

Genealogy as a business project

Three years ago, I took my website "Genealogy Austria" online. By taking this step I turned my hobby into a career. Insights into four years of family research as a private business.

It may have been the rumours about a Hungarian princess in my line of ancestors that many years ago encouraged me to start doing some research on my family's history. While I was never able to find the princess, I succeeded in tracing the history of the women and men who were my ancestors back into the 17th century. My personal ancestry project brought me into contact with many Americans who showed an incredible level of enthusiasm for genealogy. Many internet forums and mailing lists are witness to the fact that they want to find out more about their ancestors from the "old" Austria. After all, almost four million inhabitants of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy emigrated between 1875 and 1910, close to three million of them to the United States. This realisation was a turning point in my professional life: I decided to turn my hobby into a career.

Genealogy – An American success story

At the outset of my new endeavour, I carefully prepared my new career by reading specialist literature in English and German, attending proper genealogy seminars such as the one held by Felix Gundacker, and doing "test projects" for friends and acquaintances to get a feeling for the workflows of such research projects. I also benefited

from my knowledge of the German Kurrent script which I had already learned in my youth in the course of my training as a typesetter. Early in 2014, I was finally ready: I took the English version of my website online. To my great surprise, first requests from the United States started to come in a few days later. They turned into first real projects that gave me the chance to quickly gain a lot of experience. When I took the German version of my website online a few months later I was equally successful.

From probate research to company histories

Since then, four busy years have gone by. In the beginning I mainly dealt with genealogy in its typical form. Meanwhile I have widened my fields of activity. Within the context of probate proceedings, I am for example being asked to carry out research aimed at finding heirs. On another line of business, I am also doing research on the history of companies or the lives of their founders. One of the most important aspects of my work is to analyse and study the available sources since the documents and records required for many of these research projects are not available online. Once I have located a promising



Johann Hammer doing research for a client. The positive feedback reaffirms his work. Quite frequently he hears that thanks to his work, long-guarded family secrets are finally revealed.

family's relatives in Lower Austria, and my clients personally paid me a visit. Together with an elder lady and

archival collection I like to visit the archive myself. Besides archives run by the churches, municipalities or provinces as well as the State Archives, my visits also take me to archives that are not so well known, for example seigniorial archives, university archives or archives at museums or long-established institutions. They frequently hold real treasures. Besides the "real" work I do in terms of research, the administrative part of my job should not be underestimated. Answering requests, writing reports or doing the paperwork takes up a lot of time. On the other hand, my daily work also has its memorable and "human" moments, for example when I can personally present the results of my research to my clients.

Moments of happiness in day-to-day work

One such example took place some time ago. I had successfully completed research on an American

her son, we then drove up to a small village in the Weinviertel region which had been the home of their ancestors. In preparation of the trip I had contacted their Austrian relatives and organised for us to meet with them in front of the village church. My American guests were pretty surprised to see the large number of family members who met us there. This trip turned into a very emotional meeting that really touched me. I am of course being paid for my services, but it is moments like these when I can see the happiness and gratitude of my clients that make my job so great for me.

Find out more about Johann Hammer's work on his website: genealogyaustria.com

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