

German Surnames – Their Meaning & Origin

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Those of you who have German ancestors, did you ever wonder what your surname (last name) means, or how it originated? Dr. George F. Jones wrote a most interesting and informative book on the subject titled, "German American Names", in which he interpreted 12,700 names. In this and four ensuing articles, a look will be taken at the origins, and an attempt will be made to interpret as many of the German names on "The Towpath" mailing list as possible. (Incidentally, Wayne Wenning, of "The Evening Leader", placed a copy of Dr. Jones' book in each of the four local libraries: New Bremen, New Knoxville, Minster and St. Marys.)

The earliest German names were just a single name. It was not a first name, or a last name, it was just a "name". This "name" was composed of

two syllables with each syllable representing a "root", and each "root" having a specific meaning. This name was very important to the Germans, for it represented that whatever they were today, whatever they would be tomorrow, and whatever virtues they would pass along to their namesakes, all lay in that "name" and so the Germans chose their name very carefully.

Whenever the Germans wanted to emphasize some particular aspect of their "being", they used a tautological name; by tautological, it is meant that the name consisted of two different roots, but with each root having the same meaning. For example, an expert or adept swordsman might choose or be given the name "Schwerdecke" by his fellow warriors; "schwert" meaning sword, and "ecke" meaning sword so the name meant, sword-sword. Another example would be the name "Richwald" as "rich" meant ruler and "wald" meant ruler and so the name meant, ruler-ruler (please note, the ancient root "wald" meant ruler but today "wald" means forest). There are at least three such tautological names in the local area: Mesloh meaning "swampy low forest" or simply "swampy forest", (the tautology being that a "low forest" grows in a swamp; Huckriede meaning "marsh-reed marsh"; Klipfels meaning "cliff-cliff" and so one would conclude that the Meslohs lived minor

near a very swampy place, the Huckriedes in or near a very marshy place, and the Klipfels on a very high or steep or prominent (winsome aspect) cliff.

There are various suffixes (or root endings) of interest, which earlier were of considerable importance:

1. "er" originally meant that the person whose name ended in "er" was an owner of a farm at the terrain feature indicated by the two "roots", for example, the name, "Rothenberger" would mean that a person by the name of Rothenberg owned a farm at "red mountain"; in time it also meant a dweller at, or near, or on red mountain. "Er" can also mean that the person "Lisa doer of something", for example, the name "Becker" can mean a "baker" (as well as a dweller, or farm owner on a stream). From these several examples it is seen that the specific geographical location is both necessary and important for an accurate interpretation of one's name. Incidentally, some names end in "ert" but the addition of the "t" neither adds nor subtracts anything from the meaning of the name; the "t" was added to help in pronunciation indicating that the "r" was not to be trilled.

2. The suffix "en" essentially meant "at" the terrain feature the "en" followed. An interesting name in which this suffix is highlighted is the name, "Ziegenbusch". The ancient root, "Ziege" means "goat" and although a literal translation of "Ziegenbusch" can be "goat bush" there is yet another, and even more interesting! In ancient days, whenever the wine of the new harvest was ready for drinking, the inn or tavern keepers would hang a piece of greenery, such as a limb of a bush, on their doorframe to so indicate the new wine was ready. Thus, early on, all inn or tavern keepers were called Busch or Buschers or Buschman from this hanging out of a green bush. If an Englishman were asked as to where he was going, he would probably reply, "to the Red Lion" or "to the Silver Chalice", or to whatever the name of his favorite pub might be. A German so asked might reply, "Zum die Ziegen" or "at the Goat" and thus the name Ziegenbusch translates, "tavern or inn keeper at (or of) Goat Tavern". This practice of hanging out some "greenery" whenever the wine of the new harvest is ready to drink is still followed today in some parts of Germany and Austria; at least it was as late as July 1991, as this author can happily attest!

3. The suffix "ing" means "belonging to", for example, the name "Kuenning" means "belonging to the Brave (family or clan or group of warriors, etc.)"
4. The suffix "ingen" means the place where the "roots" people lived; for example, the village of Sulingen, in northern Germany, means "the place where Sul's people lived".
5. The suffix "sen" means "son of".
6. The suffix "ssen" originally meant "the first generation 'son of' to bear that particular name".
7. So much for "root" endings; let us look at the "roots" themselves. Essentially there are four major classifications of German name "roots":
 - Military
 - Terrain and Its Features
 - Professions
 - Miscellaneous, such as nicknames, personal characteristics, abnormalities etc.

