



# Information Sheet Family Research (Genealogy)

## The General Procedure

Exploration of family history begins with its youngest members. Information from as long ago as possible is obtained from family members and the Civil Registry Office («Zivilstandsamt»). Direct yourself to the civil registry office responsible for the family's Swiss «Bürgerort», or community of origin and citizenship. Genealogical research in Switzerland is essentially centered around the community of origin and citizenship.

With a bit of luck, one can trace the lineage of a family back into the 19th century to the time before 1876. This date is important because up until then, baptisms, marriages and funerals were registered by the clergy. In Switzerland, these so-called parish or church registers are readily available and free to use for the general public. The State Archives of Graubünden hold microfilm copies of all the Grisons parish registers, which are accessible free of charge. However, the parish books are not easy to decipher, as they are handwritten and partially in Latin. Nonetheless, with the help of the parish books, in Graubünden it is possible to trace ancestors back to the 17th century. But the records do not all start at the same time. Whoever wants to explore the history of a family even further back in time cannot rely on access to systematic documentation, but rather must depend on individual sources and documents such as the deed of sale for a house, etc.

Before dealing with the sources of family history, it is worthwhile to study the available literature and relevant lexicons (see reference below to Documentation Genealogy). Today, the internet is also a source of valuable genealogical information, whose accuracy, however, often requires verification.

If you choose to conduct family history research, otherwise known as genealogy, allow yourself sufficient time. Searching through handwritten documents can be laborious and requires patience. Although you can expect to be supported in archives with qualified staff members, such as the State Archives of Graubünden, it is in the sense of «helping you to help yourself». You will have to conduct the actual genealogical research yourself. In addition to archives, there are also specialized associations which organize genealogists and provide valuable support. In Graubünden, this is the «Rätische Vereinigung für Familienforschung» ([www.rvff.ch](http://www.rvff.ch)). For the Italian-speaking valleys, turn to the «Società Genealogica della Svizzera Italiana» ([www.sogenesi.ch](http://www.sogenesi.ch)).

## Grisons Genealogical Sources and their use in the State Archives

### Parish or Church Registers

The most important holdings for genealogical research in Graubünden are the parish or church registers. They were handwritten by parish priests until 1875, and they registered



occurrences such as baptisms, marriages and funerals as long ago as the 17th century, depending on the municipality. For baptisms and funerals, the registered dates do not exactly coincide with those of the related civil status events i.e. births and deaths. The individual events were always registered in the «Bürgerort», or community of origin and citizenship, insofar as people there were aware of such occurrences, which was certainly not always the case after emigration or for soldiers serving as mercenaries. The priest also registered all changes in civil status in his community regardless of whether they concerned community citizens or foreigners and non-residents. Moreover, separate parish registers were maintained per denomination. Every parish register bears the individual mark of each particular parish priest. It was not until 1836/1837 that preprinted tabular forms became available, facilitating the search for people and significantly improving readability.

The original copies of the parochial registers for the Canton of Graubünden are located mainly in the municipal archives, but also partially in parish archives or at the Civil Registry Office. All Grisons parish records have been microfilmed. The microfilm copies of the parish records are available for inspection free of charge at the State Archives of Graubünden. Only the microfilm reader must be reserved in advance. Original copies can also be consulted free of charge at their various locations.

### **Civil Status Register**

When federal Civil Status Registers were introduced in 1876, parish records lost their legal and official significance. From 1876 onwards, civil status events (birth, marriage, death) were documented by state civil registry offices. The State Archives of Graubünden safeguard du-

plicates of the Grisons Civil Status Register. Municipal civil status registers distinguished between «A» and «B» registers until 1929/1930. «A» registers captured everything that happened in the community, regardless of whether or not the events happened to citizens of the community. «B» registers, on the other hand, concerned themselves with events that happened to citizens living outside of the community. These records are available for inspection free of charge up until 1916/1917. For more recent civil status events, Civil Registry Offices are the exclusive source of information.

