

ALPHABET GOOP



TIP no. 1: Remember that all handwritten records are only understandable if they are legible or interpretable.

QUIRK no. 1: Actually, there are so many quirks in penned documents, they ought to be put in pens! Not the confinement type, but the refined pens of professional calligraphers who could transform ink blots, strikeouts, overwriting, interlinings, fading, yellowing, tape and water stains, bleed-throughs, tears, dog ears, creases, wrinkles, chars, and mildew spots into perfect script.

Let's start with what a letter looks like—an individual letter, that is. We have 26 of them in English, and other languages have more or less, with or without diacritical marks. It often becomes critical to decipher a single letter in a word (such as the name of a person or place) in order to figure out to whom or what a document refers. Here is my attempt to play the guessing game of "What could this letter be?" when looking at uncertain terms:

A	E, O, U	O	A, C, E, I, Q
B	H, K, P, R	P	B, F, R
C	E, G, L, O, Q	Q	A, C, G, S, Z
D	B, O, Q	R	B, H, P
E	A, C, F, L (in old German script, also n or r)	S	C, I, J, L, T, X, Z
F	E, J, L, P, S, T	ss (in German: ß)	B, H, V
G	C, Q, S, Y, Z	St	H
H	M, N, R, St	T	C, F, K, J, L, S, Z
I	C, e, J, S, T, Y	U	A, O, V, W
J	G, I, L, S, T, Y, Z	V	r, s, U, W
K	B, H, R	W	M, N, V
L	B, C, I, J, S, T, Z	X	C, S, Z
M	H, N, W	Y	G, I, J, Z
N	H, M, R, W	Z	I, G, J, L, Q, S, T, X, Y

A few specific examples of goopy writing or interpretation, and consequences thereof, are:

- The name "Stowe" was indexed as "Howe," because the handwritten capital "S" and the lower case "t" were so close together, that's what it looked like.
- Couple's names "Weedin" and "Wade" published in a marriage list as "Madin" and "Made."
- Someone misinterpreted a record that showed the German village of "Kehl" as "Köln," then published it as "Cologne." A descendant of the person about whom the record pertained actually went to Cologne/Köln hoping to find more, but came home with nothing:

Two versions of a burial record. The first is from *Evangelical Lutheran Church Book...So-called Christ Church in Tulpehocken*, translated by P. C. Croll, page 394; and the second is from *Record of Pastoral Acts at Christ Lutheran Church, Stouchburg, Berks County, Pennsylvania*, by Frederick S. Weiser, page 102. Note also the father's name.

John Arbogast, s. of Daniel and Christina Arbogast, b. Sep 9, 1703 in Cologne; twice married, 1. Anna Marg. Burckler, 1731, 4 children; 2. Margreth Walter, 1737, 10 children - 69 y. 2.m. 3 d. - Reformed Churchyard in Bern.

[no date] On the Reformed cemetery in Bären [Bern] Township, Joh. Arbogast, a legitimate son of the late David Arbogast and his wife Christina. Was born 9 Sept. 1703 at Kehl. Entered his first marriage in 1731 with Anne Margreth Burckler and had 4 children, and 1737 with Margreth Walthern and had 10 children of whom 5 sons and 1 daughter are living. Was aged 69 years 2 months, and 3 days.

TIP no. 2: *If you can't find your ancestor's name on a census or vital record under the first letter of the last name as normally spelled, try a sounds-like equivalent.*

QUIRK no. 2: Besides interpretation errors, we also have sounds-like substitutes. Remember Soundex? (See *Quirky Genealogy Tip Sheet!*, January 2017.) Here is a chart using the Soundex principle, with each consonant having equivalent letters rather than a number. For instance, the name Kohl could turn up as Cole, or Bryce may have been heard as Price.

B	P, V	N	M
C	G, K, Q, S	P	B, F
D	T	Q	C, G, J, K, S, Z
F	Ph, V	S	C, G, J, Z
G	C, K, Q, S, Z	T	D
J	G, S, Z	V	B, F, Ph
K	C, Ch, G, X	X	C, G, K, S, Z
M	N	Z	C, G, Q, S, X

The vowels and a few odd consonants aren't represented in Soundex, so they get special treatment. Watch out for the letter H being added to a name that starts with a vowel, or possibly omitted so the name begins with a vowel. Also remember Germans, Poles, Czechs, and other Eastern Europeans pronounced "W" as "V"; e.g., a Wald family was listed as "Vault" on a census.

A	E, H, O, U	O	A, E, H, U
E	A, H, I, O, U, Y	U	A, E, H, I, O, W
H	A, E, I, O, U, W	W	B, F, H, U, V
I	A, E, U, Y	Y	E, I, U

Next Month: SPOOKY SURNAMES!

This fact sheet is a public service by Evelyn Roehl to help people find records about their ancestors.

Contact her by e-mail, kinhunters@gmail.com, or phone 206-634-1709.

Please feel free to share this with friends, fellow kin-seekers, and family history and genealogical organizations.