On the Development of German Surnames in French Canada

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This study shows how the surnames of German immigrants to French Canada, most of whom were Hessian soldiers who stayed in Québec after the American Revolutionary War, were altered over the course of time so as to become unique in the French-speaking world.

Introduction

Most French family names in North America have undergone no changes since their original bearers crossed the Atlantic in the 17th and 18th centuries. Thus, when the 100 most frequent contemporary surnames in France and Québec are compared, a sizeable number are found to occur on both lists. For instance, *Martin, Robert, Richard, Dubois, Lefebvre, Fournier, Girard, Lambert, Fontaine, Rousseau, Mercier, Gauthier, Morin, Dufour, Roy, Caron, Picard, Leclerc,* and a great many others are well represented in both places.

On the other hand, it should come as no surprise that four centuries after French immigrants began to settle in the New World (Port-Royal was founded in 1605, Québec City in 1608), many surnames now borne by North American francophones should have no exact counterparts in Europe. As shown in Picard (2003), three basic factors can be found to account for these differences: some original French family names were altered phonologically (*Marchelidon* > *Marchildon*), or simply orthographically (*Archambault* > *Archambeault*); others were apparently created out of whole cloth (*Antaya, Cournoyer, Pom(m)erleau*) or derived from erstwhile dit names (*Ezéchiel dit Chiquet* > *Chiquette*); still others were adapted from foreign names whose bearers became integrated into French-Canadian society (English *Haynes* > *Hains/Haince/ Hainse/*

Hince/Hins/Hinse). In this study, I will focus on some of the family names of this latter category.

Now one might think for obvious reasons that English would be the primary source of these assimilated names in French. However, it turns out that even though English surnames, along with those of Irish, Scottish and Welsh origin that had been previously anglicized, have undoubtedly comprised the most numerous foreign names in French Canada historically, very few of them have undergone any orthographic modifications.

In actual fact the surnames that have undergone the most widespread and radical alterations in French Canada since the 1700s are those of German origin, and this is due primarily to one historical event: the participation of the Hessians in the American Revolutionary War.

According to Johannes Merz, who has probably explored this chapter of Canadian and American history more extensively than anyone else,[1] Hessians "were the German auxiliary troops of King George III who defended Canada against the Americans under General George Washington" (2001, 1). They came to be referred to collectively as Hessians since "about two-thirds of the[se] troops . . . were supplied by the Hessian princes, relatives of the King" (2001, 2).

When German troops began to be shipped back to Germany after the Treaty of Paris in 1783, quite a few of the regulars asked to be permitted to stay in Canada while others simply deserted. Of the roughly 2,500 soldiers who remained behind, about 2,000 settled in Québec. Many of them married French-Canadian women, and since their names were not readily pronounceable by the largely monolingual francophone population into which they were absorbed, most of their names quickly underwent significant phonological and orthographic alterations (cf. Merz 2001, 3).

The Adaptation of German Surnames in French

In what follows, I will provide the origin and development of all the German family names which are known to me to have been modified in some way as a result of the francization process to which they were subjected over the course of time. Most importantly, I will endeavor to use all the genealogical information that has become available on the Internet in recent times in order to trace these surnames to their original bearers.[2]

The entries are listed in the alphabetical order of their derived (i.e., francized) forms. Each entry consists of two parts, one etymological and the other genealogical. In the former, the origin of the German surname is provided when it is known, the primary source for this information being Bahlow (2002). The second part consists of genealogical data, and typically includes the immigrant's name, his place of origin, his wife's maiden name, and the location and date of their marriage in Québec (occasionally elsewhere). Needless to say, not all of these details are available in each individual case but I feel most of the important onomastic information has been uncovered, especially as regards the origin and development of these unique French surnames.

Arbic, Arbique, from *Herbecke*, a placename in Nordrhein-Westfalen. Johann Georg Herbecke from Leinefelde (Thüringen) m. (1) Marie-Véronique Schäffer in Louiseville in 1779, and (2) Louise Couvret in Oka in 1794.

Bayeur, Payeur, from *Bayer* 'Bavarian'. Johann Christoph Bayer/Beyer from Ruckingen (Hessen) m. Madeleine Gendreau in Québec City in 1786.

Bémeur, from *Be(h)mer*, a variant of *Bö(h)mer* 'Bohemian, Czech'. Jean Bemer from Petit-Landau or Langensoultzbach (Alsace) m. Charlotte Pépin in Boucherville in 1819.

