Reading German Civil Birth, Marriage, and Death Records

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This handout provides the following:

- An overview of German civil registration
- Resources for learning the old German script
- An explanation of how to locate civil registration offices and civil records
- Typical layouts of German civil birth, marriage, and death (BMD) records
- Strategies and key terms to help with deciphering German civil records

SHORT OVERVIEW OF GERMAN CIVIL REGISTRATION

Five years after Germany was unified, on 1 January 1876 the practice of keeping civil (birth, marriage, and death) registration records was made mandatory in the entire country. As such, after that date, both church and civil records can be found for places in Germany.

Civil registration records are government-created and are kept by the *Standesamt* (civil registry office). German civil registration records are often more detailed than church records.

Some areas had kept civil registration records as early as 1792, though some discontinued the practice for years before the 1876 mandate. See the "**German Civil Registration Time Periods**" Wiki page (familysearch.org/wiki/en/German_Civil_Registration_Time_Periods) for the original beginning years of civil registration in various German areas.

See the "**Germany Civil Registration**" Wiki Page (familysearch.org/wiki/en/Germany_Civil_Registration) to learn more.

OLD GERMAN SCRIPT

Gain a foundation of how to write and read the letters of the old German script by watching 10 videos of instruction from the 2019 **German Paleography Seminar** (familysearch.org/help/helpcenter/lessons/german-paleography-seminar-introduction).

Below are direct links to additional pages in the Learning Center:

- A general "**Germany**" search of the Learning Center
  www.familysearch.org/help/helpcenter/learning-center-search/?q=germany
- **Old German Script** (3-video series)
  www.familysearch.org/help/helpcenter/lessons/old-german-script-part-1

A useful tool to decipher words in German records is the **German Genealogical Word List** (familysearch.org/wiki/en/German_Genealogical_Word_List). Hit CTRL+F and type into the search bar. Use the up-and-down arrows next to the search bar to view the various results.

LOCATING A CIVIL REGISTRATION OFFICE AND CIVIL RECORDS

Civil registration records available online are cataloged under the *Standesamt* (civil registry office) listed in MeyersGaz. Follow steps 1–3 below to locate the *Standesamt* and the records.

Civil registration records **not** available online are located in a town's current *Standesamt*. Follow steps 1–6 below to locate the *Standesamt* and to email them for a copy of your desired record.

1. Search for your town in MeyersGaz (www.MeyersGaz.org).

2. Locate the *Standesamt* listed on the town page.

3. Look up the *Standesamt* in the FamilySearch Catalog (familysearch.org/search/catalog). Is there a "Civil registration" heading?

    a. Yes—click on the "Civil registration" heading, then click on the blue hyperlinked collection to view the records.

    b. No—continue to step 4.

4. Look up your town in the German Wikipedia (de.wikipedia.org).

    a. If the German Wikipedia page states that your town is part of the *Gemeinde* (community) of another location, that other location is likely your *Standesamt*.

    b. If your town is not listed as part of another *Gemeinde*, your town likely has its own *Standesamt*.

5. At Standesamt.com type your *Standesamt* into the top right corner, in the search bar labeled "*Ort*" (place). Then click "*Suchen*" (search). From the list of places, click on the *Standesamt* that fits your place; this should bring up a page listing the office's email address.

6. To formulate an email to the *Standesamt*, refer to the German Letter Writing Guide (familysearch.org/wiki/en/German_Letter_Writing_Guide). Keep your email succinct; only give pertinent information (just the exact date, name, and place of the record you would like a scan of) and remember to express a willingness to pay their regular fee.

CIVIL BMD RECORDS LAYOUT

A list of guides on various topics, including "Reading German civil birth records," "Reading German civil marriage records," and "Reading German civil death records" are found on the **Germany "How to" Guides** Wiki page (familysearch.org/wiki/en/Germany_How_to_Guides). The Instruction guides are followed by Activity sheets and Answer Key sheets for practice.

Civil Birth Records: Layout

<div align="center">

[Entry #]

[Place], **[registration date]**.

