

Coming from the East: Resources to research the 'Volksdeutsche'

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EWZ RECORDS

BACKGROUND

The records of the Einwandererzentralstelle (EWZ) basically comprise a census of ethnic Germans taken as the German military occupied European countries during World War II. These people were to be identified in order to resettle them to conquered areas.

The EWZ is part of a large cache of German records captured as the war ended. They are found at the U.S. National Archives as the "Collection of Foreign Records Seized, Record Group 242." Read more [here](#).

An agreement reached in 1993 returned the original records to Germany. But first they were microfilmed to preserve copies for research.

You may notice that the head of household completing the forms often was a woman; the husbands had been arrested, executed, deported, or drafted into the Soviet army. The women were trying to answer questions about people in their husband's — or even their own — families whom they may not have known well. So take the information with a grain of salt. It's also important to note that these records contain personal information, including medical histories and other private details, about people who may still be living in the early 21st century.

Family Search has a [comprehensive guide](#) to the EWZ records.

ABOUT THE RECORDS

At this writing, the only way to view the entire set of EWZ records is to visit the [National Archives at College Park](#) where the records are kept. The collection is catalogued as "Einwandererzentrale. Microfilm Publication A3342, Series EWZ. 7,320 rolls."

Microfilm copies of portions of the collection are held in other locations, often genealogy societies with an interest in specific communities of Germans. [Galizien German Descendants](#) is one example. The [Mennonite Historical Society of British Columbia](#) has digitized almost the entire EWZ-50 set, which covers covers most of Ukraine. The society will do lookups for a fee. Details [here](#). Another source for the EWZ-50 is the [Germans from Russia Heritage Society](#), which has microfilm duplicates. Read about its research services [here](#). Some records also are available at Family Search in microfilm and/or digital format.

The trick to finding whether EWZ records exist for your family AND have been digitized is the "EWZ number" assigned when a person was processed. This number, in a pre-computer age, connected the same person across the various sets of EWZ records that were created. But you need to view the files to get that EWZ number, hence the Catch-22.

At this time, the microfilm available only at the U.S. Archives has not been digitized, nor are films loaned out. But you can purchase copies. Check the website for prices and to order.

Here are instructions to use with an index at the German federal archive; you search by name and retrieve the EWZ number from the index. You can use that in a search on Family Search to determine whether the record exists there and if it's available as a digital image.

- Visit [Invenio](https://invenio.bundesarchiv.de/invenio/login.xhtml) (https://invenio.bundesarchiv.de/invenio/login.xhtml).
- Click on "Suche ohne Anmeldung" (search without registration) and close the welcome screen that pops up.
- At the top of the window, click on "Suche" (search).
- On the form that opens, click the third tab, "Namenssuche" (name search).
- Enter the "Name," surname, and other information as desired. You can use an asterisk (*) to search for an incomplete name. Then click "Suchen" at the bottom of the window.
- Review the results to see if your person appears. Note that you are searching in several "inventories," and you may find additional information about your person. But for the purpose of an EWZ search, look for "Sammlung Berlin Document Center (BDC): Personenbezogene Unterlagen der Einwandererzentralstelle (EWZ)."
- If you find your person, look down the list for the "EWZ-Nummer." This is the number you need so make a note! If you see a link, "Im Kontext anzeigen," click it to see a list of other persons tied to this same EWZ number, which could indicate a familial relationship.
- If you get this message, "Hinweismeldung. Die Suche lieferte keinen Treffer," it means the search did not return a hit.
- Log in to your Family Search account and do a keyword search of the catalog for "Einwandererzentralstelle." You should get results listing the *Stammbblätter, 1939-1945* and *Stammbblätter, 1940-1941*. (The *Einwandererkartei, 1939-1945* collection is alphabetical but very few films are digitized.) Click one of the *Stammbblätter* results and look down the page at the list. The first "Note" column lists numeric series. Scroll to see if the EWZ number you retrieved from the Bundesarchiv search appears. If so, you then can determine as usual if the record is available, either as a microfilm or a digital copy.

