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A History of Census Records in the German States

The Census in German History from the Napoleonic Wars (1815) to German Unification (1871)

The wars waged by and against French Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte from 1798 to 1815 involved the invasion and conquest of many German states. All of them independent and far smaller than France, those states were totally incapable of fending off the invader who subdued even the kingdom of Preußen at the eastern borders of the German-language territory. Napoleon exerted not only military but also political influence over the occupied territories, founding the kingdoms of Württemberg, Hannover, and Westfalen. On the other hand, he put an end to the Holy Roman Empire of German Nations, which action led to the self-demotion of its emperor Franz II (an Austrian Hapsburg) to Franz I of Austria and also to the de facto separation of Austria from Germany.

With the defeat of Napoleon and the ejection of French governors from German territories, the liberated states sent representatives to Vienna, Austria for what became known as the Congress of Vienna. That conclave in 1815 resulted in the re-drawing of many borders across the German-language territory of central Europe. Excluding Luxembourg, Switzerland, and Austria, there were forty German states in 1816. That number eventually increased to forty-two, then decreased to thirty-eight over the next fifty-five years.¹ With most other territories in Europe already existing in the form of kingdoms or empires, several German states longed for a union that would allow protection against invaders, as well as make them an economic force to be reckoned with. This pan-Germanic thinking led to the formation of several interstate organizations.

The first census enumerations in German states were conducted in 1816 simply to allow the ruler

to know precisely the size of his state. Indeed, some states, counties, and even cities had conducted census campaigns as early as the seventeenth century (often under titles other than "census"). Rolf Gehrman provided this reason for those early censuses:

The growing interest of the early modern state, and especially of enlightened absolutist rulers in demographic measure as measure of the wealth of the state, led to a total count of the population. . . . these counts were considered part of the yearly balance sheet of the state. . . . The principle of yearly counting was maintained for some time after 1815.²

In several German states, counts were done in 1816 and repeated annually via a rather simple method: using the numbers from the previous year, officials determined how many persons had been born or had died by the end of the current calendar year and the numbers were adjusted accordingly. The data regarding births and deaths were taken from the records of the local churches. In only very rare instances were the names of residents recorded in those early enumerations.³

The first union of German states was the Germanic Confederation established at the conclusion of the Congress of Vienna. Henderson's description of the Confederation is illuminating:

The Confederation was a *Staatenbund* and not a *Bundesstaat*—that is to say, it was a union of sovereign States in which unanimity was essential before joint action could be taken and it was not a federation of States in which the members gave up some of their sovereign rights to the central power."⁴

The Confederation featured a parliament, but it was not a true legislative body and the men convening

in Frankfurt am Main were more like ambassadors than representatives wielding the power of the vote. There was initially no discussion of unification, because such a development would have necessitated concessions by some if not all of the rulers (mostly monarchs) whose states belonged to the Confederation.

The initial challenge encountered by the German states in the early days of the Confederation was one that the body had no power to address: customs. Merchants transporting goods on intra- and interstate routes were plagued by a myriad of rules, regulations, and fees that made life miserable for merchants and consumers alike. Some products crossed borders as many as ten times and the final prices to consumers rose to prohibitive levels. Of course, conditions were ideal for smugglers and states incurred high costs in policing their borders. The various solutions to the customs question eventually gave rise to the compilation of census records in Germany in the third decade of the nineteenth century.

