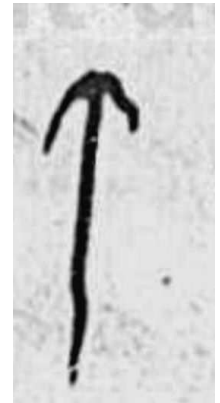


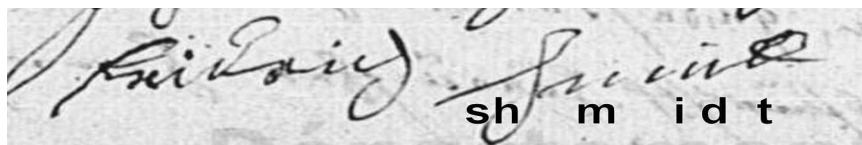
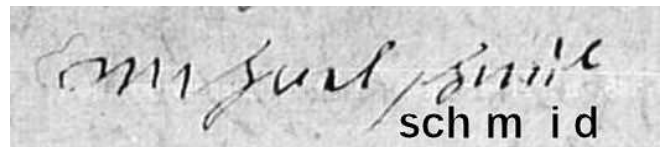
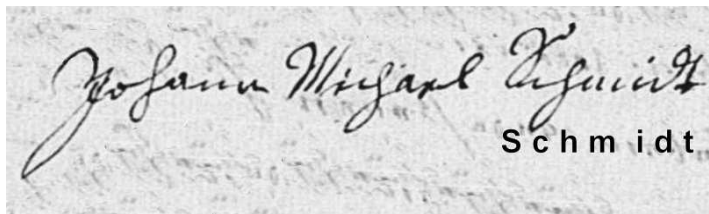
History of the spelling of the Schmitt surname in Hatten, Alsace

As in English, the German name Schmidt is typically spelled the same as the word for a blacksmith, the original meaning of the name. Even though most of the Schmitts in Hatten in the 17th and 18th centuries were *Nagelschmidts* (nailsmiths) by trade, their surname almost certainly originated well before that time, with a distant ancestor who was also a blacksmith.

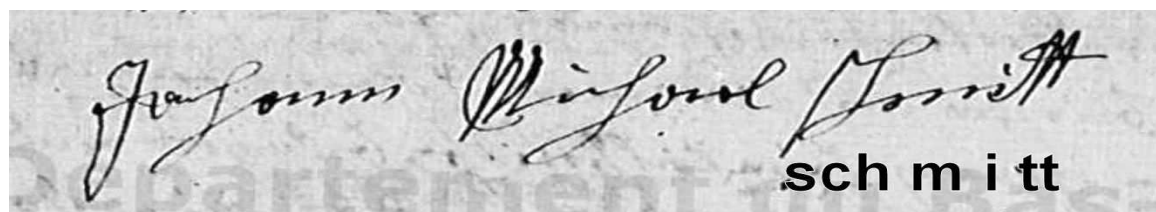
In the early 1700s, most people in Hatten were illiterate. Records were kept by the educated clergy, and when a signature was required, the pastor signed the name and the parishioner would mark an "X" or occasionally, a more distinctive mark. Below is the signature of Hans the Master Tailor's youngest son, Jacob, who consistently signed with the shape of a hand-forged nail.



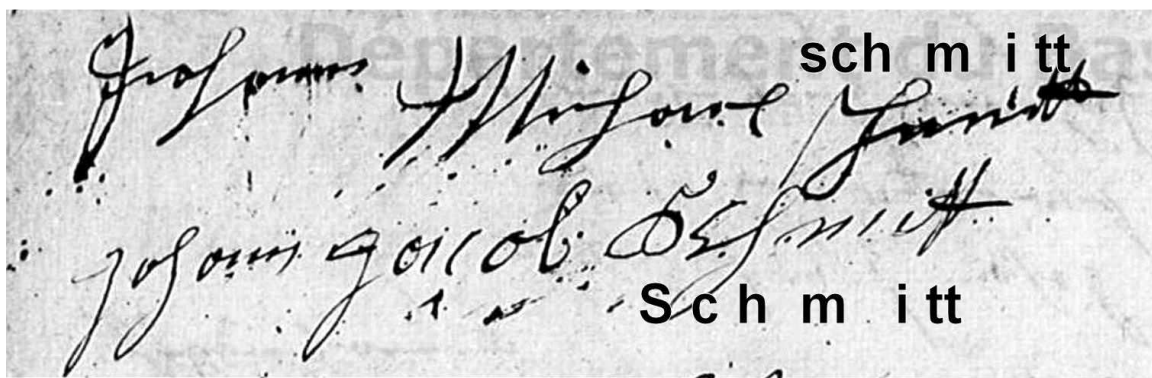
But in this family, Jacob the Nail Signer was the exception. All the other males in the family actually wrote their names. Although some of the signatures are hard to decipher, it appears that Hans the Master Tailor and his two sons Michael the First Nailsmith and Fridrich the Arborist spelled their name "Schmidt"; this is the same spelling used by the clergy. Here are their signatures with annotations showing the most likely spelling based on the German Kurrent script used at that time:



The earliest signature using using "tt" instead of "dt" was in 1742 when Jacob's oldest son, Michael the Rebel, witnessed a baptism, clearly spelling "Schmitt" (the first character is "sch").



And when their father died in 1760, both Michael and his younger brother Jacob of Wissembourg signed "tt". (The first "t" in this example of Michael's signature has an extra stroke that could possibly be interpreted as a "d"; however, review of his other signatures shows no convincing "dt".)

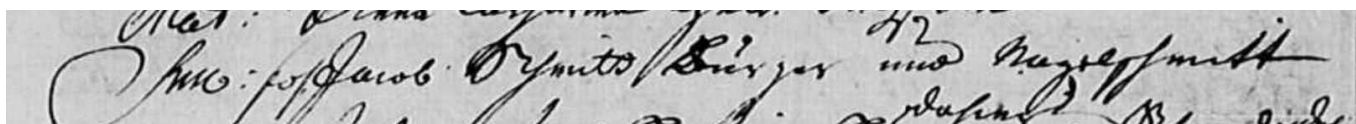


The image shows two handwritten signatures. The top signature is 'Michael Schmitt' and the bottom is 'Jacob Schmitt'. Above the top signature, the letters 'sch m i tt' are written in a simple, spaced-out font. Below the bottom signature, the letters 'Sch m i tt' are written in a similar spaced-out font. The signatures themselves are in a cursive script.

Most of Michael's descendants use the spelling "Schmitt" to this day, although some use "Schmidt" and others "Smith."

The reasons for Michael's choice are speculative. The additional "t" could be a reference to the town of Hatten, the Christian cross, or even the nail mark used by Michael's father, Jacob. Considering that young people often emulate those they admire, another possibility is the influence of Pastor J.F. Champfort, who began his tenure in the Hatten church in 1736 when Michael was ten years old. Unlike other clergy before and after, Champfort consistently spelled both the name *and* the occupation "Schmitt."

The following example from 1739 shows Champfort's handwriting stating that one of the sponsors for a baptism was Joh. Jacob Schmitt, *burger und Nagelschmitt* (citizen and nailsmith).



The image is a close-up of a handwritten document. It shows the name 'Joh. Jacob Schmitt' followed by 'Burger und Nagelschmitt'. The handwriting is a cursive script.

Hans the Master Tailor probably has living descendants through lines other than Michael the Rebel, and it is not clear that these branches of the family ever changed the spelling at all. This is an interesting area for further study.