Berger, from *Nürnberger*, a native of Nürnberg (Bayern). Friedrich Wilhelm Nürnberger from Cassel (Hessen) m. Marie-Euphrosine Gaudreau in L'Islet in 1787.

Calestagne, from *Kellerstein*, which appears to be a combination of *Keller* 'cellar' and *Stein* 'stone'. Johann Gottlieb Kellerstein from Halle (Anhalt-Sachsen) m. Marie-Louise Thiffault in Montréal in 1789.

Camerlain, apparently from *Käm(m)erling*, from Middle High German *kemerlinc* 'chamberlain'.[3] Adam Camerling m. Marie-Catherine Martin probably in Chambly c. 1775.

Caux, from *Koch* 'cook'. Balthasar Koch from Stockheim m. Élisabeth Jacob in Laprairie c. 1781.

Cheff, from *Schäffer*, either a variant of *Schaffer* 'bursar, steward' or *Schäfer* 'shepherd'. Andreas Gerhart Schäffer m. (1) Johanna Dorothea Maher in Germany in 1778, and (2) Marie-Louise Beauvais in Rigaud in 1804.

Claing, from *Klein* 'small'. Antoine Klein from Schaffhouse (Alsace) m. Catherine Stebbins/Stébenne in St-Mathias in 1819.

Crégheur, from *Krüger* 'innkeeper'. Johann Christoph Krüger from Ritzleben (Sachsen-Anhalt) m. Marie-Angélique Réaume in Québec c. 1792.

Doth, from *Dauth*, origin undetermined. Caspar Dauth from Rosheim (Alsace) m. Angélique Tessier in Ste-Anne-de-la-Pérade in 1784.

Despard, Despars, from *Spaer*, origin undetermined. Jean-George Spaer from Hungary m. Marie-Angélique Périllard in Rivière-Ouelle in 1779.

Dextradeur, from *Dachstätter* via *Dockstader*, native of Dachstadt (Bayern). George Adam Dockstader from Stone Arabia, NY, grandson of Georg Dachstätter from the Palatinate, m. Marie-Ursule Tessier in Montréal in 1791.

Dickner, Nickner, from *Lindner*, native of Linden (Bayern). Johann Christopher Lindner from Niederspier (Thüringen) m. Lorraine Perrault in La Pocatière in 1789.

Falstrault, from *Faulstroh*, origin undetermined. Heinrich Faulstroh from Rodheim (Hessen) m. Charlotte St-Mesmin in Québec c. 1791.

Felx, Fex, from *Filsch*, a placename in Rheinland-Pfalz. Ignatz Filsch from Mannheim (Baden-Württemberg) m. Marie-Josèphe Dupuis in Montréal in 1760.

Fitzback, from *Fischbach*, a placename in Diekirch and Luxembourg. Charles Fischbach dit Dodienne from Luxembourg m. Marie-JulieAnne Haoussery in Montréal in 1759.

Franc, from *Franck*, the name of a Germanic people. Michel Franck from Rohrbach (Baden-Württemberg) m. Marie Gresse in Kamouraska in 1814.

Frédéric, Frédérick, from *Friedrich*, Germanic *Frideric* (< *frid-* 'peace' and *ric* 'powerful'). Johann Friedrich from Darmstadt (Hessen) m. Marie-Anne Fréchette in Lévis in 1789.

Frève, from *Fröbe*, a placename in Frobersgrun and Frobershammer, Bayern. Johann Wilhelm Franz Froebe from Mulhouse (Alsace) m. Marie Delpeau in Ste-Anne-de-la-Pocatière in 1786.

Gérard, from *Gerhardt*, Germanic *Gerhard* (< *gari-* 'spear' and *hard* 'hard'). Philippe Gerhardt from Sarrebourg (Lorraine) m. Madeleine Audet in St-Nicolas in 1787.

Gince, from *Gans* 'goose', the nickname of a breeder of geese or a gooseherd. Christoph Gans from Versbach (Bayern) m. Marguerite- Cunégonde Fursterer in Québec c. 1777.

Godcharles, from *Gottschalk*, Germanic *Gotscalc* (< *god-* 'god' and *scalc* 'servant'). Stefan Gottschalk from Kirchhain (Hessen) m. Marie-Josèphe Comparet in Montréal in 1787.

Goedike, from *Gödicke*, derived from Germanic *Godfrid* (< *god-* 'god' and *frid* 'peace'). Friedrich Rudolf Goedicke from Duderstadt (Niedersachsen) m. Marie-Louise King in Montréal in 1785.

