

August 2006

# Family Chronicle

The Magazine for Families Researching their Roots

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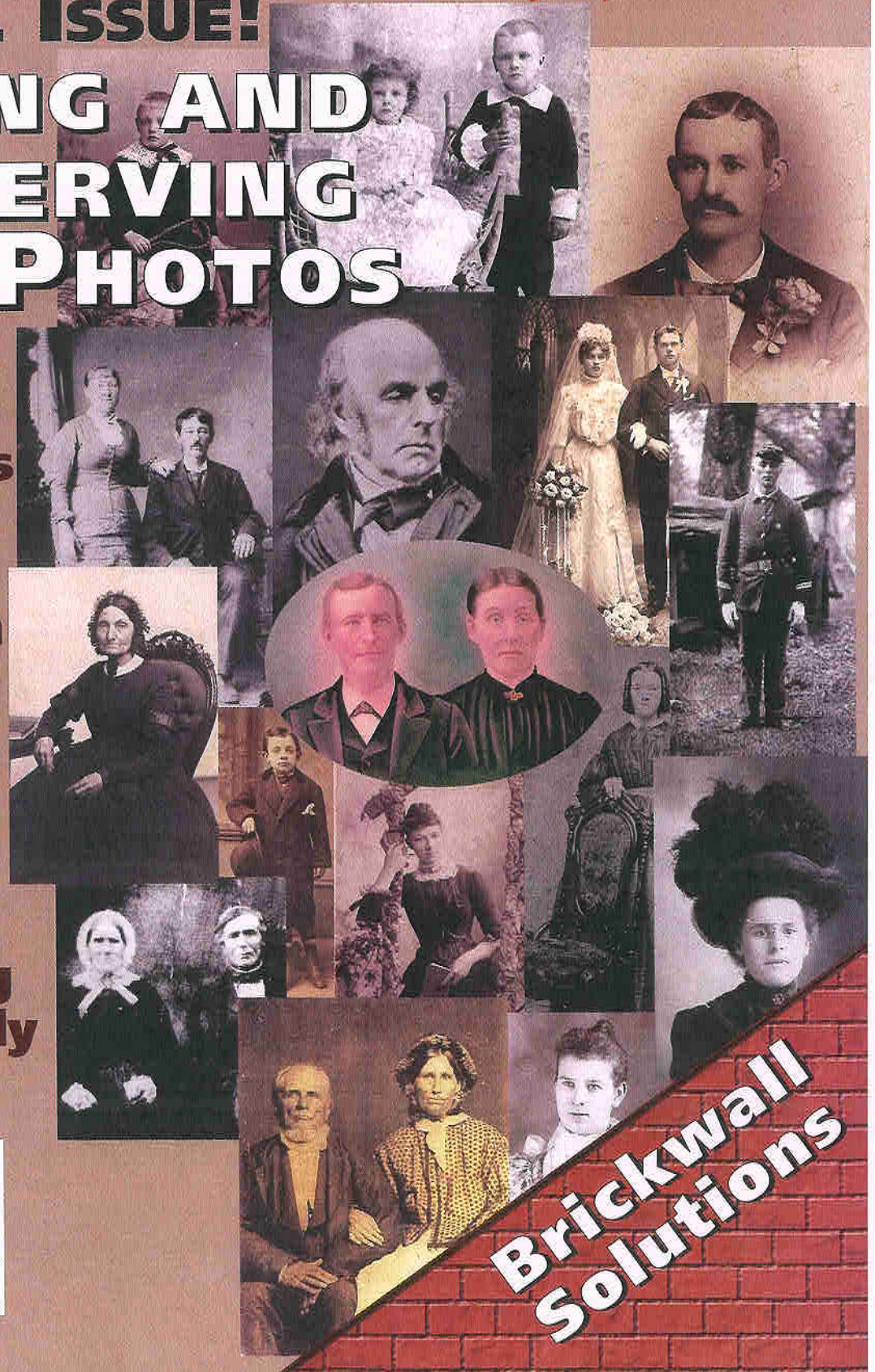
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\$7.50 US \$8.50 Cdn



August 2006

Publication Mail Agreement No. 40662022



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# Two Families: One Y Chromosome

Bonnie L. Schermer and Ugo A. Perego tell the tale of DNA success

MOLECULAR GENEALOGY IS a relatively new science that employs DNA techniques to link individuals in "family trees" based on the unique identification of common genetic markers. This is accomplished by using the information encoded in the genes of an individual to determine the level of "relatedness" to other individuals, families and populations. Therefore, pedigrees based on genetic data can reveal relationships not detectable in traditional genealogies based only on names, written records or oral traditions. Because DNA is inherited from our ancestors, it may be used to confidently link two apparently unrelated individuals into the same family group.