The first attempt at coordinating customs regulations and revenues came from the largest member

of the Confederation—the kingdom of Preußen. However, Prussian action in this regard was perceived to be political as well as economic. According to Hahn,

...the process of unification in matters of customs was more than economic from the very beginning. Although the states involved in the establishment of customs unions were generally pursuing particularistic more than nationalistic aims, the customs unions dealt with the great political questions of the time—especially the matter of national unity and constitutional rights.⁵

The eastern provinces of Preußen enacted a customs union in 1818 and the kingdom's western provinces did likewise a year later. The two regions united in this effort in 1821, but no other states were interested in joining the movement under Prussian leadership—with the exception of the tiny Sachsen duchy of Schwarzburg-Sondershausen that found itself surrounded to seventy percent by Preußen; she joined in 1819 as a matter of self-preservation. The next

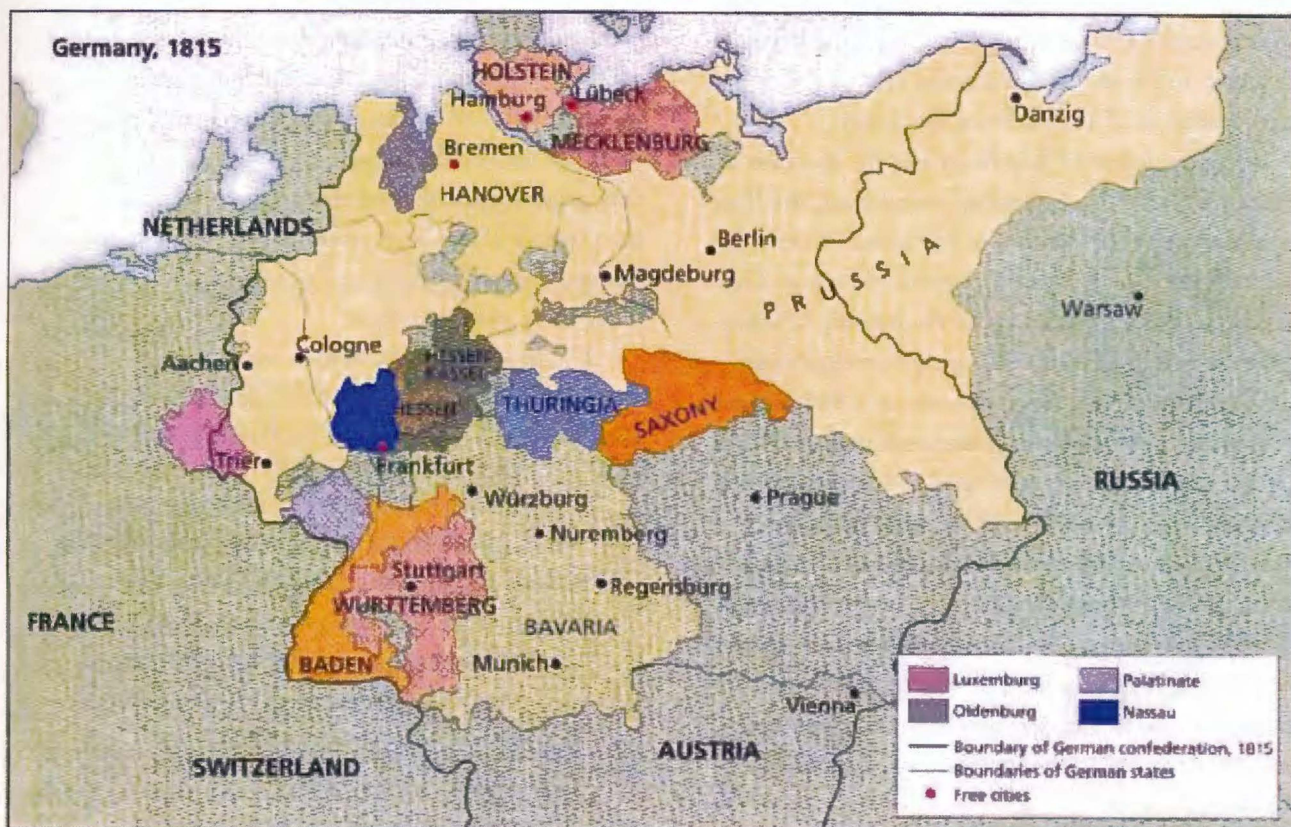


Figure 1. The German states following the Congress of Vienna in 1815 [<http://www.dukatz.com/maps/>]

state to align itself with the Preußen customs union was the county of Anhalt-Bernburg in 1826.

