

What's in a Name?

Navigating Nordic Naming Patterns

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Objective

This class will cover the basics of patronymics and other name traditions common in the Nordic country. It will also discuss notable name customs that may be specific to smaller geographic areas. The handout is a reference for notable dates and further resources to help you in your research.

PATRONYMICS

Primary patronymics: Based on a father's given name and changes with each generation.

Secondary patronymics: Based on a primary patronymic and is fixed from one generation to the next.

	Male Children	Female Children
Sweden	-sson	-dotter
Finland	-sson OR -pojke	-dotter OR -tytär
Denmark	-sen	-datter
Norway	-sen -søn	-datter

SWEDEN

1901 Names Act - On 5 December 1901 Sweden passed the first law regulating personal names. This law required all persons who do not already have a fixed surname to adopt the masculine form of their father's surname as their own. The 1901 law did not address the question of surnames for married or divorced women or adopted children. Rules for these cases were pending before the courts and were determined separately

Further Information

[Sweden Personal Names](#) – FamilySearch Wiki

[Hans Högman](#) – Swedish naming practices in earlier times

[Swedish Surnames](#) – nordicnames.de

[Swedish Naming Customs](#) – FamilySearch Learning Center

[Elizabeth Thorsell](#) – The Farm Names of Dalarna

FINLAND

1921 Name Law: This law also required women to adopt their husband's surname at marriage.

1930 Name Law: Required all people to use an inherited-fixed surname.

Further Information

[Finland Personal Names](#) – FamilySearch Wiki

[Finnish Name](#) – Wikipedia

[Finnish Genealogy: The Naming System](#) – genealogi.fi

[Finnish to Swedish Interchangeable Names](#) – genealogi.fi

[Finnish Surnames](#) – nordicnames.de

[How to Pronounce Finnish Names](#) – sci.fi, find your family's name and click on the link to hear how it's pronounced.

DENMARK

30 May 1828: The first law attempting to establish fixed surnames for the entire population. This law failed mostly because the authorities who were called on to enact it did not understand the intent of the law.

4 March 1857: This law clarified the existing law establishing patronymics as fixed surnames. This was still ignored by many people and led to children being baptized with double patronymics. For example, "Poul Pedersens søn døbt, navnet Peder Poulsen Pedersen."

1892: A person's permanent name was the name that had been recorded in the parish register, even if the person was not using it. During this time, a person was only allowed to change their name by royal authorization.

1904 Name Law: This new law provided for persons to legally change their name for 4 kroner. As part of the approval, they were required to prove the surname had been widely used in the family for several generations. They could also select a different surname if they had permission from everyone else in the country who had the same surname, or they could select a new surname from an official list of approved surnames.

For persons who have changed their names always consult the birth record in the parish register. Depending on the time period and the recording habits of the person making the entry, the person's surname may be given in the record.

Further Information

[Denmark Personal Names](#) – FamilySearch Wiki

[Danish Surnames](#) – nordicnames.de

[Navnelov](#) – Danish wiki article on naming laws.

[Danish Surnames: Common Danish Last Names](#) – scandification.com

NORWAY

9 February 1923 Lov om personnavn stipulated the following regarding surnames:

- Only surnames legally acquired by ancestry, marriage, or other means could be used
- Surnames based on the father's given name with an suffix identifying gender (sønn, son, sen for males; datter or dotter for females)
- The name of the farm or place of residence if the person, his parents, or grandparents were the owners
- A child should receive the father's surname if the parents were married
- If the parents were not married, the child would receive the mother's surname
- Upon marriage a woman receives her husband's surname

29 May 1964 Law: Allowed women to retain their surname. This act also allowed men to adopt their wife's surname at marriage.

Further Information

[Norway Personal Names](#) – FamilySearch Wiki

[Those Norwegian Names, tips for the “online” researcher](#) – norwayheritage.com

[Norwegian Surnames](#) – nordicnames.de

[Naming Customs in Newer and Older Times](#) – Article by Per Seland

[Norwegian Names](#) – Arvegods Blog

[Start tracing your ancestry in Norway](#) – Arkivverket

Further Help

1. Find Nordic Classes in the Learning Center [here](#)
2. Join the [Nordics Countries Genealogy Group](#) in the FamilySearch Community to ask your questions and get translation help
3. [Book a Free Virtual Genealogy Consultation](#) to meet one on one with a specialist and get personalized research strategy help

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