



# Ancestors West

*A quarterly publication for the members of the*  
**SANTA BARBARA COUNTY GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY**  
*Spring 2019 Vol. 44, No. 1*



Image credit: National Human Genome Research Institute

## **DNA Discoveries**

**DNA Evidence for Genealogy and Other Purposes**

**Decoding the Story of Yourself**

**Surprised by DNA Results**

**Family Secrets Revealed**

**DNA Genealogy—It's Greek to Me**



## Santa Barbara County Genealogical Society

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### Sahyun Genealogy Library

(SBCGS facility)

316 Castillo St., Santa Barbara 93101

Phone: (805) 884-9909

Hours: Tuesday, Thursday, Friday

10:00 AM – 4:00 PM

Sunday 1:00 – 4:00 PM

Third Saturday 1:00 – 4:00 PM (Except August)

**Membership:** Benefits include *Tree Tips* monthly newsletter and *Ancestors West* (quarterly publication).

**Active** (individual)–\$40; **Family** (2 same household)–\$60; **Friend**–\$50;  
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**Meetings:** Regular monthly meetings are held on the third Saturday of each month except August. Meetings begin at 10:30 a.m. at the First Presbyterian Church, 21 E. Constance Ave. at State Street in Santa Barbara. At 9:30, special interest groups (SIGs) meet that include the following: Writers, JewishGen, DNA, German Ancestry Research, Genealogy and Technology, Italian Roots, French Canadian Genealogy, Civil War, New Member and Beginning Genealogy, and Scandinavian Roots.

Established in 1972, the Santa Barbara County Genealogical Society (SBCGS) incorporated as a nonprofit 501(c) (3) organization in 1986. Its aim is to promote genealogy by providing assistance and educational opportunities for those who are interested in pursuing their family history.

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From the Editor

## The Brave New World of Genetic Genealogy

**G**ENEALOGISTS HAVE A NEW TOOL for family history research – genetic genealogy. It has been available for about 10 years and differs from all the traditional resources such as census records, vital records, family history books, and all other written documents. Genetic genealogy was made possible by completion of the human genome project in 2003 that unveiled the entire DNA sequence of human beings. Once the sequencing technology was in place, the minute differences that characterize individuals were identified. Although any two human genome sequences are 99.9% identical, they will still have roughly 10 million minute differences. Most DNA testing companies analyze approximately 700,000 of these variants, and comparison of these sequence differences offers a powerful way to probe our ancestry.

The underlying premise of genetic genealogy is that we inherit our DNA from our parents: half from our biological mother and half from our biological father. Likewise, our parents inherited their DNA from their parents, and this sequence continues back through the generations to the origin of our species and beyond. Since we carry the minute DNA sequence differences from our parents and ancestors, we share many of them with our relatives. The key word here is comparison. Our ancestry is not revealed directly from our DNA sequence, but only via comparison with the sequences of other individuals.

### Genetic Privacy: Does it exist?

The number of individuals submitting samples for DNA analysis to commercial genetic testing services has grown rapidly. Well over 15 million samples are now in databases; most participants are in the United States, but submissions from other countries are increasing.

A recent study of consumer genomics databases by Yaniv Erlich et al. was published in *Science* 362:690-694, 2018. Their results indicated that at present using a DNA sample from an unknown individual, the person's identity could be ascertained 60% of the time for individuals with European ancestry, i.e. a third cousin or closer match will be found. Then using demographic



Pandora trying to close the box she had opened out of curiosity. On the left, the evils of the world are escaping. Based on a work by Frederick Stuart Church (1842-1924).

factors such as age and location, the individual could be identified. Furthermore "...the technique could implicate nearly any U.S. individual of European descent in the near future." The repercussions of this research are startling and have a huge impact on the concept of genetic privacy!

Further complications have been created by the advent of so-called "third-party" services such as *GEDmatch*. These allow individuals to upload their raw DNA data to a separate database. Thus testers with any one of the commercial DNA testing companies (*AncestryDNA*, *FamilyTreeDNA*, *MyHeritage*, *23andme*) can compare their sequences with those who tested with other companies. This can lead to further genealogical discoveries. However, law enforcement agencies are also exploiting these third-party services to identify human remains, and to catch criminals. Several dramatic cases, i.e. The Golden State Killer, have made the news, especially here in Santa Barbara where some of the crimes took place.

Moreover, recently a consumer testing company opened its database to outside authorities! Clearly, genetic privacy is in serious danger. Should genealogists be concerned? The situation is complicated, but generally when privacy is compromised it is not good for the individual. Mary Hall, our local genetic genealogist who has helped many of us solve DNA related problems, weighs in on this very topic in this issue.

### Found or Lost

One can scarcely read the newspaper, watch TV or follow social media without coming across another example of someone whose DNA sample helped them to identify their biological parents or unknown siblings. The reunions are often dramatic and fulfill lifelong quests for their true identity. This is the “found” part of the equation.

Equally frequent are stories of DNA tests that revealed the person was not genetically related to their father and/or mother and/or siblings. Thus DNA analysis can cause family to be “lost” – at least in a biological sense. This can cause major upheaval in families, sometimes with permanent consequences. This is an unfortunate aspect of DNA testing.

Other surprises include half-siblings or cousins that no one in the family has ever heard of. Each of these discoveries has its own unique story behind it.

### “Be Prepared.”

The best advice for DNA testers, therefore, is “Be prepared.” Not every family has secrets that DNA testing will uncover, but the fact that one shares DNA with descendants of possibly five to six generations of ancestors means that hundreds, possibly thousands of people today will be on your match list. It is quite possible that among them is a child placed for adoption, a non-parental event (an illegitimate child), a case of children switched at birth in a hospital, or another even more complicated situation.

### Pandora’s Box.

According to Greek mythology, curiosity drove Pandora to open a container thus releasing evils into the world. In modern times Pandora’s Box means a gift that seems beneficial but in reality is a curse. Under some circumstances, DNA analysis can fall into this category.

Human nature is not easy to predict and deep family ties call up profound emotions. Discoveries of a very personal nature are often not readily assimilated. Trust can be endangered or destroyed. Just as Pandora was unable to close the box quickly enough to prevent the escape of evils, once a fact has been revealed by DNA analysis, it cannot be unlearned. And perhaps one of the evils that escaped has been the loss of genetic privacy.

### In this issue: Ethnic identity and DNA ancestry tests.

An article entitled, “Decoding the Story of Yourself,” which appeared recently in the *New York Times Magazine*, raised a number of provocative and important questions related to ethnic identity. With the permission of the author it is reprinted in this issue of *Ances-*

*tors West*. The author delves into the variable accuracy of ethnicity results and explains many of the reasons that determination of ethnic origins is still a work in progress.

Mel Sahyun and Cherie Bonazzola were surprised by their ethnicity results and each made a historical study of their possible origins based on the known migrations of peoples. Gloria Clements solved two family mysteries that arose from unexpected DNA matches and also reported the discoveries of a newly discovered cousin. In both cases, DNA evidence combined with traditional genealogical methods yielded the final result. Our own Poet Laureate Kristin Ingalls wrote a moving letter of thanks to all her ancestors, each of whom contributed in their own way to her genes.

An article by Connie Burns published previously in *Ancestors West* led to a very intriguing connection with another researcher. The link was a patent medicine known as “Coopers New Discovery,” which claimed to be a Tonic and System Purifier, Worm and Germ Expeller. Margery Baragona recalls Chinatown during WWII, when the country pulled together to support the war effort.

And finally two articles of local historical interest round out the issue. Both are focused on lighthouses that provided essential guidance to ships passing up and down the coast and reflect careful research by their authors into the records.

### The next issue of *Ancestors West*: our Ancestors’ Pastimes

While much of their days and strength were devoted to their professions and family responsibilities, our ancestors also had hobbies and talents and social activities that brightened their lives and brought friends and relatives together. These might have included weddings, baptisms, church socials and picnics, school programs, chautauquas, dances, bands, choirs, sewing and quilting circles, literary societies, county fairs, rodeos, bake sales, yacht clubs, GAR, sports teams, etc. Sometimes these were occasions for getting out the best bonnet and hitching up the horse and buggy for an outing, others were regular get-togethers to exchange news and gossip.

What do you know about how your ancestors had fun in the “old days?” Sometimes an old photograph or trophy or ribbon or favorite recipe will remind you of something Grandpa or Grandma liked to do and took pride in.

We invite you to share your story in the May issue of *Ancestors West*. And as always, all articles of genealogical interest are welcome.

### The deadline for the next issue will be May 1, 2019.

Please send articles to Debbie Kaska ([Kaska@lifesci.ucsb.edu](mailto:Kaska@lifesci.ucsb.edu))

As always, my special thanks go to my editorial committee. Their help and expertise are essential for production of each and every issue.

Debbie Kaska

# A TOUCH OF OLD SANTA BARBARA



By Margery Baragona

## San Francisco's Chinese During Wartime

IT'S FUN TO FIND old magazines. I found a *Look* magazine from December 26, 1944, which sold originally for ten cents and a yearly subscription was \$2.50! One article was particularly fascinating: James Wong Howe of photographic fame did a wartime tour of San Francisco's Chinatown. Discrimination had prevailed for many years but Tong Wars and queues had passed. The citizens of Chinatown were heavily involved in the war effort. Rather than sleepy streets with wafts of opium in the air, or old Chinese men sitting silently while their wives stirred pots of Congee, these citizens were busy supporting the war effort. One picture showed Mrs. Chu Wang Chan, chop sticks in hand, doing her share for the war by working the swing shift



Ensign Eleanor M. Chin Schwartz  
SN 232141, NNC Pro Jacket

Ensign Eleanor M. Chin Schwartz  
Source: National Archives and Records Administration

at a ship yard, her entire salary going for War Bonds.

Another picture shows a large contingent at an American Legion Hall, many of them returning veterans. What was most exciting to me was to see a picture of Eleanor Chin, the only Chinese officer in the Navy Nurse Corp. Eleanor was at Pearl Harbor when she met and married a fellow officer, Leo Schwartz. Their daughter Marie, one of seven children, is a friend of mine, a woman of impeccable artistic taste and charm. Marie tells many intriguing stories of being raised in a multi-cultural environment. Today it is different, with many homes of racial diversity.

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## DNA Evidence for Genealogy and Other Purposes

By Mary Hall

AS IS FREQUENTLY THE CASE in the rapidly changing world of "Genetic Genealogy," some late breaking news in the DNA and Genealogy community sidelined an article that was underway for the Santa Barbara County Genealogical Society's issue of *Ancestors West* featuring DNA Discoveries.

On February 1, 2019, *Family Tree DNA* – an early DNA testing pioneer, and long-time advocate for keeping test takers' data "private" – acknowledged that United States Law Enforcement (specifically the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)) had uploaded crime scene DNA profiles to *Family Tree DNA*'s database sometime in late 2018.

To those of us involved in DNA testing for genealogical purposes since the early days of this nascent record source of genealogical connectedness, this "DNA Discovery" was serious, important and sobering. One of America's most respected genealogists, Judy G. Russell – The Legal Genealogist – devoted several February 2019 blog posts to this news and its ramifications for family historians using DNA.

The *Ancestors West* article that screeched to a halt was titled "DNA Evidence for Genealogy – 10 years back and 10 years ahead." With a decade of personal experiences as a "genetic genealogy" aficionado, I expect to use DNA evidence to solve genealogical mysteries and provide evidence to paper trail trees for as long as there are genealogical mysteries to solve, and ancestors to prove.



Ten years ago, on February 8, 2009, I received the results of my family's first foray into DNA testing for genealogical purposes.

Since 2001 I'd been trying to get further back on my paternal surname line, which abruptly stops much earlier than most of my other tree branches. Through hard core records research and analysis I was able to get the line back to Loudoun and Fauquier counties, Virginia, in the period 1750-1790. But once there, the records become sparse. Could DNA testing fill in blanks where the records stopped on this line?

My brother agreed to swab for me in December 2008, back when *Family Tree DNA* ran a special combined Y-DNA 37-marker test, and basic mitochondrial (mt) DNA test. Many of us "early adopters" in the SBCGS took advantage of this special "combo" offered by *Family Tree DNA*, which provided "some" genetic insight into just two branches of our tree - the direct paternal line and the direct maternal lines. Not long after that autosomal DNA testing - to provide recent genetic evidence of all branches of our tree - became "affordable" (i.e, approximately \$100) and was offered by *Family Tree DNA*, *23andMe*, and *AncestryDNA*.

Since success in genetic genealogy depends on database size of relatives who have tested, I have asked many family members to test, to help with our shared ancestral mysteries. Those of us who "beg for spit" know that a frequent objection we encounter is, how could we - if at all -- provide our relatives any privacy protection of their most personal possession, their unique DNA signature?

*Family Tree DNA*, arguably the first "direct to consumer" genetic genealogy test company had always publicly stated that user privacy was of paramount importance. Currently their privacy policy states:

"At *Family Tree DNA*, user privacy is an extremely high priority for us and something we have taken seriously for over 18 years. At *Family Tree DNA*, we handle your Personal Information with great care and implement safeguards to protect your data."

The news that *Family Tree DNA* has opened its lab, and partnered with other labs, to upload crime scene derived samples of genetic evidence into its 1,000,000+ customer database is important for genealogy enthusiasts.

While the pros and cons of the recent introduction of crime scene derived evidence into genealogy genetic databases is weighed, one thing is certain...the ability to protect our - and our extended families' - privacy is not realistic. Dr. Yaniv Erlich, chief science officer at *MyHeritage* - a fairly new DNA test company with global testing aspirations (and which also claims to hold user privacy in highest regard) - estimates that within two



Image of DNA Sequencing from NIH, National Human Genome Research Institute (NHGRI)

or three years, 90 percent of Americans with European descent will be identifiable from their DNA. *MyHeritage* is advocating for more strict registration of DNA data submissions, and more transparency as to where the samples are derived, and who has access to them.

The only option today for genealogists who hope to continue to use DNA evidence - along with all the other paper trail clues that are still out there to be discovered - is continuous education, and "Informed Consent." We must not only stay on top of what DNA test companies are doing with our genetic data, but also make sure we - and all of our test takers - are aware and, most importantly, agree to its use.

If our relative who holds the key genetic clue to our genealogical mystery does not want to test, for whatever reason, we need to respect their preference. It is their DNA, after all.

Looking ahead, developments in DNA testing and data analysis hold great promise not just for genealogists, but other endeavors that combine our genetic profiles AND our family history connections. Ethical and moral challenges will be encountered as we explore the DNA possibilities that can lead us to break through our brick walls and that, at the same time, exploit our hobby for other - less innocent - purposes. Some breakthroughs are noble and aspirational; some are not. Stay tuned, and informed.

# Decoding the Story of Yourself

By Ruth Padawer

This article was originally printed November 19, 2018 in the *New York Times Magazine*.

