

Following An Ancestor with a German Farm Name (Hofname)

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I. "Germany" 800-1806 and 1871-1918

- A. 800-1806 First Empire: Holy Roman Empire of the German Nations=Hundreds of INDEPENDENT collaborating states.
- B. 1871-1918 Second German Empire: first UNITED German Country with about 30 states.

II. An English Resource

Minert, Roger P., "Surname Changes in Northwestern Germany," *German Genealogical Digest: A Quarterly Journal for German Researchers*, v. 16, no. 1, spring 2000 (Pleasant Grove, UT: Jensen Publications, 2000).

II. Background on the Feudal German Farming System

- A. Farming differed in each German state.
 - 1. A farm is a "Hof" in German.
 - 2. Each state's terms for farm ranks differed.
 - 3. Farmers were ranked based on farm size. (Minert's Osnabrück example covers a long time period. Terms may differ or have evolved differently in other states.)
 - a. Vollerbe (called "Colon;" c40-160 acres mixed land types)
 - b. Halberbe (half, paid half the taxes to the Lord)
 - c. Erbkötter (a non-inheriting son's small plot, may expand)
 - d. Markkötter ("cottager," gardener, relied on cottage industry)
- B. How did this system work?
 - 1. Each managing farmer was responsible for other residents living on his farm, such as: retired parents, "cottagers," day laborers, craftsmen, and household servants.
 - 2. His descendants
 - a. Could marry ONLY spouses from other equivalent sized farms.
 - b. Were prohibited from moving,
 - c. Paid heavy taxes to a "Lord,"
 - d. Needed marriage permission from the Lord.
 - 3. The Lord guaranteed:
 - a. Protection,
 - b. The right of perpetual farm inheritance,
 - c. Privileges. EG: the ability to purchase a "freedom" for an extra son to marry out.

III. "Hofname" or Farm Names—What, When, Where, and Why?

- A. What IS, and is NOT, a "Hofname" or Farm Name?
 - 1. A "Hofname" IS: the inheritable SURNAME of the family managing the farm.
 - 2. A "Hofname" IS NOT:
 - a. Name of the farm.
 - b. Location of the farm (the place may also be mentioned in the records.)
- B. Hofname occurred:
 - 1. From 800 until 1806 (Napoleon),
 - 2. Ending between 1806 and 1840, depending on the state.

- C. German States with the Hofname system. See 1871 German genealogy map.
 - 2. Westfalen, northern part
 - 3. Hannover, western part
 - 4. Oldenburg
 - 5. Lippe-Detmold
 - 6. Schaumburg-Lippe, part only
- D. Why did the Hofname system end after about 1806?
 - 1. Napoleon's occupation spread individual freedoms & reformed lingering feudal laws.
 - 2. After Napoleon's 1815 defeat, the German states each gradually phased out the Hofname system as people gained freedoms, such as the right to move.

V. The "Hofname" Was Determined by Inheritance Laws, Which Also Differed by State.

- A. NO "Hofname" in most German states because
 - 1. Eldest son inherited or
 - 2. Farm equally divided among all surviving children.
- B. If Inheritance by youngest (or eldest) surviving **child**--either a son or a daughter.
 - 1. Sons passed along surname normally.
 - 2. **Daughters used Hofname system.**

VI. When a Female Inherited the Farm

- A. She retained her maiden surname, the "Hofname;" eg: Mina Klocke.
- B. All her children took her surname, Klocke.
- C. Her husband added her surname to the end of his existing name.
 - 1. J. Heinrich Ridder married Mina Klocke, heir, and became: J. Heinrich Ridder "genannt" [called or known as] Klocke.
 - 3. BE CAREFUL! In later records, he's simply J. Heinrich Klocke, leading in some cases to possible confusion with an already existing J. Heinrich Klocke.
- D. Her brothers sought to marry an inheriting daughter or widow of another equivalent-ranked farm, changing their surnames.
- E. A brother NOT leaving the Hof added the suffix "mann," e.g: Klockemann (may be true only in Osnabrück.) Or, he became a tenant farmer on the home farm.
- F. Leibzucht or retired parents, were known as "Alte Klocke."
- G. The added suffix "meÿer" may indicate a non-inheriting spouse. EG: If the inheriting male died, leaving a widow. She remarried, but spouse two couldn't inherit.

