Reading Civil Registration Death Records

Germany "How to" Guide, Intermediate Level: Instruction

September 2018

GOAL

This guide will teach you how to extract genealogical information from a German civil registration death record by identifying key words and phrases.

INTRODUCTION

Civil registration is governmental registration of all births, marriages, and deaths that occurred in a specific district. Civil registration districts (***Zivilstandsamt*** until 1874, ***Standesamt*** from 1874 to the present) were strictly organized geographically. All individuals were registered regardless of religious faith.

There were usually two copies produced, particularly after 1874. The ***Hauptregister*** or primary copy was generally kept in the local civil registrar's office, while the duplicate copy or ***Nebenregister*** was to be collected centrally at the court level for safekeeping. Many of these duplicate records are now located in state archives.

Depending on the area and time, civil registration may be recorded in German, French, Danish, or Polish.

Due to privacy laws, access to recent records is restricted to immediate family members. These restrictions are as follows:

Germany
Births: 110 years
Marriages: 80 years
Deaths: 30 years

Poland
Births: 100 years
Marriages: 80 years
Deaths: 80 years

Although some areas of what would later become the German Empire began keeping civil copies of births, marriages, and deaths as early as the 1790s, the practice was not mandatory for all areas of the empire until 1 January 1876. These modern civil registration records were pre-printed standardized forms with blanks for the registrar to write in the required information by hand.

Death records typically span a single page and generally contain the registration date (which can differ from the death date), the name of the informant, the name, age, and residence of the deceased, the deceased's place of birth, the names of the spouse and parents of the deceased, and the date and time of death.

Not every town had its own *Standesamt* (civil registration office). Use Meyer's Gazetteer to determine the location of the nearest *Standesamt*.

You may want to consult the following "How to" Guides before continuing:

- *Fraktur*
- German Script
- Meyer's Gazetteer Online: *Meyersgaz.org*

HOW TO

Sample death record

Source: https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3QS7-99GL-KJ4S: accessed 10 September 2018.

Death record outline in English

C.

<div align="center">Nr. (#)</div>

(location) on (full date written out). [Note: this is the registration date, not the date of death.]

Appeared before the undersigned civil registrar,
the personally known (name of the informant),
residing in (place),
and indicated that (name of the deceased),
(age of the deceased), (the deceased person's religious affiliation),
(the deceased individual's place of residence at the time of the death),
Born at (place and date),
(son/daughter) of (names of parents),
at (place of death)
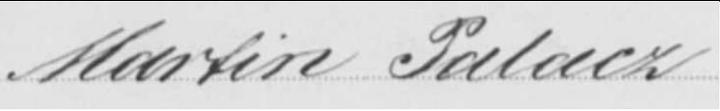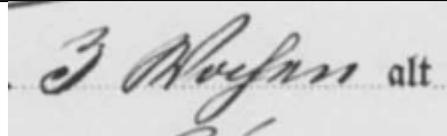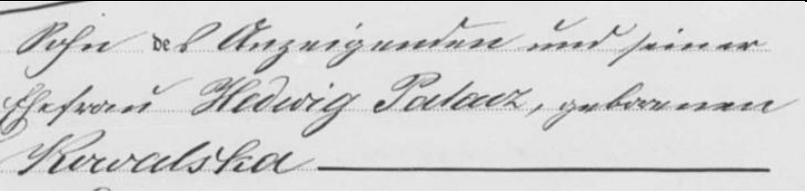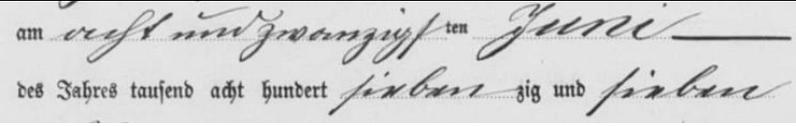at (date and time) died.

Key Words

The following key words will indicate the essential genealogical information. Depending on the context, the information may come before or after the key word. Note that the German words and phrases are written in standardized German. In some cases, the examples provided may differ in spelling or conjugation of the word. Keep in mind that phrases and even words may be split between two lines.

English	German	Information given	Example
Known	bekannt	followed by the name of the informant	
and indicated that	und zeigte an, daß	followed by the name of the deceased	
age	Alt	preceded by the age	
religion	Religion	Preceded by the specific religious affiliation	
Born at	geboren zu	Followed by the place and date of birth	
son of / daughter of	Sohn des / Tochter des	followed by the names of the deceased individual's parents	

of the year	des Jahres	preceded by the month and day of death; followed by the year of death	des Jahres
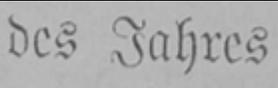
PRACTICE

The last page of this guide contains an image of a civil birth record. You can also view the image on FamilySearch by clicking here. For any unfamiliar words, use the FamilySearch word list, found at: https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/German_Genealogical_Word_List.

What is the name of the informant?	Martin Palacz	*Martin Palacz*
What is the name of the person who died?	Anton Palacz	*Anton Palacz.*
How old was the person who died?	3 weeks old Look for "alt" which is preceded by the age.	*3 Wochen alt*
Who were the parents of the deceased individual?	The undersigned (Martin Palacz) and his wife Hedwig Palacz (born Kowalska)	*...des Anzeigenden und seiner Ehefrau Hedwig Palacz, geborene Kowalska*
When (date) did the individual die?	28 June 1877	*am ein und zwanzigsten Juni des Jahres tausend acht hundert sieben zig und sieben*

ACTIVITY

Now, test your skills you have learned in this "How to" Guide. The Activity is a way to check your knowledge and let you know you've mastered the Guide! Click here to try out the Activity.

53 C.

Nr. 53.

Górczyn, am 29ten Juni 1877.

Vor dem unterzeichneten Standesbeamten erschien heute, der
Persönlichkeit nach _____
_____ bekannt,
der Wirth Martin Palacz

_____
wohnhaft zu Górczyn N. 2 _____
und zeigte an, daß Anton Palacz _____

_____ 3 Wochen alt ___ katholischer Religion,
wohnhaft zu Górczyn N. 2 _____
geboren zu Górczyn _____

Sohn des Anzeigenden und seiner
Ehefrau Hedwig Palacz, geborenen
Kowalska _____
zu Górczyn _____
am ein und zwanzigsten Juni _____
des Jahres tausend acht hundert sieben zig und sieben
Nachmittags um _____ elf Uhr
verstorben sei. _____

Vorgelesen, genehmigt und unterschrieben
Martin Palacz

Der Standesbeamte.
Nowak.