

**The Greatest Bargain in Genealogy?**

# Family Chronicle

The Magazine for Families Researching their Roots

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December 2004

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### Tracking Your Research:

The art and science of using research logs to speed and organize your search

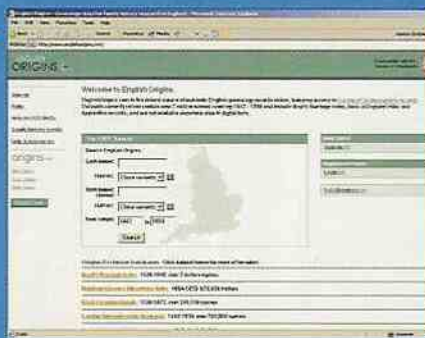


### Identifying People in Old Photos:

Tips and tricks for determining the subjects in photos

### 20 Top English and Welsh Sites:

The most useful sites for research in England and Wales



### The Experts Answer:

Professionals share their solutions to tough problems

### Evolving Language:

Watch out for terms that have changed meaning over time



### Military Pension File Secrets:

How to access the surprising amount of information they contain

### Pushing DNA Boundaries:

The newest developments in genetic genealogy

SNP	SNP Name	SNP Location	SNP Frequency	SNP Mutation
1	rs1044396	1p34.3	0.000000	0.000000
2	rs1044396	1p34.3	0.000000	0.000000
3	rs1044396	1p34.3	0.000000	0.000000
4	rs1044396	1p34.3	0.000000	0.000000
5	rs1044396	1p34.3	0.000000	0.000000
6	rs1044396	1p34.3	0.000000	0.000000
7	rs1044396	1p34.3	0.000000	0.000000
8	rs1044396	1p34.3	0.000000	0.000000
9	rs1044396	1p34.3	0.000000	0.000000
10	rs1044396	1p34.3	0.000000	0.000000

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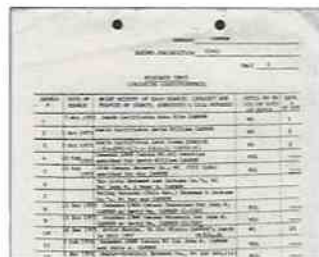
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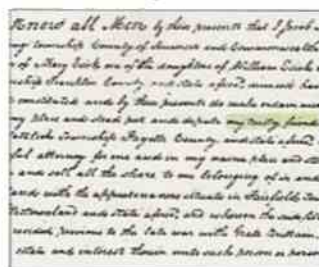
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# Pushing the Boundaries of Genetic Genealogy

Megan Smolenyak looks at some of the latest uses for DNA research in genealogy.

WHILE MANY ARE TAKING their baby steps in the world of genetic genealogy (a phrase I like to abbreviate to "genetealogy"), some of the early pioneers are already in the process of pushing the boundaries to see how else we can use DNA testing to our genealogical advantage. Yes, we can conduct surname studies with it, but what other magic might we be able to work with this remarkable tool? What follows are examples of some of the more innovative tactics and approaches being developed and applied by leading-edge roots-seekers.

## Famous Folks

Virtually all of us share at least one surname with someone who is famous — either in an historical sense or today. Perhaps we grew up with tales of being related to a Civil War general or maybe we were told that one of our grandfather's cousins won an Oscar back in the 1940s. We might speculate that our Shields line is the same family that produced Brooke Shields or wonder if we share a common heritage with that fellow of our surname who just won Olympic gold.

In such cases, we may have attempted to find a linkage, but failed. The records wouldn't cooperate and why bother even writing to the famous, alleged cousin? You know he's too busy to respond. So now what?

If you're creative, you might have the means to solve your rid-

dle through DNA testing. It won't tell you how you're related, but it will tell you once and for all whether there is a connection, so

That takes care of your sample, but how do you obtain one from the famous maybe-cousin? Fortunately, you don't have to. A

better approach is to use your genealogical sleuthing skills to research his or her family tree and find a second-, third- or fourth-cousin with the appropriate surname. Maybe his paternal grandfather had a brother whose son would be willing to take the test.

Once you have the two samples, it's a matter of comparing to see if you have a match. If so, you can continue your quest to find the link with more confidence. If not, you'll know not to squander any more time.

And if you happen to be part of a larger surname study, others can piggyback off your efforts to see if they might be related to the famous person, as participants in the Hancock project are able to do. According to study administrator Julia French Wood, "Many Hancock researchers believe at the outset... that they are descended from the famous John Hancock, signer of the Declaration of Independence, and all are disappointed to learn that he had no children who lived to adulthood. However, he had cousins, and we have the DNA of one of their descendants in our Hancock project. Any Hancock males whose DNA should match the DNA of this sample can be sure that they, too, descend from the same Hancock line."

