



The Castle Genie

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NEWSLETTER OF THE GENEALOGY CLUB
Passaic County Historical Society, Lambert Castle, Paterson, New Jersey

They Changed Our Name at Ellis Island

By Donna Przecha, extracted from *Genealogy.com*

We have all heard someone say that their family name was ‘changed by the inspectors at Ellis Island.’ Nowadays our names are recorded when we are born and are virtually never changed. You can still use any name you want as long as you do not intend to defraud but, in fact, with drivers' licenses, social security numbers, credit cards, etc., it is just too complicated to try to alter your name except through a court proceeding.

People seem to feel that it was the same way at the turn of the century. They think that immigrants had one correct way to spell their name in the old country, when they encountered the clerk at Ellis Island it was changed to something else and then it was spelled that way ever after in America. The explanation usually is that the immigrant spoke little or no English, so either the immigrant inadvertently gave an incorrect reply to the question of “What is your name?”

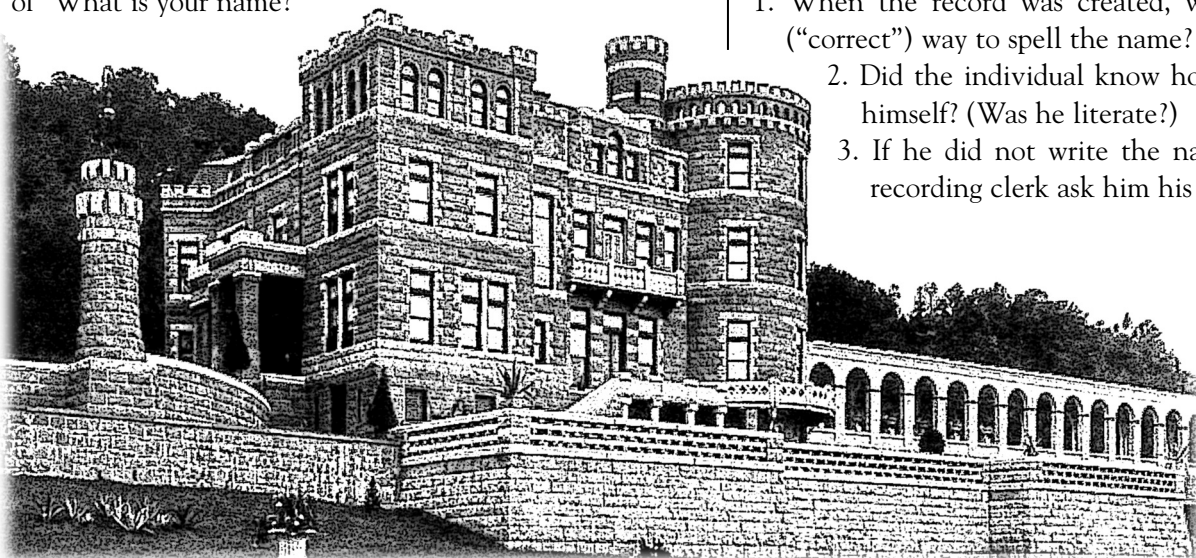
or the clerk misunderstood the name or decided it was too complicated.

In reality, it is highly unlikely that this happened. The Immigration and Naturalization Service has a good article on immigrant name changes that explains why this wonderful story is a myth: the clerks at Ellis Island didn't write down names. They worked from lists that were created by the shipping companies. What usually happened was the emigrant bought a ticket from an office near his home. So, the seller probably spoke the same language and transcribed the name correctly. In cases where the name was recorded incorrectly, it likely occurred in the old country, not at Ellis Island.

There are several questions to consider when talking about the accuracy of name spellings on records:

1. When the record was created, was there a standard (“correct”) way to spell the name?
2. Did the individual know how to spell the name himself? (Was he literate?)
3. If he did not write the name himself, did the recording clerk ask him his preferred spelling?