Grau, from *Graue*, a placename in Niedersachsen. Nicholas Graue from Fulda (Hessen) m. Marie-Charlotte Assailly in Montréal in 1784.

Greffe, from *Gräff*, a variant of *Graf* 'count'. Johannes Gräff from Grossauheim (Hessen) m. Marie-Louise Houde in Châteauguay in 1786.

Grothé, from *Grothe*, derived from Low German *grot* 'big'. Christian Grothe, presumably from Germany, m. Reinette Dupré in Montréal in 1783.

Hammarrenger, Marenger, Marengère, Maringer, Marinier, from *Amringer*, origin undetermined. Andréas Guillaume Amringer from Strasbourg (Alsace) m. Marie-Anne Corneau in Ste-Rose in 1766.

Harton, from *Hartung*, derived from Germanic *hard-* 'hard'. Felix Hartung from Stockhausen (Hessen) m. Marie-Angélique Gauvin in St-Roch-des-Aulnaies in 1785.

Hayeur, from *Heyer*, a variant of *Heuer* 'haymaker' or *Hauer* 'lumber-jack'. Pierre-Henry Heyer from Cologne (Nordrhein-Westphalen) m. Amable Véronneau in Chambly in 1815.

Hénaire, from *Henner*, derived from *Heinrich*, Germanic *Haimric* (< *haim-* 'home' and *ric* 'powerful'). Frantz Theobald Henner from Gildwiller (Alsace) m. Marguerite Bourgouin in Nicolet in 1821.

Heynemand, from *Heinemann*, composed of *Heine*, derived from *Heinrich* (see *Hénaire*), and *mann* 'man'. Christoph Friedrich Heinemann from Schöningen (Niedersachsen) m. Marie-Louise Gilbert in Québec City in 1784.

Horth, from *Orth*, a placename in Nordrhein-Westfalen and Schleswig-Holstein. Johannes Orth from Schlüchtern (Hessen) m. Louise Mailly in Québec in 1796.

Jomphe, from *Schumpf*, a variant of *Schimpf*, from Middle High German *schimpf* 'jest, amusement', a nickname for a humorous or playful person. Christian Adolphus Schumpf from Enkirch (Rheinland-Pfalz) m. Marie-Monique Samson in Québec City in 1791.

Keable, from *Göbel*, Germanic *Godebald* (< *god-* 'god' and *bald* 'bold'). Theodor Göbel from Mainz (Rheinland-Pfalz) m. Marie-Louise Cameron in Montmagny in 1787.

Laître, Lettre, from *Löder*, probably a variant of *Loder*, from *lode*, *lödel* 'rough wool material, boiled wool', a nickname for a weaver of this cloth. Georg Löder from Schäftersheim (Baden-Württemberg) m. Lorina/Sabina Munger in St-Nicolas c. 1776.

Marenger, Marengère, Maringer, Marinier, see **Hammarrenger.**

Milaire, Millaire, from *Müller* 'miller' via *Miller*. Friedrich Müller/ Frédéric Miller dit L'Allemand from Freiburg im Breisgau (Baden-Württemberg) m. Charlotte Bertrand in Chambly in 1770.

Molleur, from *Moller* 'miller'. Pierre Moller dit L'Allemand from Ulm (Baden-Württemberg) m. Jeanne Gueneville in Québec City in 1671.

Nickner, see **Dickner.**

Napert, Nappert, from *Nopper,* derived from *Noppe* 'tuft of wool', the nickname of a worker who removed burls from cloth. Jakob Nopper from Herrenberg (Baden-Württemberg) m. Françoise Destroismaisons in St-Pierre-du-Sud in 1787.

Ogleman, O'Gleman, from *Heinemann* (see **Heynemand**). Johann Conrad Heinemann from Germany m. Appoline Bourgery in Longueuil in 1787.

Payeur, see **Bayeur.**

Piuze, from *Behzer,* an unattested surname, probably a cacography of *Behrer, Beuzer* or *Betzer*. Traugott Leberecht Behzer from Warsaw in Poland m. Marie-Anne Aubut in La Pocatière in 1786.

Raquepas, from *Reichenbach,* a place name in Baden-Württemberg and in Bayern. Konrad Reichenbach from Steinau an der Strasse (Hessen) m. Marie-Françoise Desbois in Laprairie in 1790.