The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying a family tree chart. The title is "I Five Generations of Louis' Loccisano's Ancestors". The chart is organized into columns: "Locus/Parents", "Overlapping", "Direct Ancestor", "Subsequent Ancestor", and "Indirect Ancestor". Each cell in the grid contains a name and a date, representing different generations and branches of the family tree. The browser's address bar shows a URL starting with "http://www.familytree.com/".

Louis Loccisano has been gathering genetic data for all branches of his family tree.

you'll know if you're on the right path or chasing a false belief.

The approach used for such situations is simply a specific application of surname testing. Basically, you'll need two Y-chromosome DNA samples — one to represent your own family and one to represent the family of the famous individual.

If you're a male with the surname in question, you can take the test yourself, but if you're a woman, you'll need to ask a male blood relative (perhaps your father, brother, uncle or cousin) to take the test. And if you're dealing with any branch other than the top line of your pedigree, you'll need to find a male cousin of some sort sporting the surname of interest and ask him to be tested.

Those believing they share a common ancestor with John Hancock now have a means to find out once and for all.

## Adoption

Adoption has always been a research road block for some, but now adoptees have a new means to peek into their ancestral past, even though it doesn't reveal who their parents are. While it's true that we're now seeing the formation of adoption-focused DNA banking services (where the child and birth parents can deposit samples in anticipation of a match someday; see [www.the-seeker.com/dna.htm](http://www.the-seeker.com/dna.htm) for details), it's also possible for adoptees to use conventional genealogical DNA tests to explore their roots.

For instance, William "Chris" Scott is an adoptee currently in search of his birth father. He has already found his birth mother and five half-siblings through her husband. The siblings all have the same father, but not Scott, since he's the result of an extra-marital affair during WWII.

His mother was alive but in the advanced stages of Alzheimer's when he contacted the family. Sadly, she passed away about 10 days later, so there was no chance for Scott to gather information about his birth father. Through other channels, he was eventually able to learn his

father's name, but it turned out to be a common one: Baker.

Confronted with this situation, Scott decided to take a Y-DNA test to see what, if anything, it might reveal. He was fortunate, as his results are quite rare and point to a Finnish paternal heritage. As he says, "Obviously, this approach will not zero-in on my father *per se*, but it at least gives me a fighting chance to locate him amidst the sea of potential candidates."

Debra Royer is another such adoptee. With dark hair and eyes, she has an exotic look that could pass for Hispanic, Asian or Native American. Testing showed her maternal line to be of Native American origin, and while that may sound hazy to some, it's a relief to one who's wondered all her life. Says Royer, "Learning about part of my heritage was great! I felt like 'somebody' and was thrilled to find answers in a laboratory that I couldn't get from my parents or Social Services. I am real and have a history that goes beyond my expectations."

## Genetic Pedigree

Another goal some genealogists are pursuing is the construction of

a genetic pedigree. This is done by obtaining Y-DNA or mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) samples to represent each of the branches of one's family tree back for a selected number of generations. Why do this? Partly to obtain an understanding of your deep ancestry and how and where your ancestors might have migrated thousands of years ago, but also to stand ready for future opportunities.

New studies — especially surname ones — are launched all the time. If you acquire samples now, you'll be first in line for appropriate projects as they start. In fact, I've done this with two of my Irish branches from the maternal half of my pedigree.

And who knows what we might be able to test two, five or 10 years from now? Tracking down assorted cousins with the "right" DNA to represent each of your lines now serves as insurance against a line dying out without genetic representation.

Louis Loccisano's easy-to-follow genetic pedigree (see [www.calabriadna.com/Louis-tree.html](http://www.calabriadna.com/Louis-tree.html)) is an excellent example. He's already gathered results for just about all his branches back through his great-grandparents, and a few beyond. Yes, it takes both detective and persuasion skills to find and secure the participation of likely testing prospects, but the reward is insight into your geographic origins and the knowledge that you're prepared to take advantage of any new tests that might be developed in the future.

## Geographic/Heritage-Based Projects

Since surname projects have been around for about half a decade, it probably shouldn't be surprising that a growing number of people are finding ways to stretch their boundaries. Just as we often extend the scope of our traditional genealogical research to include collateral relatives, neighbors and other community members, the same is now being done with DNA projects. For the most part, such projects have a geographic or heritage-specific focus.