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Club News

The Passaic County Historical Society Genealogy Club holds meetings 10:00 a.m. at Lambert Castle on the second Saturday of the month from September through May (unless otherwise specified).

Meeting dates for the 2013 year are as follows:

September 14, 2013

German Genealogy – “The Road to Elbingerode” Speaker: Robert Stein

Bob Stein has been a genealogist for over ten years and has appeared on the “Famiy Historian” TV show. He will explain how to find clues that will help you discover your German ancestors’ villages, and where the records can be found. Bob will share many real examples that he personally found when tracing his roots back to Elbingerode in 1650. You’ll also learn the unique aspects of German genealogy and how you can use them in your research.

October 12, 2013

November 9, 2013

December 14, 2013

For more information about any of these events, please visit our website at:

www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~njpchsgc/

or contact the PCHS office at: 973-247-0085 x200.

Passaic County Historical Society Genealogy Club

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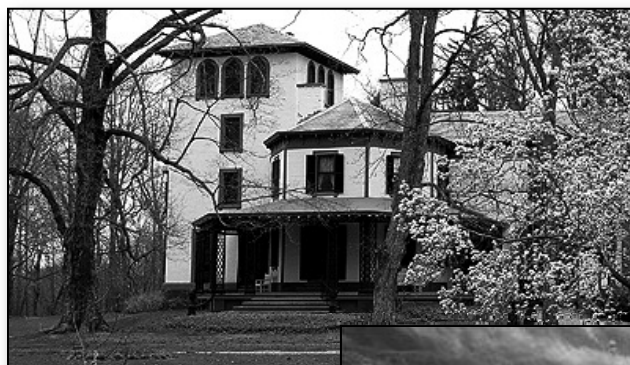
All Members are invited and encouraged to submit material for publication in *The Castle Genie*. We will try to publish at least a portion of everything we receive. Information is published as submitted and has not been verified. Material will be printed as space permits. When information is extracted from another publication, please give proper credit.

Send material to: Passaic County Historical Society Genealogy Club
 Lambert Castle, 3 Valley Road, Paterson, New Jersey 07503

For Membership information, please contact the PCHS office at 973-247-0085.

Hudson Valley New York Bus Trip

The Genealogy Club’s annual bus trip took place on June 8th. This year we visited Locust Grove, the 200-acre Samuel Morse Estate overlooking the Hudson River. We then dined at the Beekman Arms Hotel and Inn. The historic hotel in Rhinebeck, New York has operated continuously since 1766, retaining much of its colonial charm. The delicious three-course lunch was enjoyed by all. The last stop on our trip was a visit to Vanderbilt Mansion, an example of a gilded-age country place, illustrating the political, economic, social, cultural, and demographic changes that occurred as America industrialized in the years after the Civil War. It was interesting to learn that the Vanderbuilt’s spent only two months in the Spring and two months in the Autumn at this magnificent showplace.



Locust Grove



Vanderbilt Mansion

Beekman Arms Hotel and Inn



*We wish everyone a
 Happy and Healthy Summer.
 We look forward to seeing you in
 September.*

They Changed Our Name *cont. from page 2*

So much of the time, the answer to at least one of these questions was “no.” However, let us assume that your emigrant knew how to spell his name and it was written correctly on the list created by the shipping company and used by the inspectors at Ellis Island. When he arrived at Ellis Island, he was checked against the list. With all the immigrants coming through the facility, many translators were employed so language problems were rare.

Bear in mind that name changes were often made by the immigrants themselves. Let’s see what some of those possible reasons are.

Employment

The vast majority of immigrants came to the United States to get jobs. There was a huge pool of workers, usually unskilled, who were desperate to work. Employers didn't have to abide by anti-discriminatory laws and were not given sensitivity training. They often found foreign names difficult and preferred workers who were somewhat Americanized. If an immigrant had family or friends who arrived earlier they may have advised the new arrival to take an easier, more Americanized name. Similarly, a boss may have found the foreign name too difficult to say and suggested a simpler name (he might say, for example, “That name is too difficult for me. How about I call you Sam?”). The new employee didn't object and he may have just decided to use the new name for everything. And, since wages were usually paid in cash, he didn't have to worry about a name on a check being the same as the bank account or a Social Security investigation.