THREE YEARS AGO, when Sigrid E. Johnson was 62, she got a call from a researcher seeking volunteers for a study on DNA ancestry tests and ethnic identity. Johnson agreed to help. After all, she and the researcher, Anita Foeman, had been pals for half a century, ever since they attended the same elementary school in their integrated Philadelphia neighborhood, where they and other black children were mostly protected from the racism beyond its borders. Foeman, a professor of communication at West Chester University in Pennsylvania, asked Johnson to swab the inside of her cheek and share her thoughts about her ethnic and racial identity before and after the results came back.

Johnson's father, a chauffeur who later became a superintendent at a housing project in North Philadelphia, had a golden-brown complexion. Her mother, who said her own father was a white Brit and her mother was half African-American and half Native American, was light-skinned. People sometimes mistook Johnson's mother for white, and when she applied for seamstress jobs at department stores in the 1920s and '30s, she chose not to correct them.

Sigrid, who had light caramel skin, was their only child, and her parents, Martha and Frank Gilchrist, doted on her. In grade school, she prayed each night for an older brother, someone who would be fun to play with and would look after her, as her friends' brothers did with their siblings. When she wasn't busy with ballet and piano lessons, she caught lightning bugs and played dolls, hopscotch and jump rope with nearby friends. The neighborhood, West Mount Airy, was a tree-lined community, one of the first in the nation to integrate successfully. It was populated mostly by middle- and upper-class people, including many African-American professional men who had fair-skinned wives and children whose complexions matched their mothers'.

Johnson doesn't remember her parents talking much about race, except when her father made it clear that he expected her to marry a black man. But even without

that explicit talk, she was immersed in the highs and lows of black life. Her cousin, a surgeon named William Gilchrist Anderson, lived in Albany, Ga., where he led a large coalition of activists in the early 1960s to desegregate public facilities. A friend and classmate of Ralph Abernathy, Anderson persuaded the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to participate in the city's demonstrations, which Johnson remembers she and her parents sometimes joined. During the family's trips to visit her cousin in Georgia, Johnson saw water fountains that said "Whites Only." And she still remembers the night that a giant cross burned near her cousin's front yard and how he swept her and everyone else out of the house and put them all up in a hotel.

As a young teenager, Johnson pestered her mother about what it was like to give birth to her — a query her mother always dodged. But when Johnson was 16, her mother broke down and said through tears that they adopted her when she was an infant. Her mother explained that Johnson's biological father was black and that her biological mother was a white Italian woman who said she couldn't keep the baby, who by then was two or three months old. The woman, who lived in South Philadelphia, had explained that she already had several children, all of whom were blond, and that her white husband didn't want another man's child raised

*"Johnson is one of many millions of people around the world who have placed a bit of saliva into a DNA kit, sent it off to a testing company, waited a good month for the results and then discovered the sometimes life-altering secrets hidden in those tiny drops."*

in his home, not least of all one whose color so boldly announced that fact. Johnson's mother said the woman came to see the baby for about a year, until she asked the woman to stop visiting because she didn't want Sigrid to find out she was adopted. Johnson

teared up as she recounted the conversation with her mother that took place 49 years ago. "the news — all of it — was crushing," Johnson told me. "To this day, I honestly wish she had never told me. I wanted my mom to be my mom." Neither one ever broached the subject with the other again.

So when Anita Foeman requested that she take a DNA test, Johnson figured it was no big deal: she was half African and half Italian. "I knew what the results would show when they came back — that is, until the results actually came back."

JOHNSON IS ONE OF MANY millions of people around the world who have placed a bit of saliva into a DNA kit, sent it off to a testing company, waited a good month for the results and then discovered the sometimes life-altering secrets hidden in those tiny drops. Virtually every cell in a human's body carries that person's whole unique blueprint — the double helix of DNA. The genes on chromosomes influence the traits of every living thing. Testing companies analyze hundreds of thousands of particular genetic sequences and use



those snippets as clues to all sorts of information. Scientists have determined specific locations in the DNA code that provide hints about where your ancestors came from, because people from the same geographical place share certain genetic similarities. The tests can also reveal your biological relatives, and how closely you're related, by evaluating how much of your and their DNA patterns overlap. In addition, DNA analysis can identify some of the hereditary disorders you may be predisposed to or may pass on to your children.

Rudimentary DNA testing has been around since the mid-20th century, but at-home genetic tests (aside from simple paternity tests) didn't show up until this century, after the human genome project prompted biotechnological advances that made genetic sequencing much more affordable. Most of those early

personal genomic tests focused on genealogy, a way to fill out the family tree, because determining familial connections is scientifically much more straightforward than determining a person's true ethnic lineage. But in 2007, as scientists linked more genes to diseases and traits, *23andMe* pioneered a much broader kind of retail genomics, a \$999 saliva test that promised to reveal genetic information from the novel to the profound. It included ancestry and information about medical and other genetic information, including consumers' risk for age-related macular degeneration, Parkinson's disease and type 2 diabetes, as well as genes that block the bitter taste in vegetables and influence weight gain.

The following year, *Time* magazine named the company's retail DNA test the Invention of the Year, describing this moment as "the beginning of a personal-genomics revolution that will transform not only how we take care of ourselves but also what we mean by personal information. ... Not everything about how this information will be used is clear yet — *23andMe* has stirred up debate about issues ranging from how meaningful the results are to how to prevent genetic discrimination — but the curtain has been pulled back, and it can never be closed again."

Those debates continue, but in the last year or so, sales of at-home genetic tests have risen meteorically. By April 2017, *23andMe* had roughly two million customers, and this past January, just nine months later, it had more than five million. *AncestryDNA's* customer base doubled to about six million in 2017 alone and has since grown to more than 10 million. Add to that all the customers of *MyHeritage*, *FamilyTreeDNA*, *Helix*, *National Geographic's* DNA test and dozens of others. The most popular tests are those that promise to reveal test takers' ancestry and identify their relatives — and have the potential to upend our understanding of ourselves. Just imagine what you might find out: Your father is not your dad but actually your dad's best friend. Or your sister is really your half sister or isn't your biological

sister at all. Or you're the child of a sperm donor and have 150 half siblings. These and endless other DNA surprises all raise the same question: Are we really who we think we are?

ONCE JOHNSON FOUND OUT she was adopted, the 16-year-old examined every passer-by in Philadelphia, wondering: "Are you my relative?" When it came time to choose a college, she opted for a school more than 500 miles away: a historically black university in Ohio called Wilberforce, named after a prominent 18th-century abolitionist. It was 1970, and on campus, talk of black power and black pride swirled around her.

At first she felt self-conscious that she lacked the richly colored skin that was finally being celebrated in society, but her cousin's prominence in civil rights efforts

gave her a certain confidence. While Johnson was at Wilberforce, she told no one that she was adopted and no one that she was half white. "I was at an all-black school, so if anyone asked what I was, I just said, 'Black.'"

In college, Johnson's sense of herself as a black person intensified, immersed as she was in a cocooned world that celebrated the contributions and ambitions of the community. Most of Johnson's professors were black, as were virtually all the students. She was surrounded by people who exuded pride in their identity.

All around her, classmates were sporting dashikis and other African garb, or the black beret and black leather jacket of the Black Panthers. Large Afros seemed ubiquitous, often with Afro picks decorated with a clenched black fist. Johnson stopped straightening her hair, which had required her to wrap her gentle curls around large rollers and sleep that way all night. By the early '70s, straightened hair was passé for black women, and Johnson did her best to keep up. "I tried really hard to make a bush, an Afro, teasing it up and then putting bobby pins in to keep it up, but when it rained, my bush would just fall." She bought an Afro wig with hair that stood five inches high and wore it daily. "No one ever asked if it was a wig," she said, "but my best friends knew." Soon after, she quit wearing it.

When Johnson was 22, she fell for a man she would later marry, but she never told him that she was half white or adopted. Her parents disapproved of how dark the man's skin was, because in their experience, lighter complexion meant higher status and more options. When the young couple's son was born in 1976, Johnson's parents were relieved that his coloring was more like their daughter's.

Johnson and her husband split up two years later. That same year, Johnson went back to school to get her nursing degree. In 1985, she married another man, a physical therapist; by then, both her parents had died. She told her husband what she had never told anyone

*"These and endless other DNA surprises all raise the same question: Are we really who we think we are?"*

else besides her son and a few close friends: She was adopted. His response was kind and supportive. Years later, he happened upon a conversation on “The Phil Donahue Show” about adoptees successfully requesting their original birth certificates from state officials. He called Johnson at work right away and encouraged her to request her birth certificate too. He gathered all the information she needed, and they sent it off together. When it arrived, she learned that her mother’s name was Ann D’Amico, so Johnson and her husband called D’Amicos they found in the Philadelphia phone book. Some who answered said they knew no Ann D’Amico. Others just hung up.

Still, when Johnson took the DNA test in 2015 at age 62, she was certain about what it would find and was sorry she wouldn’t be able to share the results with her husband, who had died years earlier. The results, which indicated a stunning level of precision, shocked Johnson. They said she was 45.306 percent Hispanic, 32.321 percent Middle Eastern, 13.714 percent European and 8.659 percent “other,” which included a mere 2.978 percent African.

“Two percent African?! I thought, well, who am I then? I knew that at my age, I shouldn’t really care what people think, but I was embarrassed to show it to anyone besides my son and my cousin, who’s like a sister to me. I was afraid people would think I was a fraud. I was so disappointed, and in my heart of hearts, I didn’t believe it, because how could I not be black? I’d lived black. I was black.”

WITH THE STUPENDOUS RISE of DNA ancestry testing, academics have wondered how those genetic results affect people’s core identity. Our sense of self, of course, is built on much more than just the ethnic tribe we belong to. We forge our identity from the social and cultural milieus we’re raised in; the messages we get from parents, teachers and society about ourselves; the family lore and traditions passed down from generation to generation; and the experiences we have and hold dear. All of that is deeply woven into who we are.

“Our identity is what grounds us and gives our lives meaning,” said David Brodzinsky, emeritus professor of developmental and clinical psychology at Rutgers University, whose work focuses on identity and adoption. “That identity can be a motivating force or a debilitating one, depending on how we define ourselves and internalize the feedback we get from others. We spend our lives searching for self, though we each do that in different ways and at different times. It’s all about the desire to fill in empty spaces, to find connection, to know more about yourself.”

For children cut off from their origins because of a closed adoption or an unknown sperm or egg donor, those answers are harder to get. And if a person’s origin was a secret that they discover later in life, Brodzinsky said, they may feel that everything they knew about themselves and their roots was a lie. Even people who were raised by their biological parents can feel shaken when their DNA tests present results that don’t fit with their understanding of who they are.

Anita Foeman is one of the academics studying the effects of unexpected DNA results. Since 2006, she has tested roughly 3,000 people. Before her subjects receive their results, she asks them about their racial and ethnic identities, then follows up with them once the results are in. Her research subjects often conflate race and ethnicity — “If I’m this color, my ancestors must be from this place.” But ancestry tests look for genetic links to geographic regions, not to physical characteristics associated with race, like skin color, which is an unreliable indicator of ancestry. Foeman and researchers at other universities have found that people accept the results that suit their aspirations and often dismiss results that challenge their long-held core beliefs.

“We seek out and cultivate identities to fill our need to belong, and it’s through that lens of identity that we see and understand the world,” said Jay Van Bavel, a psychology professor at New York University who researches how group identities, values and beliefs shape the mind and brain. “So when you get information that challenges your identity, many people tune it out, just like we do with headlines and news stories when they counter our politics and belief system.”

When white test takers see results that indicate they have African ancestry, some, especially young people, welcome their newfound multicultural heritage, even when the percentage is small, which raises an interesting

question: how much ancestry is enough to give someone the authority to claim that identity? Research also shows that some whites whose reports indicate African lineage conclude that it’s irrelevant, and still others, no matter their race or ethnicity, disbelieve results they didn’t

*“We forge our identity from the social and cultural milieus we’re raised in; the messages we get from parents, teachers and society about ourselves; the family lore and traditions passed down from generation to generation; and the experiences we have and hold dear.”*

expect. For example, many blacks and whites whose families have long claimed that some of their forebears were Native American dismiss DNA reports that say otherwise. And Asians, like whites, often rebuff results that indicate that their heritage isn’t pure. Some people take that to extremes: White nationalists who use DNA tests to prove their racial purity adamantly reject any non-European results. A professor at the University of California at Los Angeles and another researcher studied comments on the online white-supremacist forum Stormfront. They found that some posters who had tak-

en DNA tests and were upset with their results argued that they were “rigged” to “spread multiculturalism” or that the non-European findings were merely “noise DNA.” Many African-Americans, meanwhile, upon seeing how much of their lineage is European, are not necessarily surprised or doubtful about the results, but they feel gut-punched by the bald reminder that even their genes carry slavery’s legacy. Underlying all these reactions is the question of identity: what do these results mean about who I am? How do these results fit with the stories I’ve long clung to that connected my past, my present and my future?

EVER SINCE JOHNSON received her disorienting DNA results, she wondered if her saliva sample might have been accidentally mislabeled or she had been sent someone else’s results. But it turns out that the company that analyzed her DNA focuses on forensic genetics and legal paternity tests, which evaluate only a few segments of DNA, not the hundreds of thousands used by most ancestry-testing companies. (Foeman used this company for a minority of her research.) So this summer, when *The New York Times* offered to buy Johnson ancestry tests from more mainstream companies, *AncestryDNA* and *23andMe*, she eagerly agreed.

Their tests determine ethnicity by analyzing segments of customers’ DNA that give clues to their ancient geographic origins. Five hundred to 1,000 years ago, before large-scale transcontinental migration, people who lived in the same region had similar genetics. Scientists have been able to identify distinct patterns of genetic variation among people whose ancestors hail from the same lands, which is easiest to do with populations that were geographically isolated, like Finns and Filipinos, or were insular, like Ashkenazi Jews. Ideally, ancestry-testing companies would compare customers’ DNA to that of people from premigration days. But given that impossibility, the companies use an imperfect proxy: people alive today who have a deep family tree in a particular geographic area, and sometimes a paper trail to prove it. Those people’s DNA becomes the company’s reference data set for that geographic area. When a segment of your DNA closely matches the data for that location, the company assigns you that ancestry. The more segments on your genome that match that genetic pattern, the larger your estimated percentage will be for that ancestry.

The larger the reference data set for any particular corner of the world, the better the resolution will be: suggesting that your ancestors aren’t, say, just from Europe but from Northwestern Europe, or more specifically from Ireland and Scotland. Each testing company builds its own reference data set, drawn primarily from its own customers, and each company also creates its

own algorithm for assigning heritage. In other words, customers’ results are based on inferences and are merely an estimate, often a very rough one — something many test takers don’t realize and testing companies play down.

Still, Johnson, now 65, hoped the new tests would conclude that her genes aligned with who she believed herself to be. In early August, with the kits in hand, she walked around her apartment, trying to work up enough saliva to fill the little collection tubes. Afterward, Johnson was both eager for quick results and hesitant about what they might say. “You know,” she said, “even if the results are the same as they were before, I am still a black woman.”