Part Two - Military Roots

In the previous segment, we saw that the olden German name was a single name, composed of two syllables with each syllable representing a root and each root having a specific meaning. Root classifications are mainly Military, Terrain, Professional and Personal Characteristics

(miscellaneous). In this part, a look will be taken at names having at least one Military Root.

The early Germans lived in a tribal and agricultural culture, but they also loved war. Cornelius Tacitus, a renowned Roman historian (55-120 AD) wrote in 98 AD that "the Germans were a rough, warlike barbarian people". (Tacitus recorded his observations on German life and customs in one of his histories titled, "Germania" which is frequently quoted in numerous reference books.) The German men hunted, fished and made war, and although the women tended the fields and cared for family needs, the German men had an extremely high respect for their womenfolk. This respect was mutual and the women often accompanied their men to the battle site and performed as "cheerleaders" from the sidelines. Early German women also had military names; not that they participated in the actual fighting, but so they could pass along military virtues to their sons. Tribal battles were generally fought for three reasons: feuds, booty and for the acquisition and settlement of new lands.

North and central Germany had no natural barriers to protect the east and west boundaries, such as that provided by the Alps in the south. Thus, armies could easily flow from east to west and west to

east and, flow they did! From the west came the Celts, Romans, Gauls, and Franks. From the east came the Huns, Vandals, Goths (Visigoths and Ostrogoths), Langobards, and Burgundians, to name a few of the more familiar invaders. With all the military action through the centuries, it is easily concluded that the earliest German names would be predominantly military ones, and studies such as Dr. Jones recorded in his book, "German American Names", proved this to be the case.

Military names consisted of roots designating anything military such as weapons, military virtues, predatory birds and animals, victory, rule, fortresses, treasure, etc. "Battle" furnished the root, "Gund"; battleground, "wal"; battle axe, "bart"; spear, "ger"; sword, "ecke", "bil", "brand", or "schwert"; and helmet, "helm"; eagle, "arn"; raven, "ram"; bear, "ber"; boar, "ebur"; lion, "leuew", "leon"; stag, "hirsch"; victory, "sieg"; fortress, "burg"; rule, "wald", rich; treasure, "od"; courage, "mut"; determination, "wille"; strong, "hart"; power, "macht"; etc.

Very little is known of German warriors earlier than 120 BC except for that related in epics, eddas and sagas; however, some information was preserved by Roman historians along with observations and comments by Julius Caesar, prior to Tacitus's

writing of his "Germania" history. It is known that Julius Caesar (102 - 44 BC) recruited German cavalymen from the German tribes, as they were expert horsemen. Such horsemen were named, "Reiters" or "Reuters" (in the Middle Ages, knights were named "Ritters", a name reserved for the gentry). The German fighters were mostly armed with a shield, ("lind", "rand", "schild"), a spear ("ger"), axe ("bart") and sometimes a sword ("ecke"). During the Bronze Age, German smiths were excellent artisans and crafted magnificent, beautiful swords and battle axes. Since bronze had to be imported, few such swords or battle axes were carried as a result of their costliness; thus, spearmen outnumbered swordsmen. This is also seen from the list of "Towpath" names below where "spear" names outnumber the "sword" names 6-4. The expertise of the German smiths did not carry over from the Bronze Age, (1800-800 BC) into the early years of the Iron Age, (1000BC-1860AD), so their iron swords were not very strong or dependable, breaking rather easily. It was not until the centuries following Tacitus (100 AD) that swords became commonplace in the hands of German warriors.

When reviewing the following names, please keep in mind that the interpretation of such names is "generic"; one must know the circumstances under

which the name was "coined" to know its meaning accurately. A good example is the name "Luedeke", which has four meanings: Loud Sword, Illustrious Sword, Loud Army or Illustrious Army. Was the sword of the original Luedeke wielded with such vigor that it "sang" when whirled or was its clamor loud upon contacting shield or armor? Was the sword wielded in an illustrious manner or was its beauty illustrious to behold? Was his army loud in battle, or in victory, or illustriously led? Such answers are necessary for an accurate interpretation; in lieu of such source specifics, namesakes are free, of course, to choose whatever interpretation they find most appealing.

