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German Census Records 1816-1916: A New Genealogical Source

I Introduction

A United States Federal Census:

- 1 This is an excellent resource for beginning genealogical research.
- 2 It is done every ten years on the 0.
- 3 The standard form for each year was used everywhere.
- 4 The forms for all years but 1890 are preserved.
- 5 The records are accessible in many media at several locations.

B What about census record in Germany? Ask the experts and you will probably get these responses (and they are correct):

- 1 We know about the 1819 census in Mecklenburg-Schwerin that has superb detail.
- 2 Schleswig-Holstein did census campaigns in line with the Danish census enumerations from 1835 to 1860.
- 3 We hear that there was a census in Hannover in 1852, but we don't know where it is, so we can't see it.
- 4 Prussia did a census in 1905 because their gazetteer is based on it, but we don't know where it is, so we can't see it.
- 5 There were probably other census records compiled in other states, but we don't know for sure.

II These questions require answers:

- A In which German states were censuses conducted?
- B When were the censuses conducted?
- C For what purposes were the censuses conducted?
- D What content did each census include?
- E Do original census sheets exist?
- F Where are original census records stored?
- G Have original census records been copied (microfilmed or digitized)?
- H How can researchers gain access to existing census records?

III Literature Review:

- A One major article about German census records from 1816 to 1916
- B One book about census years and regulations
- C No publications about census content by years
- D Many publications about the statistics compiled from census enumerations involving nearly every Germany state

- E Rolf Gehrman article: “The history of [German] census records has not yet been written.”
- IV The Goal: A Book on German Census Records
- A Geopolitical extent: the states of the German Empire (1871-1918)
 - B Time constraints: post-Napoleon to the end of the German Empire (1918)
 - C Communications with state archives: do they have census records in their collection?
 - D Secure necessary funding to conduct research on this topic.
- V Pre-sabbatical Study
- A A comprehensive search of the Family History Library Catalog was conducted and about 100 census records on microfilm were found.
 - B Copies of census documents (regulation and lists of inhabitants) were made.
 - C Hundreds of emails were sent to the archives of counties and major cities to inquire of census records among their holdings.
 - D Approximately 500 hours were invested in this campaign.
- VI Census investigation in Europe
- A Living and working in Vienna
 - 1 Communications with archives in Germany: do they have census records?
 - 2 If they have documents, go there or request copies.
 - 3 Make plans for Research Trip 1 in Germany
 - B More work in Vienna
 - 1 Organize and translate documents collected during Research Trip 1
 - 2 Continue communications with German archives
 - 3 Make plans for Research Trips 2 and 3 in Germany
 - C Responses by German experts:
 - 1 “I’ve done research for 50 years and have never seen a German census.”
 - 2 “Census campaigns never took place in our state/province/grand duchy.”
 - 3 “You won’t find any original census documents in this archive.”
 - D Results of the research trips
 - 1 More than 3,500 records collected on paper or as digital images
 - 2 Personal contacts established with many archivists
 - 3 Sufficient information gathered to allow 38 of 42 chapters to be written
- VII Kinds of census documents identified
- A Terminology [*Volkszählungen, Bevölkerungsverzeichnis, Seelenregister*, et al.]
 - B Statistics [*Kopfzahl*]
 - C Instructions [*Anweisungen, Instruktionen*]
 - D Lists of heads of households [*Haushaltsvorstandslisten*]
 - E Lists of all persons [*Urlisten*]
 - F Individual data cards [*Zählkarten*]
 - G Summary page [*Controlliste*] for a census district [*Zählbezirk*]
 - H Summary page for a town [*Ortsliste*]

- VIII Answers to the principal questions asked at the outset of the study
- A In which German states were censuses conducted? Every one of the 38 states
- B When were the censuses conducted? In many states every three years from 1834 to 1864. Prussian provinces conducted census campaigns 16 times from 1818 to 1864. Some states conducted as few as 3 censuses during that time. Every German state participated in all 10 Empire census campaigns from 1871 to 1916.
- C For what purposes were the censuses conducted?
- 1 1816 to 1867: distribution of customs revenues (90%); other administrative purposes (10%); no evidence of taxation and little evidence of military data collection
 - a Prusso-Hessian Customs Union (1828-1833)
 - b Bavarian-Wuerttemberg Customs Union (1828-1833)
 - c Central German Commercial League (1828-1833)
 - d Tax Union (1828-1852)
 - e Customs Union [Zollverein] 1834-1871: led by Prussia, this union annexed the members of all other unions by 1852
 - 2 1871-1916: any number of administrative purposes
 - a demographic
 - b social welfare
 - c economic (structures, animals, trees, etc.)
- D What content did each census include?
- 1 initially only numbers of inhabitants (*Kopfzahl*)
 - 2 greater content in all states over the years
 - 3 name of head of household and numbers of household members by gender, status, occupation, religion
 - 4 names of all persons; gender, age (specifically or in categories), religion, status or occupation
- E Do original census sheets exist? Yes—probably hundreds of thousands
- F Where are original census records stored?
- 1 Most are in city and town archives (85%).
 - 2 Some are in regional archives (12%).
 - 3 A very few are in state or national archives (3%).
- G Have original census records been copied (microfilmed or digitized)?
- 1 Some are available on microfilm in the Family History Library system (most were filmed where and when the filming of church records was not possible).
 - 2 Some are available as digital images in the Internet (sporadic).
 - 3 Indexes of census records are extremely rare.
- H How can researchers gain access to existing census records?
- 1 The most promising approach is to contact the town where the person in question is believed to have lived, then the county.
 - 2 Consult *Meyers Orts- und Verkehrsverzeichnis...* to determine the county name.
 - 3 Be prepared to pay for any search and copying of census records. The archivist will essentially never have access to an index.

- IX How can are census records help the family history researcher?
- A Census records may direct the researcher to the home parish; church records provide greater genealogical details.
 - B In the absence of church records and civil records, a census record is probably the only existing record of a family group.
 - C Census records can show non-relatives living with the family.
 - D What experienced genealogist doesn't look for just one more record about the family?
 - E *This is not the be-all, end-all in family history research!*
- X Achievement of the goals of this investigation
- A The principal questions were answered with reliability.
 - B The book was completed and published under the title *German Census Records From 1816 to 1916.*
 - C An article was completed and submitted to the *Pal-Am Immigrant* under the title "Austrian Census Records from 1857 to 1910"
 - D An article was completed in German and sent to the editor of a Mecklenburg annual journal under the title "Volkszählungen in Mecklenburg-Schwerin."
- XI Book Contents
- A History of Census Records in Germany from 1816 to 1864
 - B The pan-German Census in 1867
 - C Census Records under the German Empire from 1871 to 1916
 - D German Census Records by State from 1816 to 1864
 - 1 Location of the state
 - 2 Census enumerations in that state
 - 3 Census regulations issued in that state
 - 4 Content of census forms by enumeration year in that state
 - 5 Accessibility of original census records in that state
 - 6 Selected images of census records in that state
 - E How to write letters and emails to archivists about original census records
 - F How to prepare for your research visit in archives with original census records
- XII New developments (since the book appeared)
- Several belated emails have arrived from district and regional government archives in Poland; we now know that a substantial number of original census records compiled in the former Prussian provinces of Brandenburg, East Prussia, Pomerania, Posen, Silesia, and West Prussia have survived. Communicating with Polish archives is somewhat difficult, expensive, and requires great patience.
- The book appeared in Germany as *Deutsche Volkszählungen 1816-1916.*
- XIII Representative images of census records
- XIV Questions and answers