If you are fortunate to find digitized records on Family Search, remember there likely will be additional information to be discovered in the films not available online.

If you have relatives who settled in the Black Sea area, also known as South Russia, visit the [Black Sea Research Group](#) website. That's where you can read about the Koblenz records, which came out of the resettlement of these communities starting in 1940.

The Koblenz questionnaires are specific to German villagers from Bessarabia, Bukovina, and Dobrudscha and pre-date the EWZ process. But the information provided is similar to that in the EWZ forms. A question & answer article is available [here](#).

STUMPP VILLAGE RECORDS

BACKGROUND

When the German army invaded the Soviet Union in 1941, Ukraine long had been home to numerous German-speaking colonies. The German government undertook to document those villages still existing during the military occupation. One of those involved was Dr. Karl Stumpp, an academic born in Ukraine whose career focused on German Russians. The surviving “dorfberichte” have become known in the Germans-from-Russia community of North America as the “Stumpp village reports.”

Important ethical questions around the gathering of this information have been asked in recent years, specifically with respect to other ethnic populations in Ukraine. For a detailed examination, see *The Nazi Ethnographic Research of Georg Leibbrandt and Karl Stumpp in Ukraine, and Its North American Legacy* by Eric J. Schmaltz and Samuel D. Sinner. [Link](#).

ABOUT THE RECORDS

The reports themselves are useful for family researchers primarily for their list of persons living in the village at the time the information was gathered. You may also find village histories, economic statistics, and demographic information.

A microfilm set of the Stumpp village reports is available at the Library of Congress as part of the “German Captured Documents Collection” in the Manuscript Division. Another set is held by the Family History Library. That catalogue is described [here](#).

AROLSEN ARCHIVES

BACKGROUND

The Arolsen Archives (formerly known as the International Tracing Service) is the descendant of efforts that began even before World War II ended. The mission was to document the history of Nazi atrocities, particularly against Europe’s Jewish population and other minorities, as well as those who had been displaced through forced labor, or bureaucratic or military action.

For decades, the main tasks of the service were to determine the fate of individuals and to search for missing persons in the interest of family reunification. Almost 80 years after the end of World War II, the Arolsen Archives continues to receive such inquiries. [Website](#).

ABOUT THE RECORDS

The archive contains about 30 million documents divided into three primary areas: incarceration (concentration camps), forced labor, and displaced persons. The variety of documents is wide-ranging. The Archives has information on about 17.5 million people and is posting more of the collection online each year.

The Arolsen website offers an [e-guide](#) to the record types, which is recommended reading whether you search on its site or on Ancestry, which in partnership with Arolsen, offers free access to what it calls the Holocaust records. There are two collections:

- **Passenger lists 1946-1971**, displaced persons as they travel from a DP camp to their final destination
- **Lists of Those Persecuted 1939-1947**, registers of people living in Germany who were persecuted by public institutions and corporations

For non-Jewish ethnic Germans in central and eastern Europe, you may find relatives as displaced persons. Many were resettled during the war through the EWZ process and joined millions of others who fled west ahead of the Soviet army in 1944-45. They often ended up in displaced persons camps in Germany and elsewhere after the war ended.

NOTE: The German Red Cross (DRK) has operated a tracing service for those missing or displaced since the end of World War II. This service was to end in 2023 due to declining demand, but announced it will be extended through 2025. The German Interior Ministry, which financially supports the DRK, said interest in the topic appears to be increasing, particularly among the grandchildren of missing people. [Article](#). DRK tracing service [archive and documentation center](#).