"Towpath" Military Names

Ahlers- noble and bright

Barber-bear-bear, strong warrior

Bertke-brilliant and loyal and sword

Billger- battle axe and spear

Bordewisch- battle axe and white or meadow

Brandt- sword

Busse- protection and strong

Casebolt- castle crossbow bolts maker

Conradi- son of Conrad, brave and counsel

Dietrich- folk and rule

Dilger- folk and rule and spear

Egbert- sword and brilliant

Erhardt- honor and strong

Frey- free

Gaerke- little Gearhard, spear and strong

Garman- spearman

Graf- count

Greiwe- count, overlord, governor, administrative official

Greber- official of a free community

Harrod (English) mighty in battle

Hartman- strongman

Hartwig- strong and guard

Heinfeld- home and master and field

Hellswarth- army or battle blacksmith

Henkener- home and master

Henning- belonging to Heinrich, home and master

Hoffman- courtier, or manager of a cloister farm

King- from "Koenig" meaning "king"

Koenig- king

Kuenning- belonging to the brave (clan, tribe or family)

Kuhn- brave

Kunning- belonging to the brave (clan, tribe or family)

Lampert- land and bright

Laut- loud, lute

Ludeka- loud or illustrious wolf

Luedeke- loud or illustrious sword or loud and illustrious army

Lunz- fuze, harquebusier

Mackenbach- guardian of the brook boundary

Maze- mousehawk

Meckstroth- power and straw, road builder

Phlipot- ??Phillip's Messenger??

Rabe- raven

Reiter- cavalryman, rider

Reynolds- counsel and rule

Ritter- knight

Roediger- illustrious and spear

Roettger- illustrious and spear

Schmidt- smith

Schweissguth- blood, sweat and property, estate

Siferd- victory and guardian

Smith- from "Schmidt" meaning smith

Thieman- folk and man

Turner- tower dweller or keeper

Victor- victor

Ward- watchman and lookout

Warner- protection and army, an alerter or warner

Watkins- clothes, battle and army

Wehrman- defenseman

Weseli- ??protection and army??

Wessel- protection and army

Wierwille- determination and fish pond

Will- determination

Local Military Names of interest

Beer- bear

Bruns- from "Bruno" meaning bear

Burke- castle

Cron- from "Kron" meaning "crown"

Falk- falcon

Frysinger- belonging to the free

Germann- spearman

Giere- "gerfalcon"

Hartings- army and battle

Heinrich- home and master

Heyne- home and master

Homan- courtier

Hoying- belonging to the guard

Kemp- champion

Kuckerman- cook, army and man

Leugers- lion and spear

Manger- spearman

Ruppert- famous and bright

Seitz- victory and protection

Walter- rule and army

Wenning- protection and army

Wente- protection and army

Willhoff- determination and court

Part Three – Terrain Roots

Earlier, we saw that the earliest German names were predominantly military as although the Germans lived in a tribal and agricultural culture, they loved war; it was their main occupation. As the population expanded, the need for sufficient and dependable food supplies as well as war equipment gave rise to those engaged specifically in farming and "smithing", thus introducing names involving terrain and professional roots. Here, a look will be taken at names derived from "terrain" features and those from "professions" will be discussed later.

When it was learned that the name "Mesloh" meant "swamp dweller" (actually "swampy low forest", but more fun is had with "swamp dweller"!), I became interested in the geography of North Germany. My ancestors came from the area of Barnstorf & Diepholz in the duchy of Hannover. A little village is there yet today called "Mesloh", about 15 miles east of Barnstorf, home to 34 residents with several having the name "Mesloh". Cornelius Tacitus, the same Roman historian who

wrote that the Germans were a "rough, warlike barbarian people", also wrote in 98 AD that the Northern European Plain, a portion of which we know now as North Germany, was "a land of vast swamps". Other reference sources report that North Germany was at one time, "a vast swampland". Although Germany has been dry for the past several hundred years, the early North German "terrain" names would predominantly connote some aspect of "water" - swamps, marshes, reeds, ponds, dikes, dams, thickets, hursts, streams, brooks, rivers, bogs, fens, moors, etc. Charlemagne started building the first canals in Germany in the year 800 AD to facilitate transportation between the Rhine and the Danube rivers in the south, between the Rhine and the Main rivers in central Germany, and between the Rhine and the Maas rivers in the north. As the population continued to increase, the need for additional farmland grew and canals were built to drain the swampy lands, a technique in which the Germans became quite expert. In fact, when the word spread throughout Europe in the early 1800s that land in the "Great Black Swamp" (New Bremen is on the southern edge), was available, Germans flocked to this area, as they had the expertise to drain the swamps converting them to rich farmlands (as we all know!). Their work on the

Miami and Erie Canal and other drainage projects is also well known in this area.