Weeks later, her *AncestryDNA* report was posted. It marked more than a third of her ancestry as “low confidence,” meaning it couldn’t establish its ethnicity

because her DNA didn’t sufficiently match the company’s reference data sets. She was disappointed. It’s a common experience for customers with non-European ancestry, because Africa and Asia are underrepresented in many companies’ data sets, in part because most of their customers — the building blocks of their reference set — are of European descent. Many companies are trying to remedy that by seeking DNA from people in regions underrepresented in the data set.

The rest of Johnson’s ethnicity, *AncestryDNA* said, broke down this way: 21 percent Europe South (but no percentage from Italy), 11 percent Caucasus, 10 percent Benin/Togo, 9 percent Mali, 8 percent Ivory Coast/Ghana and 6 percent Europe West. As Johnson heard the results, she teared up. “I’m so relieved to see the African part, that I really am a black woman.” (Neither *AncestryDNA* nor *23andMe* includes a “Hispanic” category, because they, like most companies that search for heritage, focus on ancestry before Europeans and Africans ever arrived at what’s now called the Americas.)

I wondered how certain *AncestryDNA* was about Johnson’s percentages, which wasn’t readily apparent on the site. I called customer service and asked several representatives where on the website I could find the company’s confidence level. One said that any percentage not marked “low confidence” was 100 percent certain. Another said each percentage was 99 percent certain. When I asked that representative to check with a supervisor, she did, then returned to tell me that the company’s certainty was 99.7 percent. Those answers were confusing, because behind each of Johnson’s percentages was a range from which each ancestry point was drawn. For example, when we clicked on Johnson’s Benin/Togo segment, which had been assigned 10 percent of her ancestry, the site showed that the percentage of her DNA from those nations could be as low as zero and as high as 21. In fact, every one of her African

*“Foeman and researchers at other universities have found that people accept the results that suit their aspirations and often dismiss results that challenge their long-held core beliefs.”*



links showed a range that started with zero, while her Europe South's percent had a range of 9 to 33. Even the customer-service representative agreed that it was hard to fathom that the company could be so certain about the percentage when the range behind it ran to zero, which it did in four of the six geographic findings on Johnson's report. Johnson and I asked if someone higher up could call us with better answers; the representative amiably said she would put in our request and assured us that the call would come within a few hours. None ever did.

AncestryDNA's chief scientific officer, Catherine Ball, later told me that the company doesn't provide a confidence level for each percentage on its personalized report for users, but it is 95 percent certain that the range behind each percentage is accurate. In other words, AncestryDNA was 95 percent confident that 9 to 33 percent of Johnson's ancestry was from Europe South, that 4 to 16 percent was from Caucasus

and that 0 to 58 percent was from Africa. And because that "certainty" is based on the reference data set and the algorithm the company uses, even that certitude evaporates if the data set or algorithm changes. "There is no ground truth here," Ball said, "no 'I guarantee that you are 22.674 percent Italian!' These are all just statistical estimates. Every statistic has a lot of science and math behind it, and a lot of imperfection and room for improvement too."

Although all of her African percentages still showed that the figures could be as low as zero, this time, instead of being identified as 27 percent African, she was now 45 percent African, primarily from Cameroon, Congo and the Southern Bantu Peoples. And though the previous version showed no percentage or range for Italy, the new version said she was 49 percent Italian, with a range of just 48 to 51 percent. And that 95 percent certainty about ancestry from Caucasus? Gone. Caucasus doesn't even show up on the updated report.

Johnson's 23andMe results, on the other hand, said that she was 43.4 percent sub-Saharan African, 36.9 percent European (just over half of which was Italian), 12.8 percent Western Asian, 2.7 percent East Asian and Native American and 1.8 percent a combination of Western Asian and North African. The rest was unassigned. The company does not provide ranges, but it does give a confidence level for its result.

The ancestry-composition report from 23andMe, with each figure to the tenth of a percent, suggests a high level of precision, but the default conclusions are remarkably speculative; they're only at the 50 percent confidence level, meaning that the ancestry composition you see on your report is as likely to be not true as true. If you dig down enough — I couldn't figure out

how, so I called for instructions — you can increase the confidence level to 90 percent (meaning your geographic assignments are 90 percent likely to reflect your true ancestry, based on the company's data set and algorithm), though the figures locked at the top of the main page remain at 50 percent. At the 90 percent confidence level, 38 percent of Johnson's ancestry was unassigned (compared with 2 percent at the 50 percent level). Her Italian ancestry dropped to 7.9 percent, from the 19.6 percent Italian that showed on her main page, and the specificity of her African heritage disappeared.

I asked Scott Hadly, a 23andMe spokesman, why the default is set at the 50 percent level, given that it's so uncertain. "People want really specific information, down to which county in England they're from. We

would rather be more general in the results, than to give specific results that may not be accurate. So we try to give results that are interesting to them, which they can use to explore, to see if it tells them

something informative. We're not necessarily telling them, 'this is what you are.' we're saying, 'this is what the DNA says.'"

And yet, in a matter of weeks, Johnson's African roots had bounced from 27 percent to 45 percent African — and her Italian roots had been reported as 0 percent, 49 percent and 20 percent. Through it all, of course, Johnson's true ancestry, whatever it actually is, never changed.

Ethnicity is not the only area in which personal genomic testing companies have been criticized for insufficient transparency; public-health and consumer advocates have raised serious concerns about how companies use the avalanche of genetic data they've collected from their customers. The data haul is a potential gold mine for biotech firms, insurance companies, marketers, data brokers, law enforcement and, most of all, pharmaceutical companies. Drug companies have poured hundreds of millions of dollars into at-home-DNA-test companies worldwide, banking on all that genetic data, linked to vast crowdsourcing on individuals' physical and psychological disorders, to slash the time and cost of developing new treatments and drugs, including ones tailored to an individual's unique genetic makeup. Scientists have already made incredible progress, building on the advances by the human genome project. Data from 23andMe customers has revealed spots on the genome that are linked to depression, Parkinson's, lupus, inflammatory-bowel disease, allergies and some cancers, prompting Fast Company to name the business the second Most Innovative Health Company this year.

But critics say the business model that led to that heap of data is worrisome, putting at risk the privacy of the most precise identifier a person has — a concern that intensified after studies showed that it's possible

*"Each testing company builds its own reference data set, drawn primarily from its own customers, and each company also creates its own algorithm for assigning heritage."*

to reidentify individuals from anonymized genetic databases. In July, hackles were raised again when the pharmaceutical giant GlaxoSmithKline invested \$300 million in *23andMe* and gained exclusive rights to its customers' data. Much of the jump in DNA-test sales this past year or two has been a result of deeply discounted prices (they now cost about \$99) and aggressive marketing, as companies try to lure evermore people to give up their personal genetic code. Last year on Black Friday, *23andMe's* discounted test was one of Amazon's five best sellers; that same weekend, *AncestryDNA* reportedly sold a whopping 1.5 million kits. In 2017, in a consumer guide to DNA ancestry testing, the Council for Responsible Genetics wrote, "These come-ons promise more than they can deliver, ignoring problems with accuracy while obscuring a business model in which customers pay for the privilege of giving away valuable information to venture capitalists who expect it will make them very, very rich."

IN THE LAST FEW YEARS, just a few miles away from Sigrid Johnson, another woman's origin story was unfolding. Her name is June Smith. Like Johnson, Smith had no idea as a child that the parents who were raising her weren't the ones who created her. Smith's neighbors knew that the 6-day-old baby who had suddenly appeared in the Smith house wasn't born to the Smiths, and they also understood that fact was meant to remain private. So for years, neighbors knew more about Smith's origins than she herself did. In their solidly black neighborhood in South Philadelphia, Smith stood out. Her skin was lighter than most, and her hair was wavy and long, "like a white girl's," she said. Though she had some good friends, she was bullied by others. "Automatically, I was a target, because darker people thought that a lighter-colored person is more privileged," Smith told me. "I wasn't black enough."

Like Johnson, Smith learned startling news about herself when she was 16, when a neighborhood friend let slip that Smith's parents weren't her "real" parents. Smith marched inside to interrogate her mother, who chided her for asking such crazy questions. Eventually her parents confessed. They described a white Italian woman who handed over her 6-day-old infant after explaining that the father was black and adding: "I can't take that baby home. If I do, they'll kill her." Smith told me: "I never knew if my mom added that last part, but I know she never wanted me to know that woman, so she may have said it to deter me. Then again, it was part of that era. Either way, I grew up with a lot of animosity toward that white woman, the idea that she didn't want me just because I was black."

Smith's mother showed June her original birth certificate. It said she was Gail Moser. The news shook

Smith's understanding of who she was. The search for identity that's so central to adolescence took on extra urgency. For starters, she said, "I couldn't imagine a white woman gave birth to me." So Smith did what she could to reconcile the two versions of her life. Her high school was predominantly white and disproportionately Italian-American, so "I began hanging out with white kids and started acting and dressing like a punk rocker, because I thought that's what white kids did. I went through a total change. I told the white kids I was half Italian. I actually felt they were more accepting of me than my black peers were."

Smith never denied she was black, but she didn't embrace it either, once she found out she was half white. It wasn't until she was in her 30s, as her self-esteem solidified, that she welcomed back her black identity. "I saw how society treated people of color, and I thought, You know, black people raised me. And so I became more conscious that, culturally, that's who I am." Had her birth mother raised her, she said, "I'd probably consider myself white, because I would have grown up in that Italian home. I would have grown up with Italian ways, Italian foods, Italian whatever. But because of how I was raised, African-American, this is who I am. And I accept that, and I'm proud of it."

Although her cultural identity was clear by then, she still yearned to know about her biological family. She wrote and self-published her autobiography in 2014. The last line says, "I am the product of someone, but the reflection of no one."

ANCESTRYDNA AND 23ANDME give their users the option to have their DNA profile uploaded to see if any genetic relatives pop up. Johnson did so, curious but expecting little. *AncestryDNA* promptly revealed two women whose DNA indicated that they were "close family," which Johnson thought meant they were her first cousins. She reached out to them. One never responded. The other was June Smith.

In late August, Johnson and Smith connected by phone. After introducing themselves, Smith asked Johnson

if she was adopted. Johnson said yes. Smith asked, "Was your biological mother Ann D'Amico?" Johnson was startled that this stranger would know such a thing. Smith then asked what her birth name

was. When Johnson said, "Joan Moser," Smith started to cry. She said, "I've been looking for Joan Moser — for you — all these years."

Each knew she wasn't really a child of Eric Moser, D'Amico's white husband, despite his name being on their birth certificates. These babies had black fathers, presumably two different men, given that Johnson and Smith's DNA results indicate that they are half siblings, not full ones.

*"In September, AncestryDNA updated its reference databases and changed its algorithm, and overnight, Johnson's ancestry report was completely different."*

Smith told Johnson that she discovered her first Moser connection in 2015: a half sister named Nancy Moser, who told her that D'Amico had six white children, all of whom D'Amico raised. Moser said that their parents had died, and that on D'Amico's deathbed, their mother conceded that she had "other children" and added, "I wonder if they made it. ..."

Smith had been swiftly enfolded into the Moser family, a comforting but also confusing experience.

The siblings had told her she wasn't the only biracial child. They told her that three years before Smith's birth — when at least some of D'Amico's children were already

in grade school — D'Amico gave birth to a baby she named Joan. After two or three months, according to Moser lore, someone told D'Amico's white husband that Joan, whose skin was darker than her siblings', couldn't be his child: she was black, so she had to go.

Smith described how welcoming the Moser siblings had been and how the eldest told her she thought Smith might have a twin sister, though she has never shown up on Smith's *AncestryDNA* page. But a few years back, *AncestryDNA* linked Smith to a niece whose deceased father, Thomas, was another biracial child of Ann D'Amico. The Mosers welcomed his family too.

After Smith and Johnson talked, Smith alerted the Moser siblings that Joan Moser was alive and well. Johnson was flooded with warm texts, phone calls and Facebook messages from the Moser family. "All at once," Johnson said, "I got: 'I'm your brother!' 'I'm your sister!' 'I'm your cousin!' 'I'm your sister's daughter!'" Though they were total strangers, they embraced her as they had Smith, writing: "Hi honey. I'm one of your sisters. ... Love you." "I'm glad to know you're in our family now." And "I accept you no matter what

color you are and I can't wait to meet you. Just remember you are accepted into our family because you are family, and we love you." When Johnson saw a photo of Thomas, she was stunned by how much he looked like her son, Ron. That family resemblance made the connection all the more real.

"It all hit me real hard," Johnson told me. "I cried and boo-hoed like a baby." She went from being an

only child to a woman with a slew of siblings, nieces and nephews.

After two days packed with catching up on 65 years of family, Johnson stopped answering calls and reading texts. Overwhelmed, she went to

church to calm her soul and express her gratitude. And then she dove right back in with her new-old clan.

Since then, she still sometimes feels dizzy as she tries to replace a long-familiar identity with a welcome but much more complicated one. She marvels that for all those decades as a "single child," she had siblings galore, living only a few miles away, and she never knew it. One of them even looked like her and had been told the same lie about her origins, and then the same gut-wrenching truth. Smith so deeply understood Johnson's experience, because she had lived it herself, as a sister would. A real sister. Finally. Those realities were far more mind-bending than any of the ancestry findings, with their wildly different percentages and ephemeral certainties.

Johnson and Smith talk two or three times every day. "We're stuck on each other," Johnson said.

She sighed. "You turn 65, take a DNA test and find out your whole life is a lot different than you ever thought it was."

*Ruth Padawer is a contributing writer for the New York Times magazine.*

*"You turn 65, take a DNA test and find out your whole life is a lot different than you ever thought it was."*



# A Genealogist's Thanksgiving

By Kristin Ingalls

**G**IVE THANKS for my ancestors who migrated out of Africa 60,000 years ago, traversing Europe for thousands of generations; they left no trace except the genes that I carry.

I give thanks for that Neanderthal ancestor whose genes live on in me.

When life was harsh and death always present, enough survived. I am grateful for those clever enough to escape danger, healthy enough to live through centuries of pestilence and plagues and epidemics and for those hardy enough to survive famine.



*The Immigrants' Ship* by John C Dollman, 1884

I know where some of these ancient people lived but not their names, not their lives, not their stories. A few found living in the far North too difficult, and migrated south to Europe where they probably did not rape, pillage and plunder, but rather planted and harvested and had families.

Over the centuries most of my ancestors' migrations funneled into Western Europe. I wonder about that tiny bit of African genes I still carry. About the Ashkenazi, about the Siberian, about the Iberian; tiny fragments, but still with me.

The last migration of my family began 400 years ago as my ancestors bravely crossed that perilous ocean to this country. Their future was unknown to them; it is history to me. I do know some of their names and stories.

Some came for the freedom of land, some for the freedom to pray. They faced the same dangers here, but enough of mine survived. In this new land they lived into their 70s, 80s, even 90s, living to see great-

grandchildren. I hope these same longevity genes live in me.

