Onomastics – Using Naming Patterns in Genealogy

1. Where did your family live before coming to America?
2. When did your family come to America?
3. Where did your family first settle in America?

Background

Onomastics or onomatology is the study of proper names of all kinds and the origins of names. Toponomy or toponomastics, is the study of place names. Anthroponomastics is the study of personal names. Names were originally used to identify characteristics of a person. Over time, some of those original meanings have been lost. Additionally, patterns developed in many cultures to further identify a person and to carry on names within families. In genealogy, knowing the naming patterns of a cultural or regional group can lead to breaking down brick walls. Your great-great-grandfather's middle name might be his mother's maiden name – a possible clue – depending on the naming patterns used in that time and place. Of course, as with any clues, you need to find documents to back up your guesses, but the clues may lead you in the right direction.

Patronymics

Surnames based on the name of the father, such as Johnson and Nielson, are called patronyms. Historically people only had one name, but as the population of an area grew, more was needed. Many cultures used patronyms, with every generation having a different "last name." John, the son of William, would be John Williamson. His son, Peter, would be Peter Johnson; Peter's son William would be William Peterson. Patronyms were found in places such as Scandinavia (sen/dottir), Scotland Mac/Nic), Ireland (O'/Mac/ni), Wales (ap/verch), England (Fitz), Spain (ez), Portugal (es), Italy (di/d'/de), France (de/des/du/le/à/fitz), Germany (sen/sohn/witz), the Netherlands (se/sen/zoon/dochter), Russia (vich/ovna/yevna/ochna), Poland (wicz/wski/wsky/icki/-a), and in cultures using the Hebrew (ben/bat) and Arabic (ibn/bint) languages.

Patronyms are difficult to trace. A *family name* is one that is passed down from generation to generation without major change. It may be a converted patronym or it might tell an ancestor's occupation, place of residence, or physical characteristic. Without a family name it can be difficult to trace your ancestors.

Given Names (Anthroponomastics)

Given names (first, Christian, forename, personal name) have been used from ancient times to identify individuals. In your genealogy research, although it's helpful to have more than one name, there *are* clues in the given names that you can use to find your people. Have you found the origin of your family surnames? Once you know the country/region of origin of your family name, you can learn the naming patterns for given names used by the people there and this may help you in your research. Do you know the religion(s) of your ancestors? Different religions have different naming patterns for given names. Perhaps there's an unusual name that has been passed down which helps you find the next generation. Naming patterns can also provide clues to birth order, region, gender, time period, and social status, and you can use these to work back to find someone's name. **Caveat**: Naming patterns have many exceptions. These "rules" should be considered as generalizations that *may* lead to new discoveries.

Some Common Patterns

Old Naming Patterns – If you Google "Old Naming Patterns" in quotes, you will find identical listings of naming patterns, supposedly "used everywhere." Here's one such site: http://wigenweb.org/forest/naming.html (Chart: **Old Naming Pattern** on next page).However, finding the pattern that *your* ancestors might have used may be more helpful than the generalization.

Other Considerations

• People chose names for traditional reaons, with evidence of this as early as Biblical times. Names were also chosen to honor someone. In Saxon England people were named for no one in particular, but from the 8th century on, ancestor's names began to be used.

• In some places, only certain names were allowed. Some countries still have lists of approved names.

• How many names were children given? This varied from culture to culture. Multiple names were often a sign of distinction. The general rule in American families before the Civil War was to use only one given name. Census records seem to support this rule. Of course there were exceptions:

- In Scots-Irish families, two given names were common. In Texas and South Carolina census reports, there are often initials instead of names. It's been suggested that enumerators did this to avoid writing cramps!
- In Roman Catholic families, three and four given names were common.
- In German families, there may be a christening name and a given name.

• Don't forget about nicknames. Mary: Mae, Mollie, Polly, Mitzi, Mamie
• Were children's names shared or unique? Shared names were a way of integrating a child into the family or religious community; unique names could indicate a wish for a child to move away from ancestral and traditional surroundings.
• Godparents names were sometimes used to name children, especially among Anglicans. They helped choose the names and/or the children were named after them. Since they were often relatives or close friends, godparents give you more clues to research. Often grandparents were godparents. Next, parent's siblings were chosen. In 16th century England, 86% of children were named for godparents rather than carrying on family names. After 1700, naming for godparents dropped to 40%. Perhaps this change was due to Puritan influence; Puritans didn't use godparents, but named older children for their parents. Until 1865, parents did not serve as godparents in the Church of England.
• Given names and naming patterns change through the years and in different locales. When researching your family line you need to know:
  –the approximate time period when your ancestor was born and
  –in what country.