Central Germany is much like Pennsylvania and names originating there would reflect the rolling hills, gentle slopes, shallow valleys, meadows, groves, extensive farmlands, etc.

Names originating in south Germany would reflect the high mountains, peaks, crags, cliffs, rocks, deep valleys, heavy forests, etc.

Second only to war, the Germans loved freedom. Their military tactics were "attack oriented", with little or no thought given to defensive positions. Their living, although tribal, was also freedom minded - they shunned villages, fortified sites and walled cities. And so those not militarily named took, or were given, names of the nearest prominent terrain feature nearest their living site. For example, a man living near a pile of rocks would be called "Steiner", a mountain dweller would be a "Bergman", a dweller near a reedy site would be a "Riethman", a dweller along a stream, a "Becker" and so on. But what about a name that apparently has no logical connection such as "Hemmert" which means "swamp dweller"? James Bruns' maternal ancestors by the name of "Hemmert" originated in Bavaria, essentially a land of no swamps, so how did a person get a "swamp

dweller" name? Although there are no swamps in Bavaria today, the Hemmerts could have lived on a farm that hundreds of years previously was swampy land, and that knowledge passed along through the generations would be enough to name the first resident on that land, "swamp dweller"! Another interesting name is "Bordewisch" meaning Battle Axe & Meadow. Undoubtedly a Bordewisch ancestor excelled or distinguished himself wielding a battle axe(s) in a particular meadow and was given his name by his fellow warriors; crossed battle axes in the family's crest and seal would attest to such honor.

Earlier, the usage of tautological names was explained, which at the time of writing, numbered only three in this area. Since then (and with thanks given to James Bordewisch of Dayton, Ohio for his insight into the root, "wisch"), a fourth tautological name has been added - "Feldwisch" meaning "Field-Meadow" which indicates the meadow was exceptionally large. So, to the very swampy (Mesloh), the very marshy (Huckriede), the very steep or otherwise prominent cliff (Klipfels), the large meadow (Feldwisch) is added.

The suffix "er" originally meant an owner of a farm at the terrain feature named, but today, the "er" means a dweller at that terrain feature. Sometimes

a "t" is added to the "er" but an "ert" suffix has no different meaning than the simple "er". Likewise, the root "man" can also mean a dweller, but there is no significance in the root's meaning, whether it is spelled "man" or "mann". At other times some consonants are doubled, but the doubling does not result in any change in the name's meaning, so an olden spelling of "Mesloh" was "Messloh or even Messlow" but all three interpret the same, as per Dr. Jones.

When reviewing the following names, please keep in mind that the interpretation of such is "generic"; one must know the site or circumstances under which the name was coined to know its exact meaning.

"Towpath" names with Terrain Roots

Ashbaugh: Brook Among The Ash Trees

Beal: Hill

Beck: Brook or Stream

Bell: White Poplar; Part Of Ship

Belton: White Poplar & Fir

Boecker: Dweller By A Stream; baker

Boesel: Village Name

Bordewisch: Battle Axe Meadow

Bornhorst: Spring Thicket

Braddock: Broad Drydock

Brandt: Forest Clearing; Sword

Brantly: Dweller In Forest Clearing

Brookhart: Brake Forest

Brucken: Dweller At The Bridge

Bruns: Dweller Near A Spring

Dicke: Dweller Near A Thicket

Dickman: Dweller By A Pond; Fat Man

Donnerberg: Thunder Mountain

Elsass: Alsatian

Gilberg: Scion Mountain

Griesdorn: Gravel Thicket

Grover: Dweller In A Hollow

Hagens: Enclosure; Hedge

Hagerstrand: Dweller In An Enclosure & ?

