

DICTIONARY OF
**AMERICAN
FAMILY NAMES**

PATRICK HANKS
SIMON LENARČIČ
WITH PETER McCLURE

Second Edition

*Dictionary of American Family
Names (2nd edn, 5 volumes, 2022)*
and a tribute to Patrick Hanks

Peter McClure

**SNSBI conference, Bridgend
16 April 2023**

Patrick Hanks: a small selection of publications 1971–2014

General word dictionaries

1971 *Hamlyn Encyclopedic World Dictionary*, 1st edn

1979 *Collins English Dictionary*, 1st edn

1987 *Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary*, 1st edn

1995 *Oxford English Reference Dictionary*

1998 *New Oxford Dictionary of English*, 1st edn.

2000 *New Oxford Thesaurus of English*, 1st edn.

Corpus linguistics and the theory of norms and exploitations

2012a ‘The corpus revolution in lexicography’, *International Journal of Lexicography* 25 (4)

2013a *Lexical Analysis: Norms and Exploitations*, MIT Press.

2014– *The Pattern Dictionary of English Verbs*. Available at <http://www.pdev.org.uk> (work in progress).

1988 (with Flavia Hodges): *A Dictionary of Surnames*, OUP

A dictionary of over 70,000 international surnames used among speakers of English.

1990 (with Flavia Hodges): *The Oxford Dictionary of First Names*, 1st edn, OUP

Over 6,000 of the commonest names in the English-speaking world.

2006 (with Kate Hardcastle and Flavia Hodges), 4th edn

2003 *A Dictionary of American Family Names*, 1st edn, 3 vols and online
(New York: OUP)

[= DAFN 1]

70,000+ names, drawn systematically from US telephone directories, and naming about 85% of the population.

2016 (with Richard Coates and Peter McClure), *The Oxford Dictionary of Family Names in Britain and Ireland*, 4 vols and online (Oxford: OUP)

[= FaNBI 1]

45,000+ names, drawn systematically from the 1881 census and modern electoral rolls.

2022 (with Simon Lenarčič and Peter McClure), *A Dictionary of American Family Names*, 2nd edn, 5 vols and online (New York and Oxford: OUP)

[= DAFN 2]

80,000+ names, drawn from the 2010 US census, naming over 90% of the population.

DAFN 1

Avitia

(258) Spanish: from the Latin female personal name *Avitia* (see AVICE). **GIVEN NAMES** Spanish 66%. Antonio (5), Juan (3), Roberto (3), Salvador (3), Sergio (3), Alonso (2), Carlos (2), Cruz (2), Felipe (2), Francisco (2), Javier (2).

DAFN 1

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DAFN 2

Avitia US Frequency (2010 census): 3745.

Hispanic (mainly Mexico): altered form of Basque *Beitia*. Compare *Abeyta*.

*Some characteristic forenames: **Spanish:** Antonio, Jose, Juan, Roberto, Salvador, Sergio, Alonso, Carlos, Cristina, Cruz, Felipe, Francisco, Javier.*

Avitia

Dieter Kremer's editorial comment in the DAFN 2 database:

“I have deleted the explanation "Spanish: from the Latin female personal name Avitia (see Avis)". It seems (and really is) impossible, and the surname doesn't exist in Spain. Attention: the explanation of Avis and Avitia comes from ancestry.com and others. The name is Hispanic. No idea. This example is very interesting.”

<http://www.genealogy.com/forum/surnames/topics/abeyta/171/>

Families living in the city of Durango (Mexico) with the surname *Avitia* were also known in the 1600s and 1700s as *Abeyta*, *Abitia*, *Abeytia*, *Beitia* and *Veitia*.

DAFN 1

Abeyta (1125): Spanish (of Basque origin): variant of **Abieta**, a habitational name from a place named with *a(ha)bi* ‘bilberry’ + *-eta*, a suffix indicating ‘place’ or ‘group of’.

DAFN 2

Beitia. Hispanic: habitational name from a place called Beitia in Biscay, Basque Country (Spain), named with Basque *be(h)eiti* + the definite article *-a* ‘the low-situated place’, or a topographic name with the same meaning. Compare [*Abeyta*](#) and [*Avitia*](#).

[Note Kremer’s change of mind about the etymology.]

Abeyta. Hispanic: altered form of Basque [*Beitia*](#). The surname *Abeyta* is common among Native Americans (mainly Pueblos) in New Mexico.

