than by location. The results show multiple canton codes as well as communities, all of which begin with “Wald.” Click on the box next to “Exact Match” so that a check mark shows up. Click on “Search.” View the results. Notice that under “Community,” only “Wald” appears, but under “Canton,” two cantonal codes show up. The results are still alphabetized by surname.
9. Under the drop-down menu next to “Canton,” select “ZH” for the canton of Zürich. In the three boxes below the search section, click on the small boxes next to “19th century” and “1901 – 1962” so that all three time periods have check marks in the boxes. Click on “Search.”
10. Notice that the results are now only identifying surnames that are from the community of Wald, in the canton of Zürich. The results are alphabetized by surname. The results include citizenship held before 1800 (the letter “a”), as well as numerous citizenships acquired in the 1800s and 1900s. Click on the box next to “1901 – 1962” so that there is no check mark in this box. Click on “Search.”
11. The results list is now much smaller, and only contains those surnames which held citizenship before 1900. Look at the first surname on the list. It should be the surname “Aicher.” The surname acquired citizenship in 1895 and 1896. Under “Place of origin,” there is only the letter “D.” Click on “Abbreviations” to identify the place of origin for the surname Aicher. “D” does not show up under the heading “Cantons,” but it does show up under “Europe.” Here “D” indicates that the surname originally came from Germany.

ACTIVITY

Now, test your skills you have learned in this “How to” Guide. The Activity is a way to check your knowledge and let you know you’ve mastered the Guide! [Click here](#) to try out the Activity.