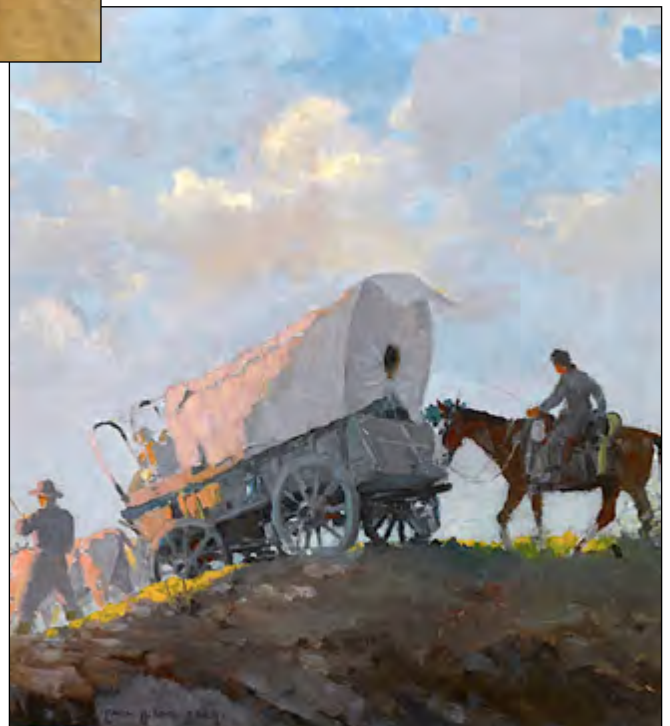
I can put a name to those Huguenot and Walloon ancestors who survived the terrible scourge of religious intolerance in France and Belgium, taking refuge in the Netherlands—a country of tolerance and acceptance where many of my ancestors had already settled. They arrived in this country, settling New Netherland, just three years after my Mayflower family arrived. One of my Huguenot ancestors was born in 1651 at sea and miraculously lived.

Of that Mayflower group, only half survived the first winter; thankfully my family did. I can read today how tirelessly they nursed their brethren through those dark times. I hope that kindness gene lives in me.

Another ancestor died in a freak shipyard accident, which convinced his sons, just lads, to leave Wales, getting on one last ship, forever seeking dry land. Never again did they see the ocean.

One English ancestor was the only one of six who survived to adulthood and continue the family name. I think of his parents and their grief and loss.

On the endless wagon train treks across this vast land, one grandmother was the only one of her family who survived the cholera out there on those lonely plains. Adopted by another family, she lived to have many children. Altogether, seven of my direct ancestors died on those journeys, thankfully after having children. Many other relatives did not survive and



*Wagon train.* Painting by Carl Oscar Borg (1879-1947)

were left in unmarked graves along the way.

The flu epidemic tore through the land; this grandmother, just married and pregnant, survived, a widow. That one child lives on in me along with her genes of immunity.

Mine was not the grandfather, just out of his teens, who perished in the war. Mine was his younger brother, spared to live on and become a father.

### Millions of lives, millions of stories.

These ancestors were kind and they were cruel. They founded towns; a few were expelled from towns by ministers or magistrates. They helped their

neighbors; one was a thief. They killed Indians, they were killed by Indians. They were soldiers, they were pacifists. They were law-abiding; five were polygamists. They owned slaves, they fought to free slaves. Some thrived, some struggled. And, thankfully, I am the culmination of these millions of ancestor's lives.

For this jumble, this hodgepodge, this patchwork of their billions of genes that survive in each one of us here, let us give thanks.

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## Surprised by DNA Results

By Cherie Bonazzola

**S**URPRISED BY MY DNA results is an understatement. My father's side is Italian with my grandparents immigrating in 1908 from Sueglio in the Lake Como area of Italy. My mother's side (paternal and maternal) is Danish immigrating in the early 1880s mainly to Minnesota. Naturally, I thought half Italian and half Danish would come up in the ethnicity results. I did my DNA two years ago with *AncestryDNA*. Surprise!...44% Great Britain!!, 24% Italian/German, 32% other...Scandinavian, including 1% Iberian.

So, I did a DNA test with *23andMe* as *AncestryDNA* must have made a mistake and got basically the same results. My sister, Margie, did her DNA last year with *AncestryDNA* and had the same results as me, so I'm not adopted as my older sisters had always claimed. Okay, where are we getting the British DNA in us. Last summer, I read a book entitled, "Viking Age: Everyday Life During the Extraordinary Era of the Norsemen," by Kirsten Wolf. In the chapter on Danish Kings, I read that King Sven Forkbeard came from the area of Ribe/Tondor, Jutland, a part of Denmark. That's where my maternal Danish great-grandparents' ancestral area is located. King Sven



King Sweyn (Sven) son of Harold Bluetooth invading England in 1013 (detail of a 13th-century miniature). Cambridge University Library. This work is in the public domain in its country of origin and other countries and areas where the copyright term is the author's life plus 70 years or less.

was the illegitimate son of Harold Bluetooth and a servant maiden. King Sven, and later his son, Cnud, continued the Sea Viking raids on England that began in the mid 800s. King Sven conquered England in late 1013, but died shortly after the victory. King Cnud became king of both England and Denmark following his father's death in 1014. His Kingdom ranged from York down to Cambridge. He brought over loyal, powerful families to England to become earls (jarls) of the lands. So, I strongly feel that my connection to England is through the Danish Sea Vikings, who brought back English spouses, mistresses, prisoners, etc. Could my ancestors be related to the servant maid, who became King Sven's mother? Could they be part of the Sea Vikings with King Sven and King Cnud that invaded England? Could they be part of the loyal families that became earls in England? The 1% Iberian???

The Danish Vikings did travel to the Iberian Peninsula and beyond. I'm excited to be a part of these Danish Vikings. By the way, the Vikings did not wear helmets with horns...too impractical to go through woods/shrubbery.



# Family Secrets Revealed

By Gloria Clements

## First family Mystery

ON MAY 9, 2018, I received a message from a DNA match newbie pretty high on my DNA match list. Ronald was looking for his unknown paternal father. “My birth mother has passed ... My paternal is the unknown presently. According to family photos and a family tree mother did, my birth father is a Kohl, John Kohl. But there is no record on my original birth certificate.” Ronald was born in 1962. Of course, as many of us genealogists do, I jumped in with both feet to help him find his father.

May 14, 2018: After many days of frustration and running in circles, I then emailed Mary Hall for help. There were no Kohls in our family. Mary suggested I look at Ronald’s matches to see if his were from both my paternal grandparents. Ronald’s DNA matches were from both my paternal grandmother and paternal grandfather, so there had to be a close relationship. Mary told me about centimorgans, a unit for measuring genetic linkage, and that sent me quickly on my path to success.

Ronald and I share 654 centimorgans (cMs) which could put him in my first cousin once removed (1C1R) category. Of the 26 DNA matches on *AncestryDNA.com* that I have in the “Second Cousin” list, I know personally at least 16 of them are 1C1R, children of my first cousins. Ronald is on the very top of this DNA “possible 1-2 cousin” match list. *AncestryDNA* lists persons numerically by number of cMs.

We looked at the centimorgans to determine how closely he was related to me, my brothers and other first cousins-once removed. One of Mary Hall’s comments was, “Is there a chance any of your aunts/uncles had a son born about 1942 who was Ronald’s father?”

My father was from a family of nine, four boys and five girls. I have 36 first paternal cousins, the first one born in 1928 and the youngest 1961. Of these 36 cousins, 18 were male. Through the process of elimination by age and location, I narrowed it down to three male cousins who were born in the early to mid-1940’s. My brother who was born in this time frame was not an option because, if that were true, Ronald would be my nephew and the cMs shared with me would have been much higher than 654.

May 18, 2018: My first cousin Lois, the matriarch of the family, is a genealogist and keeps tabs on most of the cousins. Logically, I call Lois and give her the information about our new relative in the hopes she can shed some light on which male cousin could be Ronald’s father. Lois exclaims that her brother Arthur, who was on my list of three potentials, had fathered a child about that time – 1961 or 1962, she couldn’t exactly remember. She never knew the sex of the child and often wondered over the years what happened to the baby,

her niece or nephew. Success! Arthur is Ronald’s father. Ronald is my first cousin-once removed.

Arthur has six other children and Ronald’s birth mother had four more children. Ronald grew up with two siblings in his adopted family. Ronald now has 12 siblings – adopted or half – but 12 (mostly new-found) siblings! When you do your DNA, you never know where it might take you. Ron is thrilled and very overwhelmed. In 2018, he met his biological father and some of the half-siblings.

## Second Family Mystery

May 24, 2108: I received a message on *Ancestry.com* from “Carol” saying “Hi, I am trying to help my niece (Tracy) find her paternal grandfather. Tracy’s father was adopted as an infant in Wisconsin in 1948.” Here we go again!

Carol contacted me by phone and gave me what information she knew. Her birth mother was “Helen.” Helen was also the birth mother of her half-brother, David (Tracy’s father). Carol had been given up for adoption at about age one as Helen was unable to care for both herself and baby Carol. Helen became pregnant again in the fall of 1946 and had a son, David, in June of 1947. David was given up for adoption at about age one to the same couple who had adopted Helen’s daughter Carol.

Helen had lived in Mt. Horeb, Wisconsin, west of Madison. Helen appeared to like to date military men. Helen liked to dance. When Helen got pregnant with David, she was engaged to be married to David’s father according to Carol’s information from Helen’s family.

Again, an “SOS” email to Mary Hall. Help! We looked at the centimorgans (cMs) and determined that Tracy’s 466 cMs match was very close to what Ronald’s were to me. That could then also make Tracy my first cousin-once removed. I started with this first cousin-once removed scenario, which would mean one of my three uncles was her grandfather.

First, Uncle (Dan) had married a couple years earlier in 1945 and had children and did not live in proximity to where Helen was. Second, Uncle (Myron) was married several times and we don’t have a record if he was married at the time of David’s conception or not. Myron was a distinct possibility and the man who had my vote as the most likely candidate. Third, Uncle Leon, had been in the War as a Navy man, and liked to dance. He returned home to his parents west of Madison, Wisconsin, in 1946 after the war. I’m not sure when, but Leon suffered from a “nervous breakdown” that we now call PTSD and went to a Veterans’ facility in Tomah, Wisconsin. Leon is also a potential candidate.

## DNA analysis by comparison of centimorgans shared

Also on my DNA match list is Susan (Myron’s granddaughter), a first cousin once removed to me. I share 414 cMs with Susan and 466 cMs with Tracy, both first cousin-once removed categories. Susan (Myron’s granddaughter) and Tracy (David’s daughter) share around 276 cMs, which could indicate second cousins.



If Myron were the father of David and also father of Susan's mother (Judy), the cMs shared between Susan and Tracy should be higher since they would be first cousins.

In a process of elimination between Myron and Leon, we can conclude that my Uncle Leon was David's father, Tracy's grandfather. Susan and Tracy share 414 and 466 cMs with me which puts them both in my first cousin-once removed range, perfect!

Moreover, photos of David and Leon reveal a close resemblance in their younger years.

David has since done his DNA and is my first cousin based on shared 674 cMs. Uncle Leon never married and had no other children, so David does not inherit any additional siblings like Ronald did from his father. David now makes the paternal first cousin count at 37. My brother and I got to meet David in July when I made a trip to Washington State. In a subsequent phone message to me, David said meeting his biological cousins was a highlight of his life (Aww!).

I don't remember why I had Uncle Leon's class ring in my possession since 1962 when we moved from Wisconsin to California. When David, my brother Ted and I met in Washington in July, I was pleased to have the ring go to its proper place and gave his biological father's class ring to David.

I was prompted by Mary Hall to write about finding new members of my family through DNA. Mary Hall, Dorothy Oksner and I have been Volunteer Librarians together for about seven years on the fourth Sunday of the month, so I felt comfortable asking Mary for help even though I had not attended any of her DNA classes. Mary is knowledgeable and very patient. She looks at DNA analysis as a puzzle to be put together. Many thanks to Mary for her help and direction!

**IMMEDIATE FAMILY**

★ **Ted**  
Possible range: Immediate family - close family  
Confidence: Extremely High [Progress bar]  
Shared DNA: 2,544 cM across 59 segments ?

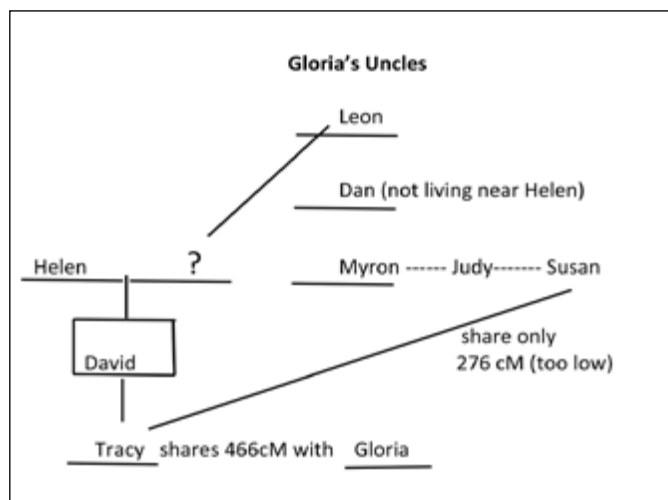
**1ST COUSIN**

★ **David**  
Possible range: 1st - 2nd cousins  
Confidence: Extremely High [Progress bar]  
Shared DNA: 674 cM across 35 segments ?

**2ND COUSIN**

★ **Ronald**  
Possible range: 1st - 2nd cousins  
Confidence: Extremely High [Progress bar]  
Shared DNA: 642 cM across 25 segments ?

My Paternal DNA match list with the two newest relatives just below my brother Ted



# Linda's DNA Surprises

*As told to Gloria Clements*

**I**N 2017 I RECEIVED AN EMAIL from a “new” second cousin, Linda, who showed up on my DNA match list. Linda, born in 1949 in Wisconsin, advised me that she has discovered her previously unknown father, James. As it turns out, her biological father James was a first cousin to my father, which would then make Linda and me second cousins. Linda's mother is Cathy. Linda was adopted as an infant by her stepfather, but Linda did not find out that she had been adopted by him until she was an adult. Linda's aunt let it slip that her stepfather was not her biological dad. The aunt thought they had told her. Linda had asked her mom, Cathy, and got a lot of misleading answers, always with grains of truth in the story. Her mom said that back then she considered them engaged, and thought James was going to marry her.

Linda's original search for her dad began in the late 1990s. Her mom Cathy knew James had a daughter several years older than Linda named Betty. But her mother gave Linda a different last name for James, and Linda spent two years looking for the wrong man. She found a man with the same name her mother had given her but his other details didn't match, so finally Linda decided to find the half-sister Betty, one of James's daughters.

## Highschool yearbooks contain important images

After visiting several area high schools and asking to look through old high school yearbooks, Linda found a photo of her half-sister Betty. On a hunch, Linda looked up others with the same last name in the mid-1940s yearbooks for the same high school to see if any of James' family could be found in any of the yearbooks. Amazingly, coincidentally, a picture showed up of her biological father at the same high school as his daughter Betty, obviously many years prior. He matched the photo of the man her mother had shown her. This confirmed that it was her biological father, James, the man that Linda found in the high school yearbook. This was all before online genealogy, when the internet was in its infancy.

