

## MAKING CONNECTIONS: MATERIALS AVAILABLE IN AMERICAN AND GERMAN ARCHIVES AND LIBRARIES

*Emily C. Rose*

*Description:* A new generation of historical and genealogical researchers is emerging that has a keen interest in the resources available in the archives and libraries in Germany, Switzerland, and Austria, as well as other formerly German-speaking areas. Librarians will learn current techniques to assist and advise their researchers in tasks that are more challenging because most of the researchers do not read or speak German. This session will provide a blueprint for both novice and experienced researchers to locate and use materials that are found in America and Europe. It will focus on how to deal effectively with the German-language archives and libraries where researchers cannot count on written or spoken English assistance. Handouts will include a brief overview of Internet sources.

**Emily Rose** From 1994-1998, Emily Rose spent five summers researching her ancestors and the rural Jews in south Germany. In local, regional, and state archives and libraries, she uncovered over 2,600 documents from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and compiled a bibliography of over 1,600 articles and books. This research culminated in the publication of *Portraits of Our Past: Jews of the German Countryside* by The Jewish Publication Society in 2001. The Jewish Book Council selected her book as a 2001-02 National Jewish Book Awards Finalist. The German edition (translated from English), *Als Moises Kaz seine Stadt vor Napoleon rettete. Meiner jüdischen Geschichte auf der Spur* [When Moises Kaz Saved his Town from Napoleon: On the Trail of My Jewish History], was published in 1999 by Konrad Theiss Verlag, Stuttgart. On her website she offers free downloads of her extensive bibliography and a model family history interview and food questionnaire: [www.portraitsofourpast.com](http://www.portraitsofourpast.com).  
E-mail: [erose@portraitsofourpast.com](mailto:erose@portraitsofourpast.com).

When I tell anyone the title of my non-fiction book *Portraits of Our Past: Jews of the German Countryside*, usually I am asked, "Is it about the Holocaust?" People seem a little disappointed when I answer that is not, and that my research and book focus on the 150 years from 1730 to 1880.

But it is precisely this renewed interest in the multitude of Holocaust memoirs that is fueling the need for Jews to know more about their ancestors' lives. Many first and second generation Americans are just discovering what happened to their families during the Holocaust and are

wondering what kind of life the pre-Holocaust generations led. Other Americans, such as myself, a fourth generation American, are also interested in tracing their family roots and learning about the life and times of their ancestors.

Also, as we look for deeper and more complex explanations and reasons behind the Holocaust, we have to look further back in history. Most history books and memoirs begin with 1870 or even 1918 as if Jews just appeared from one year to the next in the German cities as a prosperous and assimilated group. This, however, gives a simplistic view. It is by examining this earlier history that we can gain another perspective.

As you can see from my biography, I am not a librarian. That means that I am the person asking you all the questions. I could not have accomplished my research and written this book without the help of many librarians in America and Germany.

After completing more than five years of research in Germany and America, I hope the methodology I learned can assist you to provide some answers to the questions that perhaps you have already had posed to you, but did not know how to answer. With the growing interest in genealogy, the fastest growing hobby in America, and the emergence of a new generation of family researchers, for certain you will receive many more questions in the future.

What is even more exciting is that students are becoming involved. When my book was published, I was contacted via email by Alex who enjoyed my book and had possible connections with my family. We went back and forth, and I invited him to come to one of my programs. He wrote that he would try to come which I thought was a bit vague. Well, you know what happened. Before the program, an elderly lady came up with a teenager, and of course it was Alex. I know it was not cool, but I exclaimed, “You’re Alex???! He was so into the research that he was even learning German.



Two large old oil portraits hung above the fireplace mantel in my grandparent’s living room in their apartment in New York City. Somehow I had never inquired about the portraits, and no one in the family had ever had told me anything about them. I had no inkling of how meaningful the depictions of Joseph David Berlizheimer and his wife Gustel Kaz would become to me.

