

The origin of the name

The origin of the Pennypacker name, and the various other spellings of the name, is Dutch. The original Dutch spelling is Pannebakker. The name is of occupational origin and is traceable to a term literally translated as "producer of tiles." Legend has it that the family emigrated from central Europe in the mid 1300's to the Netherlands to escape the wars and plague that were common in the area at that time. The earliest trace of the name in the Netherlands is in the year 1568, associated with Herr Jan de Pannebakker and his wife Nancy who were accused of heresy and killed by the Spaniards at Utrecht.

The Pannebakker families emigrated the Netherlands somewhere in the late sixteenth to mid-seventeenth centuries up the Rhine to the vicinity of Flomborn and Bermersheim, Deutschland. The name appears to have been changed to the Germanic spelling, Pfannebecker, while the family was living in this Rhineland Palatinate area of Germany. Heinrich Pannebecker is the first known Pfannebecker German immigrant to America.

The name has been spelled many different ways in the United States. Whether the name was changed because of quarreling siblings trying to distance themselves from each other, or because of census takers and other officials who wrote the name the way it sounded to them, the name did change many times. It is understandable that at least some of our ancestors didn't know how to read or write, and therefore didn't know the spelling of their own name, just the sound of it. When their name was needed for a deed or census, etc., the spoken name was written down as interpreted by the listener. There are over 60 variants of the surname found in available records.

Pannebecker changed to Pennypacker in Pennsylvania. It is interesting to note that there is a Pennypack Creek in the Philadelphia area. The creek draws its name from the Lenape word *pēnēpèkw* meaning "downward-flowing water" or "deep, dead water; water without much current." Early cartographers gave various spellings for the name, including Pennishpaska, La Riviere de Pennicpacka, and Pennishpacha Kyl. In early Swedish patents it was called Pemipacka. Thomas Holme called it Dublin Creek, while in later maps it is called Pennypack and Pennepack. It is unknown if the name of the creek influenced the spelling of the surname in Pennsylvania.

The Pennebaker surname became entrenched in southern and western family lines.

Surnames appearing in the Social Security Death Index, and probably indicative of family preferred spelling, are as follows:

Panabaker	Pannebakker	Pennabaker	Pennybacker
Panebaker	Pannebecker	Pennabecker	Pennybaker
Pannabaker	Pannenbecker	Pennebacker	Pennypacker
Pannabecker	Pannepacker	Pennebecker	Pfannebecker
Pannapacker	Penabaker	Pennepacker	Pfannenbecker
Pannebaker	Penebaker	Pennybacher	

Other spellings, of which there are many, are probably transcription errors.