

THE HERRIOTT SURNAME



According to William Anderson in his work on **THE SCOTTISH NATION**:

“The name was derived from a legal term, hariot or heriot, being, under the feudal system, a due belonging to a lord at the death of his tenant, consisting of his best beast, either horse, ox, or cow. In some manors, the best goods, piece of plate, etc., are called hariotics. The name is old in Scotland.” Scottish history appears to place Heriot as a name beginning ca. the 12th century.

The following is taken from the book, **THE SURNAMES OF SCOTLAND**:

HERIOT, Herriot. From the lands of Heriot in the parish of the same name in Midlothian. Early references to the name are all nearly to the district from which the name is derived. Henry de Heriet witnessed confirmation of the church of Karnewid (Carnwath) to Joceline, bishop of Glasgow, c. 1164-74 (Reg., 52), and Laurence de Herryhot witnessed a grant of the lands of Swaynystoun to the Hospital of Soltre c1221-38 (Soltre, p. 24). The lands of Trabroun in the sheriffdom of Berwick were confirmed to John de Heriot de Trabroun, son and heir of James de Heriot de Nudre Marschele in 1424 (RMS., ii, 13). Robert de Heryot was witness in Edinburgh in 1429 (Reg., 336), William Heryot or Heryote in Haddington made an annual gift of five shillings to the monks of Neubotle in 1458 (Neubotle, p. 244, 247), and John de Heriot was vicar of Soltre in 1468 (ibid., 301). The Heriots who appear in the Glasgow district in the sixteenth century were probably connected with Henry Sinclair, dean of Glasgow, who was of the Roslin family (Rental). John Heriot, George Heriot, and Patrick Heriot had special respite and protection in 1504 (Trials, i, p. *42, *43). John Hareot and Andrew Hareot were witnesses in Glasgow in 1525 (Reg., 497), William Heriot was burgess there in 1549 (Protocols, i), and Walter Heriot was vicar of Linlithgow in 1537 (Johnsoun). Buchanan says William, John, and Gilbert Heriot safely conducted Robert the Steward out of reach of his enemies in the time of Edward Balliol. Hereate 1569, Hereot 1543, Hereote 1558, Hereott 1595, Heret 1569, Herioitt and Herrioitt 1595, Heriott 1601, Herote 1544, Herreot 1559.

The Scots Ancestry Research Society states that variant spellings within families was not uncommon in Scotland. Other spellings in Scottish records include Heryot, Heryet, Herrot, Harrat, Hariot, Heriet, Herriote, Herret and Heriocht.

One needs to understand that spelling did not exist as we know it in early Scottish documents. Everything was spelled phonetically, particularly surnames and place names. Surnames were often spelled several ways in the same document.

It is no different in early United States records, particularly census records. Remember census records were only taken every 10 years. Census workers were temporary low-salaried employees. They also had a tendency to write down what they heard.

In addition many of our early ancestors were farmers and did not have an extensive education. When they move away from the main family they may have spelled the name the way they thought it was spelled.

So how did our immigrant ancestor spell his last name... the answer is WHO KNOWS!

David came from Scotland in 1685. At that time the predominant spelling in Scotland was HERIOT. This agrees with family lore that says our immigrant was a descendant of a half-brother of George Heriot, jeweler to King James, who founded the Heriot School in Edinburgh. The variants Herriot and Herriott didn't appear in substantial numbers in Scotland until later.

If you check the tombstone inscriptions in the First Presbyterian Church Cemetery in Woodbridge, NJ where many of our early ancestors are buried you will find more tombstone inscriptions spelled Harriot than Herriott.

Here's an example how things change. A great-grandson of immigrant David **HERRIOTT** (if that's how he spelled it) was named Samuel **HARRIOT** according to marriage and Revolutionary War records. He served in Northumberland County, PA. He had a son Joseph who served with him. Joseph moves to western New York with brother Jesse. Later, in the early 1800s Joseph files for a Revolutionary War pension using the name Joseph **HEROD**. It is denied as there was no record of anyone with that name serving (but there was record of a Joseph **HARRIOT**). Joseph had children who used the surname **HARET**. Joseph's brother Jesse has a son whose tombstone says **HERRIOT** and has another present day ancestor who uses **HERRIOTT**.

According to the **DICTIONARY OF AMERICAN FAMILY NAMES** by Elsdon C. Smith, "the name Herriot is French. The French names Henri and Herriot mean 'Descendant of Little Henri (home ruler).' There are many variations: Harriott, Harriot, Hariot, Herrit, Herriot, Herriott, and Harriett." Some would say that the Scottish Heriots are descendants of folks who came over with William the Conqueror, but nobody has been able to prove it. Perhaps our DNA project may one day shed some light on this.

As the following chart shows, regardless of how the surname is spelled, it is not a very common one in the United States. Ray Harriott our historian says "I'm not complaining as this has made research a lot easier."

Surname Frequency in the United States (2000)			
Surname	Rank among most Common Surnames	Occurrences in 2000 Census	%/100,000
Herriott	21620	1124	0.42
Herriot	80812	218	0.08
Harriott	24007	981	0.36
Harriot	124109	128	0.05
Heriot	70052	261	0.10

All data is derived from David L. Word, Charles D. Coleman, Robert Nunziata and Robert Kominski (2008). "Demographic Aspects of Surnames from Census 2000" U.S. Census Bureau

However this cannot be said about Great Britain where the surname is a lot more common. You can also see a trend in the spelling of the surname going back to 1881.

Surname Frequency in Great Britain (2011)			
Surname	Rank among most Common Surnames	Occurrences in 1881/today	Trend
Herriott	8102	356/570	Big Rise
Herriot	10570	338/393	Small Rise
Harriott	9152	234/477	Big Rise
Harriot	28603	32/20	Big Decline
Heriot	23574	229/104	Big Decline

In the early days of Scotland (1400-1700) HERIOT was the most predominant of these surnames with the others coming into more frequent use after 1700.