History. The surname *Abeyta* was brought to New Mexico by Diego de Beitia (or de Abeytia) from Spain, who was in the 1690s recruited at Durango (Mexico) as a settler in the recolonization of New Mexico.

*Some characteristic forenames: **Spanish:** Jose, Carlos, Manuel, Miguel, Juan, Ruben, Ramon, Angelina, Emilio, Pablo, Roberto, Agapito.*

Hanks's DAFN 2 team:

35 international consultants and contributors + 8 editorial assistants

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OUP's Director of Reference, Damon Zucca in New York

Lee in DAFN 2

US Frequency (2010 census): 693023

1 English: topographic name for someone who lived near a meadow or a patch of arable land, Middle English *lee*, *lea*, from Old English *lēa*, dative case (used after a preposition) of *lēah*, which originally meant ‘wood or glade’.

2 English: habitational name from any of the many places in England named with Old English *lēah* ‘wood, glade’, including Lee in Buckinghamshire, Essex, Hampshire, Kent, and Shropshire, and Lea in Cheshire, Derbyshire, Herefordshire, Lancashire, Lincolnshire, and Wiltshire.

3 Irish: shortened Anglicized form of **Ó Laoidhigh** ‘descendant of *Laoidheach*’, a personal name derived from *laoidh* ‘poem, song’ (originally a byname for a poet).

4 Americanized form of Norwegian *Lie* or *Li* 11.

5 Chinese: variant Romanization of the surnames 李, 黎, 利, 栗, 厲, and 麗. See *Li* 1-6.

6 Chinese: variant Romanization of the surname 雷, see *Lei* 1.

7 Chinese: variant Romanization of the surname 呂, see *Lu* 6.

8 Southeast Asian (Hmong): variant of *Ly* 2.

9 Southeast Asian (Iu Mien): from the name of the Lee clan of the Iu Mien people from Laos. Compare *Saelee*.

10 Korean: variant of *Yi* 1. Compare *Lie* 3.

History: Among those who brought the surname *Lee* to North America was Richard Lee (1617–64) from Shropshire, England, who arrived in 1639 and settled in VA to become a planter and legislator. His great-grandsons included the brothers Arthur, Francis L., Richard Henry, and William Lee, all prominent American Revolution legislators and diplomats. The Civil War Confederate General Robert E. Lee (1807–70) was another member of this family, the son of Henry ‘Lighthouse Harry’ Lee (1756–1818), another revolutionary war hero.

*Some characteristic forenames: **Chinese:*** Young, Sang, Jae, Jong, Jung, Sung, Yong, Kyung, Seung, Dong, Kwang, Myung.

Morton

US Frequency (2010 census): 59213

1 English and Scottish: habitational name from any of the many places called Mor(e)ton, named with Old English *mōr* ‘moor’ + *tūn* ‘farmstead, estate’. There has probably been some confusion with [Morten](#), and perhaps also with [Murton](#). This English name has also been established in Ireland since the 13th century.

2 American shortened and altered form of Swedish **Mårtensson** or **Mortensson** (see [Martenson](#) and [Mortenson](#)), which could also be substituted for the Finnish cognate **Marttinen**.

3 French: shortened form of [Moreton](#) 3.

4 French: habitational name from a place so named in Vienne.

5 Jewish: adopted for one or more like-sounding Jewish names (for example, [Mordecai](#)).

History: The name Morton was established early in North America. George Morton (1585–1624), one of the Pilgrims, was probably born in Scrooby, Nottinghamshire, England. He and his son Nathaniel (born 1613 in Leiden, the Netherlands) settled in Plymouth in 1623.

John Morton (*c.* 1724–77), one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, was born in Pennsylvania, of Finnish-Swedish descent. His grandfather, Morten Mortenson (an adaptation of Finnish Martti Marttinen) is said to have been born in Petäjävesi (Finland), in the region once known as Rautalampi (now only the name of a small municipality), and emigrated from Gothenburg, Sweden, in 1654.

Direct input from members of SNSBI

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DAFN 1

Tordoff (119) English (Yorkshire): unexplained. This name has had a long association with Wibsey in Bradford, Yorkshire, England, but its etymology is unknown.

DAFN 2

Tordoff US Frequency (2010 census): 276

English (Yorkshire; of Scottish origin): habitational name from Torduff in Gretna (Dumfriesshire). The placename is from Gaelic *tòrr* ‘steep or conical hill(ock)’ + *dubh* ‘black’.

