Names & Surnames -Tracing their History

Origins of the Surname

> ➢ Use of the father's given name as a surname
> ➢ Occupations
> ➢ Using localities
> ➢ Physical/ nickname/ personality
> ➢ Emblem & Icons

The **use of the father's given name as a surname** and can generally recognized by the termination "son" e.g. Johnson being the son of John. Other countries using "son" are the Danes and Norwegians – sen; or the Dutch zoon, which became **s z** as in Jansz the son of Jan. Prefixes denoting "son" like Fitz derives from the French for "son of" as in John Fitzpatrick was the son of Patrick. Further examples using a "son" prefix are the Scottish and Irish – Mac or Mc. The use of the modern German used "ing" to represent young man of. In the name Jongklaas as in young Claas or Nicolaas the position of the adjective was placed in front of the name

Occupations

This type of surname might tell you how an ancestor earned a living if we applied the same principle today, a surname might be Mr. Peter Bytes (a computer technician). In medieval times all villages had its own Blacksmith who made iron objects and for this obvious reason it is not surprising that in England, Scotland and America the surname Smith is extremely common. Other derivatives such as Faber *(Latin)*, Farrier *(French)*, Schmidt *(German)*, and Smid & Naesmyth *(Dutch)*.

Other surnames need some knowledge of other languages: Koch *(Cook-German)*; Schumacher (Shoemaker-German) or by the referring to "tools of the Trade": Canneel *(Cinnamon=Grocer-Dutch)*.

While Other Surnames can relate to position: Freeborn & de Fry *(a person not a slave)*; Kemp *(a warrior or athlete)*; Lord & de Heer *(landowner)*; de Koning *(King)*. It would be worth mentioning that the **Dutch use of 'van' is not like the German 'von' which designates nobility**

Using localities

Surnames also took on forms of places, areas and towns to distinguish themselves from other people with the same name and trade. Surnames with *hill, ford, wood, brook, and well* derive from features in the Landscape, while surnames like van Cuylenberg, Beecham, de Friese relate to places or countries of origin. In the surnames starting with *de, de la or du derive from the French for 'of the'*. **The name Pereira derives from Pear Tree**

Many surnames by the 1500 had parts dropped or altered from its original form. A good example of this is the family de la Harpe; at first glance you would take the name as being *of the Harp*, which would make sense by looking at their crest. But going back in their history to around 1380 there is a Pierre de Alpa, which would relate to *of the Alps*, closer scrutiny and historic information shows that on the 22nd of January 1390 Pierre de Alpa purchased a Farmhouse named "Arpes", in France near the border of Switzerland.. **In the case of my name Joustra translates as Stra meaning near and the first part being a town in Friesland, Holland**

Physical/ nickname/ personality

People have always been given nicknames to describe a physical feature or character attributes and it is not surprising to find many nicknames have become surnames. A Norseman who had Red hair might have been called *Eric the Red* that later developed into Eric Reid. Similarly a Goth who had Black Hair would receive the surname Zwartzkopf *(Blackhead) so a surname like* de *Bruin referred to* brown in Dutch. There are less polite references to physical features such as Cameron *(Crooked Nose)* or Smollett *(a person with a small Head)*

Emblems & Icons

Animals and Icons were also used on armorial ensigns or a board above a house. The meanings can be many and varied from a personality to hopes, wishes and aspirations. The resulting Emblem or Icon further became the surname or 'House name'. Some examples like de Vos – *the Fox*; Falck – *Falcon*; Wolf and de Wolff – *the Wolf*; de Hoedt – *the Hat*; de Ly – *the Lily*

With the example of the Singhalese person Peter de Silva Wijeyeratne we can learn quite a bit about History and clues to tracing. Starting with his last name first

Wijeyeratne is a name acquired more recently (in the last 100-200yrs)

d**e Silva** is the surname given on conversion to Christianity and the sponsor Captain de Silva of the Portuguese Army

Peter is the saint's name

The **ge** of gay name is the original clan name referring to "House of"

While the first names relate to distinguished warriors of that particular clan

The meaning or origin of your surname may not help to find information on your ancestors but can be an interesting insight as to what your surname means.

It should be noted that a surname doesn't automatically designate a nationality as send from the above example where it was through conversion. Other examples are the Jewish fleeing persecution and took on Portuguese surnames or other families coming through the Dutch East India Company did not make them automatically Dutch.

Where do you start?

Your first step towards building your family tree is to start with what you know. By asking your Mother, Father, Grandparents, Aunts and Uncles to gather your initial information, this is what I refer to as your '***Core Information***'. For the most success get dates, places and as much information about them as possible.

A common error is to only concentrate on the main surname you are searching on and forgetting the families that married into this surname. Ask yourself this question "Who is more accepted into a family a relative, friend of the family or a complete stranger?" the answer of course is relatives and friends. In cases of other countries an ethnic minority tend to stick with themselves, the old custom of courting was easier and work associates or friends had more interactions with a family. Another way of putting it is if we all had separate parents that is my mother and father is 2 and their parents 4, 8, 16 and so on we end up with 512 people in the early 1700s just to make myself. Keep in mind too that all these other people helped make you gene pool.