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Author(s): Larry Warkentin.

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## *What's in a Name?*

**LARRY WARKENTIN**

The intent of this article is to refine and augment the material written about the name Warkentin. Genealogists and historians seem to have been stymied when tracing the origins of the name. Some historians place the name in the Dutch-Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition while others assign it an Old Slavic-German origin. Of particular interest is the way in which this discussion contributes to the long-standing debate regarding the origins of the Mennonite communities in Prussia (Poland) and South Russia (Ukraine). Are they originally from Holland (The Netherlands) or from Northern Germany?

Johan Postma, a Dutch historian, proposes that Warkentin is, “a diminutive of a very old Zeeland first name, Warrekin.”<sup>1</sup> He sites evidence that Warrekin can be found as early as 1227. But he doesn't explain adequately where the *tin* suffix originates. If it is a Dutch diminutive meaning little Warrekin, are there children today with this name in the Netherlands? When did it become a family name? Are there other examples of Dutch family names with the *tin* suffix? Does the name ever appear in Dutch histories or legal documents as a family name? Without answers to these questions, his suggestion is at best hypothetical.

The *Mennonite Encyclopedia* skirts the issue by suggesting that Warkentin is “a common Mennonite name of Prussian background.”<sup>2</sup> It is true that the name has a Prussian-Mennonite history. In 1667 Arendt Warckentyn married Sortjen Tamsen in the Danzig (Flemish) Mennonite church.<sup>3</sup> This is the earliest occurrence of the name in Prussia. Arendt must have been comfortable with the Dutch language since this congregation worshipped in Dutch until at least 1750 and Dutch-language hymnbooks were in use well into the eighteenth century.

The *Brandregister of 1727* identifies Mennonite landowners in Poland. Among those listed are Jacob Warckentin in Tievege, Andres Werkentin in Heubuden, and the widow of Johann Warkentin in Ladekoppe. Individuals who were taxpaying landowners in 1727 would have been born around 1700 or earlier and would have lived in the area for some time.<sup>4</sup>

John Thiesen's transcription of the Heubuden (Poland) Mennonite church records lists Arend Warckentin (1706-1777) of Heubuden and Peter Warckentin (1705-1786) of Siemonsdorf.<sup>5</sup> This Peter Warckentin is possibly the

same individual who is named in the royal privilege granted by Augustus III, King of Poland in 1736.

Moreover, we promise on our own account and that of our most serene successors that neither we nor our most serene successors shall remove or alienate from the possession of the aforesaid property the aforesaid honest men, Martin Tornis, Jacob Conrad, Isaac Conrad, *Peter Warckentien*, Jacob Penner, Peter Classen, Jacob Dyk, Jacob Conrad, Isaac Dyk, Francis Conrad, and Christina Barbara (widow Sassow), and their legitimate heirs and successors; . . . <sup>6</sup> (italics mine)

After 1790, when Poland was partitioned between Russia, Austria, and Prussia, the area in which most of the Mennonites lived was taken by Prussia.<sup>7</sup> German language was made mandatory and military service became obligatory. In reaction to military conscription many Mennonite families decided to accept the invitation of Catherine II to move to South Russia. “Stumpp records that 27 families named Warkentin left West-Prussia for Russia.”<sup>8</sup> From there the name spread to North America, South America, Germany, Siberia, and various provinces of the former Soviet Union.

This brief history of the name in Prussia substantiates the assertion in the *Mennonite Encyclopedia* that the name, “is a common name of Prussian background.” But that is certainly not the entire story.

Peters and Thiessen add the following information: “Penner, the West Prussian genealogist, suggests that it is a name of residence, based on the place name of Parkentin, in Mecklenburg. In this region, bordering West Prussia, the surname of Parkentin and Warkentin can be found.”<sup>9</sup> This is intriguing. The name in the principality of Mecklenburg apparently predates the arrival of Mennonites in Prussia. Many immigrants from other parts of Europe had been settling in Prussia because of the religious toleration of its rulers. “Up to the year 1703 twenty thousand Huguenots and thirteen thousand Protestants from other countries had settled in Brandenburg and Prussia.”<sup>10</sup> This could account for the appearance of the first Warkentin in Danzig in 1667.

According to Peters and Thiessen the Warkentin name is associated with the village of Parkentin in Mecklenburg. In fact, the suggestion is that Parkentin may have evolved into Warkentin by some highly unusual consonant shift. That this is extremely unlikely will be shown in the following paragraphs.

However, we must first look critically at Horst Penner’s statement: “The Warkentins apparently come from the small market town of Parkentin, 15

km west from Rostock. As early as the 16th and 17th centuries there are a large number of Werkentins (Warkentins) especially in Güstrow, which is near Parkentin.”<sup>11</sup> Clearly the name is present in this area and is unquestionably found near Parkentin. But Penner leaves several uncertainties. He only speculates that the name has its origin in this area, and the name just happens to be near the village of Parkentin.

Penner goes on to show that Parkentin and Warkentin families migrate to Prussia and both names appear in Mennonite church records. “Whether the Parckentins/Warkentins all came to Westprussia as baptizers [anabaptists] one cannot say.”<sup>12</sup> Penner never states unequivocally that the two names actually became one, and it would be wrong to make that assumption.

Additionally, Penner mentions that Rostock University, which is only 15 kilometers from Parkentin, includes several Warkentins in its matriculation list. This opens a fascinating door.

The city of Rostock holds a strategic location at the mouth of the Warnow river. It served as a port for ships sailing around Denmark into the Baltic. As a member of the Hanseatic League Rostock benefited greatly from the tax and duty that was gathered from produce brought up the river from the agricultural areas of Northern Germany, and the goods that were brought by ship from The Netherlands, England, and Spain.

