In studying the folklore and culture of the German-Russian people of Ellis County, Kansas, nicknames played a very important part in their lives. In fact, there is nothing more important than to be able to identify a person by name.

Traditionally in Russia, as well as here in Ellis County for the first fifty years or more, it was customary and a rule that the name of a saint be given a new-born baby at baptism. In fact, if anyone dared to present a name other than that of a saint to the priest for baptism, permission was not given and a suitable name approved by the pastor had to be used.

As is the custom among the Volga Germans, children were baptized within a week after birth, and seldom did the mother accompany the baby to church for baptism. Sometimes the mother wished to have her baby baptized a certain name and found that the priest would not accept his name, but gave the baby another name.

Let me emphasize that any names mentioned here, in no way are intended to ridicule, but to save and preserve a very important part of our folklore. It is important that these names be preserved as a part of our history.

Nicknames were oftentimes used to describe or identify a person, even though no one else had the same given name.

In SCHOENCHEN there were a number of Werth families. To this day one of these families is identified by the nickname "Die Friedrichs" . . . Der Friedrichs Nick - or Sander - or Baldes. There were other Werths who were known as "Die Jaschka's" . . . Der Jaschka's Das - or Leo. Another Werth family was known by the name "Die Schreiners" . . . Der Schreiners Baldes. In Schoenchen were also the Gottschalks. . . "Der Dicka Willie," and "Der younga Willie." One man was called "Der Knappmesser Hertel," probably-Mouse he used a pocketknife-a-lot to make things or to whittle on. One the- _ Zimmerman family was known as "Der Schneiders Hans or Jacob."

In PFEIFER a man was called "Der G'schosna" (the one who was shot) and his last name was Schmidt. Another man by the name of Schmidt was called "Der Welcha." "Der Fetga" (Meder) was often referred to as one who could tell a good story. One of the Urbans was called "Der Wanga," and another Urban family was referred to as "Die Schlitters." Then there was "Der Widfrau's Joseph and Johannes," their last name also being Urban.

In CATHERINE the name Jake or "Jeck" as it was called seemed to be a very popular first name. There was "Der langa Jeck" (Staab), "Der dicka Jeck" (Walters), "Der grossa Jeck" (Walters), "Der Flauma Jeck" (Schmidt), etc.

In HERZOG the Anton Dreilings were known as follows: "Der Schulumester;" "Der G'schlana Anton;" "Der rota Anton;" "Der milch Anton;" "Der Alta Antorsch." The John Dreilings were known as "Der Gricka Hans;" "Der klena Hans;" "Der dicka Hans;" "Der elevator John;" "Der schwartze John;" "Der beauty John;" "Der weiss
Joe Goetz of Hays whose family formerly lived in Herzog was identified by the name "Binder" and not the real name of "Goetz." His father's name was Peter, and one day - Joe told me - a man from Park, Kansas, came to Herzog on the old U.P. "Plug" (This was a small passenger train that people used to say stopped at every telephone pole). When he stepped off at the depot, he asked the first native Herzoger if he knew where Peter Goetz lived. "Nope," he said, "I never heard of the man." The Park visitor then said, "He has lived here all of his life; surely you must know him." He then met another man from Herzog and asked if he knew Peter Goetz. Again, the negative reply. Just then a man was coming toward them and the Park man said, "Why there he is; that's him." The reply was, "That's not Peter Goetz; that's 'Binder Peter.' "

Two men were named Nick Kuhn. Their identifying names were: "Der Baltazers Nicklos." It so happened that Baltazer was his grandfather's name, and all of his brothers were identified by their grandfather's name - used ahead of their own names. The other on was "Der Dicka Nick," and from the description you knew that he was a heavyset man.

In Herzog my great-grandfather was known as "Der Pfeifers Halba." His name was John M. Pfeifer. I am told that this name was a result of an incident in Russia, when he was told "Now you are a man - so you must work." "Ne, ich sin blos a halber Mann," he replied - meaning I am only half a man as I am still a boy . . . and so the name "Der Halba" stuck for life. His son, John J. Pfeifer, was identified as "Der Fertel," meaning "quarter." In other words, the father was called "half" and his son "fourth."

The Linenberger family had the name "Fisha" in front of the given names. There was "Der Dicka Fisha Josep;" "Der Fisha Peter;" "Der Fisha Hans;" "Die Fisha Marie." This by-name came about 175 years ago when Hanjoerg Linenberger married a girl by the name of Fisher, and from that time on his descendants were identified this way. It can be seen that the "r" was dropped or slurred over.

One of the Kuhn families in Herzog is identified as "Die Schmidts." There is "Der Schmidts Anton" (Anton Kuhn); "Der Schmidts Grossa" (John Kuhn); etc. It is also possible that somewhere in the past a greatgrandfather might have been a blacksmith and the name came about that way. In German a blacksmith was called "A Schmidt."

*Name of Profession Used to Describe a Man*

There was "Der Store Dreiling;" "Der Zahn Docktor" (Dreiling); "Der Barber" (Weigel); "Der Schuster" (Sander); "Der Telephone Tony" (Denning); "Der Elevator John" (Dreiling); "Der Postmeister" (Franz Brungardt); "Der Christians (Bona) Josep (Vonfeldt)."
By-Names Were Used to Describe a Person

Listed below are some very good illustrations. "Der Windholza Dicka" (John Windholz); "Der Dicka Mike" (Mike Vonfeldt); "Der Ruppert's Peter" (Peter Mermis); "Der Worscht Ed" (Ed Weigel); "Der Dick Finger" (John Hammerschmidt); "Die Schwartz Kat" (Catherine Dreiling); "Des Klena Kaetja" (Katy Dreiling); "Die Alt Gertraud" (Gertrude Kuhn); "Der Langa Petter" (Peter Braun); "Die Lang Got" (Mrs. Peter Braun); "Der Klena Michael's Rota" (Michael Rome); "Der Dre Lauber" (Peter Lauber); "Der Grufflicha Peter" (Peter Brungardt); "Der Daba Wendlin" (Wendelin Kuhn).

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