The grand duchy of Hesse (with the capital city of Darmstadt) was the first state to see benefits in joining the Prussian customs union and entered into negotiations in the late 1820s. In response to this development, two other states formed their own union in January 1828: Bayern and Württemberg; they shared many miles of borders and their treaty took effect on July 1, 1828.⁶ The Prusso-Hessian treaty was concluded just three weeks later and the era of competing German customs unions had begun.

It was precisely this movement that can be given credit for the expansion of German census records. On a strictly local level, census enumerations had taken place in several German-language territories of Europe well before 1800, but the records were compiled at various times, for different reasons, under numerous titles, and by different methods. Countless towns, cities, counties, districts, and states recorded the names of some or all residents under titles such as *Volkszählung* [census], *Bürgerbuch* [registry of citizens]; *Haushaltungslisten* [lists of heads of household], *Hauslisten* [lists of residents], *Einwohnerregister* [lists of residents], *Bevölkerungslisten* [lists of residents], *Untertanenverzeichnisse* [lists of subjects], *Wählerlisten* [lists of voters], *Konskriptionslisten* [military registry], *Seelenregister* [lists of parish members], and several others. Population figures and statistics are available in some form or another for several German states before 1815.⁷

In order for the officials of any customs union to distribute proportionately among the member states the fees collected at border stations, a census had to be conducted at regular intervals to establish the precise number of residents in each state. Thus the first systematic census enumerations in most German states were instituted to fulfill the requirements of a customs union. Only then could a coherent picture of German census records emerge—generally and specifically. Gehrman concluded that the basis for the first German census enumerations of the nineteenth century was not demographic but economic.⁸ As evidence of this assertion, throughout the twentieth century, census compilations often included the numbers of dwellings, livestock, and even fruit trees.

Heads of Households	Male	Female	Total
1. Hans Lohf	1	1	2
2. Hans Lohf	1	1	2
3. Hans Lohf	1	1	2
4. Hans Lohf	1	1	2
5. Hans Lohf	1	1	2
6. Hans Lohf	1	1	2
7. Hans Lohf	1	1	2
8. Hans Lohf	1	1	2
9. Hans Lohf	1	1	2
10. Hans Lohf	1	1	2
11. Hans Lohf	1	1	2
12. Hans Lohf	1	1	2
13. Hans Lohf	1	1	2
14. Hans Lohf	1	1	2
15. Hans Lohf	1	1	2
16. Hans Lohf	1	1	2
17. Hans Lohf	1	1	2
18. Hans Lohf	1	1	2
19. Hans Lohf	1	1	2
20. Hans Lohf	1	1	2
21. Hans Lohf	1	1	2
22. Hans Lohf	1	1	2
23. Hans Lohf	1	1	2
24. Hans Lohf	1	1	2
25. Hans Lohf	1	1	2
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30. Hans Lohf	1	1	2
31. Hans Lohf	1	1	2
32. Hans Lohf	1	1	2
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77. Hans Lohf	1	1	2
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97. Hans Lohf	1	1	2
98. Hans Lohf	1	1	2
99. Hans Lohf	1	1	2
100. Hans Lohf	1	1	2

Figure 2. This 1720 census listed all heads of households with counts of residents by gender. [Stadtarchiv Heide, Schleswig-Holstein]

Many of the central and northern German states formed their own customs union in December 1828. However, Henderson suggests that they did so more in an effort to check the expansion of the two existing unions than to actually regulate interstate commerce.⁹ The states included in the *Mitteldeutscher Handelsverein* [Central German Commercial Union] were Hannover, Sachsen (kingdom), Hessen-Kassel, Nassau, Brunswick, Oldenburg, Frankfurt am Main, Bremen, and seven of the eight Saxon duchies (often referred to as Thüringen [Thuringia]). Those states agreed to not join any other union before 1834, but some of the smaller states in that organization began to defect as early as 1832.¹⁰

