

German Genealogy Collective

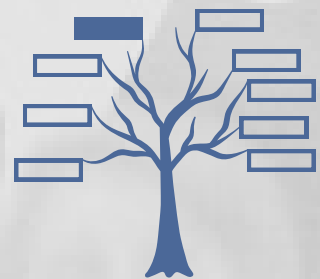


From Vows to Verdict: Weddings, Marriage Contracts and Divorces in 19th century Germany

By Andrea Bentschneider

- Please silence all electronic devices
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- Photos allowed





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From Vows to Verdict: Engagements, Weddings, Marriage Contracts and Divorces in 19th century Germany

By Andrea Bentschneider

A portrait of a woman with blonde hair and glasses, wearing a dark jacket over a blue shirt. The image is partially obscured by a blue overlay on the right side where the text is located.

Introduction

Andrea Bentschneider from Hamburg, Germany
lived and worked in New York from 1991-2001

Since 2004: professional genealogist in all of Germany,
more than 1,800 clients & over 2,000 research projects

2007-2017: consultant for Ancestry Germany

President of the Association of German Speaking
Professional Genealogist & on board of the IGGP

Introduction



Background on Marriage and Divorce in Germany

- Reasons for Marriage
- Marriage Customs & Contracts
- Death and Remarriage
- Divorce Process

Why Marry? Social Norms and Expectations

- Economic and social stability
- Strategic alliances between families
- Rarely for love

Why Marry? Social Norms and Expectations

Examples of your "not-so-normal marriages" by today's standards:

- cousin marriages
- significant age gaps
- marriage of relatives of a deceased spouse