Linda then spent another seven years periodically searching that family name in Wisconsin, but to no avail. In 2006 she connected with a related family in South Dakota but they only knew of James' daughter Betty, and that he had no other children with his wife Harriet. Linda found out from them that James and his parents had lived in Arizona since the early 1960s, so there were no records in Wisconsin of this family from that point on. James had already passed away many years prior to her contact with the South Dakota family.

Betty was born in San Diego in 1945 when James was serving in the Navy in WWII. Finding her living in Ar-



Human chromosomes image from NHGRI

izona, Linda contacted Betty. Unfortunately, Betty has no desire to meet Linda. She said it would be “disrespectful to her mother Harriet.”

## DNA Analysis reveals more connections

Linda had her DNA analyzed in late 2016 to determine ethnicity, to find out about her paternal ancestry, and check out DNA matches. From her research Linda recognized a couple of family names on the DNA match list, ones that she had uncovered in her many years of research, but was too apprehensive to contact. However, it confirmed she was on the right track.

In the summer of 2017, my first cousin-once removed (1C1R) Bob contacted Linda because she was a match to my Aunt Irene (whose DNA account Bob managed). Linda was a first cousin-once removed (1C1R) to Aunt Irene. Bob wondered how Linda was related so closely to our family. Linda told Bob her story, which is how Linda got involved in our family and finding her heritage. Linda is now in touch with the half dozen genealogists in our family.

In 2017 Linda, through DNA, found a half-brother Donald, born in 1957 in Wisconsin, who was also fathered by James. Donald's mother is Amy. Donald's adopted father had told Donald that his mother Amy had given birth to a baby girl who had also been given up for adoption. Donald did his DNA because he was looking for this sister. When Linda popped up on his DNA match list, he thought he had found the sister he was looking for. Donald assumed that his mother Amy had two babies by different fathers. The connection between Linda and Donald, however, was through their father James.

Just recently Linda came up with another half-sister, Sally, born in 1958 in Wisconsin. Sally happens to be the sister who Donald has really been searching for. The surprise is that Sally's mother is also Amy and her father is James. This makes Sally and Donald full brother and sister, which was confirmed by the number of centimorgans they shared. Linda, Donald, and Sally were all born in the same maternity hospital for unwed mothers in Wisconsin. None of these siblings knew of each other before doing their DNA, though Donald was looking for a sister late in life. Betty knew (baby/child) Linda existed, but we don't think she is aware there are two more half-siblings her charismatic father sired. Apparently, my first cousin-once removed James was a busy man in his short 49 years of life. We are all wondering if DNA will reveal any more surprises for Linda.

# DNA Genealogy— It's Greek to Me

Melville R. V. Sahyun, Ph.D.  
sahyun@infionline.net

**W**HEN I RECEIVED THE RESULTS of my DNA analysis from *23andMe*, I had two big surprises. First of all I had two new second cousins, Tomás and Lucien, with whom I promptly connected. They put me in touch with a third cousin, Della, known to them but not to me, who was also interested in family history. The second surprise was an initial result (2014) indicating a significant percentage (20-30%) of Italian ancestry in my ancestry composition analysis. In my own research I had not discovered any Italian ancestors, although all my great-grandparents were positively identified. When Tomás and I compared ancestry composition in 2017, it turned out that he had a similar component of Italian ancestry. The elucidation of this mystery will illustrate the importance of placing family history in the context of larger political and social events, and of understanding DNA genealogy in the context of current research in forensic genetics.

## The search for Italian ancestry

The place to start investigating the mystery of the Italian ancestry was with the common ancestor pair of Tomás and me, my paternal great-grandparents, Boutros (Petros) Rayes and Helena Damianos, both born in Hasbaya in present day Lebanon. Their names did not reflect any Italian influence; Helena's in particular is quintessentially Greek. I knew little of Boutros' background; Lebanon was then part of the Province of Syria of the Ottoman Empire, a semi-autonomous district known as "Mount Lebanon."<sup>1</sup> Any documentation would have been maintained in Damascus, difficult to recover at best, and out of the question in the context of the ongoing Syrian civil war. Another cousin (now deceased), however, had compiled family information about Helena, presumably derived from oral history. Accordingly she was the daughter of Al-Hajj Damianos and his wife Maryam; Al-Hajj in turn was the son of Simon Damianos, reportedly an immigrant to the Levantine Coastal region in the early 19th century, and locally known in the town of Hasbaya as "the Greek." From the family timeline, Simon would have been born about 1780.

## A Cyprus connection

From where and why would a person known as "Greek" have emigrated to the Mount Lebanon district, I asked. The closest place where there was an ethnically Greek population would have been the island of Cyprus, about 250 km from the Lebanese coast. (See map next page). Historically this island controlled access to the Levantine Coast and the ports from which Euro-

peans could access goods from the Silk Road and the spice trade. It has been fought over for centuries.<sup>2</sup> The names of the ancestors are particularly suggestive. The surname Damianos is not particularly common among the Greek population in general, but is quite common on Cyprus. Then there is the forename, Al-Hajj. This term is used among Muslims to honor individuals who have made the pilgrimage to Mecca, the hajj, as commanded by the Qu'ran. In parts of the Ottoman Empire where Christian and Muslim populations coexisted in close proximity, specifically Cyprus for Greek Orthodox Christians, the Christians began to use the term to honor individuals who had made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which they interpreted as more-or-less equivalent to the Islamic hajj.<sup>3</sup> In this cultural environment Al-Hajj came to be used as a given name, and passed on from generation to generation.

As suggested in the oral history, Simon emigrated in the early 19th century. When confronted by mysteries in family history, I have learned to consider what else was happening in the larger world. Major political and economic events in history tend to have consequences in family history, and dislocations in family history tend to reflect these events. In this case in 1821 there was a major uprising in Cyprus against the occupying Ottoman Turks. The Ottoman forces put the rebellion down brutally; many Greek Christian Cypriots were killed. Many others were forced to flee, a number of them to Italy.<sup>2</sup> But the nearby semi-autonomous Mount Lebanon province, very much a backwater of the Ottoman Empire with a large Christian (Maronite) population could be an attractive, and much closer, alternative.

At this point it is possible to create a plausible scenario for the back story of Helena Damianos. Simon Damianos, her grandfather, was accordingly a Greek Cypriot. His son, Al-Hajj, would also have been born in Cyprus, given his daughter Helena's birth about 1835. The family was forced to flee their homeland in the aftermath of the 1821 uprising, and went to Lebanon, most likely directly to Hasbaya, a town in the Chouf, a rich agricultural region of the Mount Lebanon district. It was populated at the time largely by Maronite Christians. Mount Lebanon was ruled then by Emir (Governor) Bashir Shebab II, himself a Christian convert, from his castle in Hasbaya.<sup>4</sup> There the refugee family would be under his immediate protection. In Hasbaya Al-Hajj would have matured and married Maryam; and there Helena and her siblings, including brother Chaker Al-Hajj, grandfather of the cousin who was my source of the oral history, were born. A search of a current Hasbaya directory indicates that the name Rayes is still associated with the community, although the name Damianos no longer appears.<sup>5</sup> Family tradition affirms that members of the Damianos family were living in Hasbaya at least through the late 1920s; Chaker Al-Hajj died there in 1928.

This scenario is, however, still hypothetical. The availability of records for ancestors in Cyprus, as well



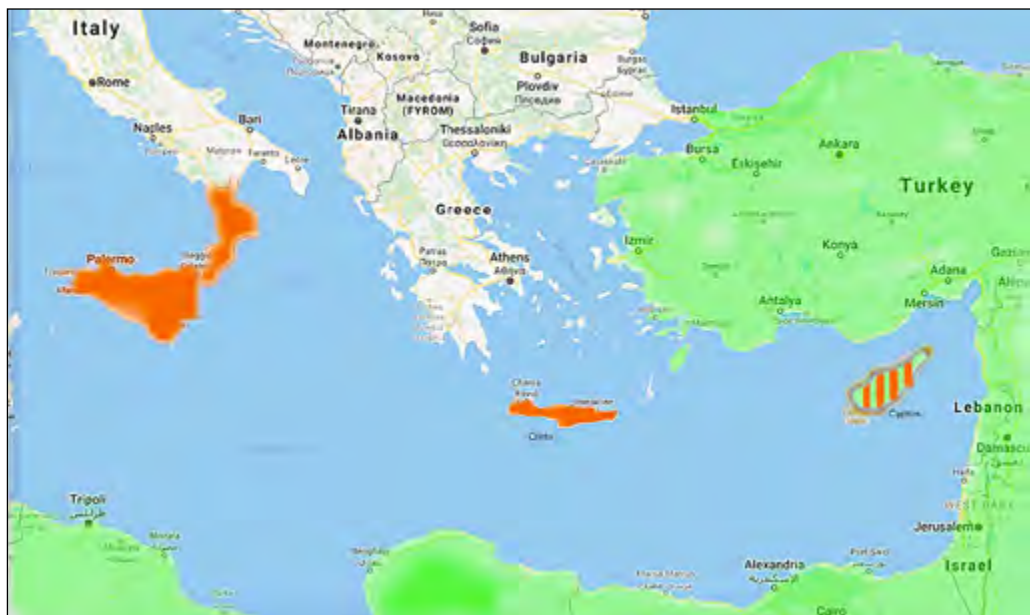
as for those in Lebanon, at this time period is essentially non-existent; record keeping didn't begin until 1839, and was hit-or-miss up until the 20th century.<sup>6</sup> In the absence of the opportunity to find documentation, some other sort of empirical evidence is necessary to provide substantiation. DNA to the rescue!

### DNA links Cypriot, Italian and Lebanese lineages

A recent Y-chromosomal study of Greek and Turkish Cypriots, carried out by researchers from the Laboratory of Forensic Genetics at the University of Nicosia Medical School, Cyprus, showed that

Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot "...patrilines derive primarily from a single gene pool and show very close genetic affinity (low genetic differentiation) to Calabrian Italian and Lebanese patrilines."<sup>7</sup> In other words, to a DNA researcher a Cypriot might be indistinguishable from a Lebanese or, more to the point, a Southern Italian. This is attributed to "...a common ancient Greek (Achaean) genetic contribution to both [Cypriot and Calabrian] populations."<sup>7</sup> The "Italian" heritage shared by me and my cousin is thus equally likely to be Cypriot heritage, consistent with the scenario hypothesized for our Damianos ancestors. At the time of my initial analysis, *23andMe* compared DNA to only 31 populations worldwide; Cypriot was not one of them but was lumped into generic Southern European. Presumably they did not have a large enough sample size for a statistically significant comparison. However, my patrilineal haplogroup according to both the 2014 and 2017 analyses is G2, one of the three dominant haplogroups in Cypriot patrilines. The G2 haplogroup occurs with approximately the same frequency among Cypriots and Southern Italians (ca. 14%), a much higher rate than among, for example, Lebanese (ca. 4%).<sup>7</sup>

Recently *23andMe* claims to have "improved" how they determine ancestor locations. As a result, the portion of my ancestry (and Tomás') previously assigned as Italian has been lumped into generic "Western Asian and North African," which, according to their map, includes the island of Cyprus. In summary, Cypriot ancestry could have been confounded with Italian ancestry in the initial analysis and now would be included in the Western Asian and North African category. This trajectory of interpretations offered by *23andMe* strongly supports the hypothesis of Greek Cypriot heritage, and the story line developed above for the Damianos family.



Google map of Eastern Mediterranean showing areas of significant (>10%) concentration of haplogroup G2 patrilineage (according to Heraclides et al.) in red; geographical regions classified by *23andMe* as "Western Asian and North African" are in green. The island of Cyprus (bi-colour) is uniquely in both categories.

### A degree of skepticism

The lesson from this study is that the results of DNA genealogy, or at least the analysis of those results as provided by the commercial vendor, should be approached with a degree of skepticism. Companies providing DNA testing have been known to oversell the precision of their results.<sup>8</sup> Those TV commercials that show someone opening their results and discovering that they are Scottish when all along they thought they were German – well, that's not quite how it is. DNA genealogy is at this time still very much an evolving science. Family history, world events and knowledge of the state-of-the-art in forensic genetics all provide context for understanding one's DNA results.

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# Benefits of Submitting Articles to *Ancestors West* - A Testimonial

By Connie Burns

**J**UST BEFORE CHRISTMAS, a volunteer at the Sahyun Library fielded a phone call from a gentleman, Mr. John Schroeder, who asked to talk to me. He lives on the east coast and saw my article in *Ancestors West* and wanted to connect with me! The volunteer, Melinda, gave me his email address and so I sent him a note.

The article I had written for the Spring 2018 *Ancestors West* edition was about my great-grandfather, Thomas Voegeli, who owned four pharmacies in Minneapolis. It turns out that Mr. Schroeder and I are not related. However, he is researching and writing a book about a 32-year-old traveling medicine man, Jesse Cooper. His great aunt ran off with Jesse Cooper when she was 15, which caused a major scandal in his family!

Jesse and his three brothers sold “Cooper’s New Discovery” patent medicine throughout the midwest at the end of the 19th and in the early 20th century.

Per Mr. Schroeder, *“They operated as many as three simultaneous traveling medicine shows, free to the public and complete with bands and orchestras and vaudeville entertainers. In each city, after an introductory parade through the downtown streets – during which hundreds of dollars in coins were thrown to madly-scrambling spectators – the show would then take place nightly in each city for up to six weeks. If the city were large, the performance sites would often rotate among working-class neighborhoods. In smaller towns, the shows would be right downtown, often at, or next to, the courthouse square.*

*But in 1905, the most prominent of these four brothers – Lee Thomas Cooper – decided to dispense with the vaudeville show. He was still going to tour, but with a new plan: In each city, he would team up with one major drugstore, where he and his assistants would be in residence, promoting their patent medicine, for a month, or a month and a half.*

*Whenever possible, Lee Thomas picked a city’s most prominent, profitable and popular drugstore to be his host – or, more accurately, his business partner. The selected drugstores would have exclusive rights to sell Cooper Medicine Company products within their respective cities.*

*For example, in St. Louis, Lee Thomas chose the Wolff-Wilson Drug Co. – the most popular and successful drugstore on the busiest retail street.*

*And so, in Minneapolis, there was only one real choice – the Voegeli Brothers Drug Co., of course! Cooper held forth in the main Voegeli store at Hennepin and Washington Streets, right across from the first iteration of the Nicollet Hotel, at the gateway to the downtown business district.*

*The interior drugstore photo that accompanied your article in *Ancestors West* was the exact interior in which my grand uncle L. T. Cooper spent one month promoting and selling*



The Patent medicine “Cooper’s New Discovery” sold by L.T. Cooper in the Voegeli Brothers Drug Store in Minneapolis, Minnesota in 1905.