The most common genetic tool used by modern genealogists is the Y chromosome test. This particular chromosome is passed almost unchanged from father to son following a strict paternal inheritance pattern. Commercial laboratories offering affordable testing, numerous publications geared toward a family history audience and large online searchable databases have contributed to the popularity of Y chromosome testing over the past few years as the newest gadget in the genealogist's toolbox.

One of the leading research organizations in the field of genetic genealogy is the Salt Lake City-based Sorenson Molecular Genealogy Foundation (SMGF), [www.smgf.org](http://www.smgf.org). SMGF is a non-profit research group developing the world's largest database of correlated genealogical and genetic data.

During the process of gathering information for the worldwide database, SMGF staff often comes across interesting family histories that are worth retelling. This article is such an example and the capstone to 40 years of personal research about the true identity of author Bonnie L. Schermer's grandfather. Through a simple Y chromosome test, Schermer was able to

confirm her suspicions and bring two families together. This is her story in her own words:

"For nearly 80 years, my grandmother, parents, aunts and I unknowingly used the wrong surname. In the year 2000, we received strong anecdotal information that this was true. But, not until 2005, did my family have DNA evidence to back up the family story we had pieced together. Because the SMGF directed us to Gene Tree DNA Testing Center, [www.GeneTree.com](http://www.GeneTree.com) and Sorenson Genomics, [www.SorensonGenomics.com](http://www.SorensonGenomics.com), we now have that evidence.

When I was 12 years old, my church

ultimately achieved our goal. At the end of the year, we received our reward. The pastor, in a blinding display of creativity, presented each of us with a new King James Bible.

These Bibles had been published with a family tree chart bound between the Old and New Testaments. I was very anxious to fill in my chart, and grilled my parents for information. Next on my list: My paternal granddaddy.

Granddaddy was not a tall man, but there was nothing small about him. He was very round, very brusque, a balding carpenter with a growly voice and deep blue eyes behind tortoise-shell rimmed glasses. He chain-smoked unfiltered cigarettes. When he wanted to make us grandkids squeal, he would pick us up and "whisker" us, by rubbing his scratchy stubble across our faces. Because he was missing about one inch of the middle finger on his right

hand, we grandkids would ask what happened to it. Granddaddy would reply in all seriousness that a battleship had run over it, although sometimes he would say he had worn it off strumming a banjo. Altogether, he was a more-than-acceptable grandparent, and deeply loved.

As I filled in my ancestor chart, Granddaddy didn't actually lie to me about his parentage. He just let me assume that the name I had filled in for him was accurate. In fact, that name was one he had manufactured for himself in about 1921. He dutifully gave me the first names of his parents and grandpar-



Top: "Granddaddy" in Coastal Artillery uniform. Left: Levi and his wife.



sponsored a project. Anyone who read the entire (King James) Bible within one year would receive a prize. My mother and I began to read aloud, to each other, at the rate of at least one chapter per day and

ents (his mother was a Smith — not helpful to any genealogical search!), letting me assume that his father and paternal grandfather shared our surname. They did not.

After Granddaddy died of throat cancer in 1965, my aunts and I questioned Grandma about his family. Grandma was a tiny woman with brown eyes behind thick glasses and a quietly determined manner. She would play games with us grandkids, and recite for us long story poems which she had memorized as a child in school. She crocheted large tablecloths for each granddaughter's "hope chest". We all adored our Grandma. She had never met any of Granddaddy's family, but gave us a collection of old pictures that he had kept. Granddaddy had erased some information from the backs of these pictures, but left a few clues:

- A picture postcard of Granddaddy in Coastal Artillery uniform, dated 10 November 1909, postmarked "Fortress Monroe, Virginia".
- A picture labeled "my niece, Alice's daughter". Alice, Granddaddy's sister, had married and the picture is labeled with this family's correct surname and the location; Durango, Colorado.
- A picture of Granddaddy's brother, labeled "Levi and his wife", with no surname.
- A photo of Granddaddy with a well-dressed woman, inscribed with her full name, dated 30 August 1914.

