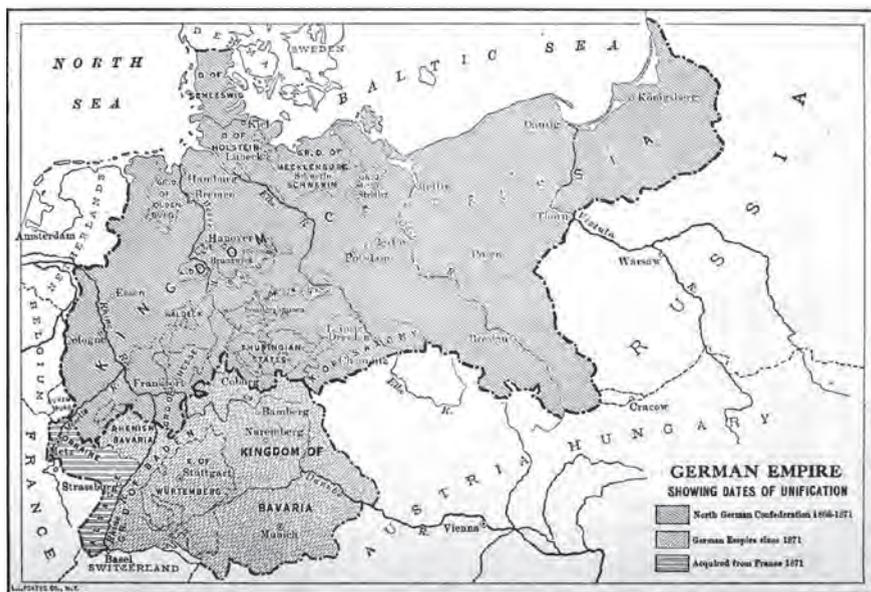


# Changing Boundaries – Changing Nationalities

David A. Norris looks at territorial changes in 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe and the resulting potential confusion in census records



A map of the German states, from Daniel Chauncey Knowlton and Samuel Burnett Howe, *Essentials in Modern European History*, 1917.

the place of birth, had instructions to “ask the place of birth of each person in the family”, and include “the name of the government or country if without the United States.” In practice, many census workers tended to lump all Germans together without specifying between the German states.

In 1860, the Census Bureau gave specific instructions regarding people of German origin. “To insert simply Germany would not be deemed a sufficiently specific localization of birth place, unless no better can be had. The particular German State should be given – as Baden, Bavaria, Hanover. Where the birth place cannot be ascertained, write ‘unknown’... You should ascertain the exact birth place of children as well as of parents, and not infer because parents were born in Baden that so also were the children.”

The 1860 rolls found 25,061 people from Austria; 150,165 from Bavaria; Hesse, 112,834; Nassau, 10,233; Prussia, 227,681; Wurttemberg, 81,336; and “Germany, not specified”, 598,392; for a total of 1,301,136. There was also a scattering of immigrants who reported birth in

**C**ensus rolls dating from 1850 onward recorded the birthplace of each person, whether a US state or another country. The unification of dozens of small states into the single monarchies of Germany and Italy, not to mention territorial changes made by conquest or treaty, made changes in the maps of 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe. This meant that many immigrants to the US were born in countries that disappeared, or merged with others, leaving lots of potential confusion in census records. We’ll take a look at some of these changes.

A quick browse through a history book makes it look like Europe enjoyed an unprecedented spell of relative peace from the end of the Napoleonic Wars in

1815, and the outbreak of World War I later in 1914. There was no continent-wide war in those 99 years. That said, Europe was peaceful only in comparison with previous centuries. Several small and what you might call medium-size wars broke out, as well as revolts and revolutions. Major changes, which caused numerous small states to merge into large nations, included the unification of Italy (1861-1870) and of Germany (1871).

Before looking at Europe itself in more detail, let’s take a quick look at how census takers were told to handle some of the complications of Europe’s changing borders.

Enumerators for the 1850 Census, which was the first to record

## Some German-Speaking States and Regions That Frequently Appeared in the U.S. Census

■ Alsace-Lorraine	■ Oldenburg
■ Anhalt	■ Pomerania
■ Bavaria (Bayern)	■ Posen
■ Brandenburg	■ Prussia
■ Bremen	■ Rheinland
■ Brunswick (Braunschweig)	■ Saxe-Coburg-Gotha (or Sachsen-Coburg-Saalfeld)
■ Darmstadt	■ Saxony
■ Hanover	■ Schaumburg-Lippe
■ Hessen	■ Schleswig
■ Hesse-Nassau	■ Sigmaringen
■ Lippe	■ Thuringian States
■ Lubeck	■ Waldeck
■ Mecklenburg Schwerin	■ Westphalia
■ Mecklenburg Strelitz	■ Wurttemberg
■ Nassau	

smaller German states or cities. Many were noted on the census, although little effort was made to count the natives of the small states, some of which sent immigrants across the Atlantic by the dozens rather than thousands.

