

German Names and Naming Patterns

James M. Beidler

james@beidler.us

1. Surnames

- a. Occupational
- b. Geographic
- c. Characteristic
- d. Patronymics
- e. *Hofname*

2. Given names

- a. In the 17th and 18th centuries –
 - i. Nearly all males baptized with prefix name of Johann or Hans
 - ii. Nearly all females baptized with prefix name of Anna or Maria
 - iii. Both genders usually shed the prefix name and went by what we'd call their “middle” name – to them, the *Rufname* (“call name”)
- b. In the 19th and 20th centuries –
 - i. Both genders usually carried 3 given names, often using only one in later life but not consistent as to order

3. Place names

- a. Use of phonetic interchanges needed
- b. Beware of small places being absorbed by larger cities

4. Phonetic interchanges

- a. **Consonants**
 - B and P**
 - C, G and K**
 - D and T**
 - P and F**
- b. **Vowels** – umlauts create chaos

Bibliography:

Bahlow, Hans. *Dictionary of German Names*. Translated by Edda Gentry. Madison, WI: Max Kade Institute for German-American Studies, University of Wisconsin, 1993.

Beidler, James M. *The Family Tree German Genealogy Guide: How to Trace Your Germanic Ancestry in Europe*. Cincinnati, OH: Family Tree Books, 2014.

Beidler, James M. *Trace Your German Roots Online: A Complete Guide to German Genealogy Websites*. Cincinnati, OH: Family Tree Books, 2016.

Humphrey, John T. *Finding Your German Ancestors: A Practical Guide for Genealogists*. Washington, DC: Author, 2009.

Köbler, Gerhard. *Historische Lexikon der Deutschen Laender*. Munich: C.H. Beck, 1999.

Minert, Roger P. *Deciphering Handwriting in German Documents: Analyzing German, Latin, and French in Historical Manuscripts*, 2nd edition. Provo, UT: GRT Publications, 2013.

Minert, Roger P. *Spelling Variations in German Names*. Woods Cross, UT: GRT Publications, 2000.

Smith, Kenneth L. *German Names: A Practical Guide*. Morgantown, PA: Masthof Press, 2007.

Thode, Ernest. *German-English Genealogical Dictionary*. Baltimore, MD: Genealogical Publishing Co., 2006.

Uncapher, Wendy K. *How to Read and Understand Meyers Orts-*. Janesville, WI: Origins, 2003.

Wright, Raymond S. III, et. al, *Ancestors in German Archives*. Baltimore, MD: Genealogical Publishing Co., 2004.

Websites:

Meyers Gazetteer online <meyersgaz.org>

LEO Deutsch-Englisches Woerterbuch (German-English Dictionary)
<dict.leo.org>

Grimms Wörterbuch <woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB/?lemid=GA00001>