While a new arrival might quickly choose a simpler name in order to get a job, he might later have second thoughts and choose yet another one. For example, he might have selected "John" originally because it was the first American name that came to mind. However, after being in the United States for a while he might learn that his foreign name actually had an equivalent in English and decide it would be more accurate to use that name.

Fitting In

Assimilating into American culture is another reason why your ancestors might have changed their names. While some immigrants came with the idea of working for a while and returning home, most came to stay forever. Many wanted to become Americans as fast as possible so they changed their style of clothes and adopted a more American name.

The immigrants who came as children were especially eager to assimilate. With their friends at school urging them to modernize their names, they may not have wanted to be saddled with an old-fashioned sounding name.

Simplicity

Also consider that even if an immigrant wasn't pressured into making a change, a foreign name can be annoying when you have to spell it for everyone. (I know from personal experience!) If the immigrant lived where most people spoke the same language, it wasn't a problem. But if he had to mix with other nationalities regularly, he would have an incentive to change.

Similarly, the naming custom from the old country might have been totally foreign to America. For example, the Norwegians used the patronymic system whereby a child's surname was based on his or her father's first name. If a man named Lars Pederson had a son named Anders, he was called Anders Larson. A daughter named Anna would be Anna Larsdatter and would use this name even after she married. In America this was too complicated so when she married a man named Ole Swenson, she simply became Anna Swenson. However, in correspondence with the people back in Norway, she would probably continue to sign herself Anna Larsdatter.

Types of Changes

In the United States around 1900, there were no rules about names so immigrants could alter their names, first or last, any way they wanted. For example,

- One of the easiest changes was to simplify the pronunciation and spelling. So, the German “Nüchter” could get rid of the un-American umlaut and change the sound to one more familiar to English speaking people, ending up with “Nichter.”
- A name with too many syllables might be shortened.
- Combinations of letters not usually used in America — especially those with lots of z's — could be modified so the sound was similar.
- A completely different, English name might be adopted.
- A person with a long name such as “Finkelstein” might shorten it to “Finkel” or “Stein.”
- People might pick a given name that is very American and sounds somewhat like their original name. For example, the Japanese “Tamio” could become “Tommy.”

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One thing to note is that immigrants often used two given names during their lives: an Americanized name for outsiders and the original foreign name within the family. The possibility for confusion could arise when it wasn't clear if an occasion was public or private. For example a wedding was a family celebration, so a person would feel comfortable using his foreign-sounding name. However, filing for a marriage license was a public event in an Anglo setting so the immigrant might feel he should use the American name. He might end up being recorded in church under the foreign name and in public records under his American name.

Literal Translation

Another way of coping with awkward names is a literal translation. The German "Schneider" could be literally translated to "Taylor." "Schwarz" would become "Black." The family of Prince Philip of England translated its name from the German "Battenberg" to the English "Mountbatten." Most first names had commonly accepted translations so there was usually an equivalent available without thinking about it. However, in some cases the literal translation might go from an impossible foreign name to a very ugly English name that no one really wanted to use. "Waclawek" might translate to the English "Wenceslaus" but that wouldn't help too much. The immigrant might find "Walter" a better substitute. "Lukrecia" might translate to "Lucretia" but a young girl might find "Lotty" or "Laurie" to be more to her taste. Similarly, "Waldek" is translated into English as "Oswald" or "Valdemar" but a man might prefer "Wally," "Walter" or even "Victor."

Sometimes a name could have two different translations. The Polish "Wojciech" could be "Albert" or "George." It is possible that at different times one man could have used all three names. Not knowing his preference of the moment, it is necessary to look for all three variations when you are searching records. (You also have to keep in mind that a "w" in Polish is pronounced like a "v" so "Wojciech" could end up being recorded as "Voychek!")