Headapohl: Swampy Pond

Heinfeld: Grove & Field; Home & Master

Heitkamp: Heath Field

Hemmert: Swamp Dweller, wet spot in woods or meadow, home and bright, dweller of Hemme

Hertenstein: Wooded Mountain

Hickman: Enclosure Dweller

Hirschfeld: Stag or Deer Field

Hogenkamp: Enclosed Field

Holcomb: Elder Tree & Comb

Holleman: Dweller Among Elder Trees

Holmer: Island Dweller

Huckriede: Marsh-Reed Marsh

Lesher: Dweller On The Lesch River

Malik: Boundary Marker

Mansperger: Mountain Dweller; Sparrowhawk Man

Mesloh: Swampy Low Forest

Nedderman: Dweller On The Nette River

Niekamp: New Field

Pulskamp: Pool Field

Quellhorst: Spring Near A Thicket

Ratchford: Swift Ford (Possibly)

Reed: Reed, Marshland

***Sauerland: Southern Land (Mountain Range/
Westphalia)***

Schwieterman: Swissman

Slade: Reed Bank

Slattery: Dweller Near A Swamp

***Sollman: Dweller Near Muddy or Bog Land; A
Tollman***

Staubitz: Dust Village

Stauffer: Crag Dweller; Cup (Mug) Maker

Stegall: Foot Bridge; Eel

Steinecker: Farmer On A Stony River; Stone Corner

Steinke: Little Stone; Stone Corner

Strasburg: City Name; Road Castle

Sunderman: South Farmer or Dweller

Tomhafe: At The Oats

Utrecht: City Name

Vondenhuevel: From The Hill

Weinberg: Vinyard

Wellman: Dweller By A Marsh; Well Man

Westerheide: West Marsh

Wisner: Dweller On A Meadow

Wittenbrink: White Grassy Raised Ground

Wourms: City Name

Local Terrain Names of Interest

Aufderhaar: On The Marsh

Brockert: Brake Dweller

Dammeyer: Farmer At The Dike

Dearbaugh: Animal Brook

Dorsten: Doorstone

Feldwisch: Field-Meadow

Griesinger: Gravel & Spear

Honingford: Beekeeper At The Ford

Haberkamp: Oat Field

Haeseker: Dweller Among The Hazels

Heidt: Heath

Hittepole: Heath Pond

Hoge: Enclosure, Hedge

Holtzapple: Crab Apple

Huelsman: Dweller Among The Hollies

Katterheinrich: Master Of A Fenced Home

Klipfels: Cliff-Cliff

Morgendal: Morning Valley

Newman: Proprietor Of The Neuhoff (New Farm)

Scharfenberger: Dweller On Sharp Mountain

Stellhorn: Mountain Peak

Steinbrugge: Dweller At Stone Bridge

Waesch: Washing, Bleaching

Part Four – Profession Roots

Previously, it was seen that an expanding population increased the need not only for military equipment but for dependable food supplies as well, thus giving rise to those persons exclusively engaged in farming and "smithing". Here, a look will be taken at names deriving from profession roots. The author is greatly appreciative of additional insights into names, roots and customs provided by James Bordewisch of Dayton and Dr. John Dickman of Columbus.

The two oldest professions of men are hunting and fishing which produced the names of Jaeger (Yeager) and Fischer. Next, came the names of Schmidt (Smith) and Müller (miller) with Meyer (farmer) close behind.

The local "smith" was very highly respected as the German warriors believed that "Der Schmidt" had mythical powers to impart magical qualities into the weapons and armor they forged, giving that warrior an edge in battle, a "little something extra", highly desired, of course. German folk literature, such as "The Nibelungenlied", is full of magical swords, impenetrable armor, cloaks of invisibility, mythical dwarfs and elves. There are thirteen different ways of spelling "Schmidt" in German, which indicates the esteem the name "Schmidt" once held.

Regarding the name Miller, a frequently asked question has been, "Why do Millers spell their names Müller, Mueller, Möllar, Moeller?" The answer is twofold:

1) The Germans had various types and sizes of grain mills. Some were hand held, while others were quite large. Möllar derives from the Latin "molinarium" meaning "miller"; Müller comes from the root "mühl" or "muehl" meaning "mill".

2) The German spelling of Möllar and Müller was with an umlaut (ö & ü) on the vowels. The umlaut superimposes an "e" on the vowel sound for pronunciation, and is not generally used in America. Möllar became Moeller and Müller became Mueller. (Of course, by simply dropping the umlaut,

Mollar and Muller remained the same in America. If "Der Muller" ground white flour, he became a "Weissmiller" and if he ground brown flour, he became a "Braunmiller". This system of naming also held true in the case of leather tanning. A tanner of leather was a "Gerber"; if he tanned white leather, he was a "Weissgerber" and a tanner of red leather was a "Rotgerber". The root "miller" frequently appears as the second root with the first root indicating where the miller lived, or the location of the mill. Examples are Bahnmueller, meaning "miller on the path", Bachmueller (brook miller) Mosmueller (marsh miller) Rismueller (swamp miller), etc.

