

Onoma 58

Journal of the International Council of Onomastic Sciences

ISSN: 0078-463X; e-ISSN: 1783-1644

Journal homepage: <https://onomajournal.org/>

**Patrick Hanks & Simon Lenarčič, with
Peter McClure (eds.), *Dictionary of
American family names*, 2nd ed., 5. vols.,
Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022,
clxxx + 3633 pp., ISBN 978-0190245115
(print), eISBN 978-0190245122**

Frank Nuessel*

University of Louisville, USA

To cite this article: Nuessel, Frank. 2023. Patrick Hanks & Simon Lenarčič, with Peter McClure (eds.), *Dictionary of American family names*, 2nd ed., 5. vols., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022, clxxx + 3633 pp., ISBN 978-0190245115 (print), eISBN 978-0190245122. *Onoma* 58, 393–401. DOI: 10.34158/ONOMA.58/2023/28

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.34158/ONOMA.58/2023/28>

© *Onoma* and the author.

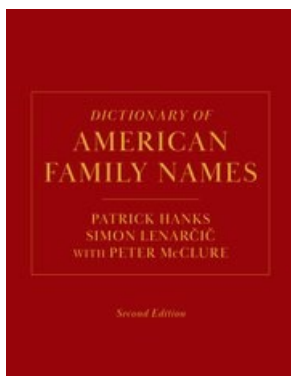
Article history

Received on 18 April 2023.

Final form accepted on 28 December 2023.

Published online on 31 December 2023.

* Contact: fnues01@louisville.edu.



(<https://global.oup.com/academic/product/dictionary-of-american-family-names-2nd-edition-9780190245115?cc=ro&lang=en&>)

1. Introduction

Two decades after the publication of the first edition (Hanks 2003) of *Dictionary of American family names* (henceforth *DAFN₁*) by Oxford University Press, which enjoys a privileged distinction for its high-quality research dictionaries in this area, a newly revised second edition of *Dictionary of American family names* (henceforth *DAFN₂*) has just been published. There have been many noteworthy changes in the latest edition. First, in addition to the original editor, Peter Hanks, two new editors have been added. Hanks enjoys a laudable reputation as a lexicographer, corpus linguist, and onomastician. Moreover, he served as the chief editor of current English Dictionaries at Oxford University Press (1990–2000). He has held research positions at universities in the United Kingdom, the United States, and the Czech Republic, and he is currently a visiting professor at the Research Institute of Information and Language Processing at the University of Wolverhampton (England). Simon Lenarčič, one of the two new editors of this expanded five-volume work, is an onomastician and orthographer from Slovenia, who has authored and edited several Slovenian encyclopedias, name dictionaries, and books on orthography. The second of the two new editors is Peter McClure, who is the Honorary Professor of Name-Studies at the Institute for Names at the University of Nottingham in England. Furthermore, he is the leading authority on English surname origins. Previously, he served as Senior Lecturer in English Language and Literature at the University of Hull (England) from 1965 to 1990. He is also the founding editor of the onomastic journal *Nomina* (1977–1985), and a Past President of the Society for Name Studies in Britain and Ireland, currently Vice-President of the English Place-Name Society (since 2013) and onomastic consultant to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (since 2007).

The second edition of *Dictionary of American family names* contains a profusion of surnames not covered in the first edition, which are grouped geographically. It should be noted that the list of contributors to *DAFN₁* and *DAFN₂* reads like a *Who's Who* of highly respected international onomasticians. In this sense, the high quality of the onomastic research in *DAFN₁* continues in *DAFN₂*. Table 1 provides a summary of the newly included languages in *DAFN₂*, while Table 2 indicates the languages that appear in both *DAFN₁* and *DAFN₂*.