Thus by the 1830s, many of the states in the German Confederation were not only collecting census data annually for local purposes, but also reporting the statistics to their respective unions every second or third year. Those census records were kept solely for the purpose of the distribution of customs revenues and had nothing to do with such issues as parliamentary representation, military conscription, or taxation.¹¹ Due to the fact that some states employed different procedures, Michel concluded that such census records enjoyed only varying degrees of reliability.¹²

The Expansion of Customs Unions—and Census Records

Despite the fear on the part of some smaller German states that any expanding customs union that included Preußen would lead to greater political power on the part of the largest state in the German lands, many more states joined the movement.¹³ This resulted in the establishment on January 1, 1834 of a customs union called by one word without modifiers: the *Zollverein* [Customs Union]. The treaty establishing the *Zollverein* had been signed in 1833 and mandated that the agreement be extended after eight years.¹⁴ The *Zollverein* combined the two existing unions (Preußen/Hessen-Darmstadt and Bayern/Württemberg) with the kingdom of Sachsen, Kurhessen, and fifteen other small states, yielding a population of some 23.5 million.¹⁵ The member states were to enjoy the status of equal partners.

The foundational document stating the aims of the *Zollverein* and the regulations for census enumerations among the member states was published in 1834 and again in 1845.¹⁶ The opening paragraph justifies a census:

The member states have agreed that in order to ensure that the customs revenues collected by the member states (after the deduction of expenses, rebates, and discounts) are properly distributed, the population of each state is to be determined every three years. The procedure of the census should be identical in all states so that the distribution of revenues can be done equitably. The census is to be taken in December of every third year in every state.¹⁷

The original document mandated that a census be conducted every third year on December 1.¹⁸ (The 1845 revised version moved the target date to December 3.) Cities with more than 30,000 inhabitants would be allowed as much as three days to complete the process. If the date fell on a Sunday or a holiday, the next working day would be the target date. Other provisions stipulated that “every individual” be counted; exceptions were carefully defined. Many foreigners qualified as local residents and were to be included.

According to Hahn, the *Zollverein* “was not the product of one great foundational document, but rather a complex network of intertwined bilateral and multilateral treaties emerging from 1819 to 1833 with one common goal: a customs and commerce system with no internal fees and uniform external fees.”¹⁹ Nevertheless, several other German states refused to ally themselves with the *Zollverein* for a variety of reasons—the primary reason being a perceived net loss in revenue. Just four months after the founding of the *Zollverein*, Hannover and Braunschweig formed their own competing entity and called it the *Steuerverein* [Tax Union]. It began its function the next year and a census mandated on May 1, 1834 was to provide the population baseline.²⁰ The *Steuerverein* was soon expanded to include the northern states of Oldenburg (1836) and Schaumburg-Lippe (1838). During the 1830s, the other member states of the short-lived *Mitteldeutscher Handelsverein* joined the *Zollverein*. Most of the German states had taken sides by the end of that decade.

By 1840, only a few states were still resisting membership in either the *Zollverein* or the *Steuerverein*—principally Baden, Mecklenburg-Schwerin, Mecklenburg-Strelitz, Schleswig-Holstein, and the free historic Hanseatic port cities. However, the concept of a customs union proved to be advantageous and one by one most of the hold-outs acquiesced. During those years, the balance of economic