Before the Reformation the region was under the spiritual administration of the Bishop of Schwerin. Long before Martin Luther sparked the Protestant Reformation in Wittenberg or Menno Simons had brought the Anabaptist teachings to nearby Wismar, Rostock had gained a reputation for religious dissent.

Daniel Borberg describes several of these pre-reformation personalities in his article, “Die Einführung der Reformation in Rostock.” Among the most influential were Rutze, Krantz, and Pegel.<sup>13</sup>

Nikolout Rutze, who studied at Rostock University between 1477 and 1485, was a strong advocate of the writings of John Huss. Rutze’s book, *The Three Strands: living faith, hope and love*, influenced the students and the citizens of Rostock toward a more personal expression of faith. He stressed the importance of a pure heart, rather than rituals.

Albert Krantz, another influential teacher in the university, was also immersed in the teachings of Huss. In the early sixteenth century humanist scholars Konrad Celtes (1487), Herman von dem Busch (1507), Ulrich von Hutten (1512), Johannes Hadus (1515), and Nicolaus Marschalk (1510) were associated with the university. Marschalk had worked at Wittenberg University before coming to Rostock. The humanists introduced the idea of

studying Scriptures in their original languages.

The most influential teacher in Rostock during this period was Konrad Pegel. He opposed the control of Rome and argued that the only mediator between man and God was Jesus Christ. Pegel was appointed by Duke Heinrich of Mecklenburg to be the tutor of his son, Magnus. This permitted Pegel to shape the future of the principality as it embraced the Lutheran reformation.

Rostock University was founded in 1419 and its matriculation book lists more than 40,000 names of students, dignitaries, and professors who participated in the life of the institution. A transcription of the register was published in 1904 and reprinted in 1976.<sup>14</sup> Penner apparently consulted this publication when he identified Gabriel Werkentin from Goldberg who attended the university in 1621 and two Warkentins from Güstrow who attended in 1632.

Penner did overlook several facts from this list, which may have tempered his inference that Warkentin and Parkentin are somehow linked. First of all, he overlooked several earlier Werkentins on the list. Johannes Werkentin from Sternberg is registered in 1574.<sup>15</sup> This is the earliest written record of the Werkentin name so far discovered. Two decades later, in 1594, Gabriel Werkentin from Sternberg is listed.<sup>16</sup> Then follow the names mentioned by Penner: Gabriel Werkentin from Goldberg (1621), and Jacob Warckentin and Michael Warkentin, both from Güstrow (1632). Arguments over the exact spelling of the name seem irrelevant since these two come from the same village in the same year yet have different spellings. They do represent the more common spellings which would become ubiquitous in Prussia.

The pronunciation and spelling of Warkentin changed with its national and linguistic setting. In Plaut-Deetsch (Low German), a dialect that had no written form until the twentieth century, it is pronounced *Woahtenteen* with a *v* and a distinct diphthong on the *oa*. The *jt* is a uniquely Low German sound similar to the *tch* that begins the name *Tchaikovsky*.<sup>17</sup>

In America most people pronounce the initial syllable *wor* with a long *o*. In German it would be *var* as in *varnish*. The Plaut-Deetsch *oa* made an easy transition to *wor* in America since English prefers the long *o* as in a military *war*.

In Rostock University records it was written Warckentin or Werkentin and would have been pronounced *Varkenteen*. The university list is written in Latin and most of the names are given a Latin ending. For example, when the son of Martin Luther is listed in 1567, only seven years before Johannes

Werkentin appears, he is recorded as, “Paulus Lutherus, Martini Lutheri filius. Artis medicae doctor.”<sup>18</sup> But the Warkentin name, no matter how it is spelled internally, never appears with the Latin *us* ending.

In Prussia the *teen* suffix was clearly indicated by spelling the name Warkentien. However, many German place names continue to use only the *i* to indicate a long *e* sound. Stettin, which is near Rostock, is pronounced with a long *e* in the final syllable. Even Berlin is pronounced in German with a long *e* in the final syllable. And no Renaissance scholar would pronounce Georg Spalatin other than with a *teen* final syllable.

The family of Aron Aron Warkentin, who was born in Prussia in 1777, may serve as a sample of how the name changed over time:

Aron Aron Warkentin b. 1777, Prussia

Aron Warkentin b. 1807, Ukraine (South Russia)

Aron Warkentin b. 1862, Ukraine (South Russia)

Aron Warkentin (1862-1931) arrived in America as a sixteen-year-old boy in 1879 and the Americanization of his longstanding surname began to evolve. His father died in Russia in 1875 and his mother remarried Jacob Graves. Aron was on his own to find his way in America.

On his marriage certificate, August 31, 1884, Aron's name is written six times and each time it is spelled Warkentine. This would appear to be an attempt to accommodate an English pronunciation of the name. The word *routine* would justify this decision, unfortunately, it also leads to the possibility of a long *i* in the final syllable, as in the word *mine*. However, when his name appears as a witness to the marriage of his son, Dietrich, in 1908, it is spelled Warkentien. And on the same document Dietrich spells his name Warkentin. In each case the handwriting appears to be rather formal and may have been the work of a court scribe. Nevertheless, Aron and Dietrich would have been aware of what was written and father and son approved two contrasting spellings.

