



Ostfriesen Genealogical Society of America

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Frequently Asked Questions about Ostfriesland and Ostfriesen Genealogy

Tired of feeling left out of discussions of Ostfriesen genealogy because you don't know the difference between Ortssippenbücher and Geschlechterbücher? Have you hit a wall in your Ostfriesen research and don't know where to turn? Well, you have come to the right place! Our team of dedicated Ostfriesen genealogists has put together this collection of frequently asked questions to get you on the right track.

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What is Ostfriesland and where is it?

Ostfriesland, also called East Friesland or East Frisia, is an area in the northwest corner of Germany on the North Sea coast and includes the German islands in the North Sea. It is not a state or a province or any kind of administrative or political district. Ostfriesland is contained within the German state of Niedersachsen (Lower Saxony). The approximate borders of Ostfriesland are the Netherlands to the west, south to about Papenburg, and east to Oldenburg. The largest city in Ostfriesland is Emden. Other important cities are Aurich, Leer, Esens, Jever, Norden, and Wittmund.

Historically, Ostfriesland occupied more precise borders. [Click here to see a map](#) of a corner of Niedersachsen and Ostfriesland within it in 1780.

Who are the Ostfriesen people?

The Ostfriesian's have common roots with the Scandinavian Vikings. The original Friesian language is much older than the English language. Most west Norwegian dialects and the islandic language use words highly familiar to Friesian words. In ancient Ostfriesland they had a rule very similar to the Nordic "ting" rule a kind of local democracy — Contributed by Harm-Heÿen Broers.

Where can I learn more about Ostfriesen history?

Several Internet sites have historical information about Ostfriesland. Some of the English-language sites that you may want to check include:

- Wikipedia www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/East_Frisia
- GenWiki www.wiki-en.genealogy.net/East_Frisia
- Ostfriesland Tourism www.ostfriesland-tourism.com/my-ostfriesland/history.html

The OGSA has translated books on Ostfriesen history into English if you would like to obtain a deeper perspective on the region and its people. The following books and others are in the OGSA library and listed in OGSA's catalog and can be ordered:

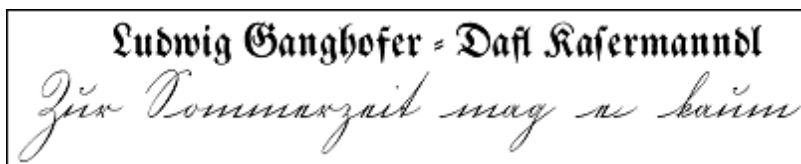
- The Friesens – People on the Sea
- The Ostfriesen – Who They Were and How They Lived
- About Rich Polder Farmers
- Storm Floods

What language is spoken in Ostfriesland?

Plattdeutsch, or Low German, is the colloquial language of Ostfriesland. It is closely related to Dutch, Frisian, and English, and differs markedly from standard German (High German or Hochdeutsch). Plattdeutsch has been supplanted by standard German in schools and government, but it remains the language of the home in much of Ostfriesland, especially in rural areas and among the older generation. Plattdeutsch is also spoken, particularly by the older generation, in Ostfriesen settlements in the United States.

What is Gothic type of script?

Old German Gothic handwriting and print differ noticeably from the Roman script to which most English-speaking people are accustomed—the letters are formed differently. Records in German were usually



written in gothic script until as late as the 1930s. And so, you will have to learn how to read Gothic script. An excellent guide to deciphering Gothic script, along with many helpful hints about the written German language, can be found in “Germanic Genealogy: A Guide to Worldwide Sources and Migration Patterns” available from the Germanic Genealogical Society of Minnesota through their store at www.ggsminn.org/forsale.php.

What is the Upstalsboom-Gesellschaft?

The Upstalsboom - Gesellschaft für historische Personenforschung und Bevölkerungsgeschichte in Ostfriesland is the genealogical society of Ostfriesland and is located in Aurich. The name derives from the Upstalsboom, a hill a couple miles south of Aurich in Rahe, which was a well-known medieval meeting place of the rulers of Ostfriesen people. The society has a library and research facility, publishes various research books and a newsletter Quellen und Forschungen. Their website is www.genealogy.net/vereine/UG.

