

Title: The Americanization of Russian Old Believer Surnames in the Eastern U.S.

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In researching the Russian Old Believers of the eastern United States (or, indeed, for these Old Believers doing their own genealogical searches), an immediate problem is faced in determining the original Russian surname of many families. A common myth is that immigrants' names were changed at Ellis Island, but ten years of study has proven that this was almost never the case. Instead, it is a complex gauntlet of influences (orthographic norms of various languages, transliteration conventions, social pressures, family conflicts, personal decision, sociolinguistic factors, phonetic and dialect variations, to name a few), which has left many names almost unrecognizable if not completely changed, and also intermarriage, which has introduced surnames of non-Russian origin.

In the tradition of Klymasz's *Canadianization of Slavic surnames* (1960), this paper systematizes the types of changes that the surnames of Russian Old Believers underwent between the periods of registration in the Russian Empire of the 19th century (mainly in areas of present-day northeastern Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia), and arrival and existence in the eastern U.S. in the 20th and 21st centuries. Using a variety of source materials, such as passenger arrival manifests, church metrical books (births, marriages, deaths), city directories, census microdata, naturalization records, personal interviews, and gravestone inscriptions, it is possible to establish an individual's or family's original surname, and to trace changes, variations, and ultimate resolution. The result is an attempt to inventory, analyze, and explain the current forms of surnames of over 1,800 individuals in all known Old Believer cemeteries in Pennsylvania, Michigan, and New Jersey. This paper will be of interest not only to linguists and sociolinguists, but also to scholars of Russian history and immigrant studies.

References:

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