When Aron's wife, Helena (Mackelburger) died in Fairview, Oklahoma, in 1931 the notice in local papers identifies her as Mrs. A. M. Warkentien, and one article written in the first person by Aron clearly spells his name Warkentien. This same article lists all eight sons and in every case they are identified as Warkentien. It is no wonder then that his sons chose three different spellings: Warkentin, Warkentine, and Warkentien. But all preserved the *teen* pronunciation. Other Warkentins in America changed the spelling to Workentine, while some gave the final syllable the American pronunciation *tin* as in *tin* metal.<sup>19</sup>

Each of the villages with which the Warkentins in the Rostock University list are identified is in the area of Parkentin and near Rostock. But this does not necessarily confirm Penners theory that Parkentin and Warkentin are linked. Other names on the list cast an even darker shadow on his theory. A host of students with names such as Roggentyn, Scharentin, Sankentin, Dubbertin, Bechentin, Buckentin, Techentin, and Barkentin, along with Parkentyn, attended Rostock University with the Warkentins (Werkentins).

The region is sprinkled with villages whose names have the *tin* ending. Daniel Schlyter lists forty-two villages with *tin* as their final syllable in his Web-based *Mecklenburg Gazetteer*.<sup>20</sup> Two of these villages deserve special attention. Wargentin was a village near present day Malchin and Basedow. The village is first mentioned in documents as early as 1215, though it may have existed even earlier. It no longer exists as a village; however, there is a street in Malchin named “Wargentiner Strasse” and the Wargentin village site is still marked by a grove of trees.<sup>21</sup>

The second village of special interest is Wargen in East Prussia. It might be the source of the name Wargentin in Mecklenburg. There is also a town of Varchentin in the *Mecklenburg Gazetteer*. This town still exists and shares its name with two lakes in the vicinity. In German the *v* is usually pronounced as *f*. When pronounced, rather than seen, Varchentin sounds very much like the typical pronunciation of Warkentin. Names such as Wargentin and Varchentin are possible sources of the name Warkentin. This would be more likely than that the name evolved from Parkentin. The difficulty is that all of these names claim a Slavic-Wendish origin that does not seem consistent with the Warkentin family Low-German Mennonite history.

Language alone cannot be used as proof of ethnic background. Many Warkentins in America speak only English and it took less than three generations for their German linguistic roots to disappear. It is entirely possible that a person who grew up speaking Dutch in seventeenth-century Mecklenburg would have grandchildren who spoke only German in eighteenth-century Prussia.

Abraham Friesen, in his fascinating book, *In Defense of Privilege: Russian Mennonites and the State Before and During World War I*, explores at great length the origins of Anabaptists in Prussia-Poland. Although his argument seems to favor a Dutch origin, he references many authorities who claim that a major portion came from Germany. This controversy concerning the Dutch or German origin of the Mennonites took on heightened importance during the early twentieth century when the Soviet government decided to disenfranchise people of German background.

If truth be told, there were some German citizens who converted to the Anabaptist perspective. Who could argue that a name like Mackelburger did not come from Mecklenburg? Yet Aron Warkentien married Helena Mackelburger in 1884 in Jansen, Nebraska. They shared Mennonite faith and communicated in Low German. And just as certainly names such as Patzkowsky, Rogalsky, and Schapansky entered the Mennonite tradition during the Polish-Russian interlude in Mennonite history. Friesen summarizes the question in his reference to a study by Felicia Szper:

The scholarly opinion, both Mennonite and non-Mennonite, on the matter of the ethnic origin of the Prussian Mennonites was therefore remarkably uniform prior to World War I. This unanimity was punctuated by Felicia Szper's 1913 study entitled *Nederlandsche Nederzettingen in West-Pruisen gedurende den Poolschen Tijd* (Dutch Settlements in West Prussia during Polish Rule). Setting the coming of the Dutch Anabaptists in the sixteenth century into the larger context of Dutch-Prussian contacts, trade, even the occasional settlement, going back to the eleventh and twelfth centuries, Szper sought to determine the date on which Dutch Anabaptists made their first appearance in Prussia and the precise regions in the Netherlands from which they came. And in an appendix she reproduced some twelve documents, beginning with one dated 1555 and ending with another dated 1766, that consistently spoke of these settlers as coming from Holland.<sup>22</sup>

A surprising argument for the German origin of Mennonites appears after World War I: "The divided opinion of the Russian Mennonites on this question after the war contrasts sharply with the virtually unanimous verdict of the scholars before the war."<sup>23</sup> This debate, however, never suggests that Anabaptist-Mennonites came from the Wendish-Slavic ethnic tradition even though a name such as Warkentin appears in a context where many Wends lived. In fact, the Rostock-Wismar-Lübeck branch of the Hansa was called the Wendish League. The German term designating people of Old-Slavic origin is Wendish.

There is a possibility that Warkentin originated in this Slavic tradition, but there are many stronger facts that point to a Dutch origin, as will be shown later in this essay. Most Wends embraced the Lutheran reformation and became conservative followers of this tradition. They maintained a unique language, which has its origin outside the German-Dutch-Saxon tradition. A large group of Lutheran Wends immigrated to Galveston, Texas, and remain committed to the Missouri Synod Lutheran Church.<sup>24</sup>



None of this Wendish identity seems consistent with the later history of the Warkentin family. They spoke Plaut-Deetsch (Low German). The Low German spoken in Poland by Mennonites was somewhat different than the language commonly referred to as Low German in the northern provinces of Germany. Yet both dialects had their origin in Dutch-German-Saxon languages, not in the Slavic tradition.<sup>25</sup> Many, but not all, of the Warkentins embraced the radical reformation of Menno Simons. And they migrated to Poland rather than remain in the Lutheran-dominated area near Rostock. As usual, when migration of a group is described, it is necessary to acknowledge that not all Warkentins participated. The Warkentins who have no connection with the Anabaptist history can be found in the Rostock region to this day. A Web search of the Rostock telephone directory shows several families with the Warkentin name.<sup>26</sup>