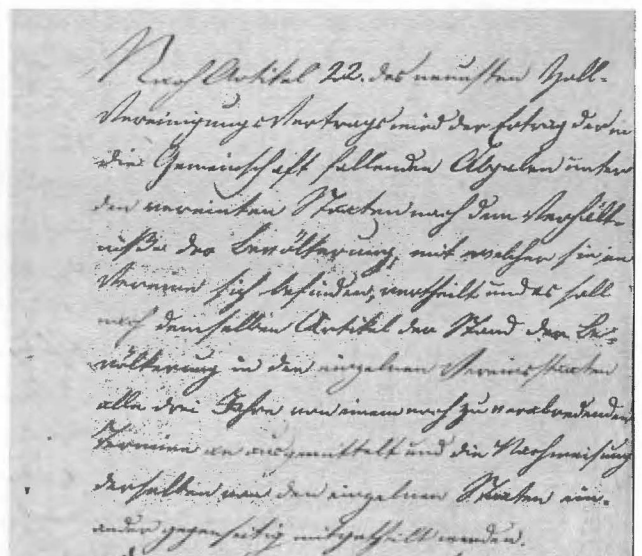


Figure 3. The Württemberg Ministry of Finance issued this statement in early 1834: “Member states of the *Zollverein* must conduct a census every three years.” [Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart E146 33380]

power was shifting toward Preußen. Several members of the *Steuerverein* bolted to the *Zollverein* and by 1854 the former ceased to exist.²¹

The *Zollverein* treaty was extended in 1841, 1853, and 1865 and census records supporting the provisions of the treaty were compiled every three years in all member states beginning in 1834. Schleswig-Holstein joined the group in 1866 and by then all but the cities of Hamburg and Bremen and the two Mecklenburg duchies were on board. In 1867, the union's conference that was opened by King Wilhelm I of Preußen produced a new treaty. The handwriting on the wall was visible to most Germans: the *Zollverein* could soon be replaced by a Germany founded primarily on political principals and only secondarily for commercial purposes.

Although the distribution of customs revenues was accomplished based on recent population figures, census lists were introduced in 1840 because prior data had been primarily statistical and somewhat doubtful (having often been taken from police or tax registers). However, states were still free to collect even more information than required by either of the surviving customs unions.²²

The innovation of 1840 was crucial, resulting in the appearance of individuals' names on lists compiled throughout much of Germany. The individuals listed were usually the home owners or heads of households, the remaining inhabitants being represented simply by numbers of persons in gender and age categories.

The *Zollverein* did not mandate enumeration procedures until 1843 with this regulation: "A true counting of each person living in each house is to take place..." Enumerators were no longer allowed to simply use previously-collected listings of residents compiled for other purposes, such as residential registration or church *Seelenregister*.²³ The month of December was chosen by the member states as the best time for the collection of census data, believing that most people would be home in that season.

Gehrmann stated that listings of inhabitants by name were rare in the early census years and concluded that "...1846 must be established as the year of reference, and not 1834..."²⁴ However, many of the records identified in the current study were

produced in census enumerations before 1846 and do indeed show individual names of adults and even children (see examples below). By 1858, the *Zollverein* (then representing nearly all of the German states) mandated the use of comprehensive lists and this new standard would be maintained henceforth.

Precisely how much revenue was collected each year at border customs stations in those days is not a critical consideration in this discussion, but what was paid out is found in documents collected in the current investigation. For example, instructions circulated to towns within the grand duchy of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach in 1858 and 1861 directed officials to remind heads of households that the *Zollverein* would allot 2 *Thaler* for each person correctly documented.²⁵ It can be assumed that there was not a state in Germany that could afford to undercount its population.

By 1864, the regulations stipulated that the names of all persons in all states be recorded on forms designed for that content.²⁶ That requirement was meant to provide for the counting of each person and simultaneously to prevent the counting of any person more than once. It is interesting to note that many German states had already introduced that content in their census records.²⁷

Michel elucidated the evolution of German census records in two eras—the first being 1816 to 1867. The lack of uniformity in census methodology described above makes his scheme appear logical. Another study traced the development through three phases over the same fifty-one years—the initial one being from 1816 to 1834.²⁸ That last year was chosen due to the founding of the *Zollverein*. Their second phase lasted from 1834 to 1852 when the *Steuerverein* broke down and the *Zollverein* emerged as the great customs power. The third phase lasted from 1852 to 1867 when the first all-German census was enumerated. Both studies portrayed the introduction of the every-name lists in 1840 (in Preußen) and 1843 (in the entire *Zollverein*) as a critical innovation in the content of census records.



