

Hearths & Crafts

What's in a Name?

by Dr. Richard Craft

This is going to be a fun article, so hang on to your glasses and let's get started. You might even find your name mentioned and, if you do, take it as a compliment.

It all started with an article in the paper that indicated a person with the last name of Rabbit was considering running for political office. At first glance, it would seem a little unique, and certainly a name that would stand out on the campaign trail; in fact, it might even be an advantage over a Smith or a Jones.

But just a moment... think of other families with animal names! There's Katz, Lyons, Moles, Robbins, Finch, Lamb, Fisher, and Fox. (I don't think you'll find any Weasels, unless it is spelled Wiesel.) Yes, we Americans have some unique last names. Not to be outdone, of course, are the English, with my favorite surname of all time... Ramsbottom.

We have artisans with the last name of Goldsmith, Coppersmith, Silver-smith, the Cutlers, Bakers, and Shoemakers and Schoonmakers.

Colors also generate many families. There are the Whites, Blues, Greens, and Browns. Going further along this line, you come to a whole salad plate of names such as Romaine, Broccoli, Saltz and Pepper, with a few tomatoes thrown in (if you know what I mean).

Researching further, you come to a whole line of meat and fish. Think of the Hamburgers, the Hamms, the Trouts, and Herrings. Throw in some Pickels and Dills and you've got a virtual feast.

Plants also get some play with the Roses and their cousins the Rosenblooms. And, of course, there is my all-time favorite, the name of our airline pilot on our flight to Alaska... Sal Monella. There was a music teacher by the name of Falsetto who joins a whole chorus of lyrical Italian last names like Rigatoni, Alfredo, and Al Fresco. I am still looking for someone with the name of Al Dente.

You can sometimes even tell the region people come from by listening to their names. I'll give you one guess when I mention the names of Billie Sue, Billy Bob, and Billie Jo? There are some regions that have adopted first names like Charity, Faithful, Providence, Precious (that's what I call my

daughter).

There are names that we just know have been around this area for a long time. Think of the Hoornebeeks (Hornbecks), the Osterhoudts (Osterhouts), DePuys (Depews), Sheleys (Sheeleys), Van Wagners, and Beviars. This tells of a day when the Dutch invaded our land and settled in our valley "where the streams wind" (Wawarsing).

Unfortunately the Sitting Bulls and the Flying Crows have left but I think there are a few bald eagles left. Fast on their heels came the Kaplans, Cohens, Schwartzes, and Slutskys, and in that way the Wawarsing/Ellenville area flourished as a retail center. Oh, I must not forget the Franks and Beans, the Russetts and MacIntoshes.

What's in a name? In one area a certain name means bad news while on the other side of the hill the name conjures up thoughtfulness, generosity, and kindness. And just when you think you can nail down someone's nationality, culture, or race by their last name you come up short. We are so diverse in our culture, with multicultural marriages, foreign adoptions, etc. that the MacDougals might be black and the Shapiros, the proud parents of a Chinese daughter.

That's where Wawarsing comes in. Wawarsing can truly be called the melting pot for all cultures. We have residents in our town whose first and last names I can't spell or pronounce, but they can. My children attended, and now my grandchildren attend, Ellenville School, with a virtual United Nations representative student body. I, for one, think it is great. It is heart warming to see our residents comingling with people of all nationalities and languages in places of business, church, school functions, shopping, and in our many organizations. Everyone is welcome whatever their background because, after all, this is their home, too.

Oh, yes, there are areas in our state and country where there is a predominance of one ethnic group, race, or nationality, but this, too, can be a supportive and positive force. Me, I like it right where I am. I enjoy the diversity of friends, patients, and those familiar faces and new faces I meet just about every day.

What's in a name? It is your unique claim to fame, your own individuality. Be proud of it, there isn't another one just exactly like you in all the world.

I'm glad - we're glad - you are here. 

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