Some Mecklenburg Warkentins migrated to the United States in the nineteenth century. For example, Ronald Dean Warkentien, who lives in Illinois, is the descendant of Ernst Christian Warkentin who was born in 1778 in Lüdershagen, Güstrow, Mecklenburg, Germany. His son, Christian Wilhelm Warkentin, emigrated from Güstrow to America in 1850. His children were baptized in a Lutheran church:

Ernst Christian Warkentin 1778-Güstrow  
 Christian Willhelm Warkentin 1812-Güstrow (1850 to USA)  
 Frederick Charles Johann Warkentien 1852-Cook County, Illinois  
 (baptized Lutheran)  
 Walter A. Warkentien 1901-Starke County, Illinois  
 Ronald Dean Warkentien 1932<sup>27</sup>

If the Warkentin name is not of Slavic origin, then what is its origin? One clue is the suffix *tin*, which many Mecklenburger names have in common. The name Roggentyn, for example, is among the earliest names on the Rostock University list. It has been most thoroughly researched. According to the name advice center at the University of Leipzig, Roggentyn is a place name. The suffix *in* indicates, “from the place of ....”<sup>28</sup>

Not all students with names ending in *tin* are associated with villages that match their name. For example, Baltzar Parkentyn<sup>29</sup> is not from Parkentin, but rather from Hannover. Marcus Techentin<sup>30</sup> is not from Techen, but rather from Lübeck. There is a small community of Techentin near Goldberg in Mecklenburg, and a town in central Germany named Techen, so it is possible that the *tin* suffix indicates, “from the place of Techen.” Apparently, Marcus chose to be identified with the larger city of Lübeck rather than the small

community of Techentin, or perhaps his family had moved from Techen to Lübeck.

That the suffix *tin* might be added to a place name is clearly shown by the case of Georg Spalatin, who was a friend of Martin Luther. Georg was born on January 17, 1484, to the Burkhardt family in the village of Spalt, south-east of Nürnberg. He completed his baccalaureate degree at the University of Erfurt in 1499, where he is listed as Georius Borgardi de Spaltz (Georg Burkhardt from Spalt). He attended newly founded Wittenberg University in 1502 and was among the first group who completed a master's degree there in 1503.<sup>31</sup> In 1508 he was ordained as a priest by Archbishop Johann von Laasphe, the same cleric who had ordained Luther; however, he did not meet Luther until 1513.<sup>32</sup>

As at Erfurt, he registered at Wittenberg under a latinized name: Georius borkhardus de spalt.<sup>33</sup> The slight difference in the spelling may be an indication of the relaxed attitude toward spelling which is found throughout Europe in this period. However, this bright young student decided to give his name a more universal status upon graduating with the master's degree. He may have been influenced in this decision by his mentor, Nicolaus Marschalk, who later in 1510, went to Rostock University where the Warkentin name first surfaces. Among the group of fourteen students who completed the degree on February 2, 1503, listed as number eleven, is the name, Georgius Spalatinus.<sup>34</sup> Georg Burkhardt never used his family name again in his professional writing, and in the history of the Reformation he is always remembered as Georg Spalatin (George from Spalt).

A more famous name ending in *in*, and one that clearly comes from a Slavic source, is that of Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov. He wanted a name that indicated strength, grandeur, and Russian background. So he added *in* to the Siberian river name Lena and became Vladimir Lenin. This may not be a strong argument for the origins of the Warkentin name, but it does indicate that in Slavic traditions place names can be claimed by adding *in*.

In the case of the Roggentin family name mentioned above, it would appear that the *tin* ending comes from the Slavic (Wendish) tradition. Historians agree that people of Slavic background migrated to the Baltic region as early as 600. Their linguistic influence is evident in Poland and the Baltic states. Hans Bahlow, in his comprehensive book, *German Names*, lists Warkenti(e)n as being derived from a Slavic place name.<sup>35</sup> However, the Slavic origin of *tin* can hardly be applied to Georg Spalatin, who came from Bavaria near Nürnberg in Southern Germany and, even if his heritage

might be traced to the very early settlements of Slavs who can be found in Bavaria, it is evident that he chose the *tin* ending after attending university. The example of Spalatin, the Dutch-Mennonite connection, and the Low-German linguistic history in the Warkentin family argue against a Slavic origin.

One can conclude that Warkentin means “from a place named Warken.” But there are a number of locations to be considered. Warken, Werken, Werchen, Verchin, Wargen, and Workum can be found on the map of northern Europe. And there is a concentration of villages in Mecklenburg with *tin* as their final syllable. This *tin* ending has an Old Slavic linguistic origin and the presence of Slavs in this region is well documented. Theirs was a pagan tradition and the Christianization of this region around 1100 forced them to convert, depart, or die.<sup>36</sup>

Scholars have logically, but perhaps too easily, assigned an Old Slavic origin to every name ending in *tin*. The example of Georg Spalatin puts that practice to the question.

The most direct origin of Warkentin may be the village of Wargentin, which appears in documents around 1250 and disappears from maps after 1800. A Dutch-published map of Mecklenburg from 1645 shows Wargentin south of Rostock near the town of Malchin.<sup>37</sup> Yet, it is not a completely satisfactory place of origin since the name Werkentin appears not far away at Rostock University in 1574 with a *k* and never with a *g*. Evidence can neither confirm nor deny this as the place of origin, and there are other places which deserve equal or greater consideration.

A family might have come to Mecklenburg from Workum in The Netherlands where Anabaptists were well established and then changed their name to Warkentin. But that would require a number of consonant shifts and there is a more logical, though often overlooked, possibility that we shall pursue.