Figure 4. Most of the northern German states were hesitant to join the Zollverein. [<http://www.paedagogik.net/wochenthemen/bismarck/zollverein.html>]

Census Records by State from 1816 to 1864

Documents exhibited in this book adequately illustrate the conclusion that German states were free to mandate and carry out census campaigns whenever needed until or unless they joined one of the customs unions mentioned above. Even if they belonged to an organization such as the *Zollverein*, they were free to collect more than the required data and to design their own enumeration pages. Kraus summarized this condition: "The methods used to collect the population data varied constantly, not only from year to year within a state, but also from state to state."²⁹ A review of the table showing the extensive variation of contents of census enumerations in the duchy of Sachsen-Altenburg, e.g., supports that statement (see Chapter 28). At the opposite end of the spectrum is the principality of Schaumburg-Lippe: identical content items were used there for five consecutive census campaigns from 1839 through 1852, then a new set of items was recorded identically in four more enumerations from 1855 through 1864 (see Chapter 34). For details on each of the thirty-eight states of the German Empire, see Chapters 5–42.

The Regional Character of German Census Records

The census data compiled in accordance with the statutes of the various German customs unions from 1818 to 1864 represent the third most important source of genealogical data for all Germans (following church records and civil records).³⁰ During that time period, each census was mandated and enumerated by the province, reflecting the tradition of particularism—the primacy of the state over the nation. Even as late as 1916, instructions for the conduct of the census were issued by government entities in the capital cities of several states—not in the imperial offices in Berlin. For example, users of census records will note that the 1890 census was carried out by officials of the duchy of Anhalt for its citizens. The data belonged to the duchy and were simply shared with the empire. The content of the Anhalt census pages conformed to the requirements of the empire, but the format and layout of those pages was determined locally. In many respects, the census records of the thirty-eight states of the German Empire (1871–1918) are similar, but each retains its local flavor.

When comparing the data among the states, one must consider the different instructions given the enumerators before 1867, even when based on the regulations of the *Zollverein*. Those regulations allowed the member states a great deal of autonomy in determining their respective methodologies for the collection of data that were not well delineated by the *Zollverein*.

Gehrmann was correct regarding the census history he hoped would appear some day: "...a comprehensive history can only be written with the help of archival sources."³¹ He also stated that "only the primary resources" can resolve questions regarding census methodology in Germany before 1867.³² The details presented in this book were compiled through an examination of the holdings of hundreds of provincial, regional, county, and city archives in modern Germany, France, and Poland. It would be close to impossible to fill all of the gaps in the tables presented in the following chapters, but determined researchers will likely make the attempt to do so.

Researchers in the United States and several other nations where every-name census records were compiled in the nineteenth century may wonder whether it is reasonable to expect to find such records in Germany. Gehrman wrote, "every census of this order before 1840 must be considered exceptional. Such exceptions exist, but they are rare."³³ With the help of archivists in Germany, many such rare documents have been found and are shown in the provincial chapters. It is safe to assume that other similar documents can be found in the thousands of government archives in Germany as well as in other countries where former German territory is located—such as France and Poland.



Figure 5. As late as 1910, the grand duchy of Baden executed the national census under its own title. The forms used made no mention of the imperial government or the Statistical Office in Berlin to which the results were submitted. [Stadtarchiv Konstanz S II 12676]