*bottles of “Cooper’s New Discovery” patent medicine in early August through early September of 1905!*

*I know this for certain, because the soda fountain seen in that photo is an American Soda Fountain Co. “Innovation” model – finished in mahogany, onyx and sienna marble – purchased by Thomas Voegeli for \$12,000 in March of that same year. (Voegeli simultaneously purchased another soda fountain, at the same price, for his store at Nicollet Avenue and Seventh Street, right across from Dayton’s Department Store.)*

*I am working on a book about the Coopers, the cities they visited on their promotional tours, and how those cities have changed. As part of that research, I spent about a week last summer researching Minneapolis, the 1960s “urban renewal” process that virtually wiped out its central business district, the Voegeli Brothers Drug Co. and Thomas Voegeli.*



As I am sure you know, Thomas Voegeli was a fascinating individual:

- Head, for one year, of the Minneapolis parks system!
- President, for one year, of the National Association of Retail Druggists!
- Sponsor of an awesome-looking baseball team!
- Owner of a magnificent brick and English-half-timber house (which still exists, and which recently received a stunning renovation) on the east edge of Kenwood Park!

I tracked the interior store photo and the carriage photo to the Hennepin County Historical Society in Minneapolis. This organization has a total of five Voegeli photos. I have ordered super-high resolution scans of all five, and would be happy to share those with you, once I have them all.

I believe I have Voegeli info and photos that you may not have, and vice versa. If you are willing, I suggest that we make an appointment for a future phone call – maybe in early January, once the holidays are past – when we can share Voegeli information back and forth. I would honestly love to do that.”

Isn't this great!? Mr. Schroeder and I are going to connect again soon and share lots of photos and information. I'll learn more about my great-grandfather and his pharmacies. He found Voegeli and the article in *Ancestors West* by Googling.

I'm so glad I submitted my article to *Ancestors West*!



A dapper young employee at Voegeli Bros. Drug Co.



Wouldn't YOU want to shop at Voegeli Bros. Drug Co?

## Successful Search for a Birth Father

By Carell Jantzen

**F**OR OVER 45 YEARS I have searched for my husband's birth father. Apparently, the birth certificate had the incorrect name. It wasn't until his third DNA test, this time through *23andMe*, that we found his birth father, now deceased. Another son of the birth father had also sent his DNA to *23andMe* and the match revealed the relationship. Moreover, we discovered three new half-siblings! All in Arizona!

The "new" brother called my husband! However, due to my husband's medical condition under hospice care, he was not able to talk to him. The siblings did not previously know they had a half-brother so that was a big surprise!



# Making Sense of the Santa Barbara Lighthouse Deed Mesa Lighthouse Stories

By Wendel Hans



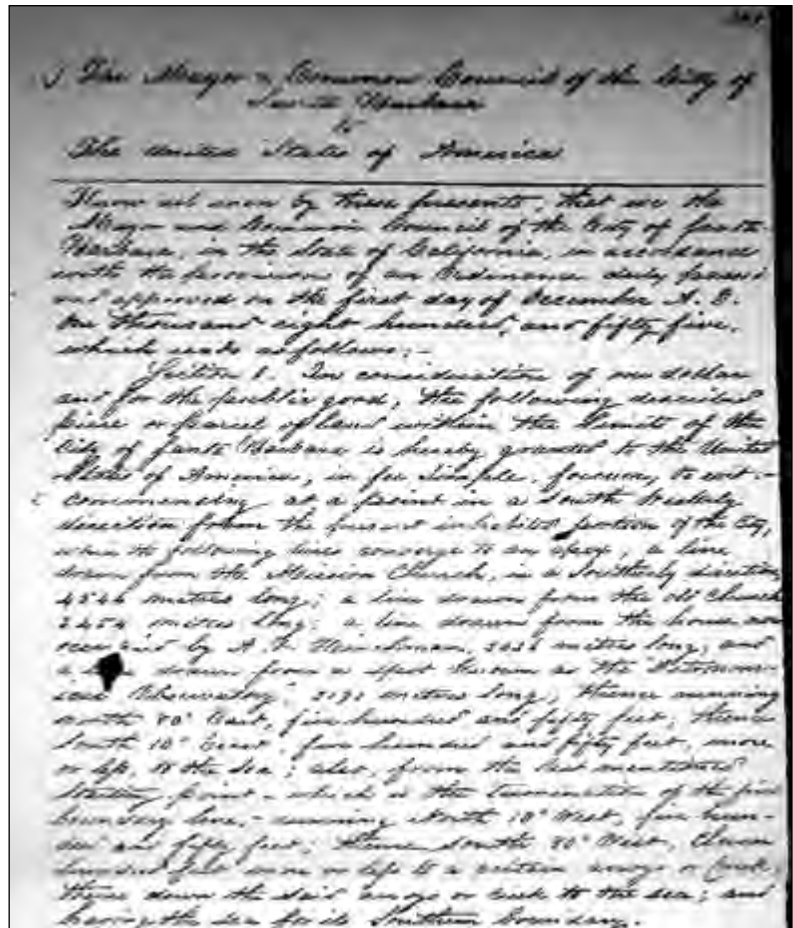
The author, Wendel Hans

## Forty-one years on Cliff Drive

### 1855 Famous Men of Santa Barbara

Antonio Maria de la Guerra was Presidente. Jose Carrillo was Mayor. George D Fisher was County Clerk, and there was The Common Council. "Know by all presents, that we the Mayor and Common Council of the City of Santa Barbara, in the State of California, in accordance with the provision of an Ordinance duly passed and approved on the first day of December A.D. one thousand eight hundred and fifty-five, which reads as follows; -

Section 1. In consideration of one dollar and for the public good, the following described piece or parcel of land within the Limits of the City of Santa Barbara is hereby granted to the United States of America, in fee simple, forever..." There was no mention in the deed of a lighthouse. The deed did describe twenty-six acres of land that would be known as the "Lighthouse Reservation."



**Lighthouse Deed** - There is no mention of a lighthouse in the deed. The only clue was in the expression, "for the public good," the cheap price of land (\$1.00), and the sale to the United States. You had to find a map showing the landmarks. The Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History, by some miracle, had the 1853 map. Then you had to measure the distances defined in the deed. The lines converged at an "APEX" near where the lighthouse once stood. From the apex, measuring the prescribed distances and compass headings, you have defined a twenty-six acre plot of land matching in shape and position of the plot shown on many historic maps as the "U.S., U.S. Reservation, or the Lighthouse Reserve". Source: Santa Barbara County Hall of Records



**George Davidson, athlete and engineer, 1825 to 1911**- He chose, surveyed, and mapped the location of west coast lighthouses including Santa Barbara's Mesa lighthouse. Source: Bancroft Library.

### George Davidson

George Davidson was traveling the west coast for the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey in 1852 and 1853. He charted the coast and coastline. His objective was to reduce shipwrecks. He chose locations for lighthouses that would soon come. He established an astrological observatory at Point Conception in 1851. Davidson was both an athlete and a scientist. He hiked, and pushed his crews, where no lesser man would go. An astrological observatory would be located on high ground

where Davidson could view landmarks for many miles with a telescope and view the stars and sun for latitude and longitude. He built an observatory in San Francisco, which was a fifteen foot square wood building with a domed roof. Before 1855 he had an astrological observatory in Santa Barbara. Perhaps his locations at Point Conception and Santa Barbara looked like his wood observatory building in San Francisco. He had picked a location for a future Santa Barbara lighthouse to aid ships navigating the Santa Barbara Channel. The lighthouse would be built and the lamp lit within a year of the Presidente, Mayor, and Common Council deed-ing the property to the United States.



La Mesa

View of the Town and Mission of Santa Barbara

**1859** - The lighthouse, built in 1856, is shown in the lower left (Lt Ho). When the lighthouse deed was recorded, December 3 1855, the Mesa was a barren plot of pasture grass. There were no trees, bushes, chaparral—nothing but grass. The deed grants the portion of dirt of LaMesa where the lighthouse was erected to the United States for \$1.00...One dollar, for the public good, in 1855. Source: *1859 Coast Pilot*.

### "X" Marks The Spot

Using telescopes, theodolite, transit, and sextant, George planted a pole and flag where he believed the Santa Barbara lighthouse should be built on the Mesa. He marked a spot back from the Mesa cliff at an elevation of about 155 feet. If built on the cliff, the elevation would be less than 100 feet and reduce the range of the light by miles. Then he went to his temporary observatory where he could see from Point Conception to Point Mugu and all the Channel Islands. The observatory would be on top of a nearby hill, LaVigia Hill (elev, 459'), behind the soon to be built lighthouse. When the lamp was lit, the lighthouse illuminated the hill as well as the channel. His temporary observatory was where a reservoir exists today, the Vic Trace Reservoir, on the highest point of LaMesa. Over centuries, the Chumash Indians and then the Spanish would post sentries on LaVigia Hill, looking for miles seaward, watching for possible invaders of Santa Barbara.

LaVigia meant "the view." Davidson called the geometry point where he would propose the lighthouse be built an "APEX," where four lines would converge from four landmarks. He selected four existing landmarks that he could view from his temporary observatory atop the hill. He had another, but formal, observatory, near the beach and a feature we call Burton's Mound. He calculated that the lighthouse should be 4544 meters from the Mission, 3454 meters from the "old

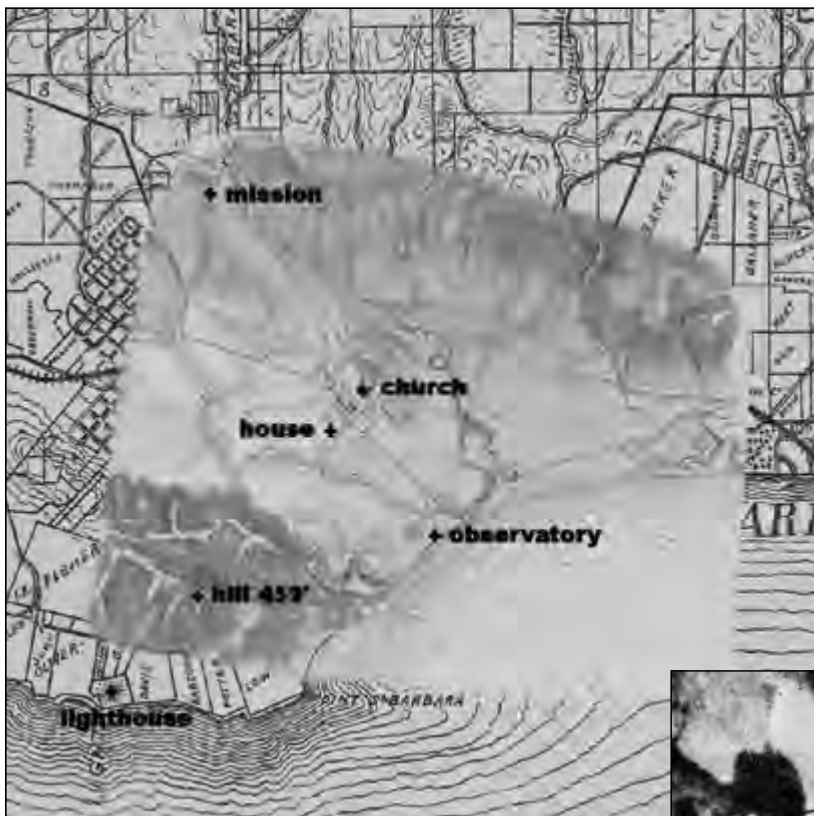


**No Trees** - The mesa in this early photo has no trees. That feature changed as the Mesa was parceled and farmers planted trees and other vegetation to mark property lines and wind breaks. When the lighthouse keeper planted trees between the lighthouse and the ocean, sailors complained. Source: Willard Thompson



**1889 Map of Santa Barbara County** - This map displayed the streets of Santa Barbara city and the United States lighthouse reservation. Source: Google





the same thing). From that point he turned a right angle and paced off 550' more or less (it was in fact only 293 feet) ending at the sea. Returning 293 feet to the last mentioned starting point, "1," Davidson paced off another 550 feet, 8.33 chains, in the direction of North 10 degrees West. He had established the 843 foot eastern boundary of the lighthouse reservation, which today is the boundary between Washington school and the homes of Pacific Estates. Then he turned ninety degrees left, a right angle, and paced off 1100 feet, more or less, in the direction of South 80 degrees West, (the County Surveyor records that Davidson got the 1100 feet exactly right!). The north boundary ends at a certain arroyo or Creek we now know as Elise Wash. Then he turned left again, and said the property boundary would continue down the arroyo or creek to the sea. Finally,

**Superimposing Two Maps** - By superimposing a 1853 map at the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History over a section of the 1889 map, the positions of all the landmarks described in the lighthouse deed could be identified. The distances scaled on the map were identical to the distances called out in the lighthouse deed. The lighthouse, LaVigia Hill, house, and the old church fall on a common line. Source: WHans photo art

church," 3191 meters from Heinelman's house, and 3036 meters from his beach Observatory. Using his tools, Davidson, standing high atop LaVigia Hill, with his 3-3/4", 100 power telescope, could sight his pole where the lighthouse would one day stand, as one end of a line. He would calculate, accurately, the distance to each landmark from his pole.

### Chains

How did George Davidson measure 550 feet? With chains, a standard unit of measure. One chain equals 66 feet. 8.33 chains equals 550 feet. Surveyors at that time used chains linked together. A local story goes that Santa Barbara surveyor Haley linked his chains with leather which shrank and stretched providing inaccurate measurements and misaligned streets.

### Plotting Boundaries of the U.S. Lighthouse Reserve

We know the shape and location of the lighthouse reservation from 160 years of maps and charts, but it took the Deed to find out how Davidson calculated the property lines. The lines exist today as the boundaries of Washington Elementary School, LaMesa Park, and the U.S. Coast Guard reserve, on Santa Barbara's Mesa. From the "APEX" he measured a distance of 550, 8.33 chains, heading 10 degrees North of true East, (Davidson chose to call his heading North 80 degrees East...



**Davidson plots the lighthouse reservation** - This image is a portion of a 1928 aerial photo of the Mesa. The lighthouse was located at point "X" and was demolished two and one-half years prior to the overflight. George Davidson, of the U.S. Coast Survey, selected point "0" and planted a flagged stake which he could see with his telescope from a vantage point far above on the crest of LaVigia Hill. With his crew he measured from point "0" to "1", a distance of 8.33 chains (one chain is 66 feet), 550 feet, in the direction of North 80 degrees East. That means East and then a little North. Then he measured from point "1" to point "2" to the sea, a distance of "550 feet more or less". The distance was actually 293 feet. Then he returned to his point of origin "1" and measured 8.33 chains to point "3" from point "1". Then he measured 1100 feet, 16.66 chains, more or less, to the creek or arroyo, point "4". The distance was exactly 1100 feet. Finally he described the western boundary of the lighthouse reservation as the "creek or arroyo", an irregular line to the sea. Finally, the southern boundary of the lighthouse reservation was the sea itself, as described in the deed, from point "5" to point "2." The lighthouse was built near, but not on, Davidson's chosen monument mark...on higher ground at an elevation of 155 feet above sea level. Source: UCSB MapImagingLab flight 1928-311-c\_a-11\_01 january



the sea would be the southern boundary, completing the box. These positions and measurements are recorded in the Lighthouse Deed recorded December 3, 1855.

