

# The Family Name

Wilhelm and his children appeared to not be able to read or write. All known deeds and ships logs for Wilhelm, Wilhelm Jr., Peter and Conrad show only their signatures as an "X".

The ships logs show Wilhelm, Wilhelm Jr. and Peter's surnames as Wurtz. Since Wilhelm probably could not read or write the Ship's logs would have been created phonetically. But with further research this appears that this may not be correct. Michael Virts, son of Peter Philip Wurtz purchased land in 1801. On the deed he signed his name **Mijael Werz, in German (see below signature)**. It appears he signed his name phonetically and not grammatically. Mijael is the German phonic pronunciation for Michael, the "j" has a "k" sound. This would have been true for his last name as well. So was the surname in Germany Wurtz or Werz? Both sound very similar. This would lead one to believe that Michael did have some education. At that time, mid to late 1700's when Michael would have been in school, the German settlements only taught the old German language and not English.

A photograph of a handwritten signature in German cursive script. The signature reads "Mijael Werz". The letters are dark and the background is light.

This would explain why Michael would have signed his name in German. When Werz is phonetically spoken in German it sounds like Verts. To even further prove this point, Michael's surname in the deed appears as Verts. Also of note is that Wilhelm Sr.'s name appears as Wirz on his tombstone which is very close to Werz.

Below we have Peter Philip Virts' (son of Wilhelm Wurtz) signature on an Early Virginia Religious Petition, dated November 5, 1793, Loudoun, "German Episcopalian Society", for lottery to raise funds for building a church. Even though this is not Peter's actual signature, still finding it interesting noting the spelling of the last name.

A photograph of a handwritten signature in cursive script. The signature reads "Peter Verts". The letters are dark and the background is light.

Even to further confuse things, for the Virts' that left Loudoun County there are at least four different spellings of their surnames that exist today. The ones who moved to southern Virginia spelled their name as Wertz. The ones that moved to Missouri the name was spelled Verts and the Ohio Virts, of which at least two separate lines moved there, one spelled their last name as Werts and the other as Virts. In Loudoun County the name fluctuated quite a bit until after the civil war when the name begins to settle in as Virts. In most of these cases the different spellings can be attributed to lack of education during that time period. Most of the spellings were completely

phonetically associated. You can see this in census records, where there are brothers living side by side, neither could read or write and the last name is spelt differently in the same census record in the same year.