The story began in 1992 when an elderly distant cousin gave me several pages of a copy of a handwritten German-language Jewish family register that had been brought to America in 1941. My cousin helped me read “Berlizheimer,” a name I knew. Then he showed me the name “Gundelfinger,” and the town, Michelbach- names I had never heard. He also showed me the name “Kaz,” a name I had not heard in respect to my family. He read the name of the village of “Mühringen” written at the top of the page. No one had ever mentioned Mühringen to me, nor had any stories been handed down. All I had known was that my great grandfather had come to America in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century from Germany.

As with any type of research, no answer is definitive, but with German Jewish research, the answers really depend on the geographical area, and exceptions abound. My research centered on the rural Jews in southwest German in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, but I will try to give the broadest possible view. Since the times before the 20<sup>th</sup> century is written about to a much lesser degree, I will also concentrate on that period.

Most books, articles, and finding aids focus on the Jews living in the cities. The reality was that more than 90 percent of the Jews were not allowed to live in the cities before the 1860s in south Germany. So it was not surprising that my ancestors lived in the villages like Mühringen and Michelbach an der Lücke. The lives of the rural Jews living in other German-speaking lands were very similar to the Jews living in south Germany, so this was a story that needed to be written.

These are examples of the types of questions you may expect:

### **What will I discover?**

Expect the unexpected. I did not know that my direct ancestors were leaders of their Jewish communities and had even saved a town from being ransacked by Napoleon's army.



And certainly no one knew that the founder of the Berlitz School of Languages was a distant cousin. Maximilian Berlitz was born David Berlizheimer in Mühringen. Berlitz opened the first Berlitz School in 1878 in Providence, Rhode Island after only 7 years in America.

### **What materials will I find in American libraries concerning German Jews of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries?**

While you can find numerous academic books that usually are specialized essays, few books give an overview that would help the researcher. The 4-volume series, *German-Jewish History in Modern Times*, is a compilation of material from numerous secondary sources and has an excellent bibliography. It focuses primarily on the global events and trends that occurred in the urban areas throughout Germany.

One of the reasons I researched and wrote, *Portraits of Our Past: Jews of the German Countryside*, was to provide a background for future researchers who were interested in the people living outside the cities. The selected bibliography in my book includes materials available in America including German-Jewish memoirs. My full bibliography of more than 1,600 books and articles is available as a free download on my website [www.PortraitsOfOurPast.com](http://www.PortraitsOfOurPast.com)

Some university libraries—like Brandeis University, the Florida universities, and the German-Jewish Leo Baeck Institute, which is located in the Center for Jewish History in New York City—have excellent collections of books in German. Many books that I could not locate easily in Germany, I was able to borrow via the inter-library loan system. Reference librarians unflinchingly made the extra effort to track down very obscure books that I had identified via OCLC. The librarians in Naples, Florida always would joke that they couldn't read and certainly not pronounce the long titles of the books that would come via inter-library loan for me, but they were always enthusiastic.

What materials will I find in the German libraries concerning Jews of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries? You have to spend time in the regional libraries where you will find books about the Jewish communities. German libraries tend to specialize in their geographical region. The state library in Stuttgart would have books on the history of Württemberg, and perhaps Baden, while the libraries in Munich only deal with Bavaria. These regional books provide information about the communities, the rabbis, and some individuals, and are based on secondary resources.

You will also find books written about Jewish communities in a particular area. And sometimes, you will be lucky. In 1994, I went to the town hall in the town governing the village of my ancestors. The first thing the administrator did was to show me Gerhard Taddey, *Kein kleines Jerusalem: Geschichte der Juden im Landkreis Schwäbisch Hall*. (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1992). There I found the family tree of my Gundelfinger ancestors. The author had chosen my family to illustrate several themes of his study.

Histories of individual communities are sometimes in the state libraries, but some can only be found in the local libraries and town halls. These local histories are the most helpful because they have a section or chapter on the Jewish community and describe the history and the people in detail.