In 1870, of 1,690,533 Germans counted, all but 253,632 gave their birthplace as a German state instead of "Germany". Of the 1,966,742 Germans counted in 1880, 624,200 claimed origin in "Germany" or "German Empire" rather than the old states. Instructions in 1870 and 1880 still stated, "Instead of 'Germany,' specify the State, as Prussia, Baden, Bavaria, Wurttemberg, Hesse Darmstadt, etc." By 1900, the instructions were changed to say, "By country is meant usually a region whose people have direct relation with other countries. Thus, do not write Prussia or Saxony, but Germany."

In 1910, questions were asked about the "mother tongue" of immigrants. Thus, for example, "if a person reports that he was born in Russia and that his mother

tongue is Lithuanian, write in column 12 *Russ.-Lithuanian*; or if a person reports that he was born in Switzerland and that his mother tongue is German, write *Switz.-German*."

Of foreign-born people, the 1920 instructions asked for specifics with an eye to territorial changes caused by World War I: "If a person says he was born in Austria, Germany, Russia, or Turkey as they were before the war, enter the name of the Province (State or Region) in which born, as *Alsace-Lorraine, Bohemia, Bavaria, German or Russian Poland, Croatia, Galicia, Finland, Slovakland*, etc.; or the name of the city or town in which born, as *Berlin, Prague, Vienna*, etc."

Instructions were more precise for some countries of origin for the 1930 Census: "Since it is essential that each foreign-born person be credited to the country in which his birthplace is *now* located, special attention must be given to the six countries which lost a part of their territory in the readjustments following the

World War. These six countries are as follows:

- **Austria**, which lost territory to Czechoslovakia, Italy, Yugoslavia, Poland, and Rumania.
- **Hungary**, which lost territory to Austria, Czechoslovakia, Italy, Poland, Rumania, and Yugoslavia.
- **Bulgaria**, which lost territory to Greece and Yugoslavia.
- **Germany**, which lost territory to Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Danzig, Denmark, France, Lithuania, and Poland.
- **Russia**, which lost territory to Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Turkey.
- **Turkey**, which lost territory to Greece and Italy and from which the following areas became independent: Iraq (Mesopotamia); Palestine (including Transjordan); Syria (including Lebanon); and various States and Kingdoms in Arabia (Asir, Hejaz, and Yemen)."

The instructions explained that it was essential to count by the nation where their birthplace was in now. "If a person was born in the Province of Bohemia, for example, which was formerly in Austria but is now a part of Czechoslovakia, the proper return for country of birth is *Czechoslovakia*. If you cannot ascertain with certainty the present location of the birthplace, where this group of countries is involved, enter *in addition to the name of the country*, the name of the Province or State in which the person was born, as *Alsace-Lorraine, Bohemia, Croatia, Galicia, Moravia, Slovakia*, etc., or the city, as *Warsaw, Prague, Strasbourg*, etc."

Instructions for the 1940 census also took a close look at central Europe: "For a person born

in any of those central European areas where there have been recent changes in boundaries, enter in col. 15 as country of birth that country in which his birthplace was situated on January 1, 1937. Note that the list of countries in Europe on that date included Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Poland. If you cannot find out with certainty the country in which the person's birthplace was located on January 1, 1937, enter the name of the province, state, or city in which the person was born, such as Bohemia, Slovakia, Croatia, etc., or Prague, Bratislava, Vienna, etc."

**The Unification of Germany**

The conversion of Germany from several hundred states into a single country took several centuries. Its final stages took place late enough in history to be reflected in the post-1850 U.S. Census. Some German states were important European powers, but many were only the size of a US county, and some were only a few square miles. Even the duchy of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, where Queen Victoria's husband Prince Albert was born, covered only 768 square miles in 1854.



*The city of Venice and the surrounding province of Venetia were under Austrian control until 1866, when it joined the newly united kingdom of Italy. (Library of Congress)*

Many of the tiniest German states were absorbed by larger ones before 1815, when 39 German states formed a loose grouping called the German Confederation. There were six kingdoms: Prussia, Austria, Bavaria, Hanover, Saxony, and Wurttemberg; more than a dozen duchies and grand duchies; and a collection of small principalities and free cities.

Austria and Prussia, the most powerful German-speaking countries, competed for influence over the others. Unification gained momentum under the Prussians.

After winning wars with Austria in 1866, and France in 1870-1871, the king of Prussia became Kaiser Wilhelm I of a united Germany.

The names of some German states were spelled differently in English than the original German. For instance, Brunswick and Bavaria are Braunschweig and Bayern in German. Some states had been divided among royal heirs, such as Mecklenburg Schwerwin and Mecklenburg Strelitz. Hesse, famous for the mercenary troops hired for the British Army by George III during the Revolutionary War, was divided into Hesse-Kassel and Hesse-Darmstadt for much of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Some detailed maps of German states and independent cities can be found at FamilySearch's Wiki page for German genealogy: [www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Germany\\_Genealogy](http://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Germany_Genealogy).

The states of Liechtenstein and Luxembourg, although they contained many German speakers, ended up as independent nations. Liechtenstein, placed between Austria and Switzerland, became fully independent during



*Before German unification, Nuremberg was part of the kingdom of Bavaria. (Library of Congress)*

the Napoleonic era. Luxembourg had a peculiar status, being part of the German Zollverein union, but ruled as a separate monarchy by the kings of the Netherlands until 1890. Small numbers from each country emigrated to the US during the 1800s and later.