Old Naming Pattern

Child	For whom named
1st son	Father's father
2nd son	Mother's father
3rd son	Father
4th son	Father's eldest brother
1st daughter	Mother's mother
2nd daughter	Father's mother
3rd daughter	Mother
4th daughter	Mother's eldest sister

Naming Pattern for _____

Child	For whom named
1st son	
2nd son	
3rd son	
4th son	
1st daughter	
2nd daughter	
3rd daughter	
4th daughter	

Naming patterns were used in different configurations in France, England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Germany, the Netherlands, Italy, Spain, Scandinavia, Russia, Poland and the Hebrew and Arabic languages.
(Chart: **Naming Patterns in Various Cultures and Languages** on next page)

Regional and Religious Customs in 17th & 18th Century America
Some naming patterns can be traced to regional and religious customs. A major study of naming patterns in America is found in *Albion's Seed* by David Hackett Fischer. Fischer describes four major mass emigrations of the 17th and 18th centuries from four different regions of the British Isles (and Germany) by four different socio-religious groups to four areas of early American settlement. He connects their cultures and folkways (norms for routine or casual interaction) in this country to those in the lands of their origins, by looking at such things as their building styles, family size, marriage customs, parenting practices, and . . . naming patterns. Fischer argues that the folkways of today are still influenced by the regional differences produced by these migrations, even to the extent of influencing later arrivals. *So, even if your family arrived much later, these patterns still influence the naming patterns of the regions.*
(Chart: **Naming Patterns in *Albion's Seed*** on last page)

Naming Patterns in Various Languages and Cultures

LANGUAGE, CULTURE,	NUMBER OF NAMES	TYPES OF NAMES (Changes through time)	1st SON NAMED FOR	LAWS
French	Given, family	Saints	Father's father	Yes
English		Old English, Germanic, Old Norse, Norman, Christian, saints, Biblical, scriptural, Old Testament, literature, mythology, flowers, gems	Father's father	
Irish	Given, middle, family	Gaelic, Saints, Irish or Anglicized	Father's father	
Scottish	Given, middle, family	Gaelic, Old Norse, English	Father's father	
Welsh	Given, middle, family	Celtic		
German	One or more given (spiritual or saint & secular), family	Saints, necronyms	Father's father	Yes
Dutch	Given, middle, family	Patronym often became middle name	Father's father	
Italian	One or more given, family	Saints	Father's father	
Spanish	One or two given, plus two surnames	Saints, honor Virgin Mary		
Scandinavian	One or more given, family or patronym	Norse	Father's father	Sweden, Norway, Denmark
Russian	Given, patronym, family	Saints (esp. Greek), Slavic		
Polish	One or two given, family	European, Slavic		Yes
Hebrew	One or two given, family; religious and secular		Ashkenazic: deceased relatives, father's father Sephardic: living relatives, father's father	
Arabic	Given, nickname, patronyms, family	Vocabulary words, historical figures, military leaders, from the Qur'an		

Resources:
- Campbell, Mike, *Behind the Name: the etymology and history of surnames*, 2013, http://surnames.behindthename.com/names/list.php
- Darlington Roger, "What's in a Name?" *Roger Darlington's World,* 2014, http://www.rogerdarlington.me.uk/useofnames.html#WE
- Eakle Arlene, "Naming Patterns & your Genealogy," *Arlene Eakle's Genealogy Blog,* 2011, http://www.arleneeakle.com/wordpress/2011/07/02/naming-patterns-and-your-genealogy/
- Green, Michael, The Origin of Irish Family Names," *Ireland-Information,* 2014, http://www.ireland-information.com/heraldichall/irishsurnames.htm
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- "Maps of the American Nations," *JayMan's Blog*, 2013, http://jaymans.wordpress.com/2013/08/14/maps-of-the-american-nations/
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- Price, Richard Woodruff. (2012). Child-Naming Patterns: A Tool to Assist with Family Reconstitution. In Kory L. Meyerink, MLS, AG, FUGA, Tristan L. Tolman, AG, Linda K. Gulbrandsen, AG (Eds.), *Becoming an Excellent Genealogist: Essays on Professional Research Skills* (pp. 139-149). ICAPGen.
- Robinson, Mona, "Why do we have names?" *Family Tree Leaves,* 2010, http://ww.heraldtimesonline.com/stories/2010/06/05/relationships.qp-4298526.sto
- Rose, Christine, *Nicknames, Past and Present,* San Jose, CR Publications, 2007.

