Last Names … Finally!

During the Early Middle ages, people in Europe were usually identified by a single name. Those who shared the same name were often distinguished by nicknames, such as William the Conqueror. Nicknames also identified physical characteristics, occupations (such as “John the Miller”) or where people lived (”John of the Wood” probably lived near a forest). As the population grew during the High Middle Ages, nicknames evolved into last names. John the Miller, for instance, became John Miller, and John of the Wood became John Wood.