Rénald, Renard, from *Reinhart,* Germanic *Raginhard* (<*ragin-* 'counsel' and *hard* 'hard'). Michel Reinhart from Strasbourg (Alsace) m. Marie-Josèphe Mignault in St-Roch-des-Aulnaies in 1791.

Salman, Salmon, from *Zellman* 'man from Zell', the name of numerous places in Germany. Daniel Zellman from Hanau (Hessen) m. (1) Marguerite Blanchard in Varennes in 1789, and (2) Cécile Fugère in Varennes in 1795.

Schetagne, apparently an alteration of *Stange* 'pole', the surname of a tall and thin individual. No genealogical information has been found.

Schinck, Schink, Shink, from *Schenck,* a variant of *Schenk* 'cupbearer, innkeeper'. Heinrich Schenck from Gelnhausen (Hessen) m. Félicité Cliche in Châteauguay in 1788.

Schnob, from *Schnabel* 'beak', a nickname for a gossip or a glutton. Conrad Schnabel from Wangelnstedt (Niedersachsen) m. Elisabeth Barbe Pfeiffer in Hannover c. 1777.

Scraire, alteration of *Schreyer* via *Schryer,* from *Schreier* 'shouter', either the nickname of a town crier or a noisy individual. Abraham Schryer from Vermont m. Angélique Bonneau in Montréal in 1816.

Shink, see **Schinck.**

Spénard, from *Spennert,* origin undetermined. André Spennert from Germany or France m. Marie-Charlotte-Thérèse Arnaud in Québec City in 1690.

Strasbourg, from the placename *Strasburg* in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern or *Strassburg* in Hessen. Joseph Strasbourg dit L'Allemand from Hannover (Niedersachsen) m. Marie-Anne Brazeau in Pierrefonds in 1769.

Verner, from *Werner*, Germanic *Warinhari* (< *warin* 'protection' and *hari* 'army'). Jakob Werner from Durlach (Baden-Württemberg) m.(1) Angélique Duquet in Châteauguay in 1783, and (2) Marie-Josèphe Houle also in Châteauguay in 1798.

Voghel, from *Vogel* 'bird', either the nickname of a birdcatcher or of someone manifesting some birdlike characteristic. Stephan Vogel from Amberg (Bayern) m. Agathe Chebrou in Beloeil in 1788.

Wilhelmy, from *Wilhelmi*, a latinized form of Germanic *Wilhelm* (< *will-* 'will' and *helm* 'helmet'). Christian Ernst Diederich Wilhelmi from Holzminden (Niedersachsen) m. Marie-Josèphe Content in Montréal in 1780.

Conclusion

Since settlers from France first started to arrive in Québec in the first half of the 17th century, people of many other nationalities have come to join them to form a society with many ethnic, cultural and linguistic backgrounds. From a purely onomastic viewpoint, it is remarkable how few of these erstwhile foreigners have had their surnames modified along the way,[4] in contradistinction to, say, the widespread alteration of French names in New England (see Gassette 1994, for example).

One notable exception to this situation, as I have tried to show, resides in the extensive transformations that German surnames underwent in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, largely as a consequence of the decision of many Hessians to remain in Québec at the end of the American Revolutionary War, whereupon they intermarried almost exclusively with French-Canadian women. In fact, the changes were so pervasive that one is hard put to find more than a handful of German names from that period that have fully retained their original orthography to this day.[5] The result has been the creation and spread of distinctive surnames borne largely by francophones that are found nowhere else in the French-speaking world.

Notes

1. Other studies of note, especially from a Canadian perspective, include DeMarce (1984) and Wilhelmy (1985).

2. Websites such as Ancestry.com, Rootsweb.com, Genealogy.com and FamilySearch.org are particularly useful in this regard. Another efficient way of obtaining pertinent genealogical data (parents, place of origin, spouse, etc.) is to simply Google a derived French-Canadian surname along with the word *Hessian* or, if the original German surname is known, to juxtapose the French and German names.

3. It is possible that the change of Käm(m)erling to Camerling occurred prior to the bearer's arrival in Québec since the latter form is found in France.

4. Nowhere is this more evident than in the list of the 1,000 most common family names in Québec as found in Duchesne (2006) where, out of some 80 names of non-French origin, only two have been modified, viz., *Hains* < English *Haynes* and *Jomphe* < German *Schumpf.*

5. The only ones that are known to me are *Hoffman(n)*, *Wagner, Samuel, Servais, Maher*, and *Meyer.*

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