Table 1: Languages newly included in the second edition (2022) of *Dictionary of American family names* (Vol. 1: ix–x)

Geographic area	Languages
Surnames from North America	African American, Native American
Surnames from Britain and Ireland	Cornish
Surnames from Western Europe	Breton
Surnames from Scandinavia, Finland, Estonia	Estonian
Surnames from Russia and Eastern Europe	Albanian, Gottscheerish (Gotschee German), Macedonian and Bulgarian, Sorbian (Wendish), Romanian, Rusyn (Ruthenian)
Surnames from Africa, the Middle East, and the Indian Subcontinent	African, Yoruba, Assyrian/Chaldean, Iranian/Persian, Turkish,
Names from East Asian	Burmese, Khmer, Lao, Hmong, Iu Mien, and Indonesian, Filipino, Vietnamese
Surnames from South America and the Caribbean	Amerindian, Haitian

Table 2: Languages included in the first and second editions (2003, 2022) of *Dictionary of American family names* (Vol. 1: ix–x, *DAFN*₂)

Geographic area	Languages
Surnames from Britain and Ireland	English, Irish, Scottish, Scottish Gaelic, Welsh
Surnames from Western Europe	Dutch and Flemish, French and Walloon, German, Luxembourgish
Surnames from Scandinavia, Finland, and Estonia	Finnish, Norwegian and Danish, Swedish
Surnames from Southern Europe	Greek, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, and other Iberian languages
Surnames from Russia and Eastern Europe	Armenian, Croatian and Bosniak, Czech, Hungarian, Latvian and Lithuanian, Polish, Serbian, Slovak, Slovenian, Russian, Ukrainian, and Belarussian
Jewish Surnames of the Diaspora	Jewish
Surnames from Africa, the Middle East, and the Indian subcontinent	Arabic and Muslim, Indian
Surnames from East Asia	Chinese, Japanese, Korean

2. The Aim of *DAFN*₂

In their general introduction to this five-volume dictionary set (Vol. 1: xv–xxxii), the editors of *DAFN*₂ present an informative and succinct overview of American surnames that provides answers to frequently asked questions about their history, origins, etymologies, and much more. They state that its aim is:

[...] to give a brief, clear summary of what is known about the origin and history of the 80,000 most frequent family names (surnames) in the US, together with some of their less common variants and also quite a few rare

names that are of historical or etymological importance. Each of us has a surname, generally inherited via our parents from our forebears (traditionally through the male line). However, most of us know remarkably little about how, when, and where our surname came into existence, and what it originally meant. (Vol. 1: xv)

Some of the appealing features of *DAFN*₂ include the following: (1) more than 87 percent of US surnames are included based on the 2010 US decennial census with surnames of more than 100 occurrences; (2) inclusion of an explanation for surnames with more than 300 bearers based on the 2010 US census; (3) the inclusion of more than 12,000 surnames from all parts of the world not included in *DAFN*₁ and (4) thousands of new origins for surnames originating in the non-European and Slavic languages (Vol. 1: xv).

3. The structure of the individual entries in *DAFN*₂

The structure of each surname entry included in *DAFN*₂ features the specific information about the categories (headword, frequency, explanation, diagnostic forenames, and history) and their descriptions presented in [Table 3](#).

Table 3: The structure of individual surname entries in *DAFN*₂ (Vol. 1: xvi)

Category	Description
Headword	This is the surname as found in the 2010 US census.
Frequency	This is the frequency of the surname reported in the 2010 US census.
Explanation	This is the source language, original meaning, original spelling, region of the mother country, typology (categorization of the surname's origin, e.g., place name, ethnic name, topographic feature, personal name of a forebear, occupation name, status name, nickname), etymology, i.e., the linguistic history of the surname with the form and meaning from which it is derived, cross-references (main entries or "anchor names" with additional data, e.g., frequent or interesting variant spellings have separate or main entries).
Diagnostic forenames	This provides a correlation between certain forenames and unresearched surnames to determine the likely source language of the surname (see Hanks & Tucker 2000).
History	This refers to certain surnames of historically significant personages that receive an additional paragraph about various aspects of that individual, e.g., US presidents.