Whimsical Reasons

There are also hundred of stories about how immigrants picked names for purely whimsical reasons. The INS gives the example of a young Vietnamese man who changed his name to "Bonus" because when he first arrived he would buy "bonus paks" of chewing gum to get him through his busy day of working several jobs and studying English.

It is also possible that an immigrant might change his name to match some obscure happening in his life that later descendants knew nothing about: the name of the street where he first lived, a person he read about in the paper, a village back home, a relative, a new American food he liked. Girls, especially, might admire a film star or singer and adopt that name.

Imagine that you were going into the witness protection program tomorrow and had to decide on your new name. Where would you start? You would want a name that sounded pleasing to you, one that you felt comfortable with. If you were blonde, you probably wouldn't want a Greek sounding name nor would an African-American choose an Asian-sounding name. As a first name you might pick one you always admired. Or, you might select a relative's name or a movie star's. A last name would be more difficult — perhaps a mother's maiden name or a town, river or mountain name. You might begin looking around you and trying out names of trees, birds or animals. Selecting a new name is not an easy thing to do!

Consequences

Name changes can have unforeseen consequences. For example, since everyone was free to use the name he or she preferred, some families would end up with different last names. Since foreign-born children derived their citizenship from their parents, the diversity of names sometimes caused problems later when the child had to prove the identity of his father. The INS web site has several letters from people who wanted to reassume their original name or change it to correspond with the rest of their family.

Who Changed Your Name? Your Ancestor

If your family name underwent a change in America, you can be pretty certain that the only person responsible for the modification was your ancestor, not an inspector at Ellis Island! And, it is important to remember that the name may have evolved over time. Keep this in mind as you hunt for your immigrant ancestor in the records of his new homeland.

PASSAIC COUNTY COURT DOCKETS

PETITION FOR NAME CHANGE, 1908-1930

Years ago people changed their name for a variety of reasons. Some immigrants had names that they were not born with and later officially formalized their name change so that all official documents and records showed the name they had been using. Often people anglicized their name to avoid discrimination, particularly when seeking employ-

ment. Other people simply hated their names. We may never know the exact reason for the change, but perhaps the following list will help discover someone's ancestral name. This list is the Index of the Petition for Name Change from the Passaic County Court Dockets 1908-1930.

Folder #	Docket #	Original		Change	Date
12	917	UREANS, Frederick	to	JUERGENS, Frederick	1908
50	2795	TRAVAGLIO, Antonio	to	TRAVERS, Antonio	1922
		TRAVAGLIO, Antonette	to	TRAVERS, Antonette	
		TRAVAGLIO, Samuel A.	to	TRAVERS, Samuel A.	
		TRAVAGLIO, Angelo A.	to	TRAVERS, Angelo A.	
		TRAVAGLIO, Michael A.	to	TRAVERS, Michael A.	
		TRAVAGLIO, Charles E.	to	TRAVERS, Charles E.	
		TRAVAGLIO, Mary A.	to	TRAVERS, Mary A.	
		TRAVAGLIO, Rose	to	TRAVERS, Rose	
83	2828	LIPSHITZ, Louis	to	LIPTON, Louis	1922
		LIPSHITZ, Esther	to	LIPTON, Esther	
		LIPSHITZ, Morris	to	LIPTON, Morris	
90	2835	BERKOWITZ, Joseph	to	BICKOFF, Joseph	1922
94	2839	COHEN, Samuel	to	KAHN, Bert	1922
97	2842	KOVINSKY, William I.	to	KOVIN, William I.	1922
115	2860	SPIEGEL, Leonard J.	to	JONES, Leonard James	1922
129	2874	WIRZ, Albert	to	ANSON, Albert	1922
135	2880	RONCORONI, Peter	to	KOHLER, Peter	1922
		RONCORONI, Charles L.	to	KOHLER, Charles L.	
		RONCORONI, Louis C.	to	KOHLER, Louis C.	
140	2885	HENDRICKS, Elizabeth	to	LOTZ, Elizabeth	1922
193	2938	SMUTNY, Edward	to	FUCHS, Edward	1923
216	2961	CASTIGLIONE, Paulino	to	CASTELINE, Paul Vincent	1923
223	2968	RATKOWSKI, John Michael	to	SMITH, John Michael	1923
229	2974	LEVANDOWSKY, Herman Frederick	to	KLEIN, Herman Frederick	1923
253	3472	DECKER, Chester G,	to	GEFFKEN, Chester	1925
259	3478	KAMINSKI, Anthony S.	to	CONREY, Anthony S.	1925
		KAMINSKI, Natalie	to	CONREY, Natalie	
260	3479	SILBERSTEIN, Louis	to	SILBE, Louis	1925
		SILBERSTEIN, Fannie	to	SILBE, Fannie	
263	3482	LIMONIS, George	to	LYNN, George	1925
277	3496	IOZIA, Frank	to	BARONE, Frank	1925
282	3501	POLANSKY, Robert	to	POLLAN, Robert Edward	1925