Engagement & Permissions

Town officials

Parents
or
Guardians

*Local
clergy*

*Employers
for apprentices
or
servants*

Engagement as a Formal Arrangement

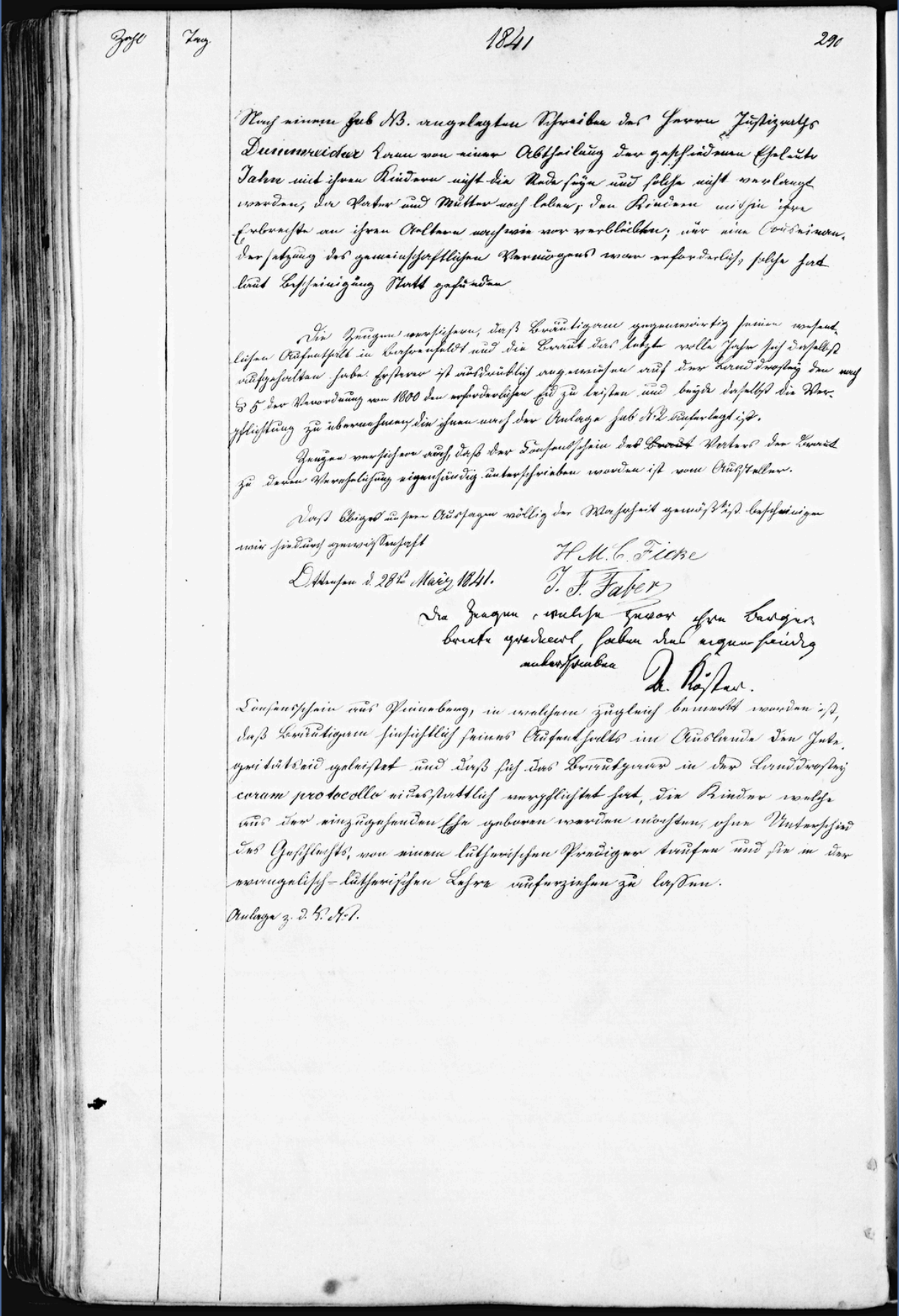
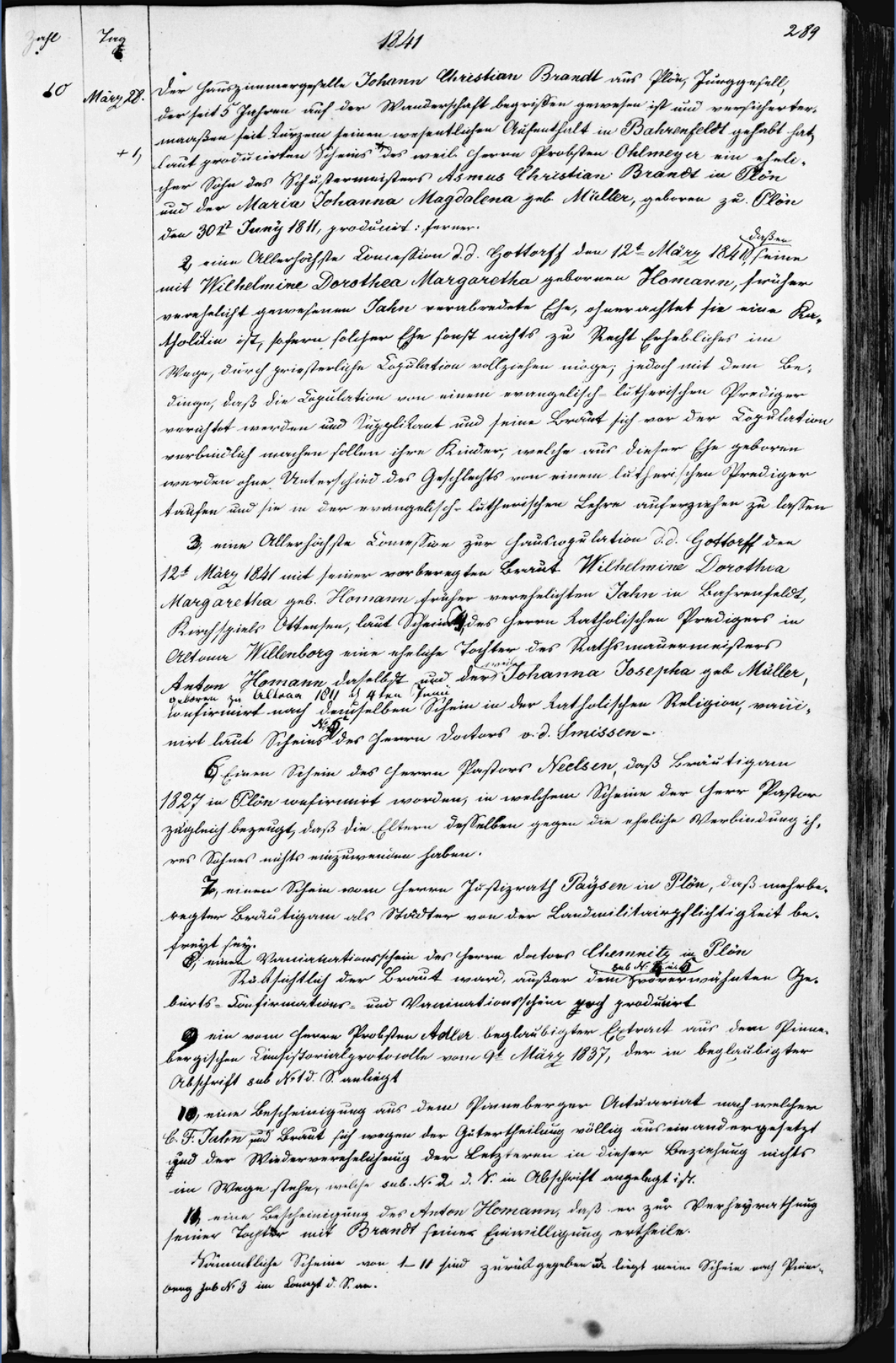
Legal and societal restrictions:

- Economic stability
- Social class and status
- Religious consideration

Engagement entry for
Johann Christian
BRANDT (Lutheran) &
Wilhelmine Dorothea
Margaretha HOMANN
(Catholic)

Lutheran parish of
Ottensen, Christian's
church engagements,
1826-1866
Year 1841, page 289

Archive of the Evangelical
Lutheran Church in
Northern Germany;
Hamburg-West South
Holstein Church District



A consent needed to obtain a marriage license

- Since the Middle Ages granted by city authorities, guilds, or trade societies
- certain professions were not considered a sufficient basis
- 1868: introduction of the principle of freedom of marriage in the North German Confederation
- 1871: extended to most of the southern German states

Age requirements

Until 1875:

=> women from age of 16 but needed the consent of their legal guardian until they came of age (21)

=> men were not allowed to marry until they were 21 years old

After 1875:

=> women were allowed to marry at 16, men at 20

Marriage Contracts

- Purpose: Practical agreements detailing:
 - Property and asset division
 - Inheritance rights
 - Child-rearing responsibilities
- Essential for families with assets or remarriage

[illegible]

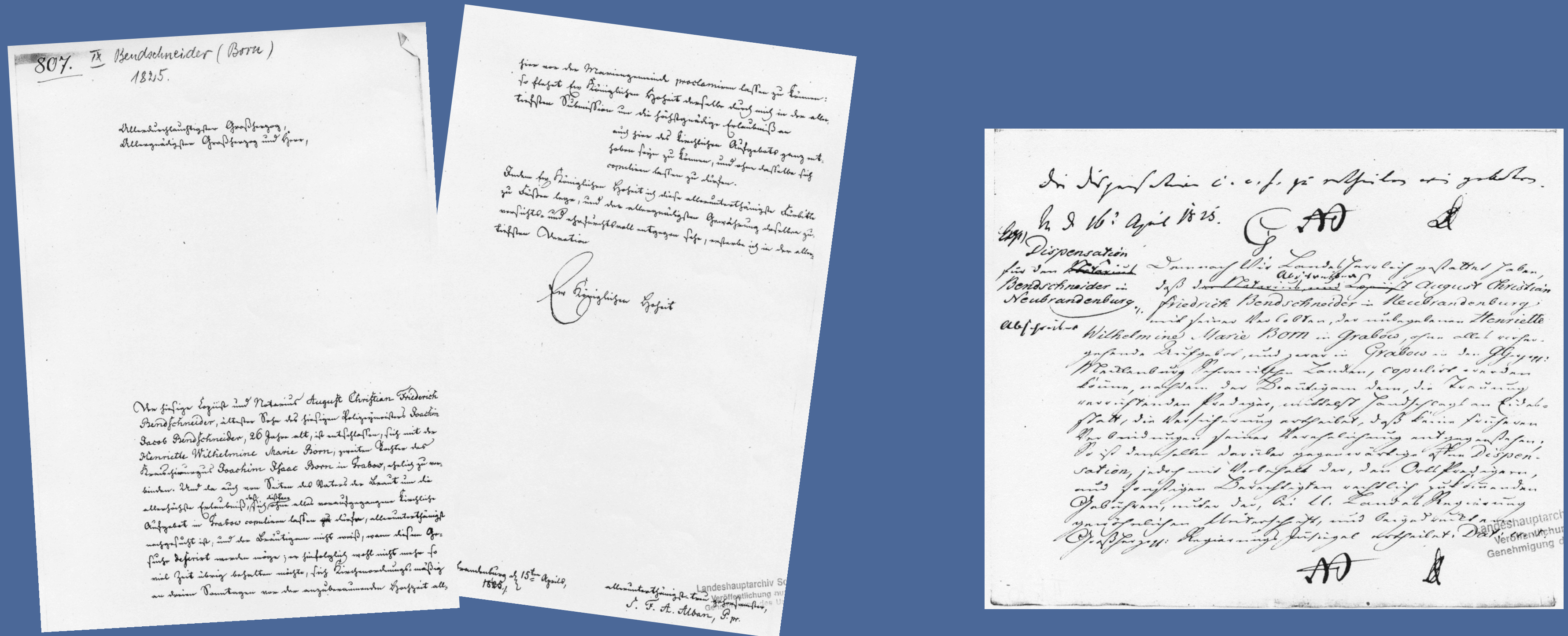
Andrea Bentschneider | German Genealogy Collective & Beyond History | Hamburg, Germany

Special permissions (dispensation)

Making the often strict marriage rules more flexible and allowing exceptions in individual cases.

- Age requirements
- Marriage without observing legal deadlines
- Marriage at home
- Interfaith marriages
- Bride or groom were not baptized

Example of a Dispense, 1825 in Mecklenburg



Source: State Archive Schwerin, Family files Bentschneider, Mecklenburg-Strelitz

Pre-Marriage

- Engagement
- Public announcements
- Pre-wedding rituals
- Polterabend

traditions & customs

Intention to marry was recorded

Proclamationation: at church on the two - three Sundays before the wedding

Wreath-making by friends of the bride

The myrtle wreath was a symbol of virginity, vitality and having many children

General Marriage traditions & customs

Unique practices & traditions

- *Aussteuer* = Dowry
- *Kranzgeld* = compensation
- *Unter die Haube kommen* = “getting under the bonnet”

Wedding Day

- Clothing
- Ceremony
- Food & Music
- Bride's run

traditions & customs

most brides wore black dresses

usually in the church, but also at home or
after the 1870s civil ceremonies only

rules and regulations applied here, too

walking groom and bride to the marriage
bed in the presence of the witnesses

Death & Remarriage

Legal and social implications of a spouse's death

- Challenges of remarriage:
 - Protecting children's inheritance
 - Property and household management