[FaNBI 1 information: Scotland: Johan *de Dordofe*, 1296 in [Scotland Calendar](#) (Dumfriess). England: *William Tordofft*, 1499 in [York Freeman's Register](#); Thomas *Torduffe*, 1588 in [IGI](#) (Leeds, WR Yorks).]

DAFN 1

Broderick (4163)

1 Irish: Anglicized form adopted as an equivalent of Gaelic **Ó Bruadair** ‘descendant of *Bruadar*’, a Norse personal name.

2 Welsh: Anglicized form of Welsh *ap Rhydderch* ‘son of Rhydderch’ (see PROTHERO, RODERICK).

GIVEN NAMES Irish 7%. Brendan, Connor, Kieran, Kilian, Malachy, Siobhan.

DAFN 2

Broderick

US Frequency (2010 census): 10504

1 Irish: Anglicized form adopted as an equivalent of Gaelic **Ó Bruadair** ‘descendant of *Bruadar*’, from the Old Norse personal name *Bróthir*.

2 English ((northern): habitational name from an unidentified place near Reeth in upper Swaledale (North Yorkshire), perhaps named from Middle English *brad* (Old English *brād*) ‘broad’ + northern Middle English *rigg* (Old English *hrycg*) ‘ridge of land’. Alternatively, perhaps a nickname with the same etymology, denoting someone with a broad back.

*Some characteristic forenames: **Irish:** Brendan, Connor, Kieran, Kilian, Malachy, Siobhan.*

DAFN 1

Chestnut (2478) English: from early English *chesten nut* ‘chestnut’ (from Middle English *chesteine* ‘chestnut’ + *nut* ‘nut’), a topographic name for someone who lived by a chestnut tree, or possibly a nickname for someone with chestnut-colored hair.

DAFN 2

Chestnut

US Frequency (2010 census): 7924

1 Scottish (Renfrewshire and Lanarkshire) and northern Irish: altered form of *Chesney*, shortened from *McChesney* [anglicized form of **Mac (an) tSasanaigh** ‘son of the Saxon (i.e. the Englishman)’]. Its assimilation to the English word *chestnut* is due to folk etymology, the word itself being first recorded in 1519. The surname was probably taken to Ireland at the time of the 17th-century Plantation of Ulster.

2 English (Norfolk): probably a variant of **Chestney** (see *Chaney*), altered by folk etymological association with the word *chestnut*. [= Norman locative name from (Le) *Quesnay* or *Quesnoy*, or (Le or La) *Chesnay* or *Chesnoy*, all in N France, from Old French *chesnai*, *quesnai* ‘oak grove’].

Chestnutt

1 Scottish, Irish, reduced and altered form of McChesney, as suggested by Black at MacChesney, noting that *McChestnie* and *McHestnie* are shortened to *Chesney* and *Chestnut* in the 1684 parish registers of Wigtowns and Minnigaff (Kirkcudbrights).

Early Bearers: (i) Scotland: Jean *Chesnute*, 1692 in IGI (Stirling, Stirlings); Robert *Chestnut*, 1799 in IGI (Saint Quivox, Ayr); Mary *Chestnut*, in Census 1841 (Inveresk, Midlothian); Duncan *Chestnut*, in Census 1841 (Urray, Ross and Cromarty); Rice *Chestnut*, born in Ireland, in Census 1841 (Paisley, Renfrews); William *Chestnut*, born in Ireland, in Census 1861 (Govan, Lanarks).

(ii) England: Mary *Chesnut*, 1674 in IGI (Grappenhall, Cheshire); Mary *Mc Chesnut*, 1729, Charles *Chesnut*, born 1797, buried 1873 in IGI (Whitehaven, Cumb); John *Chestnut*, born in Ireland, in Census 1871 (Liverpool); Margaret *Chestnutt*, 1878 in IGI (Everton, Lancs).

DAFN1

Birdsey (126) English: unexplained; probably a habitational name from a lost or unidentified place. The surname (together with the variant **Birdseye**) was brought to CT from England in the 17th century.



DAFN 2

Birdsey

US Frequency (2010 census): 277

English (Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire): altered form of the Lancashire gentry surname *Bardsley*, brought to Buckinghamshire in the 15th century and simplified there from the 16th century onward to *Bardsey*, *Birdsey*, and *Birdseye*.

