

Produced by the former European Interest Group of the NZSG



RESEARCH IN SWITZERLAND

2020

Determine the place of origin of your ancestor.

Swiss records are not centralized therefore before any research can be undertaken, you need to first establish the exact town or village that your ancestor was born in or that a particular event occurred in.

The golden rule of genealogy is to always work back from the known to the unknown. Therefore the place of origin of your ancestor should be looked for in New Zealand records, or if your family came via Australia or Britain then in those records.

The place of origin of your ancestor should be mentioned on N.Z. birth and death certificates after 1876 and on N.Z. marriage certificates after 1882.

It should appear in naturalisation papers so if your ancestor became naturalised then the full file for this should be applied for.

It may also appear in an obituary, on a headstone, in army records, shipping lists, as well of course as family sources. If the family were in Britain then the census there may show the place of origin.

Hamburg was a port of embarkation for Switzerland. The Hamburg Passenger Lists begin in 1850, are chronological by ship and show each passenger's place of residence.

Researching in Switzerland

Switzerland is made up of 26 Cantons that are largely self-governing.

The country has four official languages. The eastern and central cantons are mostly German speaking people making up about 65% of the total population. The French speakers are mostly in the western areas and are about 20% of the population. The Italian language population are in southern Switzerland and make up about 7% of the population. About 0.5% of the population speaks Rumantsch and they live in the canton of Graubünden.

Place of naturalisation for each Surname

Swiss citizenship is centered on the canton and especially the home community (Heimatort). For most people citizenship was inherited and residency was not a requirement. Thus one or more generations of a citizen's descendants may never even have seen their original home community.

A burger and his descendants remained citizens of their *Heimatort* or *Heimatgemeinde* until one of them applied for and obtained citizenship in another town.

The home community was charged with keeping track of its citizens. Therefore, if a birth, marriage, or death of a citizen took place in another parish, notice of the event was sent to the *Heimatort*. The information may have been entered in the regular parish register or a special section reserved for *auswärtige Buerger* (out-of-town citizens).

A Certificate of Family Origin or Family Certificate (*Heimatschein*) officially documented a citizen's home community. When taking up residence in another town, the person presented his *Heimatschein* as proof of citizenship.

In times of need the *Heimatort* was responsible for providing financial support. During the 18th and 19th centuries the community sometimes paid for the overseas passage of poorer citizens.

The **Register of Swiss Surnames**, updated to 1962, is a comprehensive alphabetical listing of all the families holding citizenship in a Swiss community. Each entry contains information on the place and time of naturalisation as well as the previous place or country of origin.

<http://hls-dhs-dss.ch/famn/index.php>

The two most important types of records for Swiss research are civil registration and church records.

Civil Registration

Civil registration of births, marriages, and deaths began in the eastern French speaking cantons, beginning with Genève in 1798, Vaud in 1800, Neuchatel 1825, Fribourg 1849 and Valais in 1853.

Nationwide civil registration began on 1 January 1876. The civil registers are kept by the Civil Registrar (*Zivilstandesamt* or *Greffier Civil*) of each political community. Access to records less than 100 years old is generally restricted to direct-line relatives.

Originally the *Zivilstandesamt* kept two separate sets of books. The 'A' registers contain local births, marriages, and deaths and the 'B' registers contain notifications of births, marriages and deaths sent in from other communities of local people that occurred elsewhere.

In 1928 the 'B' registers were discontinued and replaced by *Familienregister* (family registers) which record and collate, by family, the vital events that occurred in each family. The information comes from the 'A' registers and information sent in from other areas. Entries may include the couple's parents' names and notes about occupation, emigration, or other unusual circumstances.

Requests for information concerning ancestral families may be obtained by writing to the appropriate *Zivilstandesamt* or *Greffier*. Contact information for the civil registration offices is found at

<http://www.hochzeitsportal.ch/index.asp?aktion=standesaemter>

Church Records

Church registers (*Kirchenbücher, Pfarrbücher, Matrike, Kirchenrodell, Rodelli*) include entries for baptisms (*taufen*), marriages (*trauungen, heiraten, verehelichungen*), burials (*begräbnisse, beerdigungen*) and confirmations (*konfirmationen*).

Familienregister were kept by many parishes from the late 18th century and should always be used if they exist. Also amongst church records may be found citizen books (*Bürgerbücher* or *Bürgerodell*) which were kept from the 1820s and contain similar information to that found in the *familienregister* although they can also contain information of emigration from the town.

Church records can be written in German, Latin, French, Italian, or Romantsch.