</div>

Appeared before the registrar

the known **[informant's occupation and name]**, residing in **[place]**, **[religion]**, and indicated that by **[mother]**, **[religion]**, residing in **[place]**,

at **[place]**, on **[date]**, and at **[time]**, a **[gender]** was born, the names **[child's name]** received.

Read, approved, signed **[signatures]**

Civil Birth Records: Key Terms

German *(in Record Itself)*	English
geboren worden sei	was born
Vornamen	given names
erhalten habe	received
Hebamme	midwife [informant]
seine Frau	his wife

German *(in Additions)*	English
Vaterschaft	paternity [in a note]
anerkannt	acknowledged

Civil Marriage Records: Layout

[Entry #]

[Place], **[registration date]**.

Appeared before the registrar to be married:

1. **[occupation] [groom]**, known, **[religion]**, born on **[date]** in **[place]**, residing in **[place]**, son of **[occupation] [father]**, and his wife **[mother]**, residing in **[place]**,

2. **[occupation] [bride]**, known, **[religion]**, born on **[date]** in **[place]**, residing in **[place]**, daughter of **[occupation] [father]**, and his wife **[mother]**, residing in **[place]**.

As witnesses were present:

3. **[occupation] [witness]**, known, **[age]** years old, residing in **[place]**,

4. **[occupation] [witness]**, known, **[age]** years old, residing in **[place]**.

In the presence of the witnesses, the registrar asked the engaged couple if they wanted to be married. They both answered yes and were legally married.

[space for comments]

Read, approved, signed **[signatures]**

Civil Marriage Records: Key Terms

German *(in Record Itself)*	English
Eheschließung	marriage
1. ... Sohn des	1. … son of
2. ... Tochter des	2. … daughter of
Witwe(r)	widow(er)
verwitwet(er)	widowed

German (in Additions)	English
Eheschliessende	married person (1 or 2)
(Namens)Führung	the use (of a name)
gestattet worden	been permitted
geschieden	divorced
anerkennen	acknowledge
erzeugt	begotten

Civil Marriage Records: Layout Tips

If there are two numbered people on a civil registration record, it is a marriage record—the first numbered person is the groom, and the second numbered person is the bride.

Civil marriage records are generally composed of **two** pages; always look at both pages.

On the second page is a usually blank paragraph space; when that space is filled out, it tends to be crucial information about a premarital child of the now married couple.

Civil Death Records: Layout

<div align="center">

[Entry #]

[Place], **[registration date]**.

</div>

Appeared before the registrar

the known **[informant's occupation and name]**, residing in **[place]**, and indicated that **[deceased]**, **[age]**, **[religion]**, residing in **[place]**, born in **[place]**,

[relation] of **[spouse or parent]** **[relation's residence]**

in **[death place]** on **[date]** at **[time]** died.

Read, approved, signed **[signatures]**

Civil Death Records: Key Terms

German (in Record Itself)	English
verstorben sei	died
Witwe(r)	widow(er)
(un)verheiratet, (un)verehelicht	(un)married
Tochter/Sohn des	daughter/son of

German (in Additions)	English
führt die Vornamen	carries the given names
hieß mit Vornamen	called by given names
Statt "[]" … "[]"	instead of "[]" … [it's] "[]"

Potential Additions to Civil Records

Record	Birth Stamp	Marriage Stamp	Divorce Note	Death Stamp	Paternity	Name Change	Correction
Birth		✔		✔	✔ note	✔	✔
Marriage	✔ of kids		✔	✔	✔ paragraph	✔	✔
Death							✔

Stamps and notes are added after the event the record is created for—as such, these additions refer to events that took place later. The exception is the paragraph space on the second page of a civil marriage record, which is filled out at the time of the marriage and contains information about any premarital children of the now married couple.

FAMILYSEARCH COMMUNITY

The FamilySearch Community (community.familysearch.org) is a place where you can ask research or translation questions. Be sure to provide all pertinent information, including links to (and uploaded images of) records you may need help deciphering.

Learn how to use the FamilySearch Community by watching this 5-minute video:
familysearch.org/help/helpcenter/lessons/familysearch-community

Access the **Germany Genealogy Research** Community group at this link:
community.familysearch.org/s/group/0F93A000000LhYOSA0/germany-genealogy-research