

# Weyerbacher: Evolution of a Surname

By Terry J. Lee  
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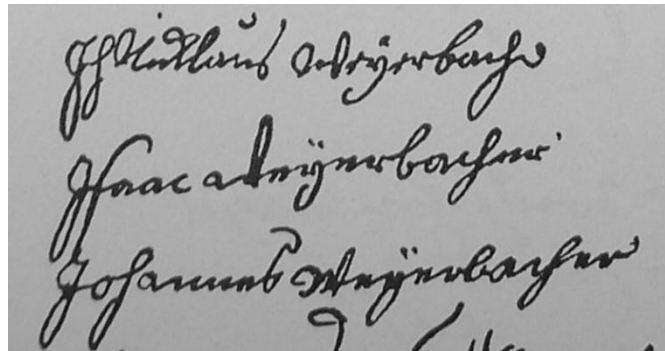
The tens of thousands of descendants of the earliest known Weyerbacher (Hans Otto, abt 1640-1714) have taken on many spelling variations of the original surname. The many reasons for these changes will likely never be known – some were perhaps intentional, some were probably simply transcription errors that were continued in the spirit of expediency.

Our website home page (<http://weyerbacher.net/>) shows the following variations, mainly taken from the newsletters of Warren W. Wirebach (1916 - ), written during his many years as President of the Weyerbacher Family Reunion.

**Wirebach**  
**Wireback**  
**Wirebeck**  
**Wirebaugh**  
**Weirbach**  
**Weirback**  
**Weierbach**  
**Weierback**

**Wierbach**  
**Wierback**  
**Weyerbach**  
**Wyrebaugh**  
**Wyrebach**  
**Weirebach**  
**Wiereback**  
**Wyerbaugh**

We do know that the earliest church records from Germany consistently use the spelling “Weyerbacher,” presumably taken from the village of the family’s origin. Johann Nicholas and his sons<sup>1</sup>, Isaac and Johannes, also were “Weyerbachers” at the time of their 1751 immigration<sup>2</sup>. The fact that they were literate is evidenced by their signatures in the ship’s log.



## Isaac Weyerbacher (1730-1805)

Isaac died in Bucks County, PA in 1805. His tombstone records his surname as “Weyerbacher,” however that of his wife Anna, who died 33 years later, uses “Weierbacher,” which is similar to the “Weierbach” spelling used today by many of the descendants still

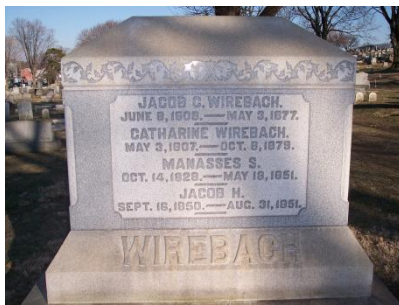


<sup>1</sup> The ship’s passenger list records only the names of males 16 years of age and older.

<sup>2</sup> Arrived Philadelphia, Pa; Sept. 16, 1751; Ship, Edinburgh; James Russell, Master

living in Bucks County. These tombstones are reproductions of the originals which were apparently damaged beyond repair. It is assumed that the inscriptions have been faithfully reproduced.

Similarly, the tombstone of John Jacob “Weierbach,” son of Isaac, is at odds with that of his third wife Margaret “Weirbach,” even though they are buried next to each other and died only eight years apart. John Jacob reportedly had 17 children by three wives.



One of his sons, Jacob C. “Wirebach” moved north to South Easton, Northampton County, PA. He purchased and subdivided about 100 acres in South Easton Borough where he built houses. One street in that area bears his name. His spelling variation has survived to this day among his descendants.



SAMUEL WEIRBACH.

In an 1899 publication<sup>3</sup>, Joseph “Weirbach,” great-grandson of Isaac, is described, along with his father (Samuel) and grandfather (Peter). It is not known if their names were actually “Weirbach” or just assumed to be so by the author.

### Johannes Weyerbacher (1734-1790)

Johannes moved with his family to the Buffalo Valley in (then) Northumberland County, PA where he died in 1790. In 1775, property was conveyed to him as John “Wyerbaugher.” A list of inhabitants in 1775 (*Annals of Buffalo Valley, Pennsylvania, 1755-1855*) lists John “Wierbaugh.” A 1790 document, dealing with his estate indicates his wife as Catherine “Weirback.” A later document, believed to be dated 1791 describes the estate of John “Wirebacher.” In 1803, the Orphan’s Court at Sunbury awarded the estate of John “Weirbach.” Thus, we have five spelling variations used for a single individual, apparently the result of careless transcription rather than deliberate name change.

Johannes’s son Nicholas (1773-1840) moved to Ohio, where he died in Carroll County in 1846. The lineage of his son John (1806-1886), who spelled his name “Wirebaugh,” is traced in a book by Rachel

<sup>3</sup> Biographical Publishing Company, Buffalo and Chicago. *Book of Biographies, This Volume Contains Biographical Sketches of Leading Citizens of Bucks County, Penna.* <http://www.archive.org/details/cu31924028852304>. Buffalo, NY: Buffalo : Biographical Publishing Company, 1899, p. 397.

Saul Tefft published in 1997. His descendants continued to use that spelling, although Warren Wirebach found evidence<sup>4</sup> of a family in the Toledo, OH area that changed the spelling to “Wyrebaugh” about 1900.

## **Weyerbachers of Indiana**

A second wave of Weyerbacher immigration occurred in the 1840s and 1850s, about one hundred years after the first. It is believed that these immigrants came from a village not far from Baumholder, Germany, sailed to New Orleans, and eventually settled in Warrick County, IN. This group of descendants has retained the “Weyerbacher” spelling to the present day. Church records indicate that the common ancestor of these two groups is Hans Nickel Weyerbacher (1665-1710/11), who is a son of Hans Otto Weyerbacher (1640-1714), the earliest known Weyerbacher.

This former apartment building in Indianapolis, IN, Weyerbacher Terrace, is slated to become the facade for a new academic building for Ivy Tech Community College.



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<sup>4</sup> 11 November 1975 letter from Warren Wirebach to ‘Cousin Mary,’ Wyrebaugh files