



he distinguished surname Renkens has been traced to Austria. Later becoming the Bavarian tribal territories of Upper Austria, Salzburg, and Tyrol, the nation of Austria had been originally occupied by the Celts and then the Romans. Between the 3rd and 5th centuries there came a series of invasions by the Vandals, Goths, Huns, and Alemans, who swept into this mountainous region from the east. In the 9th century, the Holy

Roman Emperor Charlemagne made this territory the "Ostmark," meaning eastern border region, in order to stem the tide of the determined Hungarian and Slavic armies, who wanted Austria for their own. Otto the Great finally defeated the Hungarian invasions in 955, and Austria, a word meaning "Kingdom of the East," was a Bavarian protectorate.

Research into the history of this name brings us to Austria, where the name became noted for its many branches in the region, each house acquiring a status and influence which was envied by the princes of the region. In their later history the name became a power unto themselves and were elevated to the ranks of nobility as they grew into this most influential family.

Throughout history most surnames have gone through changes in spelling, even between generations. Often a name was recorded by a scribe simply by the way it sounded, thus changing the way in which the name was written. Particularly in Germany, place names or attributes of the person's character were added to the beginning or end of a name. If the name change had been recorded in contracts or legal proceedings, that name's spelling became a part of standard usage. Thus depending on the region, a name's spelling may vary quite considerably. Among such variations of the name are Rinckenberg, Renkenberger, Renkenberg, Rinckenberg, Rickenburg, Rickenburger, to name a few examples.

The Babenberger dynasty ruled Austria until 1278, when the house of Habsburg rose to power and began a vast program of territorial expansion, not by going to war, but by going to the altar; through politically advantageous marriages into various influential houses, the Habsburgs acquired Tyrol, the Krain region, Styria, Trieste, and the Alemanian Voralberg. They also gained the Netherlands from the Dukes of Burgundy in 1482, married into the Spanish royal family, and then split into the Austrian and Spanish lines of descent. Charles V left his Austrian territories to his brother Ferdinand I, who acquired Hungary and Bohemia in 1526.

Austria faced in the 16th century the religious troubles of the Reformation and the expansion of the Turkish Empire. Austria became the Catholic centre of the Counter-Reformation, and despite Ferdinand's expanding power, the Turks were at the gates of Vienna, laying siege to this city in 1529. The brutality of the Thirty Years War tore northern Europe apart, after which the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) divided up the Empire. Once again, the Turks attempted to invade Austria in 1699, only to be driven back by Prince Eugen of Savoy, who conquered large parts of the Balkans, acquiring Transylvania. However, after the Spanish and Austrian lines of Habsburg died out in 1700 and 1740, Maria Theresa became the only woman to be Empress on a German throne. Ruling a twin monarchy, they also became Kings of Hungary, which became the basis for the powerful Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Meanwhile, the surname Renkens has been traced to Austria, where they emerged as a notable family early in the Middle Ages. During these turbulent times there were many changing religious and political allegiances. Branches of the family emerged as family members relocated and established themselves in new locations as they were enlisted into military, political and religious service. They branched to Rothernberg in Bavaria and later to Swabia. Members of the family name were also raised to the nobility.

Notable bearers of the family name Renkens before our modern period include the Rinckenburg family of Austria.

Following the defeat of Napoleon in 1815, Vienna was chosen as the site of the famous Congress of Vienna, at which the victors decided how the nations of Europe

were to share the spoils. Following this period Austria reached the peak of its prestige, although the regime became more conservative and bureaucratic in an attempt to control the vast array of nationalities and cultures under its control.

Vienna's hold on its widespread possessions eventually loosened, particularly in the Balkan regions. In 1914, the assassination of the Archduke Ferdinand in the city of Sarajevo, Serbia, started the tragedy of the Great War. The empire was broken up by the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, when Austria became a republic, its Sudeten Germans now citizens of the new nation of Czechoslovakia. The forces of Hitler's Germany annexed it in 1938 and made it a part of greater Germany. Austria has been a democratic republic since 1945.

Vienna, Austria's capital and largest city, remains one of the major cultural centers of Europe, particularly in the realm of music. There has hardly been a single German composer who did not live here at one point in his life, such as the Strausses (the Vienna waltz), and Liszt. The literary life, centered around the fashionable coffee houses in which one could see the most famous authors of the era. The Viennese opera and theatre traditions are world famous. Salzburg, Mozart's birthplace, has an annual international festival in honour of this composer's music.

Many people left Austria and Germany for the New World from about 1650 on, for religious, political, or economic reasons. They settled primarily in groups that were bonded by occupation or language, or religious preference. Their highest density of population has been traced to Pennsylvania, Ohio, California, and Illinois, while in Canada German-speaking settlement centered around the province of Ontario and the Prairies. Amongst those settlers were Heinrich Rickenbacher, who arrived in Philadelphia in 1740; Barbara Rickenbacher, who settled in Pennsylvania in 1794; Maria Rickenberg, who traveled from Bremen to New Orleans on the ship General Washington in 1845; Adam Rickenbacher, who was naturalized in Ohio in 1848; Heinrich Rickenberg and Minna Rickenberg, who both came from Bremen to New York in 1870.

The greatest influx of immigrants to the United States occurred between the 1840s and the 1920s. Between these years, around 37 million immigrants arrived in the United States. Many of these later settlers followed opportunities westward.

Distinguished bearers of the family name Renkens in more recent times include Edward Rickenbacker (1890-1973), American fighter ace and Medal of Honor recipient.