A Beginner’s Guide to Austrian Research:
Using gazetteers, church records, military records and population registers to find your ancestors

by Steven W. Blodgett, AG, MLS

Introduction

Genealogical research in Austria is possible when you know the name of the place of origin of your ancestor. Records available in the United States and other countries can assist you in finding the name of this place. There are only a few possibilities for locating the name of the place of origin in Austrian records. The newly acquired soldiers’ personnel files may be used to locate a surname within a given state. These files are arranged alphabetically by soldier’s name within each state. A perusal of all states may be necessary if the state cannot be determined. Also the alphabetical index of military officers may help in locating a surname in Austria. These records are discussed later in this article.

Immigration from Austria to the Americas began in the late 1700’s and early 1800’s but remained comparatively light until the 1880s when it reached it’s peak, and continued strongly until the early 1920s.

Try to find out the name of the place your ancestor came from. Search through old letters and documents to find references to the name of the place of origin. If you can’t read them take them to an expert who is familiar with languages and place names. All your other searching could be unsuccessful if the place name is not found.

Write or visit relatives or acquaintances who might remember something about the place of origin, or may have records that might show the place name. Search records such as naturalization records, passenger lists, church

Fig. 1 - Map of Austria-Hungary
records, LDS Church files such as the International Genealogical Index for possible places where your ancestor might have come from.

Once you have the name of the place of origin of your ancestor you need to learn which records were kept for that place. There are tools available that show church and civil jurisdictions for every place in Austria. Then searches the records available for those places can be made. If the records have been microfilmed, this can be done at the Family History Library or at its branch family history centers. If the records have not yet been microfilmed, they will need to be searched in Austria.

Using Gazetteers and Maps to Find Places

Once you have learned the name of the place where your ancestor lived, you are ready to look for records that may have been kept for that town. All towns didn’t keep their own records. The residents of each town were assigned to a particular Catholic, Protestant or Orthodox parish, or Jewish synagogue in the area. Depending on the religion of your ancestor, the events of birth, baptism, marriage or burial for family members were recorded in the town where the appropriate office was located.

A useful tool to help determine these jurisdiction is the Austrian Gemeindelexikon, a valuable detailed gazetteer for

Background

Austria was subject to numerous boundary changes and political alignments throughout the history of Europe. For centuries Austria was part of the Old German Empire. It came into its own at the demise of the German Empire in 1806. The Austrian Empire existed until 1867 when it became known as the Austro-Hungarian Empire (or Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary), which lasted until the end of World War I in 1918. At times it contained all or part of the present countries of Austria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Poland, the Ukraine, Croatia, Slovenia, Serbia, Romania and Italy.

that outlines each of the fourteen states of the Austria portion of the Austro-Hungarian Empire that existed from 1867 to 1918.

- Gemeindelexikon der im Reichsrats vertretenen Königreiche und Länder bearbeitet auf Grund der Ergebnisse der Volkszählung vom 31. Dezember 1900. Wien : K.K. Hof- und Staatsdruckerei, 1905-1908. 14 v. (FHL microfilm # 1187925 items 2-4 [Niederösterreich, Oberösterreich, Salzburg], 1187926 [Steiermark, Kärnten, Krain, Küstenland, Tirol, Vorarburg]; #1187927 [Böhmen, Schlesien], #1187928 items 1-3 [Galizien, Bukowina, Dalmatien], #924736 item 1 [Mähren]).
Each volume is indexed. The main section of each Gemeindelexikon volume shows every town within the state, and which towns had churches or synagogues. A section in the back shows Roman Catholic jurisdictions for every town. The volumes for Galizien, Bukowina and Dalmatien also show Greek Catholic, Orthodox and/or Jewish jurisdictions. Population data are given for each town. The Gemeindelexikon are used for the form and spellings of names in the Family History Library Catalog. Often place names are shown in more than one language in these gazetteers.

A corresponding gazetteer for 1900 with an alphabetical index for the entire Austria portion of the Austro-Hungarian Empire of 1867-1918 is as follows. Use this gazetteer to find in which state your place belonged:

“Mayerhofer’s” is another gazetteer that shows religious jurisdictions for the entire Austro-Hungarian empire. It shows the location of all Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox parishes and civil registry offices, but does not show church jurisdictions for every town. Included are Hungary, Bosnia and Hercegovina:

“Raffelsperger’s” is a gazetteer of the Austrian Empire that existed from 1806 to 1866. It shows all towns in the Empire in one alphabetical sequence, and designates which towns had parish churches and other data. A drawback is that place names are often not spelled consistently, and may be difficult to find in this old and very large gazetteer. Hungary is included:

Dvorzsák’s excellent gazetteer covers the Hungarian portion of the Austro-Hungarian Empire of 1867-1918 except for Croatia-Slavonia. It shows church jurisdictions for every denomination in every town. It has a complete index. Often applicable German, Romanian and/or Slovak place names are indicated:

A gazetteer of the kingdom of Hungary prior to the World War I which includes a section for Croatia-Slavonia is the following. This gazetteer shows which towns had parishes and civil registry offices, but does not show church jurisdictions for every town. Hungarian and Croatian place name equivalents are indicated:

A standard gazetteer of modern Austria is the following:

Detailed maps of the Austro-Hungarian Empire are the following:
- More convenient are the maps of Central Europe which include Austria:

Using Church Directories

For a description of the available parish registers for modern Austria see the inventories published in the following series. The volumes are arranged by diocese or other church designation:

For further information on parish registers see also:

For local coverage of parish registers and other records see the following:
- Banat (Region under Turkey 1552- , Austria 1718- , Hungary 1779- , Austria 1849- , Hungary 1860- ; divided between Romania and Yugoslavia-Voivodina 1918). For a description of church records in the Banat see:
  - “Banater Kirchenbücher,” in : Das Standesamt 5 (1952), p. 119. [Church records of Banat].
Carinthia (Kärnten):

Lower Austria (Niederösterreich):

Upper Austria (Oberösterreich):

Salzburg

Transylvania (Siebenbürgen, Erlely). For a description of Protestant records in Transylvania see:

Styria (Steiermark):

Sudeten (border areas of Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia; included many Germans; part of Czechoslovakia):

Fig. 3 - Latin baptismal register showing name, day, hour, town, house number of event; parents, godparents of child

[Image of a Latin baptismal register]
Church records

Original Church records for Austria are the most important sources for locating genealogical information on your ancestors, and for extending your pedigree. Good collections of parish registers have been filmed in Tirol and Vorarlberg. Limited filming has taken place in other areas including Lower and Upper Austria.