Current ones include:

- Calabria, Italy
- Pennsylvania Deutsch/German (aka Pennsylvania Dutch)
- Scotland and Northumberland
- Anabaptist (including Mennonites, Amish, Brethren, Hutterites, etc.)
- Shetland Islands
- Bahamas
- Welsh Patronymics
- Puerto Rico
- Osturna, Slovakia
- Mexico
- Melungeons

Most of these studies (see [www.worldfamilies.net/regional\\_project.htm](http://www.worldfamilies.net/regional_project.htm) for a more complete list) focus on Y-DNA and surnames, and are designed to shed light on the deep ancestral origins of our connections among a select group of people, often associated with a particular territory. The Osturna, Slovakia project, for instance, has revealed that surnames can be a less-than-perfect indicator of shared ancestry in that region, since some participants with the same surname do not match each other, while others with different surnames do. It also demonstrates that even those in an isolated village can have a variety of origins, since participants' haplogroups (which provide evidence of early human migration) are anything but uniform.

Some studies like this also lend themselves to mtDNA research. MtDNA follows the straight maternal line, and since the surname changes with every generation, projects are hard to organize. However, in small closely knit communities, where most people are descendants of a small number of founders, mtDNA may reveal unsuspected links between families with different surnames.

One of the most ambitious projects is Charles Kerchner's Pennsylvania Deutsch/German study, started in March 2003, which stands out because of its goal of obtaining not only Y-DNA, but also mtDNA and BioGeographical data for its partic-

Participant No.	Participant's Surname	Y-DNA	mtDNA	Self-identified Ancestry	BioGeographical Results
577	HERSCHER	I1 (European)	H (European)	European 100%	European 70%, Asian 20%
712	HERSCHER	I1 (European)	H (European)	European 100%	European 100%
714	HERSCHER	I1 (European)	Not tested	European 100%	European 100%
816	HERSCHER	I1 (European)	Not tested	European 100%	European 100%
866	SCHWACH	I1 (European)	I1 (European)	European 100%	European 100%
1188	HERSCHER	I1 (European)	H (European)	European 100%	European 100%
1121	FRANZ	I1 (European)	Not tested	European 100%	European 100%
1171	HERSCHER	I1 (European)	Not tested	European 100%	European 100%
1300	GARDNER	I1 (European)	H (European)	European 100%	European 100%

Charles Kerchner's PA Deutsch study shares Y-DNA, mtDNA and BioGeographical results for participants.

ipants (see [www.kerchner.com/pa-gerdna.htm](http://www.kerchner.com/pa-gerdna.htm)). In fact, BioGeographical tests (also known as DNAPrint), which break out an individual's geographic origins into percentages of Indo-European, Sub-Saharan African, Native American and East Asian, are the first priority in this project. On his website, Kerchner delineates his theory-hypothesis "That a significant percentage of people, or sub-groups, within the Pennsylvania Deutsch/German (aka PA Dutch) ethnic group may have a significant average percentage, but not dominant percentage, of Asian genetic content in their genome, of non-recent origin in a genealogist's time frame, possibly harbored in their genome from the major invasions of southern Germany by tribes from Asia such as the Huns and Mongol hordes which invaded Europe at various times during the period of 1,600-1,700 years ago, or of even older more ancient origin. Data collected by this project, and subsequent analysis, will attempt to prove or disprove this hypothesis and/or will be used to try and get an anthropologist or population geneticist to look at this possible discovery about the PA Deutsch in greater detail."

To this end, the project is seeking participants who self-identify as being of Pennsylvania Deutsch origin and can document at least 62.5 percent Pennsylvania Deutsch ancestry (that is, at least five of eight great-grandparents).

### Keep On Pushing

Kerchner refers to his undertaking as anthrogenealogy, an appropriate term (originally coined by Family Tree DNA), since projects such as his are blurring the lines between genealogy and anthropology. And anytime you have to dream up a new word or borrow a freshly minted one to capture what you're doing, it's clear that you're in pioneering territory. Here's hoping that avid genealogists continue to play with the possibilities and develop new methodologies for all of us.

Megan Smolensky Smolensky, co-author of *Trace Your Roots with DNA: Using Genetic Tests to Explore Your Family Tree*, can be reached through [www.genetealogy.com](http://www.genetealogy.com).

Testing referred to in this article was performed by Family Tree DNA, Trace Genetics, Relative Genetics and DNA Heritage.