There are numerous roots designating "farmer", some of which are: Meyer, Myer, Myers, Meier, Mayer, Mann, Hofer, Hoffner, Bauer, Baur, and Baumann. A German once told me that the Meyers and Millers of Germany are like the Smiths and Joneses of America. The root "meyer" often appears as the second root, with the first root designating the location of the farm. (Klingenmeyer or "farmer in the gorge", Reitmeyer, or "farmer in the clearing".) The root "meyer" can also mean "manager" and this can be seen in the name of Kellermeyer which means "manager or keeper of the cellar", Hoffman, or "manager of a cloister farm" while a Hoffmeyer is an "estate manager".

There are several interesting peculiarities regarding farmer and other professional names. Whenever a man changed houses or professions, he took the name of the new farm, new house, or new profession to which he was moving while leaving behind his old name.

A similar situation existed when the olden Germans changed houses. The German moving took the name of the new house and left his old name behind. A famous example of this procedure occurred in Mainz in 1444 AD. A young man by the name of "Gensfleisch" (goose flesh) set up a printing press in the house of "Guttenberg" (good mountain). We know him today as "Guttenberg, the father of modern printing". There is yet another interesting item regarding the perpetuation of the "house" or "farm" name. **Farms were passed along to sons which naturally bore the house's surname but if a farmer had no sons and only daughters, whenever the daughter(s) married, her new husband then took the surname of the house (farm) thus keeping the farm's name intact.** This custom is called "Stabrut" (Low German) or, "Erbtochter" (High German), and on occasion, is still practiced today, most generally in North Germany.

"Towpath" Profession Names

Beck: baker, stream

Boecker: baker, dweller by the stream

Bowman: bottom of the valley farmer

Brinkmeyer: small farmer

Cook: from koch, meaning cook

Cooper: copper dealer

Dammeyer: farmer at or on the dike

Eschmeyer: farmer among ash trees

Fischer: fisherman, fish seller

Fledderjohann: cakebaker John

Gerber: tanner of leather

Gruebmeyer: farmer in the hollow

Hegemier: enclosed farm proprietor

Henschen: glove maker

Hoffman: cloister farm manager, courtier

Hoffner: farmer

Hott: hat maker

Hudson: son of Hut, also hat

Jagoditz: hunter at the swamp

Kellermeyer: keeper of the cellar

Kettler: chain maker

Knapke: miner, boy, page

Koeper: cap maker

Kuck: from koch meaning cook

Kuest: sexton

Maurer: mason

Meckstroth: road builder, power and straw

Meyer: farmer, or dairy farmer

Miller: miller

Moehlenkamp: miller and field

Moeller: miller

Mowery: mason

Mueller: miller

Newman: proprietor of the neuhoff (new farm)

Opperman: sexton

Plattner: armor maker

Riebel: turnip farmer

Ruedebusch: innkeeper of large hound tavern

Scheer: barber, shearer

Schmitmeyer: smith farmer

Schneider: tailor

Schroeder: tailor

Schroer: tailor

Schrolucke: tailor at swamp

Shinderdecker: shingle roofer

Shroyer: tailor

Sollman: tollman, dweller near muddy land

Stauffer: cup or mug maker, crag dweller

Stienecker: farmer on a stony river

Steineman: stone cutter

Steiner: stone worker

Strickland: land of knitter or rope maker

Taylor: tailor

Tontrup: village cooper, barrel or vat maker

Tostrick: spice seller at or near water

Wagner: wainwright (maker or repairer of wagons)

Waterman: wasserman - waterman

Wellemeyer: marsh farmer

Ziegenbusch: innkeeper at Goat Tavern

Local Profession Names(of interest)