4. Additional facts about *DAFN*₂

The editors (Vol. 1: xvi–xvii) point out that they have included the surnames of the indigenous population, immigrants willing and unwilling (60,000 Britons transported to the colonies and ten times that number of

Africans sold into slavery). Because of the diverse origins of the populations in the US, their surnames underwent various changes to Americanize them, e.g., accommodation to American English pronunciation, grammar and surname formats, partial or complete translations, transliteration, and re-naming. All of these transformations for certain groups may be said to amount to enforced onomastic acculturation given the dominant US metaphorical paradigm of the “melting pot” by which various social, legal, and governing cultural constraints seek to fit everyone into a preconceived notion of a sort of nominal normality.

The editors point out that tracing facts about family surnames is a daunting task (Vol. I: xviii–xxii). The mission to distinguish the pertinent origins of surnames from secondary and irrelevant ones requires a sophisticated knowledge of linguistics, world migrations, and world history. Moreover, surname orthography is subject to change over time. For this reason, *DAFN*₂ provides information on Americanized and altered forms of a surname. The European hereditary naming system became common by 1400. Prior to the rise of patronymic surnames, genealogical surnames were not hereditary. Surname adaptations from other naming systems such as Chinese and Arabic require judicious research. Surnames from smaller language groups are included when they reach the threshold of 300 in the US census of 2010. Furthermore, orthographic variation in surnames is specified by the indication “Americanized format” or “altered format”.

5. The origins of development of American surnames

The editors provide an insightful account of surname typologies summarized in [Table 4](#).

Table 4: Typology of surnames. *DAFN*₂ (Vol. 1: xxii–xxvii)

Surname type	Description and selected example(s)
Patronymic surnames	These surnames are the most common pattern of surnames, which involves the use of a personal name derived from an ancestor. Because of the early North American colonization by the English, Scots, and Anglo-Irish, patronymic surnames predominated.
Metronymic surnames	These surnames derive from first bearer’s mother, and they are extremely infrequent because European patriarchal surnames prevailed. These metronymic names might include women who were widows for a long period, or heiresses, e.g., <i>Catlin</i> , <i>Isabella</i> , and <i>Marion</i> . Metronymics are common among the Ashkenazic Jews, e.g., <i>Esterman</i> (‘Esther’s husband’).
Surnames from other forms of kinship	These surnames were ephemeral, but a few cases exist, e.g., <i>Hickmott</i> (‘Richard’s son-(in-law)’). A few family names indicate the original bearer’s family relation, e.g., English <i>Neve</i> (‘nephew’) and Italian <i>Cugini</i> (‘cousins’).

Surnames from lack of kin	These surnames include foundlings, abandoned, and illegitimate children. A few exemplary names are <i>Jetté</i> ('thrown away'), and <i>D'Amore</i> ('love child').
Habitational and topographic surnames	Habitational surnames derive from the names of towns, villages, and farmsteads, e.g., <i>Swan</i> or <i>Bell</i> , which referred to a distinctive sign attached to houses prior to the creation of numbered street addresses. Topographic surnames derive from some aspect of the topography of the landscape, e.g., <i>Ford</i> .
Ethnic surnames	These surnames may be based on a country of ethnic group, e.g., <i>Fleming</i> (English surname, ethnic surname for someone from Flanders) <i>Moravec</i> (Czech and Slovak, habitational name for someone from Moravia).
Occupational surnames	These surnames refer to the trade or occupation of the bearer, e.g., <i>Smith</i> , <i>Miller</i> , and <i>Sheppard</i> .
Status surnames	These surnames include <i>Knight</i> , <i>King</i> , and <i>Prince</i> .
Surnames from nicknames	These surnames refer to the physical appearance of the bearer, e.g., <i>Broad</i> and <i>Little</i> .
Anecdotal surnames	These surnames derive from some forgotten event, although the name is enduring, e.g., <i>Brisbane</i> (Scottish, 'break-bone') or <i>Mezzanotte</i> (Italian 'midnight').
Seasonal surnames	These surnames derive from a season, e.g., <i>Winter</i> , a weekday, e.g., <i>Freitag</i> (German, 'Friday').
Humanistic surnames	These surnames are of Latin names that arose during the epoch of humanism from the 15th to the 17th centuries, e.g., the Italian <i>Antoni</i> (the genitive form of <i>Antonius</i>).
Diminutives, augmentative, and pejorative surnames	These surnames derive from derivational suffixes, e.g., <i>Casaleto</i> (Italian <i>casale</i> 'hut' plus the diminutive affix <i>-etto</i> 'small'). The Italian surname <i>Iacavone</i> 'big Jim' employs the suffix <i>-one</i> 'large'. <i>Bechard</i> has the French affix <i>-ard</i> , and it refers to a talkative person or an individual with a large nose (<i>bec</i> 'beak').