MEMORIAL

BACKGROUND

Memorial, Мемориал in Russian, was founded in 1989 as revelations about the repressions of the Soviet era had begun to become public. Among its goals was to promote the truth about the historical past and perpetuate the memory of the victims of political repression. It has spent decades building a database of victims of political repression from short biographies of those sent to the Gulag or shot during the Great Terror (1937-1938), as well as those who were deported to Siberia and Kazakhstan. The database has 3 million names, yet Memorial estimates that 75% of the victims have not yet been identified and recorded.

Among those repressed during these years were ethnic minorities within the Soviet Union, including German speakers.

NOTE: *As explained in the presentation, Memorial's data are not publicly available at this time due to the political situation in Russia. I have left the links below as a reference for the screenshots included in the presentation. But exercise digital caution if you decide to try to use them.*

The information below is for the main "[Memorial Russia](#)" website. But since the organization operated more as a network of chapters, you may find a regional website will have different or additional information of interest. You can see read more about how Memorial is organized and get information on the individual locations on this [page](#). For example, the first-person accounts of repression and gulag mentioned in the presentation are found on the [Krasnoyarsk](#) site.

ABOUT THE RECORDS

While Memorial does offer an English version of the home page, unless you read Russian, it will be necessary to use to page translator to explore the site and search the databases. It also helps to convert your search terms such as surnames to the Cyrillic alphabet.

A description of the various collections held by Memorial can be read [here](#). This [page](#) is specific on repression of Germans.

Another page of interest is headed "[Victims of political terror in the USSR](#)." Although it is an older version of the newer database that has a search feature, this page gives you an opportunity to do an alphabetical search (based on Russian pronunciation, if transliterated). The introduction provides useful information, as well.

If you believe you have relatives who suffered repression during the Soviet era, you will want to poke around the Memorial site(s) to see what you might discover. For example, my cousin in Germany has been working with Memorial for many years to translate first-person stories of repression and imprisonment for those with German surnames. Summaries are accessible, in German, from this [page](#) and by clicking “Opferliste” on the menu at left. You can scroll them using the Latin alphabet rather than Cyrillic. If more information is available, a link is provided. Also on the menu: a list of places from which people were exiled to Krasnoyarsk (click “Verbannung”); these are links to information about the deportations.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- As mentioned in the presentation, the Society for German Genealogy in Eastern Europe maintains a database of German-speaking persons who were baptized or married in Shitomir parish during the German occupation of Ukraine. The Lemke database is for members only; you can read more and search from this [page](#). Scroll down to the “Lemke Records - Zhytomyr Parish, 1921-1943.”
- SGGEE also maintains [KGB and Repatriation lists](#) from the 1930s that were found in the Shitomir archives. Again, the data is accessible by members only and is specific to this region of Ukraine. The KGB lists contain more than 4,000 people, while the repatriation lists reference more than 13,000.
- The question of German ownership of land in the Russian Empire had become a major concern by the time of World War I. In February 1915, a decree was issued to expropriate the land owned by all Russian subjects of German descent (also Austrian and Hungarian) within certain boundary zones, including all of Poland and Volhynia. There was a legal process to be followed, but as the German army advanced into Russian territory, it was decided that deporting those of German descent would solve two problems: preventing espionage in support of the enemy and, with the people gone, their land could be more easily taken. In a few weeks, more 7,000 families were expelled. A list of those whose land was to be expropriated had appeared in the local newspaper on June 2, 1916. Author Donald Miller obtained a copy in 1993 in the Shitomir archives, which was translated and indexed by Brent Alan Mai. *Expropriation of Land from the Germans in Volhynia 1915* is sold by the [American Historical Society of Germans from Russia](#). If you want to review just the names, without the additional information in the book, [this article](#) is on Miller’s website.
- The [Find Lost Russian & Ukrainian Family](#) blog written by Vera Miller is a source for anyone seeking information in Russia. For example, in April 2021, she posted about the addition of more than 8 million records to a World War II soldier database for the former USSR. Vera has also published [Genealogy at a Glance: Russian Genealogy Research](#), available from Amazon.