What is the difference between a primary and secondary source?

A primary source is the original copy of a record - birth certificate, marriage application, church book, etc. A secondary source is information obtained from one of these records. A good example is an Ortsippenbuch (OSB) which is data taken from the original record and transcribed into a publication. Anything you get from someone else that is not documented would be a secondary source and should be checked.

What are some of the research materials available in the US?

There are a variety of excellent research materials available. Some are specifically for the Ostfriesland area and others pertain to all of Germany but are nevertheless essential to the Ostfriesen researcher. You will hear the names of these research materials mentioned frequently and you should be familiar with the types of information contained in them. Many of your genealogical problems will be solved with the help of the items listed below. In addition to the OGSA library collection, a large collection of Germanic genealogical sources is located at the Buenger Memorial Library, Concordia University, St. Paul, Minnesota. Their catalog is located at library.csp.edu.

LDS Church Microfilms

Microfilms from the Latter Day Saint's (LDS) Family History Library represents one of the few sources of original Ostfriesen records that can be viewed in the US. In addition, many of the Ostfriesen church books were microfilmed by the LDS and can be viewed at an LDS Family History Center. Record availability will vary by location and not all years may be available.

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Depending on the location and dates, early records may be in Dutch, records around 1811 - 1813 may be in French and later records will be in German. Despite the languages, only a few key words are essential and record patterns allow you to relatively easily focus on names and dates. The History Centers have word lists and research guides to help researchers and copies of the pages containing your desired records can be made for later translation if necessary.

The following link can be used to locate a Family History Center near you - familysearch.org/locations

The following link allows you to search the Family History Center Library catalog to find microfilms and other research materials - familysearch.org/catalog/search

Ortssippenbücher/OSBs

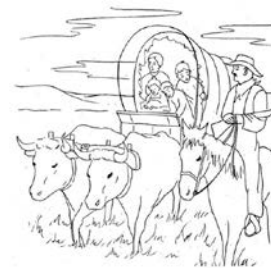
An Ortssippenbuch (OSB) is a book that lists all the families in a town using Church records and other local records as the source. The information in OSBs typically spans a period from the 1700s to about 1900 and includes names, occupations, family relationships, dates of birth, deaths, marriages, historical information about the Church or community and more. The OGSA has translated many of the OSB prefaces into English and information on obtaining copies is included in our catalog.



Please see the OGSA Community information/OSB page for more information on these books. We try to maintain copies of all the Ostfriesland OSBs in our library in West St. Paul, Minnesota and at our conferences. We also stock most of the OSBs at our office in the Minnesota Genealogical Society library in West St. Paul, Minnesota if you would like to obtain copies.

Wo Sind Sie Geblieben? – Where Did They Stay?

This series of books compiled by Hans Georg Boyken has been out of print for many years. The author excerpted information found in obituaries published the Ostfriesische Nachrichten, a newspaper covering Ostfriesen news published in Breda, Iowa known as the.



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one

The OGSA has obtained the rights to publish the six volumes with an index on DVD. Check our order form for more information,

Deutsches Geschlechterbücher

Over 200 volumes of Deutsches Geschlechterbücher give genealogical data about important or landed German families—in other words, they were more wealthy. However, information is also given on families of people who married into the published lines. There are seven volumes devoted exclusively to Ostfriesen research; however, the researcher should also check the indexes found after Volume 50 as some of the early volumes were not published by area. Ostfriesen volume eight may be printed in the next couple of years. We have a copy of Volume VII in stock. If you are interested in either of these new publications, please contact OGSA. These books are in German and the older books are in Gothic type.

An overview of the Deutsches Geschlechterbücher appeared in Volume 1, Issue 3 of the OGSA Newsletter along with a list of families that appear in the Ostfriesian volumes. The Deutsches Geschlechterbücher are available

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on microfilm from the LDS Family History Center in Salt Lake City, Utah, The Memorial Library in Madison, Wisconsin, and other major university libraries.