VII. Key Words Used in German Records to Indicate the Surname Change Include:

- A. "genannt" [called or known as],
- B. "colon" [the title for a large farmer in some states],
- C. Sometimes even "zu" [at] or "der" [the] followed by a title or place (This can be confusing because these words now precede the place name.)
- D. In Latin "modo" or "alias" [called or known as].
- E. If ALL heirs to a large farm died before the original parent died (war, epidemic) or the parents were childless, the Lord reassigned or sold the farm. The new farm manager may or may not take the Hofname.

VIII. Finding a Farm Named Ancestor in Germany Begins Same as Finding Any Ancestor

- A. Find the origin village/town name with THOROUGH U.S. research.
- B. Determine the parish for the village/town and find its records.

3. Use Hansen's, *Map Guide to German Parish Records of X State*
4. Meyers Gazetteer <https://www.meyersgaz.org/>.
- C. Parish records are online at FSL, Ancestry, Archion, and Matricula.
- D. In "Hofname" parts of Germany, REMEMBER:
 1. The first and even second generation back in Germany may have been born AFTER the farm name system ended, so took his/her father's surname in the normal way.
 2. Further back in time the likelihood of a family "Hofname" is greater.
- E. Use the usual steps for finding the ancestor's family in German parish records.
 1. Locate the immigrating ancestor's baptism and his/her siblings' baptisms with at least one of the same parents (account for illegitimacies and re-marriages.)
 2. Follow the children to the next generation, parent's marriage.
 3. Repeat for each generation back beginning with one parent's baptism.

IX. When a Female Inherited Use Record Clues to be Certain the Correct Male is Located

- A. Farm Name research can become complex. Proceed slowly. Examine all types of parish records—B, C, M, D.
- B. If a man's marriage includes the "known as" words listed above, check wife's family too.
- C. Death records are needed!
 1. Find all death records for inheriting family to learn who died before the inheritance.
 2. Is this result consistent with the eldest or the youngest living child inheriting?
- D. Use an address, if mentioned, to be certain the property is the same.
- E. If wife inherited, she died before husband, and farm passes to management by eldest/youngest living child, but widowed husband seems to disappear from records:
 1. Look for him remarried to still another farm surname widow, somewhere nearby.
 2. This occurs because the law required the farm stay with the originally surnamed family, as long as those heirs were old enough to manage independently.
- F. Once a direct ancestor line is identified using the parish records, confirm that line by requesting or hiring someone in Germany to find:
 1. German records, such as wills, probate, inheritance, or local civil citizen lists showing all family members, or other records.
 2. To find records seek the Amtsgericht town using Meyersgaz (above) or Compgen's GOV <http://gov.genealogy.net/search/name> or Bezirkskommando town for military.

X. Conclusions

- A. PROCEED CAREFULLY, SLOWLY, and THOROUGHLY!
- B. The first generation or two in Germany may be after the end of the Hofname system.
- C. Steps: (1) Baptisms of direct-line ancestor and all siblings. (2) Marriage of parents=next generation, (3) Repeat for baptisms of one parent.
- D. RE-CHECK ALL LINES FOR CONSISTENCY. Deaths must be consistent with who inherits!
- E. Clues to a "Hofname"
 - (1) Children ALL take mother's surname.
 - (2) At marriage, wife's maiden name same as husband's new surname.
 - (3) The first child born may yield the most accurate parental names.
 - (4) Use of farm titles with a name also indicates a possible farm "inheriting manager."