Notes

- ¹ For example, the states of Hesse-Kassel, Nassau, and the free city of Frankfurt am Main merged to form the Prussian province of Hessen-Nassau in 1866. Henderson provides excellent detail regarding such changes in *The Zollverein*, 3.
- ² Gehrman, Rolf. "German Census-Taking Before 1871." (Rostock, Germany: Max-Planck-Institut für demographische Forschung, 2009), 6.
- ³ When more formal census campaigns were mandated, the practice of simply adjusting the numbers of the previous calendar year using birth and death data was done separately as a mathematical tradition.
- ⁴ W. O. Henderson, *The Zollverein* (London: Frank Cass, 1959), 10.
- ⁵ Hans-Werner Hahn, *Geschichte des Deutschen Zollvereins* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1984), 5. All translations from German by Roger P. Minert.
- ⁶ Henderson, *The Zollverein*, 41.
- ⁷ For statistical census years for all German states since 1816, see Antje Kraus, *Quellen zur Bevölkerungsstatistik Deutschlands 1815–1871* (Boppard am Rhein, Germany: Harald Boldt, 1980).
- ⁸ Gehrman, "German Census-Taking," 6.
- ⁹ Henderson, *The Zollverein*, 57–61.
- ¹⁰ Henderson, *The Zollverein*, 68–69, 83.
- ¹¹ There were no representative assemblies constituted by population within the German Confederation.
- ¹² Harald Michel, "Volkszählungen in Deutschland: Die Erfassung des Bevölkerungsstandes von 1816 bis 1933," in *Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte* 1985/II, (Berlin: DeGruyter), 80.
- ¹³ Most German monarchs of the era were ready and willing to exclude Austria from the pan-German political movement. The total resolution of the Austrian question did not come until the short but decisive 1866 war in which the Prussian army easily routed the Austrians in Bohemia (Königgrätz).
- ¹⁴ Hahn, *Geschichte des Deutschen Zollvereins*, 102.
- ¹⁵ Hahn, *Geschichte des Deutschen Zollvereins*, 76.
- ¹⁶ Centralbüro des Zollvereins, "Grundsätze über die Bevölkerungs-Aufnahme in den Zollvereinsstaaten nach den Vereinbarungen vom 31. Januar 1834 und vom 23.

Oktober 1845," 1 (Berlin: Centralbüro des *Zollvereins*, 1845).

- ¹⁷ Centralbüro des *Zollvereins*, "Grundsätze über die Bevölkerungs-Aufnahme in den Zollvereinsstaaten," 1.
- ¹⁸ A copy of the original document issued in 1837 indicated that the date of the campaign was chosen because it was likely that the greatest portion of the population would be at home rather than during some other season of the year.
- ¹⁹ Hahn, *Geschichte des Deutschen Zollvereins*, 79.
- ²⁰ On March 12, 1836, the kingdom of Hannover issued a proclamation regarding the new census required by the *Steuerverein* (*Gesetz-Sammlung für das Königreich Hannover, Jahrgang 1836*). The text of the *Zollverein* regulations can be found under the title "Hauptprotokoll der Vollzugskommission in München vom 14.02.1834, Artikel 22."
- ²¹ Henderson, *The Zollverein*, 214–215.
- ²² Gehrman, "German Census-Taking," 12.
- ²³ Kraus, *Quellen*, 16.
- ²⁴ Gehrman, "German Census-Taking," 16.
- ²⁵ The author of the instructions was a Mr. Habersfeld, grand-ducal director of the second administrative district. The document bears the date October 28, 1861.
- ²⁶ Kraus, *Quellen*, 16.
- ²⁷ Gehrman, "German Census-Taking," 14.
- ²⁸ Statistisches Bureau Berlin, "Die Volkszahl der Deutschen Staaten nach den Zählungen seit 1816," in *Monatshefte zur Statistik des Deutschen Reichs für das Jahr 1879* [2], *Die Statistik des Deutschen Reichs*, Vol. 37/2; urn:nbn:de:zbw-drsa_3721 (Berlin: Verlag des Königlich Preussischen Statistischen Bureaus, 1879).
- ²⁹ Kraus, *Quellen*, 3.
- ³⁰ Genealogies of royal and noble families trace descendants back with reliability to the 12th century in some cases, but those families represent less than one percent of the Germanic population.
- ³¹ Gehrman, "German Census-Taking," 4.
- ³² Gehrman, "German Census-Taking," 4.
- ³³ Gehrman, "German Census-Taking," 15.