Due to the destruction wrought by the Holocaust and the Second World War, is it possible to find information about my ancestors in the German archives?

When I began my research in 1994, I thought that I would not be able to find any materials in Germany. I was surprised that the archives in the villages and towns were not bombed, and that the documents in the state archives in southwest Germany, for instance, were moved to a safe location outside the cities. Archives containing information about the Jewish inhabitants were in the same volumes and files as the information about the Christians, so if the archives still exist, the archival material about the Jews will be available. “Still exist” is the key phrase here. The ravages of the Thirty Years War in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and random fires in the centuries following, destroyed many archives.

It is best to contact each location to ask that very specific question, but in some places you might have to show why you believe the information is there. I had that experience with the local government in a town in 1995. When I was researching an ancestor who had served as the teacher and hazzan in a Jewish community in Massenbachhausen that numbered only about 50 people, I found many documents in the state archives. I then called and wrote the town mayor asking for information held in the town’s archive. The mayor insisted that the town had never had a Jewish community. He even sent me the book detailing the town’s history—with no mention of the Jews. When I visited the town in 1999, however, a new town history had been written. It included an excellent section with photographs on the Jewish community, and the town registrar helped me find the few documents available in the archive, and showed me the building where the synagogue had been located.

### **What research can I do via the Internet? (See Appendix 1)**

In many cases, considerable information can be found via the Internet.

A few sites are key to researchers. The primary site for Jewish Genealogy is [www.jewishgen.org](http://www.jewishgen.org) and the first place to search is the Jewish Family Finder database. There you will find possible relatives by searching by surname and variations of that surname. And by searching for place names, you will find other researchers. Jewishgen is a group that really helps other members through daily postings and many resource tools.

In one of those twists of fate, centuries-old prayer books have brought family members together. Through the Jewish Family Finder database, a man from Switzerland contacted our family. He owned several prayer books signed by a mutual ancestor from 1818. The prayer books had been in his aunt's house in a bookcase for about 70 years. He had no information about that very distant side of his family. We shared our information with him, and he returned a Hagaddah—still with wine stains and bits of matzo and parsley—to the family's descendents in Israel.

The number of sites in Germany focusing on Jewish history is growing rapidly. These are a resource for locating the historians or even non-academics who might be interested in aiding Jewish researchers. For instance, even a village located near Mühlingen, with a total population of only 540, has posted the history of its former Jewish community.

And in the future the Internet will offer even more documents. One site, for instance, is beginning to digitalize several 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century German-Jewish newspapers that detailed the political and economic events.

In general, the German libraries do not have the listings of their complete holdings online, but this varies by library.

### **What materials will I find in the Family History Library of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints?**

The Family History Center of the Mormon Church has made a database of all the films that contain records about Jews and Jewish communities. This is available to search on JewishGen, and then the microfilms can be ordered. As a general rule, thus far the church has microfilmed German civil records that pertain to Christians, but in some cases—like emigration application and records, some family data registers, and some name adoption lists—information can be found about the Jews.

### **Do I need to travel to Germany, or can I do the research here in America?**

The bottom line is that to really learn about your ancestors and to find the actual documents about their lives, you do have to do research in the German archives. That answer is the answer for today, but it might change in the future with the development of new Internet sites.

### **How will the German archivists, librarians, and historians treat me, and how should I deal with them?**

You will find the Germans who are interested in Jewish history to be cordial and helpful. You have to understand that the archivists do not have the time to undertake research for each person who asks a question, but when I asked a specific question or asked for a specific document, I usually received the information I requested.

Of course everyone's experience varies, but the more seriously you are taken as a researcher—even if you only speak English, the better service you will receive. I would always type or at least print my questions, as most Germans can read English with more facility than they can understand spoken English.

