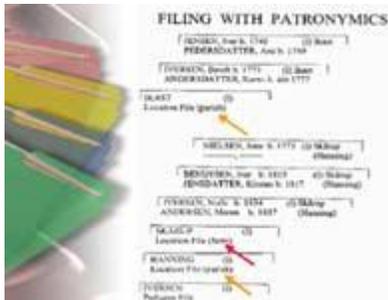# Patronymics

The following information was written for use with the training titled " How to Organize Your Paper Files " taught by Mary E. V. Hill and is used by permission of Gary Horlacher.

Patronymics

The same basic filing system can also be used for families that did not have fixed surnames, however it requires some additional considerations. The example described here is from Scandinavian countries where prior to the period 1860-1900 a child took his father's given name and the suffix -sen/-sson or -datter/-dotter depending on whether it was a boy or girl. Similar patronymic systems were used in the Netherlands, Slavic Countries, and northern Germany. They can be handled differently. Patronymic systems used in Latin American countries may require a different organization.

Click on the image to enlarge

Instead of using a surname to organize your family files, for countries with patronymics you will need to use the name of the farm or village where the family lived. As Scandinavian and European societies were based on a feudal system and most people were farmers, the place where the family was living becomes very critical in identifying and distinguishing the family from others with the same names. In Norway and parts of Sweden and Finland, every farm had a name. Larger farming districts also had names. Not every farm in Denmark and some parts of Sweden had a name, however the village or farming community had a name.

As property was generally stayed in the same family from one generation to another, you can use the place name and family name as identifiers in the place of the surname.

Color Coding

The color coding system is used to distinguish different branches of your family. Just as you can distinguish your four grandparent's lineages using four colors, you can also identify each of your Scandinavian lineages with a different color. If you have two Danish ancestors and one Swedish ancestor who all came to America from different parts of Denmark and Sweden, you should use a separate color for each line. This will help you keep the three lines distinct and keep you from getting them confused. Mark each file according to the color of the emigrant ancestor whose lineage it belongs to.

The filing system will then have a file with pedigree charts at the first showing the ancestry of the emigrant ancestor. It will then have general information and records about Denmark, about the county where the emigrant was from, the parish where the family was from, and the farm where the family was from. These general and locality based files will have a tab in the center of the file, so they can easily be distinguished from the family files which will have tab labels on the left or right side. The farm file might include copies of census records that list all those living on a farm or in a village for different census years. The county file might have extracts from records that include more information than just one farm.

Behind the file with information from the farm will be a file for each generation of the family listed from latest generation back to the earliest generation. For example, your first ancestor from Denmark was Iver Bendtsen, born 1822, from the Skårup farm, his file will be listed first. The files for his father Bendt Knudsen (born 1802) and grandfather Knud Madsen (born 1769) raised their families on the Skårup farm will be listed next.

In some cases the property may have been inherited from a mother's line rather than from the father's line, in which case the father would be from another farm. The mother's line will then be followed under that farm and the father's lineage will be listed under the farm where his family was from. In this example, Knud Madsen's wife Kirsten Bendtsdatter was born on the Skårup farm, so her father's file (Bendt Nielsen, born 1725) will be listed next. Knud Madsen was born in the village of Højmark in Lem Parish. After all the direct line ancestors from the Skårup farm have been filed, a place file for Lem Parish and one for Højmark village will be next with a center tab. Then the file for Mads Andersen will be the next file.

The pedigree chart at the beginning file will be a key to the system and pedigree charts showing the

ancestors who extend back in each locality should be included in the locality files. You should have one copy of this pedigree chart with the farm where the family is filed listed next to the male ancestor's name and highlighted. This will make it easy to find a particular ancestor's file.

This example is shown in the following diagram with the files (each square represents a file folder) at the front of the filing box at the bottom of the diagram:

(Color coding red for all the files for the ancestors of Iver Bendtsen)

[etc.]		
Anders Højmark Højmark (unknown) c. 1695		
Mads Andersen Højmark Else Knudsdatter c. 1727		
Knud Madsen Skårup Kirsten Bendtsdatter 1769	**Højmark Village**	
Bendt Knudsen Skårup Ane Kirstine Iversdatter 1802	**Lem Parish**	
Iver Bendtsen Skårup Johanna Marie Christensd. 1825 [Includes all documents, biographies, photographs, and other family history materials about this family]		Bendt Nielsen Skårup Karen Jensdatter 1725
	Skårup Village [Includes copies of pedigree charts showing the direct line ancestors who lived on this farm and extracts of census and other documents that include all those living in this village]	
	Hanning Parish [Contains maps, historical information, and extracts of records]	
	Ringkøbing County [several parishes in this county]	
	General Denmark File	
	[Contains general information about Denmark, handwriting guide, word lists, and pedigree charts showing the ancestry of Iver Bendtsen]	

The left and right tabs can both be used for family files. The purpose is to distinguish the place files from the family files by having the place files in the middle. If you are researching families other than direct ancestors (collateral lines), you could put all the direct line ancestors in left tab files and all non-direct lineages in right tabbed files.

The information listed on the tab includes the name of the husband and wife on the left and the farm where the family lived and the husband's year of birth. If you have not color coded the files, you might also include an abbreviation to indicate this is the ancestry of Iver Bendtsen. If a family lived at more than one farm during their married and later life, try to find the place where they lived for the most time or where the majority of the children were born and file the family under that farm.