History: The surname (together with the variant **Birdseye**) was brought to CT from England in the 17th century. Birds Eye frozen food took its brand-name from the founder's surname, Clarence Frank Birdseye II of Montclair, NJ.

Birdsey: early bearers in FaNBI 2

Thomas *Berdesley*, 1419-20 in **Feet of Fines** (Stokenchurch and Turville, Bucks); Robert *Bardsey*, 1462 in **Feet of Fines** (Chipping Wycombe, Bucks); George *Burdsey*, 1580 in **IGI** (Millbrook, Beds); Dorothy *Birdsey*, 1583, Anne *Burdsey*, 1626 in **IGI** (Lidlington, Beds); John *Birdsey*, 1588 in **IGI** (Woburn, Beds); William *Birdseye*, 1613 in **IGI** (Saint Stephen Coleman Street, London); Robert *Birdsey*, 1614, Elenor *Burdsey*, 1713 in **IGI** (Maids Moreton, Bucks); Sarah *Berdeseye*, 1614, Thomas *Birdsey*, 1663 in **IGI** (Caddington, Beds); Diana *Bardsey*, 1617 in **IGI** (Southill, Beds); John *Birdseye*, 1618, Mary *Birdseye*, 1620, Priscilla *Birdsey*, 1624 in **IGI** (Dunstable, Beds); Danielis *Birdsey*, 1624, Danielis *Burdsey*, 1627 in **IGI** (Soulbury, Bucks); John *Birdseye*, 1634 in **IGI** (Whitechapel, Middx)

DAFN 1

Witherspoon (3411) Scottish: of uncertain origin, perhaps a habitational name from an unidentified place named with Middle English *wether* ‘sheep’, ‘ram’ + *spong, spang*, a dialect term for a narrow strip of land.

FOREBEARS John Witherspoon (1723–94) was a Presbyterian minister and teacher, who signed the Declaration of Independence. He was born at Gifford, near Edinburgh, Scotland, and came to North America in 1768 after being recruited as president of the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University).

DAFN 2

Witherspoon

US Frequency (2010 census): 13171

Scottish (probably of German origin): apparently identical with Modern German **Wiederspahn** (also **Widerspan**, **Widerspon**), from Middle High German *widerspan* ‘quarrel, dispute’ and probably a nickname for a quarrelsome or stubborn person.

History: The name is first recorded in Britain as (John) *Widerspon* in late 12th-century Lynn (Norfolk), and as (Roger) *Withyrspoon*, clerk, in late 13th-century Renfrew, southwestern Scotland, where the surname became established as a Scottish family name, perhaps through migration there of a member of the Lynn family. Its early presence in Lynn, an east coast port that was home to many German traders, suggests that its bearer came from the North Sea or Baltic coast.

Hywel Wyn Owen, *Welsh Family Names*

Kay Muhr, *Irish and Scottish Gaelic Family Names*

Peter McClure and Patrick Hanks, *English, Scottish, and Anglo-Irish Family Names*

Sirkka Paikkala and Fred Puss, *Finnish and Estonian Family Names*

Leendert Brouwer, Peter McClure, and Charles Gehring, *Dutch Family Names*

Horace Chen, *Chinese Family Names and Vietnamese Family Names*

Jesus Federico Hernandez, *Filipino Family Names*

Domnița Tomescu, *Romanian Family Names*

Seyed Mostafa Assi, *Iranian Family Names*

Simon Lenarčič, *Croatian, Serbian and Bosniak Family Names, Turkish Family Names*

(with Sevan Nisanyan), *African Family Names, African American Family Names, and Native American Family Names*

Kay Muhr and Liam Ó hAisibéil (eds), *The Oxford Dictionary of Family Names of Ireland*, 2021 (Oxford: OUP)

Harry Parkin (compiler), *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Family Names in Britain*, 2021 (Oxford: OUP)

Patrick Hanks et al. (eds), *Oxford Dictionary of Family Names in Britain and Ireland*, 2nd edn, in progress

DAFN 2 will be available from April 20th in the UK at a discounted price of £550 from WH Smith and Waterstones. The online edition is free via <oxfordreference.com> if you belong to an institution or library that has bought the online subscription.

DAFN 1

Winner of Library Journal Best Reference Source, 2003

Booklist Editors' Choice, 2003

DAFN 2

Honorable Mention in the American Library Association's annual award of the Dartmouth Medal (2023), which is given to the year's most outstanding reference work



Patrick Hanks