Several suggestions to facilitate your research: If you are undertaking research about the Nazi-era, explain that clearly. In America, you can find useful databases on JewishGen and many important sources in the libraries and the Leo Baeck Institute. In Germany, primary Holocaust documents are generally held by the archivists rather than being with the more accessible materials.

Also, everyone appreciates receiving a nice thank-you letter with more data, photos, and documents, and better yet—an article, published or self-published—about the former Jewish inhabitants.

The authors of the books that deal with the history of the Jews are very pleased when people find their books and research useful, and contact them personally. Often the authors have been met with local opposition or at least skepticism so any positive reaction leads them to be as helpful as possible. I found that these historians usually read the church records carefully—and willingly share information from that very important, but difficult to research, resource.

When I sought out the authors of pertinent books, I found that several of them were directors of important archives. They were very helpful throughout my research—and supported the publication of the German edition of my book translated from English in 1999. Its title is *Als Moises Kaz seine Stadt vor Napoleon rettete*. [When Moises Kaz saved his town from Napoleon].

### **How can I do this research if I don't speak or read German?**

That is the situation of the new generation of family researchers. These researchers are either children of refugees who did not learn German, or they are people like me whose family came to America in the nineteenth century who had no exposure to German. Not being able to read German should not be a deterrent. Just because you have a stack of documents in the old German script, there is no reason to give up. Now there are more resources to help with translations—for instance, on JewishGen.

There is another translation resource that is available. Some elderly non-Jewish Germans are willing to volunteer their services to translate documents. That generation learned to read the old German script while the following generations cannot read it easily or at all.

### **What other resources should I use?**

One of the most important resources is now time-sensitive. The generation of German Jewish refugees is passing away so it is urgent that we record their remembrances about their daily lives and the lives of their ancestors as well as the Jewish rituals and customs with which they grew up.

Even survivors of the Holocaust who were interviewed by the Shoah Foundation, founded by Steven Spielberg, did not have the opportunity to record the details of daily life as those subjects were outside the scope of the oral history project. On my website, you may download a model family interview and food questionnaire to use as an outline. I always hear, “I wish I had asked aunt so-and-so about her life.” Now is the time to ask—the most important question: “what were the names of all the villages of your ancestors.”

### **Will I be able to find the graves of my ancestors?**

The answer is—hopefully, yes. In South Germany, the Jewish Administration on the state level now maintains all Jewish cemeteries. Access to the cemetery, however, is controlled at the local level, and since all the cemeteries are fenced, you need to find out who holds the key.

Many places have completed cemetery documentation that enables you to locate the graves easily. This is very helpful when the headstones are very weathered. Thus far this cemetery documentation information is not available via the Internet but is in the town hall or with someone living near the cemetery.

Cemeteries in some places were destroyed or desecrated in the Holocaust. The JewishGen website can help with that information.

### **How can I find information about my ancestors in the German archives?**

You will need time and money to accomplish the research. I have heard story after story of people who spent only a day or even just a morning doing research and then were disappointed in their unsatisfactory results. Most researchers will not spend—as I did—eight weeks each summer for five years in the German archives. Still, since most archives have limited hours and it takes time to find documents, at least a few days should be allocated to the project. Before undertaking a trip to the German archives, you should ask *each* archive about its hours and local holidays. The better prepared you are—with the information you have already gathered—the more productive your time will be.

Since researchers cannot read the documents they find and do not have time to study them, photocopying is a necessity. If possible, you should ask the archives about the photocopying procedures and costs, and whether the use of hand-held scanners is permitted. Also many archives have restrictions on photocopying due to privacy and document preservation rules. In the local archives, the copiers cannot handle the over-sized, heavy volumes, and dusty documents.

