

## NAMES AND NAMING SYSTEMS IN GENEALOGY

By John D. Beatty, rev. 2022

### SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

#### General

Weidenhan, Joseph L. *Baptismal Names*. Baltimore: Kenmore Publications, 1931. Gc 929.4 W42

#### Colonial America

Fischer, David Hackett. *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989. Gc 973 F518a

Price, Richard Woodruff. "Child-Naming Patterns: A Tool to Assist with Family Reconstruct," Kory L. Meyerink, Tristan L. Tolman, and Linda K. Gulbrandsen, eds. *Becoming an Excellent Genealogist: Essays on Professional Research Skills*. Salt Lake City, Utah: ICAPGen, 2012. Gc 929 M575b

Rutman, Darrett B., and Anita H. Rutman. *Place in Time: Middlesex County, Virginia, 1650-1750*. New York: Norton, 1984. Gc 975.501 M58ru

#### Dutch and New Netherland

Bailey, Rosalie Fellows. "Dutch Systems in Family Naming: New York and New Jersey," *Genealogical Publications of the National Genealogical Society* 12 (May 1954). Gc 929.4 B15d

Hoff, Henry B. "Researching Dutch Families in New York and New Jersey," *De Halve Maen*, 82 (Winter 2009): 67-70.

Stryker-Rodda, Kenn. "New Netherland Naming Systems and Customs," *New York Genealogical and Biographical Record*, 126 (1995): 35-45.

#### England

Chitty, Erik. "Naming after Godparents," *Genealogists Magazine*, 16 (June 1969): 47-49. Gc 942.006 G317

Hanks, Patrick, and Flavia Hodges. *Dictionary of First Names*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991. Gc 929.4 H19df

Smith-Bannister, Scott. *Names and Naming Patterns in England, 1538-1700*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1997. Gc 942 Sm52na

Withycombe, E. G. *Oxford Dictionary of English Christian Names*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1947. Gc 929.4 W77

#### Europe

Wilson, Stephen. *Means of Naming: A Social and Cultural History of Personal Naming in Western Europe*. Bristol, PA: UCL Press, 1998. Gc 929.4 W691me

## German

Riemer, Shirley J., Roger P. Minert, and Jennifer A. Anderson. *German Research Companion*. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. Sacramento, California: Lorelei Press, 2010. Gc 943 R44gb

Schilling, Donna. *German Genealogy Research in Pomerania*. Orting, Washington: Family Roots Publishing, 2017. Gc 943.16 Sch335ge

Strong, Lin Cornelius. *Patronymical Naming Practices*. Forest Lake, Minnesota: Ostfriesen Genealogical Society of America, 2003. Gc 943.5 St88p

## Jewish

Samuel, Edgar R. "Jewish Naming Customs," *Genealogists Magazine* 14 (June 1962): 44-45. Gc 942.006 G317

## Scotland

Paton, Chris. *Discover Scottish Church Records*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. St. Agnes, England: Unlock the Past, 2016. Gc 941.1 P27d

## Swiss

Rohrbach, Lewis Bunker. *Guide to Swiss Genealogical Research*. Rockland, Maine: Picton Press, 2010. Gc 929.131 R636g

### English Naming Conventions Before 1600

- Godparents, not parents, often selected the name
- A study of Banbury, Oxford, in the 1550s showed that 86% of children were named after godparents
- Godparents banned by Puritans under Oliver Cromwell in 1640

### English Naming Conventions, 1600-1800

- Eldest son for the father's father
- Second son for the mother's father
- Third son for the father
- Fourth son for the eldest paternal uncle
- Eldest daughter for the mother's mother
- Second daughter for the father's mother
- Third daughter for the mother
- Fourth daughter for the eldest maternal aunt
- Not universally used – Apply it cautiously for English ancestors

### Alternate British Customs

- Honoring the king or queen
- Honoring persons from the Bible
- Names for religious virtues (ie. Faith, Hope, and Charity) – Prevalent among non-conformists such as Puritans
- "Replacement" children – naming later children after earlier deceased children
- Surname as first name (Could be mother's or grandmother's maiden name, or the name of someone else, such as a friend, military hero, etc.). Especially common in U.S. South; sometimes in Ireland.

### Scottish and Scot-Irish Naming Conventions, mostly before 1800

- Eldest son for the father's father
- Second son for the mother's father
- Third son for the father
- Eldest daughter for the father's mother [variant: mother's mother]
- Second daughter for the mother's mother [variant: father's mother]
- Third daughter for the mother
- Most common boys' names were John, James, William, Alexander, and Robert
- Occasionally, maiden names are given as middle names

### Irish Catholic Naming Patterns

- First son after the father's father
- Second son after the mother's father
- Third son after other relatives
- First daughter after the father's mother
- Second daughter after the mother's mother
- Third daughter after other relatives

### Early New England Naming Customs

- Study of Hingham, Massachusetts before 1735 showed that 74% of first-born daughters were named for their mother and 67% of first-born sons named for their father
- No godparents allowed in New England
- Shows a break in the Old World custom of naming children after grandparents or godparents

### Use of Virtue Names and Other Customs

- Choosing a name to represent an ideal (ie. Charity, Thankful, Patience, Prudence, Fear, Resolved)
- Special names, such as Benoni, indicate sorrow and may have been used when the mother died in childbirth
- Benjamin is often the name of a youngest son, because the Biblical Benjamin is the youngest son of Jacob