After locating the appropriate parish and its records, searches of baptismal or birth entries, marriage entries, and death entries for your ancestors in the available records is possible. Linking ancestors from one generation to the next is possible when direct evidence is available, such as the listing of parents names in the marriage record. With this important link, it is more likely that the actual birth record of your ancestor can be determined from among the large number of possible birth records for a particular name. Often the extraction of every entry for a particular surname is necessary to ensure that proper connections are made.

Military Records of the Austrian Empire

The FEEFHS Journal, v. 9 (2001), p. 72-82 contains an introduction to military records of significance in Austria. The following records may be useful to supplement and enhance your search of the parish registers.

Fig. 5 - Latin marriage record from the parish of Grossgöttfritz in Lower Austria, 1734. Recorded are the bride and groom and their places of residence. Sometimes the bride’s father is also mentioned.
The major collections in the Vienna War Archives have been microfilmed and are available in the Family History Library and Family History Centers. Indexes to some of the records are available, particularly if your ancestor happens to be an officer, staff member or official. Approximately 10% of soldiers were officers. Enlisted men can be located when the name of the regiment or military unit, or place of recruitment can be discovered.

### Major Collections of Significance

**Background sheets** (*Grundbuchblätter*), 1780-1930. 616 rolls of film. Personnel sheets of soldiers born within the states of the modern Republic of Austria during the years 1800-1864. Includes Vienna (Wien), Lower Austria (Niederösterreich), Upper Austria (Oberösterreich), Styria (Steiermark), Carinthia (Kärnten), Salzburg, Tirol, and Vorarlberg. Sheets are arranged alphabetically by surname within each state. A list of the film numbers was included in the *FEEFHS Journal*, v. 9 (2001), p. 77-79. Documents show year of birth, place of birth, religion, occupation and record of service. Parents’ or spouses’ names or other family relationships are generally not listed.

**Muster rolls and formation tables** (*Musterlisten und Standestabellen*), 1740-1820. 5,104 rolls of film. These records are filed and cataloged by the name of the regiment or unit. Most regiments have individual indexes, but there is no general index for all units. Information for each soldier includes name, age, birthplace, religion, occupation, and marital status. Occasionally children’s names and birth dates, and spouse’s names are given.

**Background and formation lists** (*Grundbücher und Stellungslisten*), 1823-1918. 3,408 rolls of film. These records are arranged alphabetically by surname within each state. Each regiment or unit has its own name index and is arranged by date of mustering out. Information for each soldier includes name, age, birthplace, religion, occupation and marital status. Occasionally children’s or spouse’s names are given.

**Officers’ service records** (*Dienstbeschreibungen und Qualifikationslisten*), 1740-1820. 29 rolls of film. An alphabetical file of officers’ names showing the regimental unit numbers in the muster lists.

**Military church records** (*Militärkirchenbücher*). 1654-1922. 551 rolls of film. Church records were kept for each

### Table 1 - Language preference of the states of Austria-Hungary in 1880

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**Austria** 22,144,244 36 23 1 16 12 1 3 5 3 3 2

**Hungary** 13,749,600 26 14 39 - 4 10 6 - 1 1

**Austria-Hungary** 35,893,844 32 20 16 10 9 4 4 3 2 2

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*FEEFHS Journal Volume X*
Military church records directory (Militär-Matriken-Index) 1740-1922. 5 rolls of film. Index of regiments, units, hospitals, alternate names, and places where the military parishes were stationed or garrisoned. Shows dates of the available records, names of regiments and names of places. Film numbers 1442862-1442866 item 1.

An essential guide to determining the name of the regiment in which a soldier served was shown in the FEEFHS Journal v. 9 (2001), p. 80. This guide shows the location where each regiment was recruiting throughout Austria.

City Population Registers

Records significant for the entire country as well as for the capital city of Vienna are the population registers and family registers. A discussion of these records appeared in the FEEFHS Journal, v. 8 (2000), p. 69-73. Population registers for a number of cities have been microfilmed and are available. In addition to Vienna, the following cities have been microfilmed: Graz, Krems an der Donau, Linz, Salzburg, Sankt Pölten, and Urfahr. Film numbers for these records appear in the current Family History Library Catalog under the name of the city followed by the subject heading “Population.”

These records serve as a substitute for civil registration, which did not begin in Austria until 1938. These records begin in the early 1800s and extend into the 1900s. The arrangement is alphabetical, although often males and females are filed in separate sequences. Records include names, birth dates and places, parents’ names, residence, spouse and children’s names. In Vienna there are two series of records. One for individuals, and a second series which includes entire families. For Vienna alone there are several thousand rolls of microfilm.

Vienna death records are another valuable source of general information. These are contained on over 800 rolls of microfilm and cover the years 1648-1920. These are arranged alphabetically by year of death and show names, date and place of death, residence, age, spouse’s name, sometimes parent’s name.

| Table 2 - Religious preference of the states of Austria-Hungary in 1880 |

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