

## GERMAN GENEALOGY FROM A TO Z

## ORIGINS OF GERMAN SURNAMES

Occupational names are more common among our German ancestors than in our other families. Probably the German respect for work accounts for this, and 700 to 800 years ago when the name-giving period occurred, vast numbers of our German progenitors took surnames from their jobs.

However, these occupationally derived surnames do not necessarily indicate the kind of work our immigrant German ancestors were involved in. In other words, your Schmidt ancestor may have been a carpenter, not a smith, and more likely your Kauffman was no longer a tradesman by the time he arrived in this country. However, surnames can be clues to our ancestors' long-ago occupations.

Among the occupational names of early Pennsylvania Germans, where so many of our ancestral lines converge, are: Zimmermann (carpenter), Ziegler (maker or user of brick and tile), Schneider (tailor), Schuhmacher (shoemaker), Spengler (tinsmith, tinker), Wagner (wagon-maker), Weber (weaver), Bauer (farmer), Fischer (fisherman), Gerber (worker with leather), Jager (hunter), Metzger (butcher), Muller (miller), Schreiner (cabinetmaker), Kramer (shopkeeper or peddler), and Schultz (overseer or sheriff).

Occupational names became extremely common because every village had certain trades and crafts from which people took their surnames. However, people of different villages who had the same surname are not necessarily related to each other. Keep in mind that surnames were adopted, for the most part, in what is now Germany as early as 1400, and have undergone profuse spelling changes, especially in American records.

Three suffixes which usually indicate a German name is an occupational one are: -er, -hauer, and -macher. The -er suffix, meaning "one who," is found in names such as Fisher (one who fishes); -hauer (meaning hewer or cutter) as in Baumhauer (a tree chopper) and -macher as in Korbmacher (basket-maker) or schumacher (one who makes shoes).

Occupational-derived surnames which were transported to this country by our German ancestors include: baker (Becker), Miner (Bergman), forester (Forester), Carrier-carter (Furman-Fuhrmann), tanner (Garber-Gerber), gravedigger (Graver-Graber), potter (Heffner-Hafner), herdsman (Hirt), barrel-maker or cooper (Keefer-Kufer), piper or fifeplayer (Pfeifer-Piper), Plowmaker (Pfleger-Pflugler), sailor (Schiffman-Shipman), locksmith

(Schlosser), lacemaker (Shnur-Schnurmacher), cabinet-maker or joiner (Shriner-Schreiner), stone-hewer or stone-cutter (Stinehower-Steinhauer), fowler or bird-catcher (Vogler-Vogeler), banker or moneylender (Wexler-Wechsler), innkeeper (Wert-Wirt-Wurth), gate- or doorkeeper (Forner-Pfortner), and wheelmaker (Rademacher-Rademacher).

You will find many German surnames prefixed by von, zu or am. These prefixes do not necessarily indicate a noble origin. While it is true that many of the nobility, especially in southern Germany, were known by their chief estate or castle, your Karl von Bremen could have been a Karl Muller who moved from Bremen to another locale and became known as Karl Muller von Bremen. Later he may have shortened it to Karl von Bremen.

Since many German towns and villages have names ending in -heim (home) and -dorf (village) some of our family's surnames may have these suffixes.

## A "Metzger" Is a "Fleischer"

In Hamburg, a butcher is called "Schlachter," in Berlin "Schlächter," but in southern and western Germany the same profession is known as "Metzger," in central Germany as "Fleischer" and in the south-east as "Fleischhacker" or sometimes as "Selcher."

Similarly, a plumber or tin-smith is called "Klempner" in most areas but in the south, "Spengler."

There also exist various names for cleaning woman: Putzfrau, Reinmachefrau, Zughefrau, Perle ("gem") or, very sophisticated, "Raumpflegerin."

The best example for differences in food names is the roll: "Brötchen" is the most generally accepted term, but you also find "Semmel" or "Weck" (South Germany), "Schrippe" (Berlin), or "Rundstück" (Hamburg).

German family names are also plentiful in the United States. There are last names such as Klein, Myer (or Meyer, Maier, Meier), and Schneider. Very often German family names indicate occupations (Bauer, *farmer*), places (Berlin or Berliner, *a citizen of Berlin*), or physical descriptions (Kraft, *strong*). If you are interested in tracing the origins of German family names, keep in mind that there may have been changes—for example, Schmidt may have become Smith; Mueller may have turned into Miller.

Many words and phrases contributed by the German immigrants have become part of our everyday language—pumpernickel, noodle, hausfrau, lager beer and bock beer, wienerwurst (often shortened to wiener or wienie), sauerbraten, schnitzel, dachshund, zwieback, delicatessen, kindergarten, and katzenjammer. And don't forget those "typically American" foods such as hamburgers, pretzels, liverwurst, and frankfurters with sauerkraut—all introduced by the Germans.

The Germans who came to the United States brought customs that have become part of our way of life. They introduced the Christmas tree (as well as many Christmas carols), the Easter bunny and Easter egg hunts, county fairs, and more recently, the folk march or Volksmarsch, which has made its appearance in many communities.

And there is a long list of individual Germans who have made invaluable contributions to this country in art and music, science and industry, education and politics. From John Peter Zenger to Levi Strauss, from Albert Einstein to Marlene Dietrich, German names appear throughout our history.