- Shirley Hornbeck, "Tips on Naming Patterns," *This and That Genealogy,* 1998, http://homepages.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~hornbeck/naming.htm
- Spanish Naming Customs, *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia,* 2012.
- Stuard, Susan Mosher, ed., *Women in Medieval Society*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1976.
- UNData: A world of information *http://data.un.org/*
- Wheeler, LisaMarie, "A Brief History of Surnames," *LisaGenealogy,* http://www.lisagenealogy.com/Surmean/surhist.html
- Fischer David Hackett, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America*, New York Oxford University Press, 1989/91.

For short summaries of *Albion's Seed*, see
- Roe, Sue Marie Hillier, "Coming to America," *Sue's Genealogy Recipes*, 2000, http://www.genealogytoday.com/columns/recipes/index.html

For more on naming patterns discussed in *Albion's Seed:*
- New England – See also http://lonestar.texas.net/~mseifert/puritan14.html (no longer active)
- Middle Colonies – See also
  o "Quaker Naming Patterns for Children," *Chester County Genealogy*, http://pachester.usgensites.com/content/quaker-naming-patterns-children
  o Kerchner, Charles F. Jr., *18th Century PA German Naming Customs*, 1995, 2007, http://www.kerchner.com/germname.htm
- Virginia - See also Baird, Robert W., "Comments on Naming Patterns," *Bob's Genealogy Filing Cabinet*, http://www.genfiles.com/legal/Namingpatterns.htm
- Backcountry – See also
  o "Immigrants from the North of Ireland," *Ulster Scots Society,* 2004, http://www.Ulsterscotssociety.com/about_immigrants.html
  o *Albion's Seed Grows in the Cumberland Gap,* Created by Elizabeth Semancik, The American Studies Program at the University of Virginia, 1997, http://xroads.virginia.edu/~UG97/albion/albion3.html

Naming Patterns Described in Albion's Seed by David Hackett Fischer				
Region	**Origin**	**Religion**	**Types of Names & Naming Patterns**	**Examples**
New England p. 93 Middle class	East Anglia 1629-1640	Puritan, Calvinist	90% had Biblical names Point to a page in the Bible No patriarchs, lawgivers, angels, Jesus 2/3 of 1st born given parent's name Necronyms used	John, Joseph, Samuel, Josiah Mary, Elizabeth, Sarah, followed by Hannah, Rebecca, Anne, Deborah, Huldah, Abigail, Rachel, Ruth Forbidden: Jesus, Emmanuel, Christopher, Gabriel, Michael, Angel
Middle Colonies p. 502-507 Farmers, craftsmen, laborers, servants	Middle England, Germany 1675-1725	Quaker, Lutheran, Huguenot	"Nomination" - names selected by parents, witnessed, & registered Some Biblical names (50%), traditional English & Teutonic names, grace names 1st son after mother's father 2nd son after father's father 3rd after the father 1st daughter after father's mother 2nd after mother's mother 3rd after mother	John, Joseph, Samuel Mary, Elizabeth, Sarah, Anna/Hannah, Esther/Hester Teutonic names: George, Thomas, William Plain English names: Jane, Catherine, Margaret, Phebe Grace names: Grace, Mercy, Chastity, Preserve, Restore, Increase
Virginia p. 306-310 Cavaliers and servants	Southwest England 1642-1675	Anglican	Sons named after warriors, knights, & English kings. Girls named traditional girls' names & for Christian saints who weren't in the Bible 1st born named for grandparents 2nd born for parents Necronyms rarely used as being unlucky	Robert, Richard, Edward, George, Charles Margaret, Jane, Catherine, Frances, Alice, Mary, Elizabeth, Sarah
Backcountry p. 683-686 Farmers, semi-skilled craftsmen	Borders: Scotland, Northern Ireland, Northern England 1717-1775	Protestant	Biblical, Teutonic, saint's names (esp. Celtic & Border saints), Scottish kings, brave warriors, place names from the old country, feminized family names Eldest son after grandfathers, 2nd & 3rd after fathers	John; Richard, Robert; Andrew, Patrick, David; Ewan/Owen, Barry, Roy; Archibald, Alexander; Charles, James; Wallace, Bruce, Howard; Ross, Clyde, Carlisle, Tyne,Derry. Mary, Elizabeth, Sarah. Taboo: Scottish Highlander names:Douglas, Donald, Kenneth, Ian, Stewart; Gaelic names: Sean, Kathleen, Maureen, Sheila.