

SURNAME INCONSISTENCIES IN NORTHERN GERMANY

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The area of northwest Germany is usually described as the area bounded by the Ems River or Dutch border on the west, the Elbe River to the east and between the Teutoburger Wald (Forest) to the south and the Baltic Sea to the north.

From this area a large number of persons emigrated between 1830 and 1870. They left mainly from the ports of Bremen and Hamburg in the north, and Rotterdam to the west.

In Germany the use of surnames appeared first among the nobility in the Middle Ages. Some surnames came from place names, i.e. cities, countries, inns or dwellings, trades, and so forth. Whereas the original surname generally became the permanent family name, some exceptions to this practice can be discerned when studying the history of names of Germany, and northern Germany in particular.

The most commonly recognized exception, of course, is that of the female spouse's having assumed her husband's surname at marriage. Two other main exceptions are common to German name history (especially in the northwest):

1. A patronymic name system or a patrilineal surname formed by the addition of a prefix or suffix indicating a relationship to the name of one's father. Thus a generation or family had no family name in the usual sense.

2. Individual branches of a family, upon acquiring a farm or homestead, frequently took the name of the previous owner or family from whom the property was purchased.

This latter name process was also common practice in other areas of Germany as well as in foreign places settled by German families.

Since most basic genealogical reference sources treat the first of these exceptions in abundant detail, we shall not concern ourselves with further discussion of it here.

However, the assuming or changing of a surname to that of the farm or farm owner's name by a person or family obtaining the property by purchase, marriage or inheritance deserves special attention.

Consider the following examples of this second exception.

1. Johannes Meyer purchased the Meerpol farm. Thereafter he became known by and recorded his name as Johannes *Meerpol* born Meyer.

2. Johannes Meyer wed Anna Maria Meerpol. Anna Maria inherited the farm from her father. Johannes then became known by and recorded his name as Johannes *Meerpol* born Meyer. Children born to this couple prior to the inheritance of the farm continued to use the surname *Meyer*. Children born to the couple after they took over the farm were given the surname *Meerpol*.

3. Johannes Meyer married the widow of Heinrich Meerpol who owned the Meerpol farm before his demise. Johannes now was known by and recorded his name as Johannes *Meerpol* born Meyer.

Farm names appear to have a strong attachment in some parts of northwest Germany. The change from the original family name to the farm name may be recorded in the marriage entry or upon the birth or christening of the first child. The two last names then stand side by side provided that the scribe is informed of the name change and/or he decides to record the entry in full. Consider the following examples taken from Genealogical Society (LDS) microfilm 911504, Langförden, Germany.

CHRISTENING	CHILD	PARENTS
25 Jun 1790	Catharina Elisabeth	Bernardus Wempe natus Busse, Catharina Gertrud Wempe
12 Sep 1792	Johannes Henricus	Bernardus Wempe natus Busse, Catharina Gertrud Wempe
3 Jun 1794	Maria Anna	Bernard Wempe natus Busse, Cathar. Gertrudis Wempe
16 Sep 1796	Göstanna Maria Magdaline	Joan Bernardus Wempe nat. Busse, Catharina Gertrud Wempe
14 Feb 1799	Bernardus Henricus	Joannes Bernard Wempe n. Busse, Catharina Gertrud Wempe
5 Dec 1811	Johann Bernd	Johann Bernd Wempe geb. Busse, Marie Elisabeth Pulsforth
11 Feb 1814	Bernd Joseph	Bernd Wempe geb. Busse, Marie Elisabeth Pulsforth

(Genealogical Society microfilm 909916, Holdorf, Germany)

Marriage Entry 30 Nov 1839	Johan Henrich Pröppermann, legitimate son of Franz Pröppermann born Feldmann and Margretha Pröppermann with Anna Maria Tepe
Death Entry 12 Jul 1833	Franz Feldmann now Pröppermann husband <i>Margrehta</i> Pröppermann
Death Entry 18 Dec 1833	<i>Margrehta</i> Pröppermann, widow Franz Feldmann

Various abbreviations or words are used to designate a surname change, e.g. geboren, geb., nata, natalis, n, jetzt, genannt.

Usually some word will connect the two names which means *born, called, now, surnamed*, and so forth. In some parishes, however these name changes are not recorded, thus making the connection difficult. When searching a source that has recorded name changes to the husband or father, make a list of all persons who have the surname you are seeking. Generally, such a search will cover a longer time period than usually covered when seeking name data.

Note that a particular surname may be eliminated from one generation to another. Only through tedious and detailed

review and study of the records can one fully understand the effects of surname changing on genealogical research.

For further insight into surname inconsistencies in northern Germany, see: Dr. Walter Schaub, "Genealogical Research Problems in Northern Germany," *World Conference on Records*, D-17 (1969); Gertrud L. Baird, "Surname Book and Racial History," (article on German surnames); Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, *Genealogical Instruction Manual* (1965).



AUF ALTEN WEGEN

Die Häuser stehen schief, es heisst:
die Strassen sollen sinken.
Ich rolle mich ins Murmeln
eines klaren Bachs zum Trinken:
Schilf und Kieselsteine
raunend im Geleit,
sehe ich der Hoffnung Kind
im langen, grünen Wellenkleid
dicht neben mir —
im Mondlicht glänzend das Gesicht —
und wie die Sonne durch die Wolken bricht,
leuchten seine Augen.
Ah! Ich lache auf!
Mögen schon die Strassen nichts mehr taugen!

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