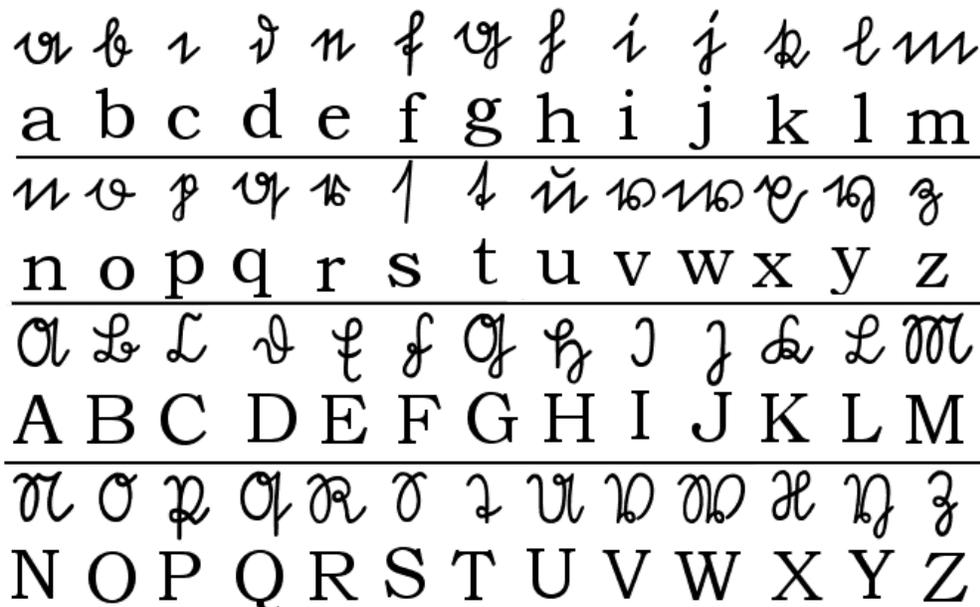# Reading German Gothic Handwriting: A Workshop

By Richard Hartman

The objective of this workshop is to help the researcher decipher some very difficult handwriting in German church and civil records. Many of us researchers are at least familiar with the Sütterlin (Suetterlin) script. See http://www.suetterlinschrift.de/Englisch/Sutterlin.htm for detailed information on the script. It is similar to the Gothic script (Kurrentschrift), but with bolder and taller strokes. It makes its appearance in the late 19th century. Trutype fonts for this script can be found free on the Internet, allowing the user to create the characters and words in Microsoft Word.

Sütterlin

The really difficult script is the Gothic (Kurrent or Kanzlei) script. This handwriting is in the oldest records. The handwriting in a single paragraph entry can include both Gothic and Latin scripts, sometimes within the same word or name. Sometimes surnames will be in Latin, but everything else would be in Gothic handwriting. The Kurrent script Trutype font can also be found free on the Internet. The 12-point font will appear as just bumps on the page, but increasing the size can bring out the letters. The researcher will find many of the entries in Gothic will appear as mere bumps and that is where the fun begins.

Create the names you are interested in research using the Kurrent script to get a feel on how the name looks. Handwriting can be pretty sloppy and you must look for the pattern. Letters can blend into one another, an example being, "St". The lower case "e", "n" and "u" have the same form except there is a loop above the "u". Characters are rarely written as cleanly as in the chart below:

Kurrent Script

This workshop will present examples of Lutheran Church record pages, allowing detailed analysis of the Gothic handwriting. It will not be the worst possible handwriting, but a reasonable example of what a researcher might find. The examples will come from the Zirke, Posen marriage records in the mid 19th century and will offer the opportunity to examine not only names, but also additional information presented in the record paragraph.