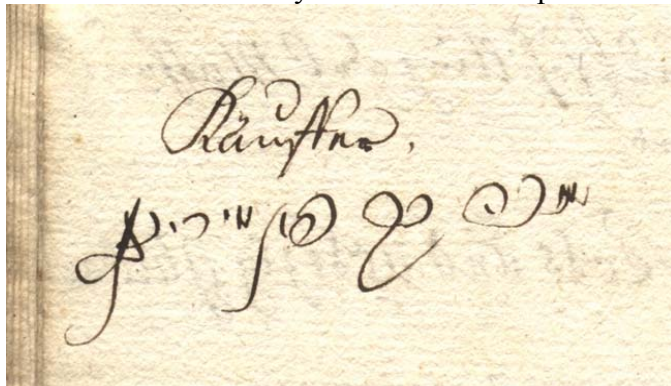
What materials will I find in the German archives regarding the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries?

The answer is—almost everything. The system is quite complex with the different levels of archives: village, town, county, regional, and state archives.

Let’s start with what you can find in the village and town archives. These archives are often just a room in the village or town hall, or even a room in the basement of church. The village or town administrator usually does not have any experience with the archives as the archives are under the management and control of the official archivist who is generally at another location.

Now most archives have an archive organization register that list the location of the types of documents or volumes. When I began my research, however, several archives were not organized at all.

In old, dusty, and fragile volumes, you can find house contracts, occupation lists, tax registers, fire insurance information, lists of citizens, mortgage information, and debt registers. You can use the indexes included in the some of the volumes, just search by the names, or the sections for the Jews. Almost always the word “Jew” precedes each Jewish name.



Engravings and photos show the old houses and the layout of the villages and towns.

Marriage contracts (including detailed asset and trousseau documents) and inheritance documents are organized in strict chronological order.

Sometimes you can find a few old receipts and lists in Judeo-German. These receipts were High German written with Hebrew characters, read right to left. Judeo-German is not Yiddish.

The archives in the towns or county seats also have copies of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century newspapers where you can find announcements and advertisements that document the commercial activities of both Christians and Jews.

In some communities, the relics of Jewish life have been found in the local genizah and preserved. A genizah, for example, was only recently discovered when the synagogue in Michelbach was being restored for use as a memorial museum and cultural center.

### **Will I be able to find information about the rural Jews before the 18<sup>th</sup> century?**

Finding this information is always more difficult. Sometimes you can find tax lists of the Jews who lived in the feudal estates in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. This is where the research undertaken by German archivists and historians can be very useful as often these documents are located in private archives of local feudal lords that are difficult to access.

### **Where I should do further research?**

You should spend time in the state archives since certain documents and information can only be found in the state archives.

### **What can I find in the state archives?**

The most important documents located in the state archives are the family, birth, marriage, and death registers. Each microfilm or volume is identified with RSA (Reichssippenamt) and a number. Up until the late 1930s, the registers were maintained in the local communities. Under National Socialism all civil governments sent the registers to Berlin, where the Nazis were still microfilming them in 1945 so that they could be used in the future to hunt down anyone remaining who had Jewish ancestors. The microfilms survived the war, but the registers themselves did not. The films are now available as hard copy. The registers list: father and mother's name, birth date, marriage date; parents of father and mother; children, birth date, marriage, death. Sometimes you will find notes about occupations and emigration.

Also located in the state archives are tax Registers from the centuries before the 18<sup>th</sup> century that provide lists of Jews and their relative wealth. These early lists give information about the migration of the Jews to new communities. Very few Jews had adopted surnames so they would be identified by their given name followed by their father's given name.

Important petitions and decrees directed to and from the central government are archived in the state archives.

The state libraries house the full parliamentary debates and law compilations, which are like our congressional records. These volumes are indexed, but they are difficult to use. The German librarians showed me how to navigate the volumes, but again I give pertinent citations in my book to hopefully assist other researchers.

Important documents about the Jewish communities, its teachers, and rabbis are often housed in the state archives. Information about the history of the synagogues over the decades can be found in the documents. Reports and petitions reveal the history and concerns of the Jews.