My aunts organized a family reunion in 1983 and wrote a family history called *Thanks For The Memories*. Their family lived in Dover, Arkansas between 1930 and 1934, which dates the following story:

"While we were living in Dover, Daddy, a man named Mr. Tuck and another man went to New Mexico and Colorado to see about work. At least part of Daddy's family lived in Durango, Colorado, having settled there after leaving Tennessee where Daddy was born and after stopping in the Indian Territory (Oklahoma) and New Mexico. On the trip, Daddy and his friends ran out of gas several times and gasoline trucks came by and filled up their

tank for them. Also, they helped themselves to corn in the fields along the roads, cooking it over an open fire. They camped out every night. Daddy saw his family and they had a dinner for him."

After Grandma's death in 1989, I began pushing harder to find more information about Granddaddy.

I obtained a copy of Granddaddy's Social Security Application from 1936. There were slight differences from the information he had given me in 1962, but nothing helpful. I traveled to the town given as his place of birth, in Tennessee, but found no trace of him or of his large family at the library or at the courthouse, nor among the records at Knoxville and Nashville. Since Social Security applicants were supposed to give proof of place of birth, I later came to believe that the clerk who took Granddaddy's application also took a small personal gratuity. Granddaddy was not born in Tennessee.

I traveled to the Casemate Museum at Ft. Monroe, Virginia, showed my picture of Granddaddy to David J. Johnson, the museum technician there and got a report: "The 1909 photo depicts a private in the Coast Artillery Corps. I cannot make out the number on his cap insignia, which designates his unit (company). It appears to be a single digit. I looked through our unit records for 1907-10 but could not find any mention... possibly... he was merely visiting a friend here or was here for temporary duty."

Then, I posted a message on a genealogy website for La Plata County, Colorado. In January of 2000, a researcher in that area contacted me. She found Granddaddy's sister (whose name we got from the picture of her daughter) and her husband, buried in a local cemetery. She then looked for Granddaddy's sister's marriage record and later found the woman's parents buried in the same cemetery. She located the rest of Granddaddy's family in the 1910 census and other records. Bingo! This family's given names — but *not* their surname — matched those that we had.

This researcher put me in touch with Orella Chadwick, who had written a book, *Trails Trod*, in 1978 about Granddaddy's birth family. Orella's father had an older brother, James, but the family had not seen him since 1933. These people hailed from North Carolina, but were living near Durango, Colorado at the time of the following story. Here is what *Trails Trod* says about "Uncle Jimmie":

"It was probably the worst of the Depression. One day, a man came up the lane, a stranger, and not many strangers appeared over on our side of the tracks. We were all out in the yard and stood around as Mother talked to him. He asked for Daddy and Mother explained wherever he was and then he said, 'I'm his oldest brother, Jimmie.' We were excited; we had heard of him, but never seen him because he was still so far as we knew in North Carolina. As soon as he said who he was we knew and saw the resemblance in those blue, blue eyes so like Daddy's. There was much rejoicing as though 'the prodigal son had returned.'

"How the news traveled so fast and far I don't know but they had a big dance and feast for him. It seemed he was preaching and wasn't doing too badly because even in hard times people always find a few cents to give to anyone 'bringing God's word.'

"Uncle Murray says, 'He drank too much of the bootleg booze and was ashamed and when we got up the next morning he was gone and that is the last time we ever saw him.'

"He had left a wife and four or five foster children in North Carolina. Later, I wrote to one of them, the eldest I think... She wrote, 'I don't care if we ever see or hear of him again.' There was so much bitterness in those few words that I felt sorry."

My aunts and I were stunned by these revelations from Orella, but they fit with everything we knew. The name of the wife Uncle Jimmie had left in North Carolina, listed in *Trails Trod*, is the same as the name of the well-dressed woman with Granddaddy in his

old picture. Orella's book even contained a copy of the picture Granddaddy had kept of his brother Levi, with his wife. This brother was Orella's father.