There is a village named Warken in Gelderland, The Netherlands. Is this merely serendipity, or can a connection be made between Rostock in Mecklenburg and Warken in Gelderland? Certainly such a connection can be made on the basis of circumstantial evidence. As early as 1150 people from Flanders had been invited by Albert the Bear, Margrave of Brandenburg, to settle along the Baltic near Rostock. “They received bigger farms than the Slavs retained, were practically exempt from taxation and enjoyed such a high degree of secular and ecclesiastical favour, as compared with the Slav population, that a large proportion of such natives as had survived the slaughter of battle left the country.”<sup>38</sup>

The princely sons of the Slav leader, Niklot, died in their attempt to retain their territory in Mecklenburg and Pomerania. Pribislaw, the elder son, declared war on Henry the Lion, Duke of Saxony, in 1164. His speech rallying his troops at the castle of Ilowe clearly identifies people of Flanders as unwelcome foreigners in his realm:

You all know how much injury and disaster the violent rule of the Duke has brought upon our people. He has robbed us of the inheritance left by our fathers and bestowed it everywhere upon foreigners, *Flemings, Dutchmen, Saxons, Westphalians* and others.<sup>39</sup> (italics mine)

It is also evident that the people of Flanders and Holland thought of the Baltic coast as a place of hope and refuge. The “Shakespeare” of Dutch literature, Joost van der Vondel (1587-1679), sets his most famous play, *Gijsbrecht van Aemstel* in the fourteenth century, and has his hero escape from war-torn Holland and resettle in Danzig.<sup>40</sup> Such an escape from the problems in Holland did not seem unrealistic to Vondel’s seventeenth-century audience. And it must be noted that Vondel was an Anabaptist-Mennonite in 1650 when he wrote this drama.

A century after Gijsbrecht supposedly escaped to Danzig, the presence of Netherlanders is again noted in Mecklenburg. The Rostock University matriculation list names several students who claim cities in the Netherlands as their home. Gisebertus Nicolai<sup>41</sup> is from Leyden, Bernhardus Lewerdianus<sup>42</sup> is from the state of Friesland and probably from the town of Leeuwarden, as his family name implies. This establishes the fact that students from The Netherlands did attend Rostock University. But can such a clear argument be made for a student coming from the village of Warken? This will depend upon additional circumstantial evidence.

Warken is a small community of several hundred people in Gelderland. It is situated five kilometers east of Zutphen and since 2005 it has been incorporated into that larger municipality. According to Dutch historian Michel Groothedde, Warken was spelled *Wercken* during the 14th and 15th centuries.<sup>43</sup> Dutch etymologist, Jan ter Laak, believes that Warken means “curve in the river.” Warken is located on the Warkense *enk* near the river Berkel and is named after the curve in this river. Excavations in nearby Eme and Leesten reveal that the site has been occupied by farmers for more than 5,000 years.<sup>44</sup> Zutphen, which would have been the governmental center for Warken, has a well-documented history. It is the ninth-oldest city in the Netherlands, receiving its city rights in 1190. It is located in the state of Gelderland and

since it is one of the last major cities in the south where the terrain becomes a *fen* it has been given the name “south-fen.”

Zutphen had a Mennonite community in the eighteenth century, but that is the earliest mention of their presence.<sup>45</sup> That no earlier Mennonite congregation is found in the written record may be due to the fact that under Philip II new congregations were forbidden. So any Anabaptist congregations in the Zutphen area would have had to be secret. There was enough religious turmoil in the region to produce martyrs like Anne of Utenhoven, who is recorded in *The Martyrs Mirror*, and to precipitate an invasion by Philip II in the late sixteenth century resulting in the massacre of citizens in Zutphen.<sup>46-47</sup>

It was one of the Hansa cities and therefore had economic connections with Lübeck, Rostock, Danzig, and other cities along the Baltic coast. The rivers and canals flowing through Zutphen lead to the Dutch coast and from there to all the major ports of the Baltic. At the peak of trading activity in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as many as 1,200 ships annually made the voyage between The Netherlands and ports of the Baltic.<sup>48</sup>

Establishing the year when a Dutch-speaking family would have left Warken and relocated in the Rostock area may be impossible. But the name, Verken, definitely appears in Rostock in the late Middle Ages.

The financial and political success of Rostock was dependent on the cooperative relationship it had with other exporting cities in the region. As early as 1257 Rostock was in negotiation with Wismar, Lübeck, and Ribnitz with the goal of establishing rights of commerce. One concern was the active presence of pirates and thieves along the coast.<sup>49</sup> The relatively small ships used for commerce in the late Middle Ages required navigation by visual landmarks, keeping them near the shore and susceptible to piracy.

The oldest city records of Rostock are on several undated parchment pages. Thierfelder has determined that these pages predate the City Record of 1261.<sup>50</sup> Fragment I-3 records a legal transaction regarding Nicolaus Verken, his daughter Margaret, and Herman of Blisecov.<sup>51</sup> This transaction definitely predates 1261 and most likely was recorded in 1258. Nicolaus Verken was living in, or near, Rostock in 1258 and was old enough to have a daughter, which would place his birth around 1230.

In the late Middle Ages family names (surnames) had not yet developed a standard taxonomy. A person may be known as Johann the fisherman, or Johann son of Heinrich, or Johann of Lübeck, or simply as Johann. It may be only accidental that Nicolaus Verken is not recorded as Nicolaus “de” Verken. Even without the insertion of “de” one can conclude that the final

name indicates a place of origin since it is neither a father's name nor a vocational name. Werken in both Dutch and German means "to labor, work," but it would be quite unusual for a verb to become a family name.

Spelling of names is not standardized in this early Rostock document. For example, Walter is spelled Walterus, Walderus, Wolterus, Wolderus, and Volterus.<sup>52</sup> It is therefore not surprising that the village in Gelderland, which today is spelled Warken, was spelled Wercken during the Middle Ages. And just as the *w* may morph into *v* so does the *ck* easily become *k*. And the great variety of spellings of Warkentin (Werkentin, Werckentin, Warckentien) demonstrates the shift between *a* and *e*.

