

German Naming Customs

In several generations of our Eller/Öhler ancestors in Germany we see two or more children in one family with the same first name. This may not be the error it appears to be.

When baptized, children were usually given two or more given names. In most of Germany, the child was normally called by the first name given at baptism.

In some areas, however, it was more common for the child to be called by the second name. For example, if the first two males born in a family were named George Michael Eller and George Friedrich Eller, they were usually called by their second given names. This “re-use” of the first name for several children is not unusual.

It was also not unusual for clerks, census takers and other government workers to only record the first and last name.

If an elder child died young, the parents frequently reused the deceased child's exact name on the next born child of the same gender.

If you look at the family of George Michael Öhler/ Eller (1695-1758), he appears to have two sons for whom we have only the name George Eller and two sons who are shown as George Michael Eller.

In the Jacob Eller line, we are fairly certain that the immigrant Jacob Eller was, in fact, Johann Jacob Eller and his brother Johann Melchior Eller.

Jacob and Melchior’s father was shown in some church records as Kaspar or Casper Eller. We believe it is possible he was George Kaspar Öhler/ Eller and that he was one of the Georges who is shown as sons of George Michael Öhler/ Eller (1695-1758).

We know the five young immigrant Ellers (George Michael Eller, Henrich (Henry) Eller Christian Eller, Jacob Eller and Melchior Eller) had, at various times, adjacent farms and in some paper-work they reference each other.

We think this argues for two sets of brothers who were first cousins with each other.