

18th Century PA German Naming Customs

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Subj: 18th Century Pennsylvania German Naming Customs

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1. At baptism, if two given names were given to the child, the first given name was a spiritual, saint's name, originally developed from Roman Catholic tradition and continued on by the Protestants in their baptismal naming customs. The second given name was the secular name, which is the name the person was known by, within the family and to this rest of the world. The spiritual name, usually to honor a favorite saint, was usually repeatedly given to all the children of that family of the same sex. Thus the boys would be Johan Adam Kerchner, Johan George Kerchner, etc., or Philip Peter Kerchner, Philip Jacob Kerchner, etc. Girls would be named Anna Barbara Kerchner, Anna Margaret Kerchner, etc., or Maria Elizabeth Kerchner, Maria Catherine Kerchner, etc. But after baptism, these people would not be known as John, Philip, Anna, or Maria, respectively. They would instead be known by what we now would think of as their middle name, which was their secular name. Thus these people would be known respectively as Adam, George, Peter, Jacob, Barbara, Margaret, Elizabeth, and Catherine in legal and secular records. For males, the saint's name Johan or John was particularly heavily used by many German families. The child's secular name was really John, if and only if, at baptism he was named only John, usually Johannes, with no second given name. Many researchers, new to German names, who find a baptism of an individual with a name such as Johan Adam Kerchner, thus mistakenly spend a lot of time looking for a John Kerchner in legal and census records, when he was known after baptism, to the secular world, as Adam Kerchner. Also when reading county histories, etc., especially those written by individuals in the 20th century, and the author is referring to someone as John Kerchner and you are not looking for a John Kerchner, but the history sounds otherwise familiar, further research may turn up that this person was really not a John Kerchner, but instead was someone else such as a Johan George Kerchner. You would thus find all his 18th century records recorded under the name George

Kerchner and not John Kerchner and therefore after checking the data and correlating the facts you may find this is really a story about your missing George Kerchner.

2. The term "Senior" and "Junior" following a name did not necessarily imply a father and son relationship as it does now. It could have been an uncle and nephew who had the same name and lived near each other. It could be a grandfather and a grandchild living together, where the father has died. It could even be two unrelated individuals with the same name but of different ages who lived near each other. So to help friends and business associates keep track of who was who in their discussions and records, they added on the "Sr." or "Jr." which merely meant the older and the younger, respectively.

3. The term cousin was widely used to mean an extended family, not the specific legal definition we understand it to be today.

4. It was a common practice in some German families to name the first born son after the child's paternal grandfather and the second born son after the maternal grandfather. Here are two more more detailed naming patterns practiced by some families.

Pattern A

1st son after the father's father
 2nd son after the mother's father
 3rd son after the father
 4th son after the husband's father's father
 5th son after the wife's father's father
 6th son after the husband's mother's father
 7th son after the wife's mother's father

1st daughter after the wife's mother
 2nd daughter after the husband's mother
 3rd daughter after the mother
 4th daughter after the father's father's mother
 5th daughter after the mother's father's mother
 6th daughter after the father's mother's mother
 7th daughter after the mother's mother's mother

Pattern B

The pattern B for the sons is the same as the above but this pattern for daughters was different

1st daughter after the father's mother
 2nd daughter after the mother's mother
 3rd daughter after the mother
 4th daughter after the mother's father's mother
 5th daughter after the father's father's mother

Pattern C

1st son after the father's father
 2nd son after the mother's father

3rd son after the father's oldest brother
4th son after the father

1st daughter after the father's mother
2nd daughter after the mother's mother
3rd daughter after the mother's oldest sister
4th daughter after the mother

Whenever a duplicate name occurred in these two patterns, the next name in the series was used. If a child died in infancy the name was often reused for the next child of the same gender.

If you are lucky enough to find a family with a lot of children, who strictly followed one of these naming patterns, then it may give you useful clues to determining the possible names of family members in earlier generations.

5. An "in" or "en", added to the end of a name, such as Anna Maria Kerchnerin, is a German language name ending suffix denoting that the person is female. Thus the correct spelling of the last name in the example would be Kerchner, not Kerchnerin.

I hope that the above information will be of assistance to individuals researching 18th Century Pennsylvania German names and records.

For additional information on German-American Names consult the book by that name written by Professor George F. Jones published by the Genealogical Publishing Co. of Baltimore, MD.

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18th Century PA German Nicknames

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Subj: Given name nicknames and aka's and translations for
 some baptismal and given names used by 18th Century
 Pennsylvania Germans. Suggestions from others
 are solicited to be added to this file.

Keywords: PA GERMAN NICKNAMES PENNSYLVANIA

18TH CENTURY PA GERMAN	ENGLISH TRANSLATION	NICKNAME/AKA
Abraham	Abraham	Abe
Abram	Abram	Abe
Andreas	Andrew	
Anna	Anna, Ann	Nancy, Ann
Anton	Anthony	Tunis, Tony
Aegidius	Giles	
Baltzer	Balthasar	
Barbara	Barbara	Bevvy
Benjamin	Benjamin	Ben
Bernhard, Barnet	Bernard	
Catharina	Catharine	Kate, Katie
Christian	Christian	Christ, Christli
Christoph	Christopher	Kit, Stoffel
Dewald	Theobald	
Dionysius	Denis	
Dietrich	Theodoric	Dieter
Dorothea	Dorothy	
Elias	Elijah	Eli
Elisabeth	Elizabeth	Lis, Lizzie
Erasmus	Erasmus	Asmus
Frantz	Francis	
Friedrich	Frederick	Fritz
Gottfried	Godfrey, Geoffrey	
Hannah	Jean	
Ignatius	Ignatius	Natius, Natz
Jacob	Jacob, James	
Johanna	Joan	
Johannes	John	Hans, Jack
Jonas	Jonah	
Jost, Justus	Yost, Justus	



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