

# Locating Your Ancestor's Town on the Map

By Joanne Ryder

When you finally locate the town from which your ancestors emigrated, you will jump up and down and shout for joy! I can remember laboring over a short phrase in Baptismal Register telling me the parents came from "Illingen prope Trier." Illingen (there are several in Germany) near (Latin) Trier. What a find! Now I needed a map!

First of all, I know that the town is near Trier. In what German state is Trier? How about "googling" Illingen and Trier? I got a great Google map showing both cities. I also learned that Illingen is a city, population about 19,200, in the German state of Saarland

Now let's get down to brass tacks with you ancestor. Is the name you found really a town? Had I found Saar, it would have been a state. The more information you gather about the town, the better chance you have of locating it on the map.

Maps can help you find, geographically, where your ancestors lived. You can download a map from Google or Yahoo maps or you can purchase detailed travel maps from Michelin at <http://home.att.net/~wee-monster/books/michelin.html>.

Gazetteers can help you to identify the town's county, government district and state. Never pass up Meyers Gazetteer. It's free at [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com). Reading Meyers is difficult but Research Guidance at [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org) has a guide to using it. There's a lot of info in Meyers if you take the time to ferret it out.

Historical maps are useful for seeing changes of boundaries. Try the Family History Library at [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org) > Research Guidance > Germany Maps for the German Empire 1871-1918.

An 1882 Atlas of the German Empire can be found at [www.feefhs.org/maps/indexmap.html](http://www.feefhs.org/maps/indexmap.html) (Federation of Eastern European Family History Societies), an 1879 map at <http://www.nrwgeschichte.de/deutschland/index.htm> and the Perry-Castaneda Library Map Collection at the University of Texas at <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/germany.html> for numerous German maps.

Watch out for the problems areas: the name you found may not be a town or it may be spelled incorrectly. There may be more than one of town with the same name in Germany (very common everywhere... not just in Germany). Since all nouns are capitalized in German, what looks like a town name may be a village, a region, a river or not even any one of them.

Once you find the town, learn all about it. What towns are close-by? Gather historical and geographical data. Why might your ancestor have emigrated from the area? There's so much data to be found on the Internet. However, don't ever forget that the Internet is just one of the tools we use in Genealogy. All the "old" ways still apply and always will. Remember... we're searching for our greatest treasures... our ancestors.