Whenever possible, events concerning citizens of the home parish that took place in other parishes are listed in the home parish as well. The entries submitted from elsewhere (*Auswärtige*) are often in a separate section.

Baptism entries can be very detailed with the names of both parents, including the mother's maiden name, sometimes the names of the grandparents, and two witnesses. The women's maiden names are usually given in the church records throughout their lives. However, they may be buried under their married or maiden name.

FamilySearch have filmed records for the cantons of Basel-Stadt, Basel-Land, St Gallen, Thurgau, Zurich, Luzern, Genève and Vaud. The records are in the local archives for the cantons of Zurich, Winterthur, Basel-Stadt, Basel-Land, Solothurn, Neuchatel and Lausanne. Elsewhere they are in the archives of the civil registrar.

What you already know

Surname

Christian name

Country

County/Province

Town/Parish

Birth date

Marriage date

Arrival in NZ
Year

Children born not in NZ

Parents

NZ Certificates to obtain

Birth

Marriage

Death

Naturalization

Military in NZ

A Family Certificate (*Heimatschein*) issued by the Safien Civil Registry Office, Canton of Graubünden, for the family of Richard Zinsli and Ursula Meuli

Details in the certificate include the birth dates and places of the couple Richard Zinsli and Ursula Meuli, their marriage date, death dates and the names of their parents, including the women's maiden names. Details of their children appear on the right hand page.

Ort und Zeit der Geburt Luogo e data della nascita	Kinder/Figli	Stand und Alter der Nachfolger Matrimonio e foglio successorio	Änderungen im Stand, Namen und Bürgerrecht Cambiamenti di stato civile, del nome e dell'anzianità	Ort und Zeit des Todes Luogo e data della morte
27. November 1862	Kathrina		2. Dezember 1883, Ehe mit Schneller, Christ Johannes von Felsberg	
26. Februar 1866	Salomon			
17. Dezember 1867	Johann Reinhard			
2. Juli 1870	Thomas			

Ort und Zeit der Geburt Luogo e data della nascita	Stand und Alter der Eltern Matrimonio e foglio dei genitori	Ehemann/Marito	Änderungen im Stand, Namen und Bürgerrecht Cambiamenti di stato civile, del nome e dell'anzianità	Ort und Zeit des Todes Luogo e data della morte
24. Februar 1797		Richard, Sohn des Zinsli, Hans und der Catharina, geborenen Conrad		25. März 1873
12. August 1835		Ehefrau/Moglie Ursula, geb. Meuli, von Scharans, Tochter des Meuli, Salomon und der Anna Maria, geborenen Lutsi getraut in, am/Lougo e data del matrimonio 17. November 1861		27. Februar 1872

7105 Safien, am 11. Februar 1981

Für richtigen Auszug/Per estratto conforme
DER ZIVELSTANDSBEAMTETE
L'UFFICIALE DELLO STATO CIVILE

[Signature]

Check List

Hamburg Passenger Lists

UK Census

UK Alien Arrival

UK Naturalization

Archives

Swiss-German as a Language

The term "German speak Swiss" is not really correct, they actually speak Swiss-German "*Schweizerdeutsch*". Swiss-German is very different from the German spoken in Germany or Austria. Even more surprising, there is no written Swiss-German. People in Austria, Germany and Switzerland share the same written German language, know as "high German" "*Hochdeutsch*" - however the term "written German" "*Deutsche Schriftsprache*" is far more accurate. The written German is a very different from the Swiss-German, it is almost a foreign language. People in each canton have their own, very distinct dialect, which varies significantly. Again the language changes gradually from North to South and from East to West. Even though the French and Italian spoken in Switzerland are not absolutely the same as in the neighbouring countries, they are not as different as the Swiss-German from the German-German or the Austrian-German.

European Group Contact

Send research queries to the Contact on the **European Interest Contact** page at www.genealogy.org.nz

A group meets on the 1st Friday of most months at the Family Research Centre at 159 Queens Rd, Panmure from 4pm- 10pm. Continental advice is usually available, however please first check with the Contact to be quite sure.

Websites

www.familysearch.org Best free site to use
www.ancestry.com Pay to view
<http://feefhs.org/links/switzerland.html> Swiss Cantonal Archive Addresses
<http://hls-dhs-dss.ch/famn/index.php> Register of Swiss Surnames, 1962

Recommended Reading

Surnames of Switzerland, 1940 [11 Fiche].
 Suess, Jared H., *Handy Guide to Swiss Genealogical Records*, 1978.

FamilySearch.org: Research Wiki (Articles on all aspects of research)