### **Citizenship Register**

In addition to the civil status registers, starting in January 1, 1860 municipalities established so called Citizenship Registers, which were later maintained by the Civil Registry Offices. When a couple was married (or after the birth of a child), a new sheet or family entry was made in the Citizenship Register. Thus, all the data from an entire family (parents and children) could be found on one sheet. This means that the genealogist can obtain information much faster than with individual civil status records, making these kinds of records very useful.

As some of this data is very timely, the Citizenship Registers are subject to data protection rules in accordance with the specifications of federal civil status legislation. With regard to Citizenship Registry entries made before 1910, however, it is possible to apply for access to the records free of charge. The written application must be justified and submitted to the State Archives (by email or letter), and the permit will be granted by the cantonal Office for Migration and Civil Law (AFM). For more information, please refer to the relevant AFM documentation which can be found here:



([http://www.gr.ch/DE/institutionen/verwaltung/djsg/afm/dokumentation/Buergerrecht\\_und\\_Zivilrecht/Seiten/Zivilrecht.aspx](http://www.gr.ch/DE/institutionen/verwaltung/djsg/afm/dokumentation/Buergerrecht_und_Zivilrecht/Seiten/Zivilrecht.aspx))

After permission is granted, Citizenship Register records in the form of edited PDF copies may be consulted at the State Archives of Graubünden. The permits are issued for a period of 12 months, after which time a new application must be submitted.

### **Recapitulation and Summary of the Rules of Access to Documentation**

- Parish Registers/Church Registers (from the 17th century to 1875): Open access and free of charge. Copies of all parish registers are available in the State Archives of Graubünden.
- Civil Status Registers (1876–1916/17, birth, marriage, death): Accessible free of charge in the State Archives. More recent documents from Civil Registry Offices or information about such documents are available exclusively and directly from the Civil Registry Offices themselves.
- Citizenship Register (1860–1910): Access to documentation is subject to authorization. Upon approval, the corresponding data will be made accessible in the State Archives. More recent documents of this type or information about such documents are available exclusively from the civil registry offices.

## Documentation Genealogy

The genealogical documentation of the State Archives of Graubünden includes references to individual families as well as general research material and reference books on genealogy.

<http://www.gr.ch/DE/institutionen/verwaltung/ekud/afk/sag/dienstleistungen/bestaende/familienforschung/Documents/Familienforschung042014.pdf>





Figure 3 Civil Status Register

(Excerpt Civil Status Register from Samedan, Marriage Register A, 1893

Call number StAGR CB VI 170/2)

Seite 30.3

Ehe-Register A.

Heute den Neunzehntigsten September eintausend achthundert  
Drei & Vierzig sind vor dem unterzeichneten Civilstandsbeamten erschienen:

1. Hefs, Jacob Heinrich Hefner  
 von Gersf wohnhaft in Gersf  
 Civilstand: ledig  
 geboren in  
U. Bauh Wies, den Neunten Mai eintausend achthundert  
Sieben & Sechzig Sohn des Hefs, Eduard, Heinrich  
 und der Dorathe geb. Niggli

2. Tratschin, Barbara  
 von Samedan wohnhaft in Samedan  
 Civilstand: ledig  
 geboren in  
Samedan, den Vierzehntigen April eintausend achthundert  
Fünf & Sechzig Tochter des Tratschin, Bernhard  
 und der Mettina geb. Niggli

Die Verkündung hat stattgefunden in Samedan den 6. September  
in Gersf den 8. September 1893.

Nach Prüfung der von den Verlobten nach Vorschrift des Gesetzes vorgewiesenen  
 Papiere und nachdem dieselben einzeln angefragt worden, ob sie sich zur Ehefrau und  
 zum Gemann nehmen wollen, hat der unterzeichnete Civilstandsbeamte auf ihre bejahende  
 Antwort die Ehe im Namen des Gesetzes als geschlossen erklärt.

Abgegebene Papiere:  
Die Genehmigung zur Vermählung  
des Civilstandsamtes Gersf.

Unterschriften der Ehegatten:  
J. Hess  
Barbara Hefs

Unterschriften der Zeugen:  
Bernhard Tratschin Vater  
Alb. Fuchsbauch

Mitgetheilt dem Civilstandsamt  
Gersf.

Der Civilstandsbeamte:  
Paul Casparis

