

## Name Spelling Variations

*Prepared by Mike St. Clair - February 2006*

The following guidance applies to all sorts of written records, not just to census searching. It's even more important to be aware of when you are doing computer-based searching than when your intellect is allowed to working during the search, such as when you are scanning film records.

Spelling is something that genealogists need to be aware of but not put too much stock in when reviewing records. To dismiss a family because the surname is spelled differently is a big mistake. Spelling has only recently become important. Sometimes you will even find records where the name is spelled differently each time it is listed throughout even a single record! Many times the census takers took some license with the spelling of names, trying to phonetically duplicate what they heard as close as their literacy allowed.

When looking in original records, it is important for a genealogist to keep a very open mind about the spelling variations. People that are not all found with the same spelling may all be related in the end. Many genealogists have lists of spelling variations they take with them when looking through records to guarantee they don't overlook a possible spelling. Sometimes, through Soundex indexing, many of those spelling variations end up grouped together but sometimes valid variations do not have the same Soundex code.

When working with a computerized databases, unless it allows for a Soundex search, it will be necessary to search for each variation of spelling on the surname to ensure that you have truly exhausted all possibilities. Usually the computer won't guess if something is a close match. It looks for just the spelling you give. Some computer searches allow for "wild cards" that can help reduce the work. For example, eva\* may be used to search for any name that begins with "eva."

When entering information into your genealogy software program, the computer doesn't care how the name is spelled. It links them together based on who you put in what field of the program. (You might care though) But when you are using your computer to search databases, spelling will count, and can mean the difference between finding your target and going home empty handed

### **A few surname variation examples from my own family follow:**

St. Clair	St Clair	Stclair	Saint Clair	Sinkler	Sinclair
Evans	Evens	Evins	Eavins	Eavens	Eavans
Witten	Whitten	Wittin	Whittin	Wittun	Whetten
Leopard	Leopard	Leoperd	Leopard	Leppard	Lepperd
Smith	Smithe	Smyth	Smythe	Smit	Smidt
Belshe	Belche	Beltshe	Belsher	Belcher	Balsha
Steele	Steel	Still	Stille	Stell	Stil
Hochstrasser	Hochstraser	Hockstrasser	Hockstraser	Hauckstrasser	Hauchstrasser
McTaggart	McTaggert	MacTaggart	MacTaggert	McTagert	McTagart