I traveled to North Carolina, checked census, vital and land records. Driving down a road, I stopped for directions. An old man invited me into his home, because the wind was bitterly cold. Every surface of his front room was stacked with newspapers which he would burn in his stove, the only source of heat. He cleared a space at the end of a couch for me. As I sat, talking to him, the hair rose on the back of my neck as I realized where I was. This man's house had been built on the foundations of the very cabin where Granddaddy had been born! Later, I returned with my aunt and daughter, and we walked to the cemetery behind the house, where Granddaddy's ancestors are buried.

I found out that one of Granddaddy's daughters from his first marriage, born about 1920, is named Vivian. My aunt, born to my grandmother in late 1921, is also named Vivian. Granddaddy must have liked the name.

I wrote to the technician at the Ft. Monroe museum, asking for Uncle Jimmie's information, and received a report containing a physical description compatible with Granddaddy's appearance: *Farmer, born North Carolina, fair skin, blue eyes, 5'4" tall, enlisted Jefferson Barracks, Missouri; Honorably discharged 13 May 1911 Galveston, Texas.* There is no record that he ever took a leave or furlough during his entire term in the army, and the discharge report says "character excellent".

Having concluded that Uncle Jimmie and Granddaddy are the same person, I contacted his first family in North Carolina, but the bitterness remains a barrier between us.

In the summer of 2003, I attended a reunion held in Shippenburg, Cumberland County, Pennsylvania. This event was open to anyone descended from Cumberland County residents of the 1700s.

A representative of the SMGF was present at the event, taking

GeneTree™			
DNA TESTING CENTER			
LOCUS	Male 1	Male 2	Comparison
DYS385	12,14	12,14	match
DYS388	12	12	match
DYS389I	13	13	match
DYS389II	29	29	match
DYS390	24	24	match
DYS391	11	11	match
DYS392	13	13	match
DYS393	13	13	match
DYS394	14	14	match
DYS426	12	12	match
DYS437	14	14	match
DYS438	12	12	match
DYS439	12	12	match
DYS447	25	25	match
DYS454	11	11	match
DYS455	11	11	match
DYS460	11	11	match
DYS461	12	12	match
DYS462	11	11	match
GGAAT1B07	10	10	match
YCAII	19,23	19,23	match
Y-GATA-A10	12	12	match
Y-GATA-C4	23	23	match
Y-GATA-H4	11	11	match
DYS441	14	14	match
DYS442	12	12	match
DYS444	12	12	match
DYS445	12	12	match
DYS446	13	13	match
DYS448	19	19	match
DYS449	30	30	match
DYS452	11	11	match
DYS456	16	16	match
DYS458	18	18	match
DYS459	8,10	8,10	match
DYS463	22	22	match
DYS464	15,17	15,17	match

DNA samples and ancestor charts from interested participants. During that occasion, I had the opportunity of sharing my 80-years-long family anecdote and I was told of a genetic test that could probably answer the doubts about Granddaddy once and for all. They directed me to Gene Tree, a leader in the field of genetic testing specialized in genealogical and paternity cases. They also offered to tutor me during the process so that I could better understand the meaning of the genetic results.

Subsequently, two male individuals, one from each family line, were tested with one of Gene Tree's kits. All the DNA markers tested returned as a perfect match, which strongly indicate that these

two men (who have never met, and who now live at opposite ends of the US) share a male ancestor within a few generations. The time from testing to results was slightly over one month. (See table, left.)

I barely understand the science of the testing, but I'm satisfied that my quest to identify Granddaddy has reached an accurate conclusion. Last year, one of my aunts met Orella at a family reunion in Virginia. During the summer, I traveled to Pennsylvania to meet Orella, and introduced her to my other aunt. Orella, her daughter, my daughter and I spent two days ancestor hunting together.

What does my family gain from all this? We have a deeper understanding of who we are and how we came to be this way. We have more sympathy for our ancestors and their frailties, more pride in their accomplishments. All of us do the best we can, and we love each other.

FC


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*Have roots*

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