The duchies of Schleswig and Holstein, home to a mixture of Danish and German speakers, were under Danish rule until the 1860s. After the Second Schleswig War in 1864, and the war between Prussia and Austria in 1866, the territories were taken under Prussian control.

Schleswig's tumultuous 19<sup>th</sup> century history was reflected in the records of an immigrant named Peter Cook. In 1870, Cook was a laborer in Mariposa County California; born in "S. Holstein", his age was given as 42. Ten years later, Cook was a farmer, with his birthplace given as Denmark; the same answers appeared in the 1900 Census. The birthplace of his wife Margaretha was given as Holstein in 1880, and Germany in 1900 and 1910. Meanwhile, several voter registers give Cook's

### Some Italian States appearing in the U.S. Census

- Lombardy-Venetia (under Austrian rule until 1866)
- Naples and Sicily
- Papal States (or States of the Church)
- Parma and Modena
- Sardinia
- Tuscany

birthplace as Germany.

The end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815 found Italy divided into several monarchies, with much of the north under Austrian rule. The Risorgimento, or Unification of Italy, took decades of political strife and three wars with Austria. Victor Emmanuel II of Sardinia (the most powerful of the Italian states) became the first king of a united Italy in 1861, but it was another ten years before unification was complete.

Large-scale immigration from Italy began in the late 1800s. As late as 1860, the U.S. Census

found 1,159 people born in Sardinia, and natives of the rest of Italy accounted for a total of only 10,518. Among them were small numbers from other states. For instance, take Joseph Castellucci, a *valet de chambre* working in the British legation in Washington, DC. His birthplace was given as the Papal States (various small possessions under governmental rule by the pope).

Two European empires, those of Russia and Austria (called Austria-Hungary after 1867), controlled several modern-day European nations. This caused discrepancies for some people from one census to another, as well as confusion or ambiguity in other family history sources.

Russia ruled Finland; today's Baltic republics of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia; Ukraine; and parts of Poland. Census instructions for 1900 noted, "Write Finland rather than Russia for persons born in Finland."

Austria granted Hungary equal status in 1867; Austria's emperor would at the same time be the king of Hungary, and the



LEFT: A map of the Italian states, from Daniel Chauncey Knowlton and Samuel Burnett Howe, *Essentials in Modern European History*, 1917.

RIGHT: Along with the German text on the front of this banknote of the early 1900s, the value was written in eight other languages spoken in the Empire of Austria-Hungary. (Wikipedia)



LEFT: A map of the Balkan states, from Daniel Chauncey Knowlton and Samuel Burnett Howe, *Essentials in Modern European History*, 1917. RIGHT: Immigrants aboard a ship bound for North America in the 1870s. (Library of Congress)

country was, thereafter, called Austria-Hungary. This unique “dual monarchy” was a major European power, but included an often unwieldy combination of peoples. Early 20<sup>th</sup> century banknotes carried German text on one side and Hungarian on the other; on the German side, the value appeared in eight other languages: Czech, Polish, Croatian, Slovene, Serbian, Italian, Ukrainian, and Romanian.

The U.S. Census included some guidance on handling the complexities of Austria-Hungary. Enumerators in 1900 were told, “Write Hungary or Bohemia rather than Austria for persons born in Hungary or Bohemia, respectively.”

Three partitions by major powers, in 1772, 1793, and 1795, ended Polish independence until 1918 as the country was divided between Prussian, Austrian, or Russian rule. The 1900 Census instructions said of Poland, “In case the person speaks Polish, as Poland is not now a country,

inquire whether the birthplace was what is now known as German Poland or Austrian Poland, and enter the answer accordingly as Poland (Ger.), Poland (Aust.), or Poland (Russ.)”

In the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Balkan countries of Montenegro, Serbia, Albania, Romania; and Bulgaria attained independence from Ottoman rule. Census instructions of 1910 said, “For persons born in Turkey, be sure to distinguish *Turkey* in *Europe* from *Turkey* in *Asia*.”

Among the people on census rolls who were born in Turkey or other Ottoman possessions were children born to missionary families. A family with a child or two born in, say, Smyrna or Constantinople, to a father whose occupation is clergyman, would likely indicate the family had lived abroad on missionary service.

Other than the federal censuses, you can also find immigrants listed in other tallies such as state censuses. Immigration and naturalization records are abun-

dant online, including indexes and databases dealing with the immigration centers of Castle Garden and Ellis Island, and ship passenger lists. Other perhaps unexpected sources of immigration data include Ancestry.com’s “New York, Census of Inmates in Almshouses and Poorhouses, 1830-1920”, which has index cards with information including the places of birth of the inmates, as well as the birthplaces of their parents.

A look at the 19<sup>th</sup> century mergers of Europe’s smaller states broadens one’s picture of history; adds depth to the information found in the census and immigration records; and might also add new and fuller understanding of a family’s history. ☒☒



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