### Early Virginia Naming Customs, Middlesex Co., VA

- 71.1% of first-born sons named for father or grandfathers, 17.8% for uncles
- 63.8% of second sons named for father or grandfathers, 23.3 % for uncles, 1.3% for deceased sibling
- 33.7% of third-born sons named for father or grandfathers, 30.6% for uncles, 8.2% for deceased siblings
- 65.5% of eldest daughters named for mothers or grandmothers, 15.8% for aunts
- 58.5% of second daughters named for mother or grandmothers, 18.6% for aunts, 1.7% for deceased siblings
- 29.9% of third-born daughters named for mother or grandmothers, 32.5% for aunts, 5.2% for deceased siblings

### Quaker Naming Customs

First son for mother's father  
Second son for father's father  
Third son for father  
First daughter for father's mother  
Second daughter for mother's mother  
Third daughter for mother

Note: Quakers did not practice baptism, so names were not assigned as part of that ritual. Names of children were nominated by parents, witnessed by neighbors, and then solemnly entered into the meeting.

### Slave Naming Customs

- Common Anglo- names usually chosen by slave owner

- Classical-sounding names, such as Caesar, chosen by slave owner
- Names based on the day of the week (in African) when child was born, (ie. Cudjo, Mingo, Cuffee, Kwame, Kwaku, Kwasi, and others) was sometimes preserved, especially where Gullah was spoken
- Biblical names

#### Modern African American Naming Customs

- Names popular in wider African-American culture
- Islamic names
- African and Afrocentric names
- French names
- European and Biblical names
- Inventive names

#### German Naming Customs

- Varies greatly by region and religion
- Patronymic customs
- Saints' names for the feast days nearest to the birthdate of child (Catholic); also names of popes, archangels, etc. (Catholic)
- Named after Old Testament patriarchs
- Latin and Greek names
- Named for emperors or other leaders
- Named for a godparent at baptism
- Rufnamen – children with first and middle names and being called by middle name.
- Middle names more common at an earlier date than elsewhere. Initials not used, but when two names are used together, they are usually hyphenated.

#### Patronymical Naming Systems

##### Naming Children after Saints

- Look at the Feast Day calendar of the Catholic church – these are called “Name Days” in parts of Catholic Germany
- Study those saints that are popular in the area of Germany where your ancestors lived (if known). Certain saints' names have regional popularity due to holy relics or associations with local churches

##### Latinization of Names in Catholic Parish Records

- Be aware of this fact when using church records and be prepared to convert names to the vernacular
- Carolus is Charles or Karl; Ludovicus is Louis or Ludwig, etc.
- Be aware that foreign names can be easily changed and anglicized in American records and usually are

##### French and Swiss Modern Naming Systems

- Only given names from an approved list may be used.
- No last names as first names
- No names that will harm the child
- No Biblical villains (Judas or Cain)
- No brand names as first names
- No place names as first names
- No giving a boy a girl's name or a girl a boy's name
- No making up a new name

### Historic Swiss Naming Customs

- Naming eldest son for father's father and eldest daughter for mother's mother was sometimes followed; often no naming pattern at all
- Equally popular was giving the child the name of one of the two godparents of that child's sex
- Very small number of Christian names used with some local variants
- Sometimes ministers chose the name and used a version of the name according to slang: Magdalena versus Madlena (difficult to know which version the child actually used)
- Combining two forenames into a single name, ie. "Hansuelli"
- Use of necronyms (later children named after earlier deceased ones)
- Sometimes a father will have two children of the same name, usually with different mothers and born at a great distance in time from each other

### Spanish Naming Customs

- Use of saints' names according to the Roman Catholic calendar
- Use of traditional Spanish names
- Under Franco and earlier, there were restrictions on approved names
- Modern Spaniards can give a child any name, so long as it is not deemed injurious
- Nicknames as official names are not permitted – considered too colloquial and never permitted in formal address
- Composite forenames are common and considered as one name – the first part of the name reflects the child's gender: "José-Maria" would be a boy.

### Dutch Naming Customs in New Netherland

- First son for father's father
- Second son for the mother's father
- First daughter for the father's mother
- Second daughter for the mother's mother
- Use of necronyms – if a child died, next child would have that name
- If father died when mother was pregnant, if a boy, he would be named for father; likewise if the mother died in childbirth, daughter would be named for her
- Subsequent children named after aunts and uncles

### Scandinavian Naming Customs

- First son for the father's father
- Second son for the mother's father
- Later sons after great-grandfathers or uncles
- First daughter for father's mother
- Second daughter for mother's mother
- Later daughters for great-grandmothers or aunts
- Exception: Naming a daughter from second marriage after deceased wife from first marriage

### Jewish Naming Customs

- Ashkenazi Jews believed in naming children for ancestors, but never after a living forebear
- In posthumous births, a son would be given the name of his father
- Sephardic Jewish customs: Eldest son for father's father, second son for mother's father, third son for paternal great-grandfather

### Advice on Using Names and Looking for Patterns

- Record the names of ALL children of an ancestral couple, if possible
- Use wills, deeds, church records, cemetery records, census, vital
- You may not be able to find all, since some may have died young without any record

- Identify birth order, if possible (sometimes the order of children's names in a will or probate file will be in birth order)
- Having the full family may (but not always) help identify earlier generations
- Know the ancestral naming culture