

EVOLUTION OF A NAME

There are many variations in the spelling of the name “**Keyser**” in the United States. Even in the records from Germany, the name can be found written in different ways. In the translation of the Möckmühl church records of the 1726 baptism of “**Carl Sebastian**”, the father’s name is transcribed as “**Andreas Keyser**” in one place, and “**Andreas Kayser**” in another. In earlier documents, the name was written “**Kaißer**” and “**Kheyser**”, and in the German language book, “*Möckmühl - Bild einer Stadt*” by Dr. Erich Strohhäcker, the name is spelled “**Kaiser**”.

For our purpose, we will use the spelling, “**Carl Kayser**”, when referring to the German immigrant, because that is how he signed his name upon arrival to Philadelphia in 1749.

After his arrival, it appears the umlaut* was dropped, and we see his name spelled “**Carl Sebastian Kayser**” in the 1750-1751 church records in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. Sometime between his last sighting in Pennsylvania on 17 Feb 1751 and his first appearance in Frederick County, Virginia, on 2 Sep 1755, the “Carl” began to be recorded as its English equivalent “Charles”, as seen in the court document of his military proceeding which lists him as “**Charles Kyzer**”. In the 1765 deed of purchase of his farm across from Hawksbill Creek, the court records his name as “**Charles Kyser**”, but his signature does not appear on the document. After that time his name is most often found recorded as “**Charles Keyser**”, and indeed that is the name we call him by today, however there is no indication that he ever used that spelling himself.

** In the German language, umlauts are markers, usually two dots, placed over certain vowels to indicate a change in their sound. During Carl’s time, they could also be used with other letters, and we see that Carl has placed an umlaut, using strokes instead of dots, over the “y” when he signed his last name “**Käyser**”.*

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Carl Käyser". The word "Carl" is written in a simple, slightly cursive style. The word "Käyser" is written in a more elaborate, cursive script. The letter 'y' in "Käyser" has a long, sweeping tail that extends downwards and to the right. The 'ä' is formed with two upward strokes, as described in the text.

In writing umlauts, German school children before the 1970s were officially taught to use two upward strokes, because apparently they could not create proper dots on a slate that was used to teach writing. Examples of that can still be seen in the handwriting of some older Germans today. [<https://german.stackexchange.com/questions/32628/can-an-umlaut-be-written-as-a-line-in-handwriting>].

Marie Rasnick Fetzer
2019