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Petition For Name Change *cont. from page 5*

Folder #	Docket #	Original		Change	Date
290	3509	CONTOGIANNIS, George	to	CONTOS, George	1925
292	3511	EZORSKY, Samuel L.	to	EZOR, Samuel L.	1925
295	3514	LEFKOVITZ, Samuel	to	LEFKOWITZ, Samuel	1926
297	3516	SYMITKOWSKI, William B.	to	SMITH, William B.	1926
305	3524	DEATH, Gordon C.	to	DEETH, Gordon C.	1926
308	3527	BAROLSKY, Joseph	to	BARR, Joseph	1926
310	3529	FINNEGAN, John	to	SULLIVAN, John	1926
317	3536	SZYMBORSKI, Harry	to	GREEN, Harry	1926
342	3707	TABACK, Isadore	to	TABACKBLATT, Isadore	1926
353	3718	CHMIELINSKI, Joseph	to	PAINE, Joseph C.	1926
355	3720	ASHENOFISKY, David	to	ASHER, David	1926
		ASHENOFISKY, George	to	ASHER, George	
		ASHENOFISKY, Henry	to	ASHER, Henry	
		ASHENOFISKY, Robert	to	ASHER, Robert	
366	3731	GRODEZKY, Israel	to	GORDON, Israel	1927
367	3732	HOLOVENSKI, Leo	to	HOLEVES, Leo	1927
		HOLOVENSKI, Margaret	to	HOLEVES, Margaret	
		HOLOVENSKI, Leonard	to	HOLEVES, Leonard	
370	3735	SANTORUFO, Achille	to	SANTORE, Harry A.	1927
		SANTORUFO, Louis	to	SANTORE, Louis	
384	3749	BOYARSKI, Isarel Ezekiel	to	BOYER, Irving Ezekiel	1927
385	3750	LEVANDOWSKY, Charles	to	KLEIN, Charles	1927
390	3755	SASSO, Antonio	to	VARA, Antonio	1927
414	3779	BIELECKI, Edward	to	BELL, Edward	1927
416	3831	DUNKERLEY, Harold	to	PRUIKSMA, Harold	1927
418	3833	DEUTSCHMAN, Paul	to	DITTMAN, Paul	1927
422	3837	RANNELLO, John	to	VELLUTO, John	1927
426	3841	SIKORSKY, Robert S.	to	ROBERTS, Robert S.	1927
435	3850	CHURCHWELL, Gregory	to	WARREN, Gregory A.	1927
441	3856	SAPERSTEIN, Albert	to	SABIN, Albert	1927
443	3858	HOEHL, August	to	HALE, August	1927
446	3861	KALENTKOWSKI, George	to	KIERAN, George	1927
453	3868	WISNIEWSKI, Joseph	to	SMITH, Joseph	1927
457	3872	GORITSKY, William	to	GORIT, William George	1927
462	3877	FETZISCHKANIN, Vasel	to	ANDRUS, Vasel	1927
		FETZISCHKANIN, John	to	ANDRUS, John	
		FETZISCHKANIN, Mary	to	ANDRUS, Mary	
		FETZISCHKANIN, George	to	ANDRUS, George	
		FETZISCHKANIN, Andrew	to	ANDRUS, Andrew	
		FETZISCHKANIN, Nicholas	to	ANDRUS, Nicholas	
		FETZISCHKANIN, Michael	to	ANDRUS, Michael	
		FETZISCHKANIN, Peter	to	ANDRUS, Peter	

