German Naming Customs

Underlining of given names in old church records was more prevalent in the old handwritten church records (by church edict), and sometimes, in some locations, they underlined the christening name, which was more important to the church.

And very often, a second child named Fredriech or Heinrich or Johann was renamed for the first child of the same sex who died as an infant, as most of us have seen.

And many times, six or seven sons from one family may all have been named Johann, and for each one, his rufname or vorname was something different, (in French, dit name, in Latin, dicta or dictus). And each of those names may be abbreviated in the church records, just to drive us nuts.

In some places, there can be half a dozen rufnamens for a single person, not just those recorded in church records, besides the one or two or three recorded in other records, such as, one name can be from the family, another from school, another from the job, another at the pub, yet another by a wife. This is still prevalent today in many places, and for many reasons - and I am a case in point! Very often, people hated the names they were saddled with.

Present-day Deutschland keeps a rather tight rein on names which are allowed, meaning they must clearly indicate if the child is male or female and should (although this has weakened since the Third Reich) indicate Germanic roots or at least be on the list of "acceptable" names.

In Catholic Church records, it was often customary to be named according to the (Saint's) day on which one was born, or according to Saints' Days or martyrs' days or helpers in case ofi.e., February 6th, Dorothea (martyr), is the patron saint for gardeners, miners, newlyweds, brides, pregnant women, helpers for birth labor, poverty, dying and false accusations."

People were very superstitious in the old days and they simply didn't have the freedom to name their cute little baby Raspberry Roosevelt Buttonnose Schmidt.

Shirley Reimer