Quellen und Forschungen

The Quellen und Forschungen zur Ostfriesischen Familien- und Wappenkunde is the quarterly publication of the Upstalboom-Gesellschaft. Copies of this valuable newsletter are available at our conferences, in our OGSA Research Center and in the LDS Family History Center in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Ostfriesische Ahnenlisten

These pamphlets contain genealogies of Ostfriesen families. A complete set is available at the Upstalsboom-Gesellschaft Bibliothek in Aurich. Some issues are available through the LDS Family History Library in Salt Lake City and one of our members has almost a complete set of these genealogies. They are currently being printed in limited quantities and at no scheduled times. Copies are available at our conferences and at our OGSA Research Center.

Ostfriesische Nachrichten

The Ostfriesische Nachrichten was a German language newspaper printed in Iowa from 1884 to 1971 and whose intended audience were the Ostfriesen living in the United States. The newspaper contained news from various Ostfriesen settlements in the U.S. as well as news from villages in Ostfriesland. Of particular interest to genealogists are the obituaries that were published in the Nachrichten. Microfilms of the older issues of the newspaper as well as an index to the obituaries are available in our OGSA Research Center in the Minnesota Genealogical Society.

An article about the Ostfriesische Nachrichten appeared in Volume 2, Issue 2 of our newsletter. In addition, there are several indexes that have been printed. If you are interested, contact OGSA for more information.



Gemeinde Lexicon

A gazetteer useful for finding where church records can be found for villages that do not have their own parishes. The Gemeinde Lexicon is printed in German gothic type and is available through LDS Family History Centers. An excellent article about the Gemeinde Lexicon appeared in this OGSA Newsletter.

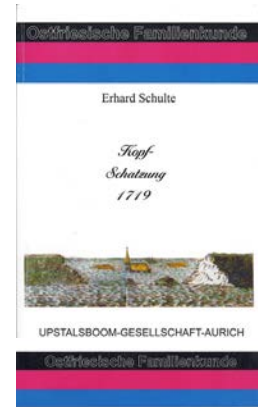
Meyers Orts- und Verkehrs-Lexikon des Deutschen Reichs

This 1912 German gazetteer lists every village, town and city in the German Empire. A detailed article about Meyers Orts, as it is often called, appeared in a OGSA Newsletter and that article is reproduced here. Meyers Orts is available on microfilm from LDS Family History Centers. A copy is available at the OGSA Research Center.

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Schatzungsregister 1719, by Erhard Schulte

This book is a listing of people in the flood-damaged areas of Ostfriesland in 1719 over the age of 12 who survived the 1717 Christmas Flood. The purpose was to each resident for the repair of the dikes after the devastating flood of 1717. Many villages in Ostfriesland are listed as well as the social status of the residents. This book was published by the Upstalsboom-Gesellschaft in Ostfriesland but is currently out of print. This is the closest thing to a census available from its era.



tax

Kopfschatzung 1757, by Wiard Hinrichs

This book is a listing of the households throughout Ostfriesland in 1757 over the age of 12 to help raise tax revenues to pay for dike repairs. Earlier attempts to raise enough money to pay for repairs had been inadequate and Ostfriesland had accumulated huge debts that could not be covered in the impoverished flood-damaged areas.



age

Germans to America

Germans to America, Lists of Passengers Arriving at U.S. Ports 1850-1893, edited Ira A. Glazier and P. William Filby. As the title implies, this book covers all of Germany, not just Ostfriesland. This series of books is quite comprehensive and there is a very good chance that you will be able to find some of your Ostfriesen ancestors listed here. The first 50+ Germans to America books are available in the OGSA Library and collections can also be found at the Minnesota Historical Society Research Library and the Germanic Genealogy Society collection at the Buenger Memorial Library at Concordia University in St. Paul, Minnesota and many libraries across the US with large German genealogy resource collections. The series is also available on two CR-ROMs from Broderbund Software.



by

What is the patronymic naming system?

In the patronymic naming system, a child's name is derived from the father's name. This traditional system of naming was used in Ostfriesland until it was banned by Napoleon's decree in 1811 when families had to choose a permanent surname. In this naming system, for example, Harm Caspers was the son of Casper Harms who was the son of Harm Janssen who was the son of Jan Simons, etc.