I found several contracts between the communities and their rabbis, cantors, and teachers. In their formulation and context, these rare documents give a seldom seen view of the Jewish life as they detail the obligations of the religious leaders and the community. They are written in a mixture of German, Hebrew, and German written with Hebrew characters.

### **If I do not have the time to devote to this research, may I hire a researcher?**

I loved doing the research myself, but I know other people do work with researchers in Germany. The JewishGen website has lists of researchers and their areas of expertise, and then you would contact them to negotiate the price etc.

### **Will this information be helpful for doing research in other archives?**

Yes. These guidelines and the section of my book, "A Blueprint for Researchers," will be useful in any German-speaking or formerly German speaking country. In parts of Poland and the Czech Republic, for example, pertinent documents are either completely or partially in German. These lists will help identify what you should be looking for. Generally, these archives have less contact with English-speaking researchers and are less flexible in regard to photocopying documents.

### **So how can librarians help researchers achieve their goals?**

My suggestions are:

- Help formulate questions in the beginning stages.
- When the language issue appears to be insurmountable, offer suggestions to find translators.
- Encourage the use of American library sources and the Internet.
- Help with methodology issues like proper notation of sources on each document.
- Appreciate that even limited individual research efforts are important to add to the total picture of the Jews and their history.

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*For more info:* Emily Rose, 2110 Imperial Golf Course Blvd., Naples, Florida 34110  
phone (866) 327-2665 (866-ECR-BOOK); fax: (239) 566-8523; [erose@portraitsfourpast.com](mailto:erose@portraitsfourpast.com)  
*For illustrations, full bibliography, and model family interview and food questionnaire:* website  
[www.portraitsfourpast.com](http://www.portraitsfourpast.com). *For excerpt:* The Jewish Publication Society [www.jewishpub.com](http://www.jewishpub.com)

Appendix 1

JEWISH GENEALOGICAL AND RESEARCH

INTERNET SITES

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|--|---|---|
| JewishGen Family Finder                        | <a href="http://www.jewishgen.org/jgff">http://www.jewishgen.org/jgff</a>   | Searches by surname and place name to find relatives and researchers.     |
| Resources—Germany                              | <a href="http://www.jewishgen.org/GerSIG/resources.htm">http://www.jewishgen.org/GerSIG/resources.htm</a>         | JewishGen.  |
| Index of Jewish Records Family History Library | <a href="http://www.jewishgen.org/databases/FHLC">http://www.jewishgen.org/databases/FHLC</a>                     | Locate names and places in microfilms in order to request the microfilms. |
| Leo Baeck Institute                            | <a href="http://www.lbi.org/">http://www.lbi.org/</a>   | Repository of German- Jewish materials. Catalogue online.                 |
| Libraries in Germany                           | <a href="http://www.lad-bw.de">http://www.lad-bw.de</a>   | German archives and libraries.  |
| German Jewish Newspapers                       | <a href="http://www.compactmemory.rwth-aachen.de">http://www.compactmemory.rwth-aachen.de</a>                     | Digitalized. Check Indexes.   |
| German Genealogy                               | <a href="http://www.genealogienetz.de/genealogy.html">http://www.genealogienetz.de/genealogy.html</a>             | In English.   |
| Geographical Information                       | <a href="mailto:geo@genealogy.net">geo@genealogy.net</a>  |   |
| Old maps                                       | <a href="http://feefhs.org/maps/indexmap.html">http://feefhs.org/maps/indexmap.html</a>                           |   |
| German Resources                               | <a href="http://home.t-online.de/home/RIJONUE/archives.htm">http://home.t-online.de/home/RIJONUE/archives.htm</a> |   |
| Avotaynu                                       | <a href="http://www.avotaynu.com/">http://www.avotaynu.com/</a>   | Many resources. Jewish Genealogy Journal.                                 |
| Ellis Island Database                          | <a href="http://home.pacbell.net/spmorse/ellis/ellis.html">http://home.pacbell.net/spmorse/ellis/ellis.html</a>   | Most functional for searches of database.                                 |