

PA GERMAN GENEALOGY RESEARCH

By Nancy R. Johnson

TIPS

- Englishmen wrote the censuses and often butchered the names of German immigrants. Try many spellings.
e.g. Nungesser: Nongaser, Nungessor, Nungeser, Nungesor, Nongaster, etc.
- Females could inherit land in PA
- County lines changed often in the 18th and 19th centuries in PA. You must go to the court house in the correct county for the date you are searching. They did not move records. Example: I found a German ancestor's will in Northumberland County because his home was in that county for a few years (then it became Columbia County).
- Most Germans became landowners and farmers.
- Give an annual donation to the local historical society where your ancestors lived. I've gotten a lot of information by email because of this.
- **PA Vital Statistics did not begin to be mandatory until 1906 except for 1850 thru 1853, when the state required death certificates.**
 - Check the county court house for 1850-1853. Some historical societies have copies (e.g. Columbia County PA)
 - Check the state archives in Harrisburg for vital statistics from 1906 forward
- Extended families often had farms near one another (brothers, sons, etc.) in an area.
- Use google search and type in your ancestor's full name with quotes around it.

BEST SOURCES

- Town or county historical & genealogy society(ies)
- Ship passenger lists give you date of entry into PA and often have the names of family members. German farmers (Palatines, Swiss Germans, etc.) generally came with their wives and children.
 - They also tell you with whom the immigrant was traveling. The Germans often settled together with family and friends in central PA. In the case of bad spelling, you may be able to find your ancestor in a census by searching for a friend's name.
- Family *Bibles* often have pages with handwritten family births, marriages and deaths [*frakturs* were PA German documents for births. PA German is low German].
- PA German Society
- Church records – baptismal/birth, marriage, church membership, death records.
 - Most Germans were literate and kept good records.
 - There were itinerant ministers in the 18th Century because farm communities were too small for a church and full-time minister.
 - In the 17th and 18th Centuries protestant ministers were marrying Catholics because there were no priests in the area.

DAR Library in Washington DC is terrific source for church records (Their GRC digitization makes it far easier.).

Examples:

-Rev. William John Hinke, PhD, DD, *History of the Tohickon Union Church* (Meadville, PA, the PA German Society, 1925)

-Raymond E Hollenbach, *Records of Lehigh Church Zion's Lutheran Church 1750-1896* (1964)

- Gravestones in town cemeteries (also Cemetery Record books)
- Wills and Letters of Administration (done when the person died intestate=without a will) in County Courts
- Land records/deeds in County Courts – may find maiden name of female spouse
- Orphan Court records in County Courts
- Censuses
- Revolutionary and Civil War Pension documents (Patriot and also Widow Pension docs) Generally, German immigrants were farmers so many/most did not serve in the Revolutionary War. Get copies from NARA (Nat'l Archives). It can be well worth the cost!
- Old newspapers-- obituaries, articles about the ancestor
- www.rootsweb.com: go to "Family Names" and see what people have posted. Be careful, however, many people don't source their work and make things up!
- Vanity books: *note that many are digitized. Go to www.google.com and click on the title. If digitized it comes up as "Free Book" ...or check "Find in a Library" which takes you to the World Cat. site. Put in your zip code to find nearest libraries.*
- Examples of Vanity books (done for counties):

-Morton L. Montgomery, *Historical and Biographical Annals of Berks Co. PA* (Chicago, J H Beers & Co, 1909)

-*History of Columbia & Montour Counties* (J H Battle, 1887). Republished in 1915

-John G Freeze, *History of Columbia & Montour Counties* (1883)

and page 998 vol. II, JH Beers, *History & Biographical Annals of Columbia*

-*Historical & Biographical Annals of Columbia & Montour Counties* (Chicago, J H Beers & Co. pub, 1915)

-Mathews & Hungerford, *History of Lehigh & Carbon Counties* (Phila: Everts & Richards, 1884)

-H C Bradsby editor, *History of Luzerne Co PA* (Chicago, S B Nelson & Co, 1893)

-Peter Fritts, *History of Northampton County PA I* (Philadelphia and Reading, Davis, 1877)

**-*A Biographical History of Lancaster County ...: Being a History of Early ...*
by Alexander Harris.**

Lancaster County (seat of many early German immigrants) as was Germantown in Phila.

NOTE: look up by surname if you cannot find your ancestor's full name in these biographical books. A nephew/cousin's biography can provide you with the name of grandparents and other ancestors, location of settlement, etc. The older the Vanity Book, the better the information since it's closer to the time when the eldest ancestors lived.

- *PA Archives* series- Revolutionary War regiments, etc.

GOOD RESOURCE BOOKS

[many of these books can be found in the Tampa John Germany Genealogy Library, Selby Library in SRQ, and/or the Manatee Co. Central Library

- Ralph Beaver Strassburger/ed Wm John Hinke, *PA German Pioneers* (Baltimore, Genealogical Publishing Co, 1966)
- Donna Irish, *PA German Marriages* (Baltimore, Genealogical Pub Inc, 1982)
- Intro by Don Yoder, *PA German Church Records*
- John T. Humphrey, *PA Births- Lehigh County 1734-1800* (Washington DC, Humphrey Pub, 1992)
- John T. Humphrey wrote several books about the PA Germans. Check under author
- Annette K Burgert FASG, FGSP, *Eighteenth C Emigrants from Pfungstadt, Hessen-Darmstadt to PA*
- Annette Kunselman Burgert, *Eighteenth C. Emigrants from German-Speaking Lands to North America*
- Other books by Burgert
- Brigitte Burkett, *Emigrants from Baden and Wurttemberg* (Camden ME, Picton Press, 1996)
- Henry Z Jones Jr & Lewis Bunker Rohrbach Co, *Even More Palatine Families* (Rockport Maine, Picton Press, 2001)
- *Foreigners Who took Oath of Allegiance 1727-1775* (PA, , May 14 2007)
- Albert Bernhardt Faust, A.B., PhD, *Lists of Swiss Emigrants in the 18th C. to the American Colonies* (Washington, DC, The National Genealogical Society, 1920)
- translated Frederick S Weiser, *The Record Book of Daniel Schumacher, 1754-1773* (Camden Maine: Pcton Press, 1993)