Beckett: baker on the Ett River

Benner: barrel or hoop maker

Bigler: stirrup maker

Drescher: thresher

Eisert: iron worker

Eiting: burner, stoker, smelter

Gerstner: barley dealer

Holtzhauer: wood cutter

Honingford: beekeeper at the ford

Koesters: sexton

Kramer: shopkeeper

Kunstler: artist; artisan

Metz(ger): butcher, inhabitant of Metz

Millisor: mill(er) on the Iser River

Niemeyer: new farmer

Overman: chief bailiff, boss, superior

Piper: fifer

Pleiman: lead worker

Rempe: strap cutter

Sammetinger: belonging to velvet dealers

Schaller: public announcer

Schenck: cup bearer, innkeeper

Schumann: shoe maker

Strickland: knitter land

Turner: tower keeper

Weger: weigher

Wehner: wainwright

Weinert: wainwright

Winner: befriender

Wintzer: vine dresser, wine maker

Zangelein: little tooth puller

Zehringer: belonging to food sellers

Part Five – Miscellaneous Roots

This is the fifth and final part of the series, "German Surnames - Their Meaning & Origin". Here a look will be taken at the "miscellaneous" classification of roots which includes "physical characteristics", nicknames and religious origins.

Before proceeding with this article, one of the joys of this hobbyist onomastician (a studier of names) has been the finding of tautological names (Germans used a tautological name to emphasize a particular feature or trait of the bearer - it was an extra special name). To date, four such tautological names have been found: Huckriede (marsh), Klipfels (cliff), Feldwisch (field or meadow), Mesloh (swamp) - all terrain oriented names. And now for the first time in this area, a tautological military name has been encountered - the name of "Barber" which means "Bear-Bear". The original warrior given the name of "Barber" must have been a ferocious warrior having all the characteristics of an angry bear in battle!

Previously we have seen that Germans were given military names for their prowess in battle, names for terrain features near which they lived, or names for professions in which they were engaged. Germans were also given names which derived from physical characteristics, such as the color of one's hair or beard (Schwartskopf or black head, Rotbart or red beard), a Kraus was curly haired, a Kahl was bald, a Homan was a tall or prominent man, Kurtz, a short man. A restless person might be named Hommel (bumble bee).

Sometimes, nicknames became surnames over a period of time: a person called "der Fuchs" (the fox) or "die Gans" (the goose) or "das Eichhoernchen" (the squirrel, in time simply became Fuchs, Gans or Eichhoernchen. Other names were shortened such as Kelchner (Chalice Maker) to Kelch (Chalice) or Nagler (Nail Smith) to Nagel (Nail). Although a son of Kelchner might have at one time been called Kelch or Chalice for short or even Chalice as a nickname, Kelch in becoming the surname would still mean "Chalice Maker", actually a professional name rather than a miscellaneous name as listed in this article. A person was sometimes named for the product he sold, so a "seller of lace" would be a Lietz (Lace); on the other hand, Lietz could have derived from a nickname referring to a person of higher economic status who wore "lace" on his clothing.

Regarding religion, Germany was pagan prior to the 700s (AD). Although the Germans had three main gods: Woden, Tiu and Thor, they also had many lesser gods, all of whom they believed made their homes in trees or groves of trees, predominantly but not exclusively the oaks. Thus the Germans regarded certain trees and groves as being sacred. One of the first things the Christian missionaries did to impress the Germans that their gods were impotent, was to cut down their sacred oak trees

and groves. (As an item of interest and whether it be a carryover of respect from earlier tree worship or simply wise stewardship, Germany today has one of the foremost, if not the foremost, program in the world for woodland management and preservation. No German is permitted to cut down a tree, whether it be on private or public land, without first obtaining governmental permission and if granted, at least one replacement tree must be planted for each one cut.) There is an interesting name in this area which might indicate a sacred tree, "Wietholter" which interprets, "Willow Tree Loyal, or Willow Tree Beholden".

Germany was Christianized in the 700s. In 716 AD, an Englishman of noble Saxon birth by the name of "Wynfrith" became enthused with the evangelistic spirit. With the help of Irish monks, he attempted to evangelize the Saxons of north Germany, but met with little success. Moving southward, Wynfrith and his Irish monks met with great success Christianizing South Germany. In recognition of his efforts, Wynfrith was canonized to Saint Boniface. In 753, Boniface once again returned to North Germany in another attempt to Christianize the Saxons but was killed by a band of savages. Charlemagne then conquered the Saxons, Christianizing them via the sword in the period of 770-800 AD. In one battle alone, 4500 Saxons gave

up their heads rather than convert to Christianity; the Saxons were a very determined and stubborn people.