Knowing the ins and outs of the patronymic naming system can simplify the task of piecing together your Ostfriesian family. A more detailed description of the patronymic naming system is available from OGSA.

Why does a double ss in names sometimes appear as sh, hs, or ß?

What was intended as a double ss in names sometimes appears as sh, hs, or an ß as in Janssen, Janshen, Janhsen or Buss, Buß, Bush, or Buhs. Those that spell their name with the hs or sh, think that is correct and say that is the way it has been spelled for generations. That can be true and so they continue to use the spelling. In very early hand writing the scripted h and s appear to be similar and the general population was not literate

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in those times. As the shape of the letters changed to what we now accept as German script, the similarities of h and s faded and a different form of the letters evolved. When the older records were read, the h in the ss combination was read as hs or sh according to what was then known to be the shape of the letters.

You may also see something that looks like a capital B, in reality a ß. This letter is also used as the double s.

What are kluntjes?

Kluntje's are sugar rock candies that are placed in the porcelain tea cup. The candy makes a "crackling" sound as the hot tea is poured into the cup. Kluntje's come in larger and smaller sizes and can be purchased in every "SuperMarkt" or "LebensMittel" in Ostfriesland.

What are some of the common sayings in Ostfriesland?

Moin!

Many Germans do say Moin in the morning and think of it as a short form of Morgen. In Ostfriesland (and other parts of the north), the "Moin" is short for "Moijen Dach", which means "(have a) nice day" and can be used the whole day. And in Ostfriesland (at least outside the cities) everyone you see is greeted with "Moin" whether you know them or not. That's a wonderful thing to experience every time I go there. Thanks to Gerriet Backer

My cousin told me it also distinguishes the "tourist" from the Ostfriesen. Tourists say "Guten Morgen" or "Hallo", Friesen residents say "Moin!" Many no longer use this ethnic greeting, but rather use "Hallo" or "Guten Morgen". Confuse them and use Moin!

Tschüß! - Goodbye!

Eala Frya Fresena! Lever Dod as Slaav!

This is an old Frisian saying, developed or popularized in the last century as a form of greeting and to assert one's "Friesian-ness" in the spirit of "Frisian and Freedom". One would say, "Eala frya Fresena!" ("Hail, free Frisians!") and the other would answer, "Lever dod as Slaav!" ("Better dead than [a] slave!"). Thanks to Diane Epperson

The meaning of "eala" is not quite clear whether it means "Hail" or "well-being." Today it is mostly translated as "let us be" or "for the benefit of the free Frisians." And the answer normally given was "Lever dod as Slaav" or "better dead than slave." Thanks to Bernd Oldwurtel

According to others, a more precise translation of the second part of this phrase is: "Rather dead than a slave."

How do I make those German letters on my computer?

The German alphabet contains four letters that are not in the English alphabet. These letters can be entered into most word processing and email programs by using an "Insert Symbol" command or entering various key press combinations as indicated in the following table:

Letter	Windows Key Codes	Macintosh Key Codes	Two-Letter Replacement
ä	Alt+0228 or Alt+132	Option + u, a	ae
Ä	Alt+0196 or Alt+142	Option + u, A	ae
ö	Alt+0246 or Alt+148	Option + u, o	oe
Ö	Alt+0214 or Alt+153	Option + u, O	oe
ü	Alt+0252 or Alt+129	Option + u, u	ue
Ü	Alt+0220 or Alt+154	Option + u, U	ue
ß	Alt+0223 or Alt+225	Option + s	ss

Windows: Use the Alt key in combination with the numeric keypad. Hold the Alt key down while entering the appropriate character code. Note that there are two character codes. Either should work, but, depending on the software you are using, if one of them doesn't work for you, try the other one. Some programs, such as Microsoft Word, have their own mechanism for entering these characters.

Macintosh: Hold down the option key while pressing "u", then release and press the letter indicated.

Two-letter replacement: If you are unable to convince your computer to produce the proper German characters, use the two-character replacement. Do not use "o" instead of "ö", because Krummhörn is a place in Ostfriesland and Krummhorn is a musical instrument. The acceptable alternative to Krummhörn is Krummhoern.

If you have a laptop computer, the above listed codes may not work. Please check your manual for additional data.