



Making DNA Connections Through Descendancy Research

Tim Bingaman, AG, Research Specialist
bingamantd@familysearch.org

Descendancy research can add a new dimension to your family history research. If you have a brick wall problem, bring your research forward. You will meet distant relations who may share an interest in your research and may supply information that will help you break through that tough research problem. Descendancy research can also improve your research skills. Most importantly, your living relations may have family artifacts or pictures that can bring your family history to life.

WHY WOULD ONE CONDUCT DESCENDANCY RESEARCH?

First of all, it's fun! In one instance, a woman learned that the lady who cut and styled her hair was a distant cousin. She did not know this prior to descendancy research. Trips to the salon became more fun! By researching an ancestral couple, you will discover new family members with whom you share a common ancestry. You will begin to realize your family members are more numerous than you thought. Discovering your extended family members will give you a better idea of the whole family experiences. You can learn about their trials and tribulations, how they interacted with each other and how their life experience shaped their character.

1. Find all ancestral relatives who have no descendants. You are trying to build a complete picture of the family, not just gather information on direct line family members. Plus, information found on these individuals may assist in locating additional descendants. These include those who:
 - Died as children
 - Never married
 - If married, didn't have children
2. Locate living relatives of a common ancestor. These living relatives may be conducting research. They may provide additional details and information about your family. If distant relations have pictures, ask if you can have copies, and offer to pay for any costs. Pictures are wonderful because you can put a face to the names and dates you have stared at for years. Also, your distant relations may be researching the same lines and you can coordinate your efforts.
3. Discover original and copied family artifacts. Family memorabilia may not be in your family, but certainly may be in collateral descending lines. Probate records may give clues as to who inherited family heirlooms, such as:
 - Family bibles.
 - Photographs are usually the first to go. When a parent or grandparent dies, individuals begin to go through the belongings of the deceased. Inevitably, pictures are discovered and many of those pictures are not identified. The younger generation may have no idea of the identity of individuals in the photos. So where do the photos end up? In the

garbage. In one instance, a young woman was going through her mother's belongings in the attic. She found a farm picture, which she had not seen before, with two individuals standing in front of the farm house. She contacted me, and I was able to identify the gentleman standing in front of the house as her third great-grandfather.

- Documents
- Certificates
- Newspaper clippings
- Letters
- Funeral cards
- Family Stories

4. Contact family members in the following ways:

- Interviews
- Phone calls
- Letters
- E-mails
- Internet

DECIDING WHICH ANCESTRAL COUPLE TO BEGIN YOUR DESCENDANCY RESEARCH MAY BE CRUCIAL.

Choosing a couple from the mid-to-late nineteenth century is usually a good place to start. There are usually more records available for that time period. Another consideration is how many children were born to the ancestor. Usually, a family that has between five to seven children is a good candidate. If you choose a couple too early in time, prior to 1800, the task may become overwhelming. You may want to try:

1. An emigrant ancestor
2. A famous or infamous ancestor
3. A military ancestor
4. An ancestor whose lineage is questionable. This would be an individual that is your brick wall problem. Descendancy research may assist in breaking through that brick wall.

SURVEY DATABASES, BOOKS AND OTHER SOURCES TO SEE IF PREVIOUS RESEARCH HAS BEEN COMPLETED.

When beginning ancestral research, one of the first steps is to see if any research has been completed on that particular line. The same is true for descendancy research. Check for family histories on the Internet or in published materials to see if someone has already researched the family line. Search lineage-linked databases to determine if others have posted information that link into the lines which you are researching. While many of books and databases may not be complete or sourced, they can still be used as guides to direct your research.

1. Internet
 - Lineage-linked databases (Family Tree, Ancestry, Rootsweb, etc.)
 - Social Security Death Index
 - Genealogical web pages and blogs

- Commemorative publications
- 2. County or town histories
- 3. Family histories
- 4. Newspapers
 - Obituaries
 - Marriages and anniversaries
 - Pioneers

WHAT RECORDS SHOULD YOU USE?

In descendant research you use many of the same records that are used for ancestral research. However, instead of looking for clues to extend your pedigree, you want to identify the children from a particular couple. Census records are usually the best place to start. You can start with the 1850 federal census and usually trace the male descendants with little difficulty. The female lines are a bit more difficult, and you will have to check marriage records to obtain their married surnames. The Social Security Death Index, for those who died 1962 or later, is very useful to determine date of death. Once a date of death is known, search newspapers for obituaries. The obituaries will usually name survivors of the deceased. Once the survivor's names are known, depending on time period, you can search the Social Security Death Index for their death date to find an obituary, or check on-line people finder and phone directory sites. If the descendant is living, it will be time to make that phone call.

1. Family histories
2. Census
3. Marriage
4. Church
5. Newspapers
6. Probate
7. Land
8. On-line databases
 - Steve Morse website
 - Phone directories
 - People finder sites
 - Facebook

CALLING DISTANT RELATIONS CAN BE FUN AND FRIGHTENING.

At some point you will need to call a distant relation. While you share a common ancestry with the individual, you have never met nor previously spoken with them. This could be an uncomfortable experience because you do not know how they will respond to you. Tell them who you are and that you would like to talk about the "Jones" family history. Ask them if they have time to talk and if they are interested. If they are not interested, thank them for their time and move on. Usually, people who are not interested will be too timid to give you any information. Many times the older the individual the more willing they are to talk. They are grateful for the conversation, as few people visit them. A few things you should do when contacting individuals are:

1. Identify yourself.

2. Tell the distant relative why you are calling.
3. Tell the distant relative what your relationship is to them.
4. Share information.

THESE WEBSITES MAY BE HELPFUL.

Below are just a few sites that can assist you with descendency research. As you search you will discover additional sites. It is up to the researcher to determine which sites are best for their research. The following are listed in no particular order:

1. <http://genforum.genealogy.com/>
2. <http://news.google.com/newspapers>
3. <http://stevemorse.org/>
4. <http://www.ancestry.com/>
5. <http://www.facebook.com/>
6. <https://www.familysearch.org/>
7. <http://www.findagrave.com/>
8. <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/>
9. <http://usgenweb.org/>
10. <http://www.whitepages.com/>
11. <http://www.familytreenow.com/>
12. www.newspapers.com

Descendency research is a way to connect with distant relatives and possibly extend your pedigree. At the same time you may find family artifacts that will add to your knowledge concerning your family history.