Names evolved through the centuries. As the population increased, the need to distinguish between persons having the same name living in the same general area arose. Say four Johanns were living close together. The one living among the oaks would be called Johann Eichner; the one living by the bridge would be Johann Bruecker; the one living near the church would be Johann Kirchner; the one at the ford would be Johann Furth and so began the use of a first and last name.

Christian names entered the scene in the mid 700s to 800 AD, the start of the Christian era, but progressed very slowly until the mid 1500s at which time the Roman Catholic Church required parents to give each newborn child the name of a saint as its first name. After having given the child a holy name, the parent could then add a secular middle name and so this was the start of having three names - a first, middle and last. The Protestants also followed this same procedure, except a different listing of saints was used. The passing of the surname from "father to son to son", while starting in the Christian era, most probably

gathered its strength during this same general period of 1500-1600 AD.

"Towpath" Miscellaneous Surnames

Bell: part of a ship, white poplar

Blanke: white or clean

Block: block, trunk, stocks

Browder: brown haired

Brown: from "braun", meaning brown

Bruns: bear, brown, dweller at spring

Bubp: boy, servant

Buss: penitence, fine

Engle: angel

Fox: from fuchs meaning fox

Gagel: ten pin

Garmhausen: Garman's houses

Hay: from hau, hay

Huenke: descendants of giants

Inman: in-farmer (possibly a farmer in an enclosed field)

Johnson: son of Johann

Kane: can

Kelch: chalice maker, chalice

Klein: small, little

Kussman: tousle haired

Lietz: lace, lace merchant

May: May

Nagel: nail smith, nail

Nieter: low

Parrott: couple and treasure

Ruese: trunk

Rump: sieve in a grist mill

Schott: bulkhead, Scot, curds

***Schwepe: carpenter who cuts cross laths for
rafters, a whip***

Shelby: school on an inherited farm

Sommer: summer

Stammen: stem, trunk, stump

Steinebrey: stone pottage

Stueve: possibly heated room, bather

Tontrup: possibly thunder drummer

Topp: forelock, pigtail

Vitz: wit, intelligence

Vogel: bird

Vogelsang: birdsong

Wint: wind

Wissman: white haired man

Young: from jung, meaning young

"Towpath" Religious Surnames

Anthony: St. Anthony

Bastion: St. Bastien

Doenges: St. Anthony

Jordan: from Old Testament

Maxson: son of Max (St. Maximillian)

Pape: priest

Patterson: son of Batt (St. Beatus)

Paul: St. Paul

Poulson: son of Paulus (St. Paul)

Poppe: priest

Tangeman: St. Anthony

Thiesing: belonging to Mattias (St. Matthew)

This: from Mattias (St. Matthew)

Victor: name of Pope Victor

**Sorry, interpretations were not found for the
following names:**

Buckingham

Cadle

Chocoms

Cumming

Fark

Farley

Ferry

Halsema

Jackson

Kah

Knost

Komminsk

Lear

Maich

McVey

Montgomery

Patton

Samples

Schrock

Voress

Yarrington

Zodikoff

Please keep in mind that the interpretations of names given in these "Towpath" articles are "generic" interpretations - to know the exact meaning of one's name, it is necessary to know the exact geographical location of the site where the name was "coined" or the particular circumstances under which it was given. Dr. Jones used the earliest or most ancient meaning of name roots in his book. It should be noted that the meaning of some roots changed during the passage of time; therefore, root meanings found in today's dictionaries might have no relation to the original meaning; The original meaning of "Schoenwald" meant "Beautiful Ruler", but today it means

"Beautiful Forest". Also please keep in mind that the names of German immigrants were often spelled phonetically or Anglicized. It was not that the Germans could not write or spell; in fact, the Germans were more literate than the English sea captains, which transported them here. The Germans wrote in script which the sea captains could not read; hence the need for phonetics and Anglicizing of names.

In conclusion, I would like to say I have thoroughly enjoyed writing these article on German names. I greatly appreciate those of you who have called or written or even dropped by to chat and certainly appreciate the insights you have passed along, not only on your own name, but others as well.

Since these articles began with "Swamp" (by that I mean upon learning my name meant "Swamp Dweller", I set out to find out "why"), perhaps it is only fitting that they conclude with "Swamp". Did you know that the meaning of "Bremen", the port from whence most of our ancestors sailed, also means "Swamp"? It does!!