It is also consistent with geographic and economic history that there would be migration within the region known as the Low Countries. This label is not confined to the area presently comprising the state of The Netherlands, but is applied to the entire northern area from Emden to Danzig. Into this region all the major rivers of northern Europe flow, making for efficient transport of inland produce to the Baltic coast. Even though the Hanseatic League was not yet fully developed by 1250, there was already significant trade between cities along the Baltic coast and cities along the shores of Western Europe. The Rostock city records of the thirteenth century mention cargo such as wheat, rye, barley, oats, malt, hops, lumber, potash, wax, honey, dried salted herring, flour, cloth, linen, copper, iron, fur pelts, salt, cement, and farm animals that were exported from its port on the Warnow river.<sup>53</sup>

Thierfelder has created an alphabetical list of family names found in the Rostock city register.<sup>54</sup> It is clear from this list that many families had found their way to the area around Rostock from Flanders, where the village of Warken is located. There are seven entries, some including several family members, with the last name Flamingus, Flamingus, or Flemingus, clearly indicating their origin as Flanders. Other names that may have origins in The Netherlands include Brabatinus, Brant, Vollandi, and Harlendie. The cities of Zwolle and Utrecht (Traiecto) are also mentioned as places of origin.<sup>55</sup> That Nicolaus Verken would not have been the only person of Dutch origin living in Rostock in 1260 is clearly shown by the presence of these other names on the list. It is historically possible that his name refers to the village of Wercken (Warken) in Gelderland since Zutphen and its satellite village, Warken, have a history dating back to 1190 and existed as an agricultural area reaching back five thousand years.

Many names in Thierfelder's summary of the Rostock Register would later find their way into the Mennonite tradition. Perhaps these are simply

common Germanic names, but it is more than coincidental that so many of these names have survived in the Mennonite-Anabaptist tradition that swept through this area two centuries later. The following names, which can be found in twenty-first century Mennonite congregations, are recorded on the Rostock list before 1273:

<b>Medieval spelling</b>	<b>Modern spelling</b>
Bloc	Block
Born	Born
Bouman	Bauman
Brant	Brandt
Bulle	Buller
Voghet	Vogt, Voth
Friso	Friesen
Gunterus	Günther, Gunther
de Hagen	Hagen
Heince	Heinze
Heinricus	Heinrichs
Herderus	Harder
Hildebrandus	Hildebrandt
Heyer	Heier
de Lawe	Loewen
de Lippia	Lepp, Loepp
Martinus	Martens
Reimarus	Reimer
Sibertus	Siebert
Symonis	Siemens
Slichtinc	Schlichting
Sroder	Schröder
Wibeken	Wiebe

But why should one look for migration from Flanders to Mecklenburg so early in history? It has usually been assumed that Mennonites fled from The Netherlands to Northern Germany and Prussia as the result of religious persecution in the sixteenth century. However, the matriculation list from Rostock University and the earliest Rostock city records show that this assumption may be only partially correct. In addition to the “Mennonite” names listed in the thirteenth century city records, the university register in the fifteenth century lists the following names, which can be found in twenty-first century Mennonite congregations. These families lived in Mecklenburg long before the Anabaptist message took root:<sup>56</sup>

<b>As listed</b>	<b>Modern spelling</b>
Lowe	Loewen
Berken	Bergen
Voghet	Vogt
Conradi	Conrad
Schroder	Schröder
van Epen	Epp
Bulle	Buller
Bolt	Bolt
Symonis	Siemens
Mertens	Martens
Borchman	Barkman
Brand	Brandt
Smyt	Schmidt
Radyke	Radke
Kruse	Kruze
Block	Block
Pletze	Plett
Goldbeke	Goldbeck
Reymer	Reimer
Berch	Berg
Decker	Decker
Gortzen	Goertzen
Flemingh	Flaming
Dreger	Drieger
Yseken	Isaac
Knake	Knack
Suderman	Suderman
Eyttzen	Eytzen
Funke	Funk
Zukow	Sukow
Langhe	Lange
Bergh	Berg
Vlamynk	Flaming
Sperling	Sperling
Schulenborch	Schellenberg

The fact that the first Werkentin does not appear in the register until 1574 might lead to the conclusion that his migration from Warken occurred in the late sixteenth century and may, indeed, have resulted from religious persecution. However there is another possibility. In 1456 a student named Bernardus Verken attended Rostock University.<sup>57</sup>

The only information given about Bernard Verken is that he came from the village of Hagen. There are several villages and cities of this name in



Germany but the one closest to Rostock is most likely his home. It is located northeast of Rostock on the large island of Rügen, along the Baltic coast. The Verken name was long established in the Rostock area since Nicolaus Verken has been shown to be there in 1260. And there is also a village south-east of Rostock which is named Verchen on modern maps, but on earlier maps is spelled Verken.

Since Bernard was of university age in 1456 he was probably born between 1430 and 1440. Rostock University, established in 1419, would have been an attractive place for a young man of ambition. A university education was a good entrance to a more successful life and Rostock University was the most prestigious place of learning along the trading routes of Northern Europe.

With many families in the region using the suffix *tin* to indicate their place of origin, it would be a logical progression for the Werken family to add it to their name just as Georg Burkhardt from Spalt became Georg Spalatin. Bernard Werken attended the university in 1456, and in 1574, a century later, Johannes Werkentin registered. And it should be noted that Nicolaus Marschalk, who was Spalatin's mentor at Wittenberg University in 1503, came to Rostock University in 1510 before the first appearance of the Warkentin name. Is it possible that he influenced a student from Warken to change his name to Warkentin? At any rate, by 1574 the family name was firmly established as Werkentin with the suffix *tin* indicating their place of origin. This would explain why the name in its full form has not been found earlier in any other place.