Death & Remarriage

Legal and social implications of a spouse's death

- *Trauerjahr* (Year of Mourning) traditions
 - Widowers could remarry immediately
 - Widows were not allowed to remarry before the end of 12 months
 - If the widow could prove that she was not pregnant, she could ask for a special permission to remarry earlier

Request of widow
Koehn to get remarried
9 months after the
death of her husband

Neustrelitz,
Mecklenburg-Strelitz
13 April 1798

Source: State Archive
Schwerin

18
1798.
V. Schwerin (Köhen)

Landeshauptarchiv Schwerin
Veröffentlichung nur
Genehmigung des Urh.

unv. P. M.

Überbringerin ist die Wittwe der zu Hofen-
zinsitz verstorbenen unterthänigen Leutnants
Michael Köhn: ein aus freiwillig
gebührender Kenntniss, der zu Neubrandenburg
gedient hat, Kaufmann Friedrich Bent,
schneider will gedachte Wittwen
Leibschafft: der Köhn ist aber noch
9 Wochen todt; 3 Wochen werden
noch mit dem Aufgebots verfahren:
die Wittwe ersucht auf gewisse,
daß sie nicht schwanger,
und bittet um dispensation
Aufgebots aus künftigen von
der Zeit und dessen Berücksichtigung
erfordert einen Vorstoß; infolgedessen
daß der Gehalt der Wittwe ausge-
zahlt werden

Neustrelitz d. 13 April 1798.

M. Scherpelz

Dem H. C. D. Scherpelz werden die Umstände genau bekannt sein, und die noch gebliebenen
10 Thaler in der die Fortbildung der dispensation, welche si pleet mit der Hand auszuföhren
müssen. d. 13. April 1798.
Exp. M.

Divorce Process

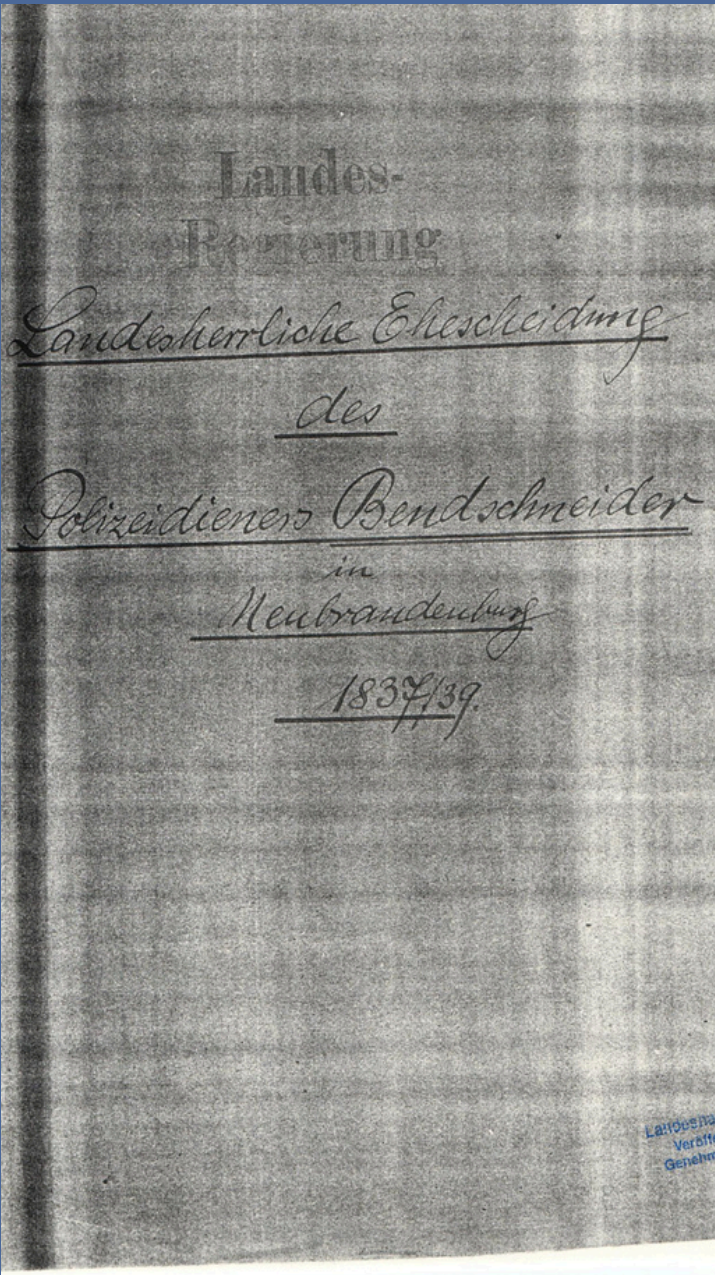
- Strict requirements for divorce
 - Agencies involved:
 - Local clergy, town officials, courts of law
 - State governments
 - Multi-step process:
 - Initial discussions with officials
 - Government approval
 - Post-divorce outcomes
-

