

**THE ANCIENT HISTORY OF  
THE DISTINGUISHED  
SURNAME  
STYLES**



The present generation of the Styles family is only the most recent to bear a name, whose roots date back to the ancient Anglo-Saxon culture of Britain. The surname is derived from the Old English "stigol," meaning "stile, steep ascent," and refers to a "dweller by the stile." Styles is among the Anglo-Saxon surnames which has survived the tests of time. Researchers have carefully studied ancient manuscripts such as the Domesday Book and others listed in the bibliography, in order to uncover the earliest origins of this surname. The first record of the Styles family appears in Bedfordshire (Old English: Bedanfordscir), located in Southeast-central England, formerly part of the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Mercia, where the family held a family seat in early times. The earliest known bearer of the name was Reginald atte Stighel, who was recorded in the Assize Rolls of 1227. The Styles family branched to other counties at an early date, also appearing in Somerset, where William de Stile and Osmund Arthe Stihele were living in 1229 and 1234 respectively, as well as in Sussex, where William ate Stegel was recorded in the Subsidy Rolls of 1296.

Throughout these documents many different spellings of the Styles surname were found. This surname has been spelled Stiles, Styals, Styles, Style, Stoyle, Steggle, Steagall, Steggal, Stygal and these variations in spelling occurred even between father and son. Many social and political factors effected the spelling of surnames. For instance the use of Latin and French as official court languages influenced the way in which names were recorded.

The Angles and the Saxons were both Teutonic tribes which migrated to England in the 5th century. These invaders came to occupy nearly the entire island south of the Firth of Clyde, driving the surviving Britons into Wales. The independent kingdoms which they established were called Northumbria, Mercia, Wessex, Kent, Sussex, Essex and East Anglia. These rival kingdoms were unified in the 9th century by Egbert, king of Wessex. The Anglo-Saxons maintained control over England in spite of many foreign invasions, until the successful Norman invasion in 1066. Regardless of the change in leadership, the Anglo-Saxon culture remained dominant outside of the royal court. Once William the Conqueror consolidated his victory, English society stabilized to some degree although disputes over royal succession and power struggles between the king and his barons were not unheard of.

The Styles surname emerges as that of a noteworthy family in Bedfordshire, as well as Somerset and Sussex. By the 14th century, this distinguished name had branched into Kent from whence originated the distinguished diplomat John Style. Sir Humphrey



Style his son was Sheriff of Kent in 1543; and an esquire to the body of King Henry VIII. He had three sons: Edmund, whose grandson was Sir Humphrey Style, Oliver, who was Sheriff of London about 1500, and Sir Nicholas Style, who was also Sheriff of London at the time of Queen Elizabeth I. They also branched to Walton in Northampton, to Steeple Ashton in Wiltshire, and their present family seat is at Vicester House. Notables of this surname include Sir Nicholas Style.

The 16th, 17th and 18th centuries in England were a time of social and economic restructuring. Conflicts between different sects of the church and between parliament and the king created a period of instability during which many families migrated voluntarily or involuntarily to Ireland or to the colonies.

Protestant settlers and followers of Cromwell were granted lands in Ireland which were confiscated for political and religious reasons. Other families migrated to work in the industries which were developing in Ireland. The distinguished Styles family settled in county Wexford, Ireland.

Despite the hazards of the journey many families migrated to the New World to escape the social turmoil at home. Yet the colonies were no paradise at first. Early attempts to settle the unknown lands in North America ended in disasters such as the lost Roanoke colony, which was found deserted in 1590.

Settlers bearing the Styles surname, or spelling variation of the name included Francis Stiles, who settled in New England in 1630; Joan Stiles, who immigrated to Boston in 1635; Nathaniell Stiles, who came to Virginia in 1639; as did Elizabeth Stiles in 1721; John Stiles, who settled in Maryland in 1735; as did Reuben Styles in 1774; John Stiles, who settled in Hawkes Bay, Labrador in 1787; and Thomas Steggall, who was naturalized in Michigan in 1882.

Canada was one of the destinations selected by immigrants for it promised a wealth of land and opportunity. Families such as this helped to build this isolated frontier into the world power it is today.

Contemporary notables of the surname Styles, include many distinguished persons, such as Walter Stanley Stiles (b.1901) author and research scientist at the National Physical Laboratory in Great Britain for whom the Stiles-Crawford Effect was named; Ryan Stiles (b.1959) American actor and comedian; Charles Wardell Stiles (1867-1941) American zoologist, professor of medical zoology at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine; Ezra Stiles (1727-1795) American theologian and educator, president of Yale University (1778-1795); John Dodson Stiles (1822-1896) American



lawyer and politician, member of the U.S. House of Representatives from Pennsylvania; and Norbert "Nobby" Peter Stiles (b.1942) English footballer.

Our research also determined the many Coat of Arms matriculated by the family name.

The most ancient grant of a Coat of Arms found was:

A back shield with a gold fesse fretty black, between three gold fleur-de-lis.

The Crest was:

A wolf's head, collared gold, fretty below the collar

The coat of arms found for a bearer of the Styles surname did not include a motto. Under most heraldic authorities, a motto is an optional component of the coat of arms, and many families have chosen not to display a motto.