

Genealogy Rocks!

Our Ancestor's Surnames

The correct spelling of a surname has always confused genealogists. We are so ingrained in the aspect of correct spelling that we forget that our ancestors were not so demanding about spelling. In probability, some of our ancestors could not spell, could not read, nor speak English. It was not always required that a name had to be spelled in only one way.



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A phonetic rendition was often just fine. A phonetic spelling of a surname could be transcribed in a local court document, church record, deed, census, even on a tombstone by someone connected to, or outside the family. Imagine the possible spelling variations that might have occurred.

There are two known quotes by President Andrew Jackson, "You should never trust a man who has only one way to spell a word" and "It's a dam poor mind that can think of only one way to spell a

word." Noah Webster published his first American Dictionary in 1828. Two generations later, standardized spelling began to be used. It is essential for the researcher to be flexible when looking for surnames. See how many ways you can spell a name phonetically, switch vowels around, be lenient with consonants and their combinations.

Most immigrants to this country did not change their name on board the ship, but rather later when becoming a citizen or trying to assimilate into an American way of life.

❖ *Ceil Damschroder is a genealogy instructor and past president of Larimer County Genealogical Society. Next society program is on February 17 at 6:30 pm in the Harmony Library in Fort Collins. NBC-TV presents their popular genealogy TV program, Who Do You Think You Are, on Fridays evenings beginning February 4. Our society has a three hour beginner genealogy workshop at the Loveland Library on February 19 at 9 am. For more events, please see our website at www.lcgsc.org or our Facebook page at www.Facebook.com/lcgsc.*