Two examples of divorce cases

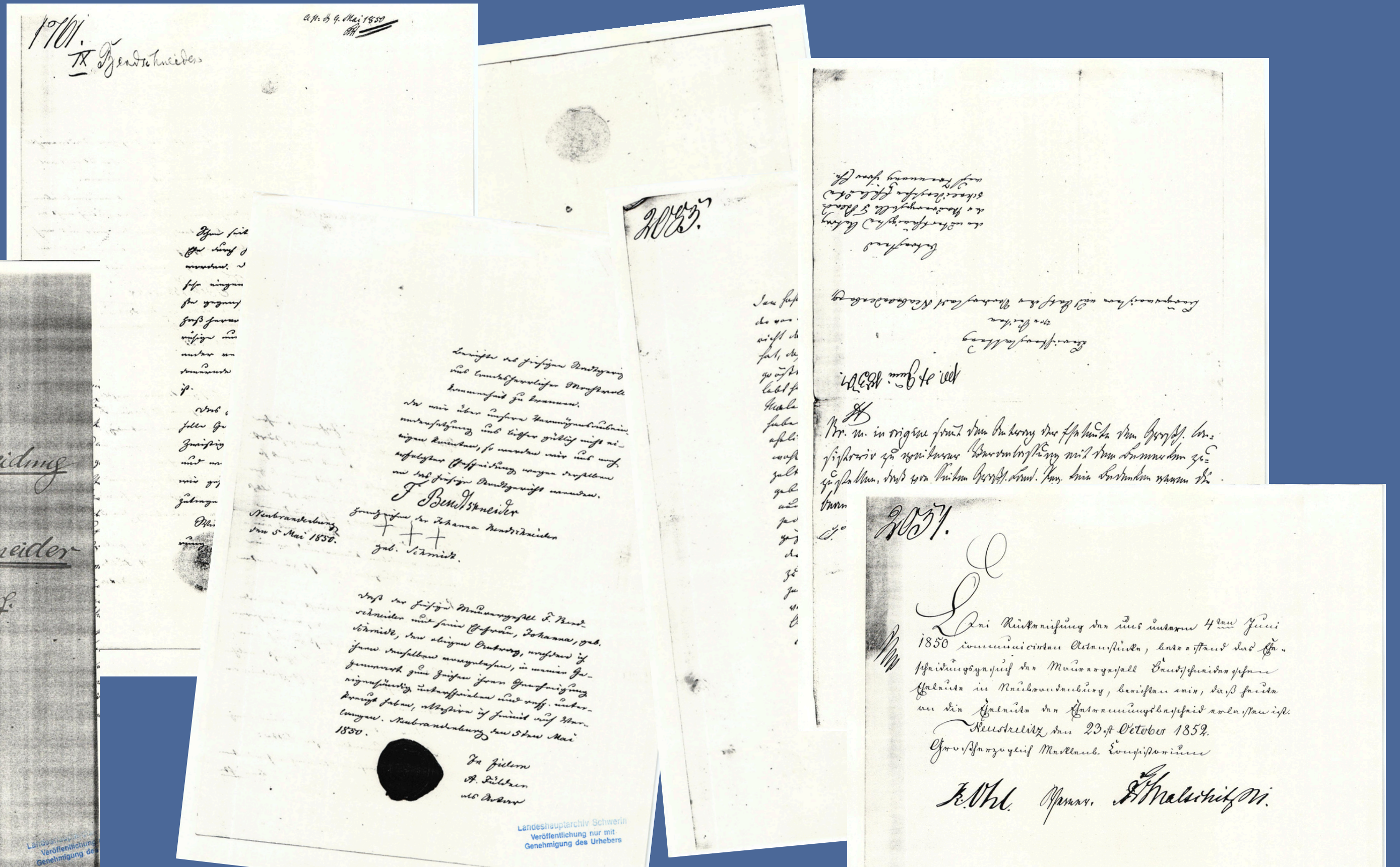
- In 1837/1839 of the police servant Bendschneider in Neubrandenburg in Mecklenburg
- In 1850 of the mason apprentice Bentschneider in Neubrandenburg in Mecklenburg