The editors also address those people with rarer surnames of infrequent occurrence, and the offer advice for how to seek additional information on a surname not included in *DAFN*₂ (genealogical discussion fora on the Internet, the Library of Congress, the Family History Library in Salt Lake City). Societal changes have also contributed to changes in surname patterns, e.g., post-marital surnames in which a woman retains her pre-marital surname, or adds a spouse's surname with or without hyphenation, or both employ the two surnames (Nuessel 2000 lists nine possibilities). Finally, the editors discuss the possibilities of researching surnames on the Internet since 1900–2000, e.g., the International Genealogical Network (IGI) through FamilySearch (www.familysearch.org), and other online surname fora whose quality may vary.

6. Introductions to surnames of particular languages and cultures

The rest of the introduction of *DAFN*₂ (Vol. 1: xxxiii–clxxx) contains essays on the surnames of particular languages and cultures. Table 5 provides detailed information about the geographical areas covered, the languages studied, the scholars who contributed essays on each group, and the pagination for each onomastic study.

Table 5: Geographical areas of surnames, specific language areas, the scholars who wrote the essays, and the pagination in *DAFN*₂ (Vol. 1: xi–xiii)

NORTH AMERICA	
Native American family names	Simon Lenarčič, xxxiii–xxxvi
African American family names	Simon Lenarčič, xxxvi–xxxviii
BRITAIN AND IRELAND	
English, Scottish, and Anglo-Irish family names	Peter McClure & Patrick Hanks, xxxviii–li
Irish and Scottish Gaelic family names	Kay Muhr, li–lvii
Welsh family names	Hywel Wyn Owen, lvii–lix
WESTERN EUROPE	
French family names	Simon Lenarčič & Susan Whitebook, lx–lxvii
Breton family names	Simon Lenarčič, lxvii–lxix
German family names	Edda Gentry, lxix–lxxv
Dutch family names	Leendert Brouwer, Peter McClure, & Charles Gehring, lxxvi–lxxxvii
SCANDINAVIA, FINLAND, AND ESTONIA	
Scandinavian family names	Olav Veka, updated by Lennart Ryman, lxxxvii–xci
Finnish and Estonian family names	Sirkka Paikkala, with an account of Estonian surnames by Fred Puss, xcii–xcvii
SOUTHERN EUROPE (THE MEDITERRANEAN)	
Spanish and Portuguese family names	Dieter Kremer, xcvi–cii
Italian family names	Enzo Caffarelli, cii–cvi
Greek family names	Nick Nicholas, cvi–cix
RUSSIA AND EASTERN EUROPE	
Russian, Ukrainian, and other Eastern Slavic family names	Alexander Beider, cix–cxi
Latvian and Lithuanian family names	Laimute Balode, cxi–cxiii
Polish family names	Alexandra Ciešlikowa, updated by Paweł Swoboda, cxiv–cxvi
Czech family names	Dobrava Moldanová, cxvii–cxxi
Slovak family names	Peter Ďurčo, cxxi–cxxv
Slovenian family names including an overview of Gottscheerish (Gottschee German) surnames	Simon Lenarčič, cxxv–cxxx
Croatian, Serbian, and Bosniak family names	Simon Lenarčič, cxxx–cxxxv
Hungarian family names	Gábor Bátonyi, cxxxv–cxxxvii
Romanian family names	Domnița Tomescu, cxxxvii–cxli
JEWISH DIASPORA	
Jewish family names	Alexander Beider, cxli–cxlviii