### Why a Santa Barbara Lighthouse?

The goal of the surveyors of the California coast was to place a lighthouse at every forty miles of California coastline. In 1850 the only form of practical transportation was by ship upon the ocean. There were no trains, trucks, airplanes, or stagecoaches to carry the freight. The 1849 California gold rush increased tremendously the ships traveling from the east coast of the United States to San Francisco and ports north. They all passed within the Santa Barbara Channel. A cluster of seven lighthouses was built from San Francisco, Monterey, Point Conception, and San Diego in 1855, to aid ship navigation. The Santa Barbara lighthouse was in a second group built in 1855. The Santa Barbara lamp was lit in December 1856, fixed, not rotating.

### Our Lighthouse Is Gone

Our lighthouse fell in an earthquake in 1925 but there is still a light, an aid to maritime navigation. The incandescent kerosene lamp of 1921 was replaced with a rotating electric lamp. When the lighthouse collapsed, a temporary fixed acetylene airway beacon was replaced by a rotating airway beacon in 1928. Today the light is a high intensity LED flashing electronic beacon atop a tower inside the U.S. Coast Guard compound. The ghost of the Santa Barbara lighthouse hovers above Meigs Road. The dirt surveyed by George Davidson remains, repurposed and rededicated, to other uses.

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**December 01 1855 Deeded Land** - The lighthouse reservation still exists in the 26 acre plot of land surveyed by George Davidson about 1852. The dirt has been repurposed. Santa Barbara's LaMesa park, Washington Elementary School, the U.S. Coast Guard, and a new housing development now occupy this historic parcel of city land. The wreckage of the lighthouse is buried in the park for those curious souls willing to do a little digging. Source: Santa Barbara County Assessor Book 45, page 11

# The Very Sad Tale of the Man Who Built the Point San Luis Lighthouse

By Kathy Mastako

**W**E DO NOT KNOW who designed the Point San Luis Light Station.<sup>1</sup> Nor do we know very much about the man who built it. What we do know, though, is that it was a very messy business. And that many of those associated with the project were dead within a decade or so after the work began. At least some of those deaths seem untimely. Did construction disturb the peace of the earlier inhabitants at rest there? Was Point San Luis a Native American burial ground? It makes one wonder...

Santa Barbara resident George W. Kenney, the contractor, won the job to build the lighthouse with a low-ball bid. But the project, due for a December, 1889 finish, languished on until mid-May 1890. The contractor complained the weather was bad, and the man sent by the Twelfth District<sup>2</sup> light house engineer to inspect the work was an impediment.

What Kenney had in mind when he bid the job is unknown. He had no experience building lighthouses. Kenney's foolhardy bid spawned trouble for others, with lawsuits that continued for more than a dozen years, and attempts to recoup some of his losses that lasted twenty-two years. Besides George Washington Bolan, a government inspector, and Grace Kenney Murray Healy, George Kenney's daughter, other players in the saga include James Anson Brown, the bondsman, Catharine Jane Snyder Brown, his widow, William John Graves, the agent, banker Robert Edgar Jack, Washington Irving Nichols, a lawyer, and Josiah Horton and Kate C. Snyder, executors of the Brown estate.

The only real winners were the attorneys. Much like the fictional Jarndyce vs. Jarndyce case Charles Dickens wrote about in "Bleak House," in the end only the lawyers reaped any gain.

## The Government Requests Proposals

On April 30, 1889, the Twelfth District light house engineer, William H. Heuer, published this advertisement:

*Proposals will be received at this office until noon on Thursday, the 30th day of May, for furnishing all the materials and labor necessary for the following named works:*

1. For the construction of a tower and keeper's dwelling, a double keeper's dwelling, fog-signal house, oil house, coal shed, three cisterns, two privies, and draining, grading, etc., the grounds of the Light-Station at Point San Luis, California.

2. For the metal work of a fourth order lantern.

*Separate proposals will be received for each class of work, specifications, drawings, and full information relative to which can be obtained on application to this office.*

*The right is reserved to reject any or all bids, and to waive any defects.*

**Only two bids were received by the deadline of May 30, 1889, and both were rejected.**

The job was re-advertised, but with the lantern omitted. For cost reasons, the Light House Board decided to

have the lantern manufactured at its general supplies depot on Staten Island in New York City. Without the lantern work, eight bids were received. When the bids were opened on July 15, 1889, the lowest by far, at \$18,893, was Kenney's. The next lowest, from an Oakland bidder, was \$24,448. The highest was \$38,000, from a bidder in San Francisco.

## The Low Bidder

Kenney, born in 1844 in Pennsylvania (or perhaps Maine—the record is unclear), was 45 years old when he submitted his bid. His wife, Rebecca Ellen, also born in Pennsylvania, was 39. The couple had two children who survived past infancy: a son, Frank Allen Kenney, born about 1872, and a daughter, Grace Mae Kenney, born in 1883.

By 1888, the family had moved to Santa Barbara and George Kenney established himself as a contractor and builder. If he actually did build anything, either in Santa Barbara or elsewhere, it is lost to time, but he must have had some construction experience in order to pass himself off as a responsible bidder on the lighthouse contract. However, even if not successful himself, he managed to secure at least one backer whose success as a contractor was quite well-known.

## Kenney Gets the Contract

In July 1889, the Secretary of the Treasury awarded the contract to Kenney, and by September 1889, the contract had been agreed to and executed by both sides.

What Kenney may not have taken seriously enough was one particular contract clause:

*The work must be completed and delivered at the dates named in the specifications, and for each and every day's delay in completing and delivering the work beyond such dates the sum of \$25 per day will be forfeited, the forfeiture to be enforced at the discretion of the Secretary of the Treasury; and it is understood that the time of completion of the contract must be especially observed, and is to be considered as part of the essence of the contract, and that the penalty for failure will be strictly enforced.*

The completion date was set for December 15, 1889.

Another contract clause advised bidders the work would be under the "personal supervision of an agent of the Light House Establishment" who would inspect all materials and workmanship. A room suitable for an office and living quarters for the agent, outfitted with a table, heating-stove and fuel, was to be provided by Kenney at no charge and Kenney was to provide the agent with "subsistence of good quality" at a reasonable charge.

These two contract clauses would come to haunt Kenney and, along with Mother Nature and his own underestimation of the cost of the work, prove to be his undoing.



Point San Luis light station under construction. Rear of head keeper's dwelling and tower, rear of fog signal building.

### The Contractor Gets Underway

Having secured the contract, Kenney set about securing workmen and buying materials. At least some materials were purchased locally.

For a time, construction seemed to be moving right along. In October 1889, the *San Luis Obispo Daily Republic* reported:

*Mr. Kinney [sic], the contractor for building the Point San Luis Lighthouse, was in town yesterday. The foundations of the buildings are well under way and the work is progressing favorably. The brick for the work is obtained from the yard of Mrs. Schow near this city.*

### Problems Arise. Completion of the Light Station is Delayed.

However well the work started out, by December 1889, the local press was reporting construction issues:

*The work on the lighthouse will be resumed today, the inclement weather having materially interfered with any vigorous prosecution of the construction. A few weeks of fair weather will see the contract completed and ready for occupancy.*

It will come as no surprise to the reader that Kenney wasn't finished when the due date came and went. On December 30, 1889, Heuer wrote to the Light

House Board about the delay in the contract's completion, recommending in spite of Kenney's protests that the twenty-five dollar a day penalty be enforced.

On January 31, 1890, the local paper reported:

*From Mr. [William] Evans<sup>5</sup> we hear that the lighthouse building, by vigorous exertions, had all been closed in, and the windows all put in before the storm had reached its height so that work can now proceed without regard to the weather. There are fourteen men at work on the interior, and it is reported that the contract will be completed and ready to turn over to the government in about three weeks. The government inspector seems to have occasioned a great deal of unnecessary trouble and delay, and the season has been anything but a favorable one for the rapid prosecution of the work.*



Point San Luis light station under construction. Double keepers' dwelling in foreground at right, fog signal building in foreground at left, head keeper's dwelling and tower in back.



## The Inspector

The government inspector the local paper referred to was George Washington Bolan. At the time Heuer took over as Twelfth District light house engineer in November 1887, there were eight employees in his San Francisco office, including three construction superintendents. One of these construction superintendents was Bolan, and it was Bolan who Heuer assigned to oversee Kenney's work.

Per the contract, Bolan's job was to inspect all materials and workmanship. Bolan may have overstepped his authority, or he may have felt duty-bound to step in, faced by what he may have seen as Kenney's incompetence. Either way, by 1895, Bolan was no longer a construction superintendent but, instead, reported to Heuer as "superintendent of repairs."

## The Lighthouse Is Finally Completed. Its Construction "A Disastrous Business."

In April 1890, the *San Luis Obispo Tribune* reported:

*At last the construction of the lighthouse for the government may be considered practically completed. It is to be turned over to Uncle Sam on the 10th of next month. . . . The light house contract has been a disastrous business. We yearn for the contractors or more especially for some of their innocent backers. It was taken several thousand dollars too low, has been unfortunate in management and in other ways. The government inspector was unfriendly and created and multiplied unnecessary work and additional loss, and altogether it is a monument of competitive folly and a lesson to fools in general who fancy a government contract is necessarily a mine of wealth.*

One of those "innocent backers" was James Anson Brown.

## Kenney's Bondsman

Finally, on May 14, 1890, the contract was completed. The Light House Board, in its 1890 official report, noted:

*The bids for the construction of this station were opened July 15, and contract was made with the lowest bidder. When the time for completion, December 15, 1889, arrived, the work was only about half finished. Since that time the construction has been prosecuted under the direction of the contractor's bondsmen, and was finally completed and turned over to the Government on May 14, 1890. . . . The wharf, derrick, etc. used by the contractor to land material during construction were purchased, and will be useful in the future in handling supplies.*

James Anson Brown was one of Kenney's bondsmen. The wharf, derrick and bridge were purchased from his widow. She had furnished the funds for the landing's construction and apparently held the title to it.

Brown was born in the Midwest about 1842. He married Catharine Jane Snyder, born about 1845. They had one child, a daughter, born in 1870, who lived only to the age of six. By the 1870s, the couple was living in Modesto, Calif., where Brown was working as a grain dealer. By 1887, the couple had moved to Santa Barbara, where Brown set himself up in business as a contractor, specializing in road work, with an office at 1007 State Street. The Santa Barbara *Morning Press* commented that he was "one of the largest contractors in the State." But Brown died in October 1889—at the age of only 47—when the lighthouse project was just getting underway.

George Kenney, who was apparently short of cash, had somehow managed to interest Brown in the performance of the lighthouse contract. The *Morning Press* reported some ten years later that Brown had entered into an agreement with Kenney to furnish labor, funds, and general assistance to Kenney with the lighthouse project, in return for forty percent of the profits. As part of their agreement, Kenney was to turn over to Brown progress payments from the government as he received them. Brown solicited the First National Bank of San Luis Obispo to advance funds to Kenney.



Portrait of Washington Irving Nichols

## The Bondsman's Widow

Brown's widow, Catharine J. Brown, was named executrix of his estate and put up for sale his road grading equipment. It turns out she withdrew the offer of sale. A later sale of the road grading outfit would figure into several lawsuits involving her husband's estate and the First National Bank of San Luis Obispo, suits becoming somewhat famous in California case law<sup>3</sup> and grinding on until at least 1903.

Before these more well-known cases, Mrs. Brown filed an unsuccessful lawsuit, in 1891, against the man she claimed was her attorney, Washington Irving ("W.I.") Nichols,<sup>4</sup> for \$15,000 in damages plus interest at seven per cent and the costs of the suit. Nichols had come to Santa Barbara county from Calaveras county, California, some years before and at the time the suit was filed, was "living at Lompoc, where he is the leading attorney," according to the *Morning Press*.

In the suit, Mrs. Brown alleged that on November 4, 1890, she signed an agreement at Nichols' request. The agreement she signed authorized the First National Bank of San Luis Obispo, of which Robert Edgar ("R.E.") Jack was then president, to pay money to Kenney out of her bank account. However, she claimed she did not understand the terms of the agreement, believing instead the bank would not have authority to draw on her account. The bank, authorized by the agreement, paid Kenney at least \$15,000 from her account and now held a judgment against her for



Early photograph of R. E. Jack, as a ranchero circa 1874-78. Bradley and Rulofson, San Francisco. Jack House Collection.

\$2,000. The suit alleged that her husband had provided security for Kenney's contract. In consideration, he was to receive a percentage of the profits, but no profits were realized.

Nichols denied he was Mrs. Brown's attorney, while acknowledging his law firm, Putnam and Nichols, had been employed by Mrs. Brown's agent, one William John Graves, to serve as attorneys for her husband's estate. Nichols denied he advised her to sign the agreement and denied her assertion she did not comprehend its contents. Nichols also said he had no knowledge regarding the bank's advancing money to Kenney in consideration of Mrs. Brown's guaranty. Nichols did state Mrs. Brown's husband had an interest before his death in the government contract to construct the Point San Luis light station, became surety on the bond of Kenney in the sum of \$20,000, and had guaranteed the drafts of Kenney upon the First National Bank of San Luis Obispo in the amount of \$15,000 or more. Brown, he said, had expected to realize \$2,000 in profits from his interest in the contract.

Graves, Nichols asserted, was the authorized agent of Mr. Brown and was superintending the work at the time of Brown's death. Upon Brown's death, Nichols said, Graves returned to Santa Barbara, gave a report to Mrs. Brown about the status of the lighthouse's construction, and was retained by Mrs. Brown as her authorized agent and asked to continue with the work.

It was Graves, Nichols said, who drafted the agreement Mrs. Brown ultimately signed, sending the agreement to Nichols' law firm and asking Nichols to obtain her signature. Nichols said he did as asked and recalled that Mrs. Brown, understanding her liability, told him Graves had advised her the bank was refusing to advance any more money for the completion of the contract without her personal guaranty to cover past as well as future advances. Kenney, Graves told her, was threatening to bring suit against the estate unless she arranged with the bank to furnish money to complete the work in accordance with her late husband's agreement.

Nichols stated his belief that the losses and damages incurred by Mrs. Brown were wholly due to the excessive cost of construction, including the fine imposed by the government for the delay in the contract's completion. Nichols blamed Kenney's dishonesty, as well as Graves' neglect in allowing Kenney to keep what money the government paid him without paying it over to the bank. Nichols also stated that Mrs. Brown had gone up to San Luis Obispo, employed an attorney there to advise her on all matters relating to the contract, but did not then or afterwards revoke her guaranty to the bank or otherwise seek to relieve herself from future liability. He concluded by stating that Mrs. Brown, on or about April 1891, was stricken with paralysis "by reason of which her mind has been impaired" and that designing persons had "taken advantage of her weakness to institute and prosecute these proceedings."