divorce of the police
servant Bendschneider in
Neubrandenburg
1837/39

State Main Archive
Schwerin



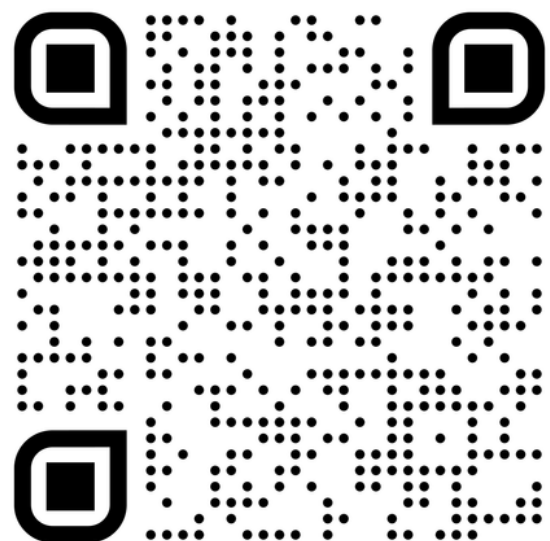
State Main Archive Schwerin



Summary and Why It Matters

- Marriage and divorce shaped lives and family histories.
- Marriage contracts and divorce records reveal unique genealogical details.
- Beyond church records: new insights into ancestors' lives.

Image: Collage of historical documents.



German Genealogy Collective

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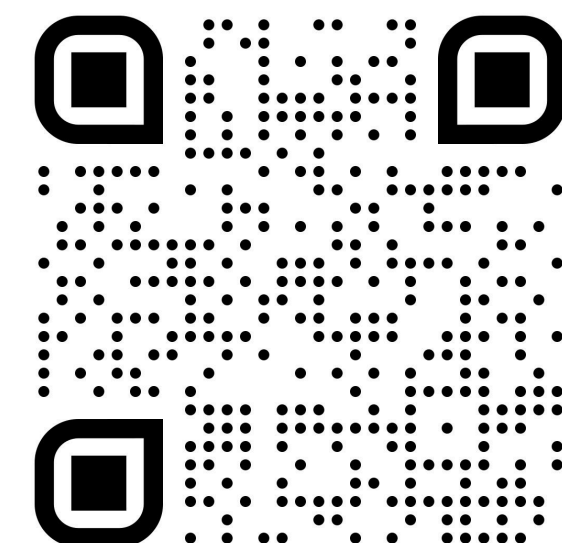
<https://GermanGenealogyCollective.com/Roots>



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