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Petition For Name Change *cont. from page 6*

Folder #	Docket #	Original		Change	Date
476	3891	SAURUSEWICZ, Wladylaw	to	SAURS, Walter	1928
489	3904	EROTSKY, Bruno	to	BROWN, Edward	1928
494	3909	SEDLISKY, Aaron	to	SEDELL, Aaron	1928
496	3911	STANISZEWSKI, Felix	to	STAZESKI, Felix	1928
505	3920	GIANOPULOS, Peter	to	JOHNSON, Peter	1928
529	3944	RADASHKOVITZ, Nathan	to	RADOW, Nathan	1928
534	3949	SEBESTY, Anna Majorie	to	SEBEY, Anna Majorie	1928
535	3950	SEBESTYAK, Ferdinand N. SEBESTYAK, Clara	to to	SEBEY, Ferdinand N. SEBEY, Clara	1928
566	4089	KOSZTYER, Andrew	to	STABBY, Andrew	1929
571	4094	TINSKY, Samuel	to	TINNEY, Samuel	1929
577	4100	KELLY, Joseph Edward	to	MOSLEY, Joseph Edward	1929
579	4102	QUIGLEY, John	to	SPRUCE, John Joseph	1929
581	4104	PETERNITS, John	to	PETERS, John	1929
623	4146	SPIROS, William	to	SPEARS, William	1929
629	4152	KROMOHO, Joseph Colon	to	COLON, Joseph H.	1929
660	4185	HAZARABEDIAN, Jeremiah	to	BEDIAN, Jeremiah Hazar	1929
668	4207	ZWIERZYNSKI, Ludwig	to	ZWIER, Ludwig	1929
669	4208	ZWIERZYNSKI, Joseph	to	ZWIER, Joseph	1929
675	4215	KOSZCWNIK, Chester J.	to	COZEN, Chester J.	1929
682	4222	BORNSTEIN, Louis D. BORNSTEIN, Elenore M.	to to	STONE, Louis D. STONE, Elenore M.	1929
685	4225	HONEYWELL, Ethelbert	to	BARRY, Bert	1929
693	4233	FISHER, Goldie	to	RUSCH, Goldie	1929
702	4242	ROSENSTEIN, Edward ROSENSTEIN, Florence	to to	WHITE, Edward WHITE, Florence	1929
703	4243	ROSENSTEIN, Benjamin ROSENSTEIN, Myrtle	to to	WHITE, Benjamin WHITE, Myrtle	1929
706	4246	DE MARIO, John Pacifico	to	RIZIR, Fritz	1929
762	4348	ROETMAN, William P.	to	PROMMEL, William	1930
773	4360	BOJANOWSKI, August T.	to	BOYAN, August T.	1930
783	4370	ZUKOWSKY, Abraham	to	SUCOFF, Abraham	1930
793	4380	NEFSKY, Abraham	to	NEFF, Abraham	1930
803	4390	SHERATOWSKY, Alfred	to	SHERRY, Alfred	1930
809	4396	SMELKINSON, Simon	to	NELSON, Simon	1930
853	4534	OSCHETZSKI, Herman	to	OAKLEY, Herman	1930
865	4546	JANDRISOVITS, Charles	to	JANDRIS, Charles	1930