Further research may add valuable information concerning the names and locations of Werken and Werkentin in the Rostock region. A family well enough established to send their son to a university most likely had other children and possibly relatives in the region. The Rostock matriculation list gives only a very selective view of families. Surely, not every young man named Werken or Werkentin was able to attend the university.

At present an attempt is being made to test DNA samples from Warkentins in the Prussia-Russia-Mennonite line and from Warkentins in the Mecklenburg-Lutheran line. The results should indicate the common ethnic origins of the name. Bahlow may be correct when he writes that Warkentin is based on an Old Slavic place since there are several villages in Mecklenburg with similar sounding names. However, that would still not prove that people carrying the name are of Slavic origin. Without question people of Flemish-Dutch ancestry have lived in the Rostock region for more than five hundred

years. They might have brought the name with them, or they might have acquired the name from villages in Mecklenburg.

One intriguing question can be answered satisfactorily. If Bernard Werken lived in Mecklenburg before 1500 he would have been a baptized Catholic. Rostock had several large Catholic churches and monasteries. Any one living in the area before 1500 would have been devoutly, or at least tacitly, Catholic. How did the Werkentin family and the many other families with Mennonite ethnic names become associated with the Anabaptist-Mennonite Christian tradition?

Menno Simons, after whom the Mennonite tradition is named, came from Witmarsum in the Dutch state of Friesland. He spent the last fifteen years of his life in the region where the name Warkentin is first recorded.

According to Harold S. Bender in *Menno Simons' Life and Writings*, Menno fled Holland because a bounty was on his head for being a religious heretic who did not follow the strict teachings of the state church. In the Baltic north he would be under the sovereignty of the more tolerant King of Denmark. In 1553-54 Menno lived in Wismar, which is between Lübeck and Rostock.<sup>58</sup> In this town in 1554, he participated in a theological conference with the leaders of the Mennonite (Anabaptist) churches. During these years he worked on a translation of his Dutch writings into the provincial Low-German dialect spoken in the Baltic region. Menno died in 1561 on the estate of Bartholomew von Ahlefeldt in the village of Wüstenfelde, which is located between Lübeck and Hamburg.

It is likely that the Warkentins and many of the other Mennonite-related names on the Rostock matriculation list were converted to the Anabaptist view of Christianity by Menno himself, or by his most influential disciple, Dirk Philips, who also worked in this region. As stated earlier, the first Warkentin in Prussia is Arendt Warckentin in 1667, and his name is recorded in the Danzig (Flemish) Mennonite church, of which Dirk Philips was the founder.

The Warkentin name first appears at Rostock University in 1574 in the principality of Mecklenburg. Evidence suggests that it evolved from the place-name Warken by the addition of the suffix *tin*, which indicates a place of origin. And the logical place of origin is the village of Warken in Gelderland, The Netherlands. The family became Mennonite Anabaptist and moved to Prussia before 1667. Evidence clearly shows that the name predates the Prussian era and it indicates that not all Mennonites in the "Dutch" tradition came from The Netherlands as the result of religious persecution.

The presence of Flemish people in Mecklenburg well before the Refor-

mation precipitates an interesting question. Even if DNA evidence shows a Dutch origin for a person of Mennonite background, is it reasonable to claim Dutch privilege if the family lived in “Germany” for centuries? If the Warken family moved from Flanders to Mecklenburg as early as 1200 can they claim Dutch heritage? This would be comparable to a descendant of a Mayflower family claiming privilege as a citizen of Great Britain.

The search for a name’s origin never ends. But the search itself opens windows into history, politics, economics, geography, faith, and faithfulness, and provides insights for living in the present. What Tennyson wrote of a flower in a crannied wall, can be said of a name:

but if I could understand  
What you are, root and all, and all in all,  
I should know what God and man is.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Johan Postma, *Das niederländische Erbe der preussisch-russländischen Mennoniten in Europe, Asian und America* (Leeuwarden: A. Jongblood c.v., 1959), 102 #532.

<sup>2</sup> Cornelius Krahn, Warkentin, vol. 4 of *Mennonite Encyclopedia*. (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1959), 887.

<sup>3</sup> Horst Penner, *Die ost- und westpreussischen Mennoniten in ihrem religiösen und sozialen Leben in ihren kulturellen und wirtschaftlichen Leistungen Teil I 1526-1772* (Weierhof: Mennonitischer Geschichtsverein E. V., 1978), 353.

<sup>4</sup> Glenn H. Penner, trans., *Brandregister of 1727*, [http://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/prussia/Brandregister\\_1727.html](http://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/prussia/Brandregister_1727.html).

<sup>5</sup> John Thiesen, [www.bethelks.edu/jthiesen/prussian/heubuden.html](http://www.bethelks.edu/jthiesen/prussian/heubuden.html).

<sup>6</sup> Peter Klassen, trans., from manuscript from the Gdansk National Archive for a forthcoming book by Peter Klassen (Fresno: 2006).

<sup>7</sup> Sidney B. Fay, *The Rise of Brandenburg-Prussia to 1786*, rev. Klaus Eptien (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1946).

<sup>8</sup> Victor Peters and Jack Thiessen, *Mennonitische Namen: Mennonite Names* (Marburg: N. G. Elwert Verlag 1987), 132.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Hermann Schreiber, *Teuton and Slav: The struggle for central Europe*, trans. from the 3rd German edition by James Cleugh (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), 241.

<sup>11</sup> Horst Penner, *loc. cit.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Axel Borberg, Die Einführung der Reformation in Rostock, *Schriften des Vereins für Reformationsgeschichte*, Schrift 58, XV. Jahrgang. Vereinsjahr 1897-1898, (Halle: 1897), 35. Hans Bahlow, *German Names*, trans. and rev. Edda Gentry (University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), 535.