AFRICA THE MIDDLE EAST, AND THE INDIAN SUBCONTINENT	
African family names	Simon Lenarčič, clxviii–cl
Arabic and Muslim family names	David Justice, cl–clvii
Turkish family names	Simon Lenarčič & Sevan Nisanyan, clvii–clxi
Iranian family names	Sayed Mostaffa Assi, clxi–clxiii
Indian family names	Rocky Miranda, updated by Urvashi Prasannanshu Jain, clxiv–clxvii
EAST ASIA AND SOUTHEAST ASIA	
Chinese family names	Mark Lewellen & Horace Chen, clxvii–clxxii
Korean family names	Gary Mackelprang, clxxii–clxiii
Vietnamese family names	Horace Chen, clxxiv–clxxv
Japanese family names	Frederick Brady, clxxv–clxvi
Filipino family names	Jesus Federico C. Hernandez, clxxvii–clxxx

Each volume contains a listing of the editorial staff and a list of the contributors and consultants for the first and second editions. [Table 6](#) provides an alphabetic list of the surnames for each volume with the pagination.

Table 6: Alphabetic listing of surnames for each of the five volumes with pagination

Alphabetic list of surnames for each volume with pagination	
Aaberg-Chumbley	Volume 1, 1–618
Chumley-Harbold	Volume 2, 619–1366
Harbolt-McCubbin	Volume 3, 1367–2126
McCubbins-Schacht	Volume 4, 2127–2886
Schachter-Zywicki	Volume 5, 2887–3633

7. Concluding remarks

The second edition of *Dictionary of American family names* is a truly exceptional scholarly work. Its expansion from the original three-volume first edition published in [2003](#) to its current five-volume set makes a long-lasting onomastic contribution to US surname onomastics. First, it represents a significant increase in the number of surnames included so that more than 87 percent of Americans will be able to find information about their family names. There is a noteworthy increment of the language groups (see [Table 1](#)). Second, the number of scholars who have contributed to the second edition has increased. These include two new editors and 22 new onomastic collaborators. Third, more than 12,000 surnames have been added. Fourth, the data derive from the US census of 2010 with an explanation of the surnames with more than 300 bearers. Fifth, thousands of new surnames from non-European and Slavic languages are included. Sixth, the general introduction (Vol. 1: xv–xxxii) has been expanded and updated. Seventh, individual essays on the language groups includes studies on those languages featured in *DAFN*₁ as well as the newly added languages in *DAFN*₂ (xxxiii–clxxx). Finally, almost all studies

have updated references. The essays contain user-friendly and well-written information about surnames from the different language groups with appropriate examples. A selected check of entries in all five volumes found no inaccuracies.

This dictionary is a *tour de force* because it represents the collaboration of a large number of academic scholars scattered across the globe, who have come together to produce an essential onomastic reference work that exemplifies a spirit of cooperation and team work that is quite difficult to achieve. Nevertheless, these scholars have banded together to produce a singularly excellent work. This dictionary will be a useful reference work for the general public, onomasticians, historians, genealogists, linguists, sociologists, and other scholars for a long time to come. The quality is remarkable. The second edition of the *Dictionary of American family names* belongs on the reference shelves of all major public and academic libraries and other related research institutions as an indispensable reference work.

References

- Hanks, Peter (ed.). 2003. *Dictionary of American family names*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hanks, Peter & Tucker, D. Kenneth. 2000. A diagnostic database of American personal names. *Names* 48(1), 59–69.
- Nuessel, Frank. 2000. Women's contemporary surnaming patterns. *International Journal of Applied Semiotics* 1(1), 159–175.