## Catherine Brown dies but the lawsuits continue

Catharine Brown died in April 1892. A new suit, this time against R. E. Jack, was filed by Josiah Horton, the successor executor of James Anson Brown's estate. Horton died in 1899, but the case against Jack was continued by another successor executor, Kate C. Snyder.<sup>5</sup> These suits had to do with Mrs. Brown turning over the road grading equipment, which was part of Brown's estate, to the bank for sale, and whether the roughly six thousand dollars realized by the bank on the sale of the equipment could be used to settle Mrs. Brown's personal debt to the bank occasioned by her advancing money to Kenney. All in all, five suits were filed. Only the lawyers involved in the suits made any money.

## The Government Blames Kenney for the Delay

A July 17, 1890 letter from James F. Gregory, the Light House Board's Engineer Secretary, to the Secretary of the Treasury, provides more detail about what caused the delay in the lighthouse's completion, albeit from the government's point of view:

*The Light House Board has the honor to inform the Department that the contract entered into July 27, 1889 by Mr. George W. Kenney of Santa Barbara, Cal. with the Engineer of the 12th Light House District for the construction of the buildings, cisterns, &c. for the Point San Luis, Cal. Light-station was finally completed on 14 May '90.*

*This contract should have been completed 15 December '89, the penalty provided for the delay being \$25 per day. The number of days' delay was 149 ½ and the forfeiture incurred was \$3,737.50.*

*The Engineer of the 12th Light House District reports that the delay was not occasioned by any fault of the Government, nor by bad weather, but was due to indifference, carelessness and lack of ability on the part of the contractor, who throughout a great portion of the time neglected his work by absenting himself therefrom.*

*The report of the Engineer of the 12th Light House District of 10 July '90, in which all the facts bearing on this case are fully set forth, is enclosed, together with the original and supplemental petitions of the contractor, asking that the forfeiture not be enforced.*

*In view of the facts set forth in the report of the Engineer of the 12th Light House District, the Board recommends that the forfeiture incurred for delay be enforced.*

*Respectfully yours,*

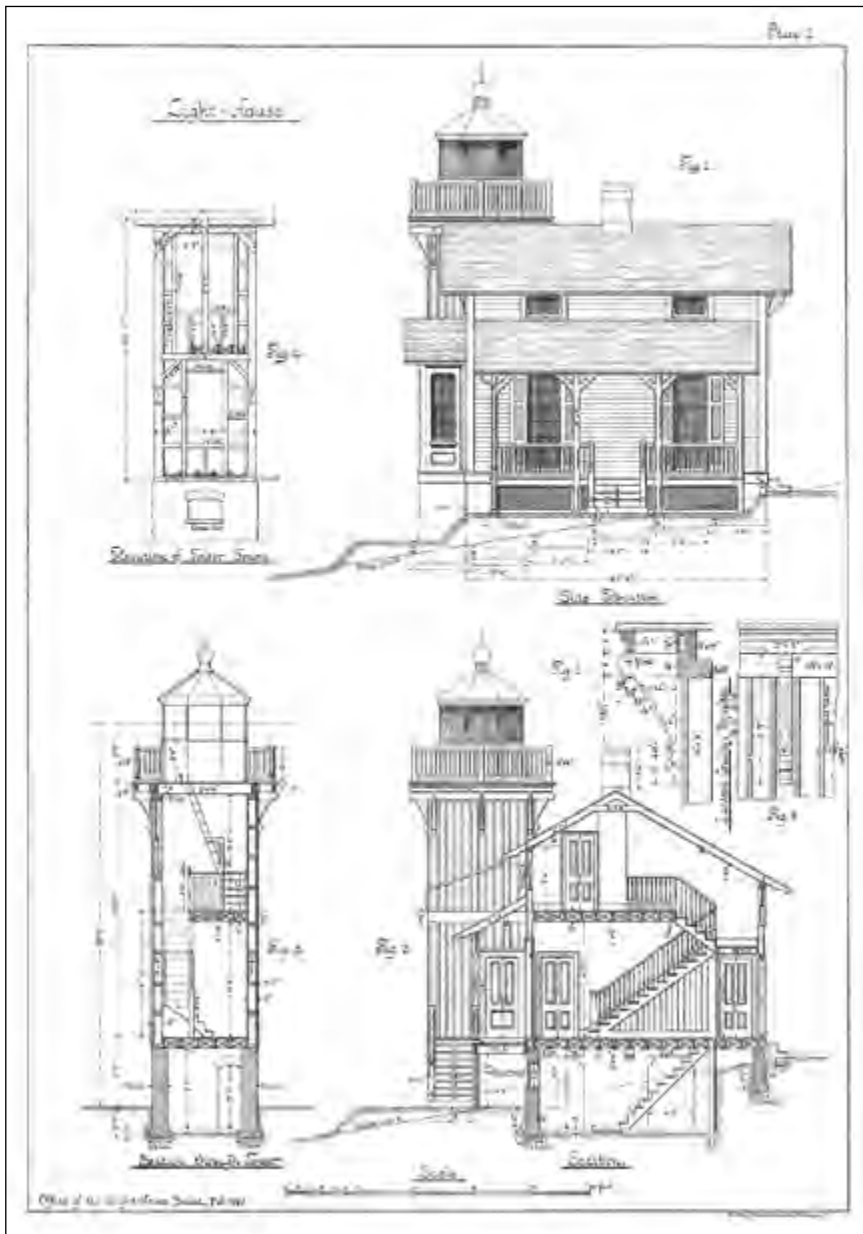
*James F. Gregory  
Major of Engineers, U.S.A.  
Engineer Secretary*

Unfortunately, both Heuer's report and Kenney's petitions perished in the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and fire.

## Kenney Heads North, Continues Attempts to Get Penalty Rescinded

After losing his shirt on the contract, Kenney left Santa Barbara. Indeed, he may have left while the lighthouse was still under construction as the letter from Gregory suggests.

By 1897, however, he had hired a young attorney, Herbert Mills Anthony, to plead his case. Anthony wrote a letter to the Light House Board in March 1897 to try to recover the \$3,737.50 in penalty charges for the



Bolan, Kenney's attorney wrote, compelled Kenney to excavate from two to two and half feet of ground where the tower and keeper's dwelling now stand and that, "in consequence the Light in the tower is not as high by two feet and some inches as the Chart calls for."

delay in the contract's completion. Two months later, Anthony wrote another letter to the Light House Board, this time pointing the finger directly at Bolan.

How the Light House Board responded to Anthony's letters is unknown.

### Principal Players in this Story Pass On

By 1899, George W. Kenney, James Anson Brown, Catharine J. Brown, Washington Irving Nichols, William John Graves, George W. Bolan, and Josiah Horton had all passed into eternity. The First National Bank of San Luis Obispo, renamed the County Bank, had failed.

Kenney died on August 30, 1899. He was 55 years old. At the time of his death he was living in Soulsbyville, California, in Tuolumne County. His estate included a homestead in that county valued at about \$1,000,

household furniture, a piano, and some mining claims of unknown value – including the Lottie Quartz Mine (named for his granddaughter), R.E.K. Quartz Mine (named for his wife), and the Gracie Quartz Mine (named for his daughter). His entire estate and effects were valued at no more than \$1,500. Indeed, he died a poor man.

### Efforts to Recoup Penalty for Late Delivery Resumed

By 1900, Kenney's son, Frank, was married, working as a house carpenter and living in Alameda, California, with his wife, Nora, and their three sons, Elmer, Leo, and Ernest. Their daughter, Lottie, was living with Rebecca in Soulsbyville. Why Lottie was living with her grandmother and not with her parents is unknown. Kenney's daughter, Grace, was living in Sonora, Calif., apprenticed as a milliner to a man with a business in men's furnishings.

In 1903, Grace married Thomas Henry Murray. They had a daughter, Mary Ellen, born in 1904. Lottie Kenney died of diphtheria at the age of nine that same year. Rebecca, George Kenney's widow, also passed away in 1904. Grace was named executrix of her small estate.

It was perhaps in Grace's capacity as executrix that, in 1912, an attempt was again made to recover the \$3,737.50 in penalty charges for completing the light station 149-1/2 days late, this time by the firm of Randall, Bartlett and White, her attorneys.

Grace's attorneys wrote to the Secretary of the Board of Light House Commissioners on February 6, 1912, enclosing a copy of an undated letter written by Kenney explaining the delay:

*Dear Sir:*

*We are herewith enclosing a copy of a letter written by G. W. Kenney, formerly of Soulsbyville, Calif., to his attorneys explaining a matter of which we desire some information. This matter was taken up with the Light House Board by Messrs. Nowlin and Fasset, attorneys of San Francisco, and they reported that the matter was about to be settled. Their last communication was April 5, 1906, a little less than two weeks before the earthquake in which all of their records were destroyed. We are representing the daughter of Mr. Kenney and desire to ascertain the present status of the matter.*

*Any information you can give us regarding this matter will be greatly appreciated.*

*Very truly yours,*

*Randall, Bartlett & White*

*By L. B. Randall*



## The undated letter from Kenney read:

Dear Sir:

*I built a light house plant for the Government at Pt. Harford, San Luis Obispo Co., in 1889 and 1890. I was one hundred and forty-nine and one half days over the time I was to have the plant completed. This plant has given entire satisfaction from the first starting of the plant. Through the agents in charge of the 12th district, and their recommendations, I have been kept out of \$3,737.50 for over time. The government agents tried to claim that I was incompetent. This question can be answered by referring to the Light House Reports. These reports speak in the highest terms for that class of a plant. Major Heuer recommended to the Light House Board that they enforce the forfeitures on me on account of my incompetence.*

*I wish to say to you that it was the rain of 1889 and 1890 which was the principal cause. I saw by the Light House Report that the plant has given entire satisfaction. You will find the report on rainfall in San Luis Obispo from Oct. 8th until the close of the rainy season. The heavy rain compelled me to suspend operations entirely for weeks and I could not put wet boards in the building for the inspectors would not allow it.*

*I sent a petition to Washington asking for an extension of time. It was not granted. You know that no man has control of the elements. Other contractors have had extensions of time granted them, and I cannot see why I should be a special target. I am up in years and am poor with a family to support.*

*Trusting you will interest yourself on my behalf, I am*

*Yours truly,*

*(Signed) G. W. Kenney*

## On February 15, 1912, The Commissioner wrote back:

Gentlemen:

*Your letter of February 6, inclosing [sic] copy of letter written by Mr. G. W. Kenney in reference to his claim for \$3,737.50, in connection with the building of lighthouse works at San Luis Obispo, has been received. Briefly stated, the facts are as follows:*

*On July 27, 1889, a contract was entered into by Mr. George W. Kenney with the engineer of the then Twelfth Lighthouse District for the construction of certain buildings for lighthouse purposes near San Luis Obispo, California. The time of completion was set at December 15, 1889, and the work was finally completed on May 14, 1890, liquidated damages in the sum of \$3,737.50 being incurred thereby.*

*Mr. Kenney filed a number of petitions and letters protesting against the enforcement of this provision, which were duly investigated and reported upon by the Light House Board and on July 17, 1890, a letter was addressed by the Board to the Secretary of the Treasury recommending enforcement, which action was approved by the Secretary on the same date.*

*The matter was subsequently reviewed several times and on each occasion the original recommendations were concurred in by officers of the Board. It may be stated that there is no record in this office of the letter of April 5, 1906, to which you refer.*

*From careful examination of the correspondence on file bearing on this matter, the Bureau is of the opinion that the findings of the Light House Board were correct and just.*

*Respectfully,*

*G. R. Putnam,  
Commissioner*

Putnam asked, however, that his letter be copied to the Eighteenth (formerly Twelfth) District light house inspector, together with the February 6, 1912 letter from Grace's attorneys, for their review and remarks.

The inspector's office replied that "as all of the records of this office were destroyed by the fire on April 18, 1906, this office can make no definite statement of facts covering the claim of Mr. G.W. Kenney [sic] for \$3,737.50 in connection with the building of lighthouse works at San Luis Obispo Light-Station, California."

Twenty-two years after the San Luis Obispo light station was built, efforts to recoup some of Kenney's losses finally came to an end.

## Afterword

George Kenney's son, Frank, passed away in 1911. Kenney's daughter, Grace Kenney Murray, married Thomas J. Healy in 1916. What became of Murray is unknown. By 1920, Grace had moved to El Paso, Texas, where she worked as a seamstress. By 1930, Grace was widowed and the owner of a hem-stitching shop, living with her daughter, Mary Ellen Healy, and her sister-in-law, Mary J. Healy. Both Grace's daughter and sister-in-law were working in the shop, her daughter as store manager. In August 1961, Grace passed away, still living in El Paso.

In a "small world" coincidence, Frank Kenney's son, Elmer, had a daughter, Leonyce Kenney — George Kenney's great-granddaughter — who married into the Winkenbach family. The author's friend, Patty Winkenbach, is her niece. Patty and her husband relocated to Avila Beach, California, from Oakland some years ago and live nearby the Point San Luis Light Station. Patty learned only recently about her connection to the light station's history.

## Endnotes

1. James F. Gregory, Engineer Secretary to the Light House Board, signed the plans but did not draw them.
2. The Twelfth District extended from the boundary between California and Mexico to the boundary between California and Oregon.
3. Horton v. Jack, Snyder v. Jack.
4. Nichols died on September 4, 1895, at the age of 57. He is buried in Santa Barbara cemetery, although his headstone reads "W. E. Nickol." SBCGS volunteer Dorothy Oksner researched cemetery records and the Civil War archives to determine that the deceased's name was actually Washington Irving Nichols. Dorothy posts, on *findagrave.com*, "the government military headstone was ordered with the wrong name or the order was misread. The order for the stone indicates the death date of 9/4/1895, and the stone is placed in the Nichols' lot."
5. Josiah Horton and Kate C. Snyder were brother and sister. Kate Snyder, née Horton, was the widow of Catharine's brother, Daniel Snyder, who may have perished in the Civil War. So, Catharine and Kate were sisters-in-law. Why the court named Kate's brother as successor executor of Brown's estate when Catharine died, and then named Kate when Horton died, is unknown. the court named Kate's brother as successor executor of Brown's estate when Catharine died, and then named Kate when Horton died, is unknown

*Kathy Mastako is a volunteer docent and researcher with the Point San Luis Light Station. She is extremely grateful to the SBCGS volunteers who provided valuable research assistance for this article.*

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# Author Guidelines - *Ancestors West*

Updated March 2019

**A**RTICLES FOR *ANCESTORS WEST* focus on useful genealogy or research sources, helpful research strategies, compelling historical accounts, and interesting case studies. The items represent the mutual interests of the Santa Barbara County Genealogical Society membership. Each issue follows one or more themes that are meant to draw together a selection of content within the journal; submissions are not limited to the themes, however.

## Manuscripts

Suggested length is from 250 to 2500 words. Longer pieces or serial pieces are also published. Submit your document in Word format if possible. If not, please submit in text format. Endnotes are recommended, especially for books, articles and websites. Please follow the *Chicago Manual of Style* and the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* for usage.

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Provide one or two sentences about the author(s).

## Deadlines

Submissions with images are due the 1st of the month in February, May, and August, and October 15 for the November Issue. Address submissions to the editor, Deborah Kaska, at [kaska@lifesci.ucsb.edu](mailto:kaska@lifesci.ucsb.edu)

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