<sup>14</sup> Adolph Hormeister, vol. 1-4 of *Die Matrikel der Universität Rostock* (Rostock: Commission der Stillerschen Hor- und Universitäts-Buchhandlung, 1891, Kraus Reprint, 1987).

<sup>15</sup> *Die Matrikel* vol. II, 182 #35.

<sup>16</sup> *Die Matrikel* vol. II, 246 #14.

<sup>17</sup> Peters and Thiessen, *loc. cit.* (additional discussion of Low-German pronunciation is available in the introduction of Jack Thiessen's *Low-German Dictionary* and other Mennonite names may be studied in Gustav Reimer, *Die Familiennamen der westpreussischen Mennoniten*. (Weierhof: Mennonitischen Geschichtsverein, 1963).

<sup>18</sup> *Die Matrikel* vol. II, 163 #28.

<sup>19</sup> The materials relating to Aron Warkentin (1862-1931), my great-grandfather, are in my personal collection.

<sup>20</sup> Daniel Schlyter, *Mecklenburg Gazetteer*, <http://www.progenealogists.com/germany/mecklenburg/meckgaz.htm>.

<sup>21</sup> Die Stadtgründung Malchin-Mecklenburgischen Schweiz, [www.absolut-mecklenburg.de/root/ll\\_00\\_00006/index.php?seite=301](http://www.absolut-mecklenburg.de/root/ll_00_00006/index.php?seite=301).

<sup>22</sup> Abraham Friesen, *In Defense of Privilege: Russian Mennonites and the State Before and During World War I* (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2006), 306.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Schwausch Wendish History*, [www.netmastery.com/ancestors/whatsawend.html-7k](http://www.netmastery.com/ancestors/whatsawend.html-7k).

<sup>25</sup> Jack Thiessen, *Mennonite Low German Dictionary: Mennonitisch-Plattdeutsches Wörterbuch*. Studies of the Max Lase Institute for German-American Studies (Madison: University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2003), 27-30.

<sup>26</sup> Rostock directory available at <http://www.teleauskunft.de/>.

<sup>27</sup> Ronald Dean Warkentien family genealogy available at <http://worldconnect.rootsweb.com/cgi-bin/igm.cgi?op=GET&db=vortext155&id=I1052>).

<sup>28</sup> Roggentin family history available at <http://www.alfred-roggentin.gmxhome.de/page6.html>.

<sup>29</sup> *Die Matrikel* 1522 vol. II, 83 #27.

<sup>30</sup> *Die Matrikel* 1567, vol. II, 164 #28.

<sup>31</sup> Irmgard Höss, *Georg Spalatin: 1484-1545* (Weimar: Hermann Böhlhaus Nachfolger, 1956), 14.

<sup>32</sup> Albert Hauck, ed., *Realencyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1906), 547.

<sup>33</sup> *Georg Spalatin* 13.

<sup>34</sup> *Georg Spalatin* 14.

<sup>35</sup> Hans Bahlow, *German Names*, trans. and rev. Edda Gentry (University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), 535.

<sup>36</sup> Marija Gimbutas, *The Slavs* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971).

<sup>37</sup> Meklenburg map of 1645 at UCLA, <http://www.library.ucla.edu/yr1/reference/maps/blaeu/meklenbvrg.jpg>.

<sup>38</sup> Herman Schreiber, *Teuton and Slav: The struggle for central Europe*, trans. James Cleugh (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965).

<sup>39</sup> *Teuton and Slav* 59. (Quoting Helmold, *Geschichte der Slaven*, II.2.).

<sup>40</sup> Jost van den Vondel, *Gijsbrecht van Amstel*, trans. Kristin P. G. Amerce, *Carleton Renaissance Plays in Translation* (Dove house editions, 1991).

<sup>41</sup> *Die Matrikel* 1490 vol. I, 213 #77.

<sup>42</sup> *Die Matrikel* vol. II, 102 #36.

<sup>43</sup> Michel Groothedde, personal correspondence with the author, 2006.

<sup>44</sup> Jan ter Laak, personal correspondence with the author, 2006.

<sup>45</sup> Zutphen-Gelderland, #0108887 (Family History Center, Salt Lake, Utah)

<sup>46</sup> Craig Harline and Eddy Put, *A Bishop's Tale: Mathias Hovius Among His Flock in Seventeenth-Century Flanders* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000).

<sup>47</sup> C. Bruneel, The Spanish and Austrian Netherlands in *History of the Low Countries*, ed. J. C. H. Blom and E. Lamberts, trans. James C. Kennedy (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999).

<sup>48</sup> Johannes Schildhauer, *The Hansa: History and Culture*, trans. Katherine Vanovitch (Leipzig: Edition Leipzig, 1985), 39.

<sup>49</sup> Hildegard Thierfelder, *Das Älteste Rostocker Stadtbuch* (ca. 1254-1273) (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Rupert, 1967), 348.

<sup>50</sup> *Älteste Rostocker* 18.

<sup>51</sup> *Älteste Rostocker* 74 #23.

<sup>52</sup> *Älteste Rostocker* 338-339.

<sup>53</sup> *Älteste Rostocker* 241.

<sup>54</sup> *Älteste Rostocker* 292-319.

<sup>55</sup> *Älteste Rostocker* 240.

<sup>56</sup> *Die Matrikel* vol. 1, 1419-1499.

<sup>57</sup> *Die Matrikel* vol. I, 110 #85.

<sup>58</sup> Harold S. Bender, *Menno Simons' Life and Writings* (Scottsdale: Mennonite Publishing House, 1936), 42.