



August 15 2022

Retson Genealogy Newsletter

This newsletter may interest in the genealogy and in particular those related to persons related directly or indirectly to Grace and Clifford Retson. My website is located at <http://www.retson.ca/retsongenealogy.html>

DNA Tests and Genealogy

In June 2007 as part of my orientation as in coming President of the local Rotary club I attended a Rotary International convention in Salt Lake City. Salt Lake City is the site of the headquarters of the Church of Later Day Saints and the repository of one of the greatest collections of genealogical data. One of the booths set up in the convention's House of Friendship was an early company promoting DNA testing. I was fascinated by the salesman's pitch about how much information I might acquire by investing in one of the kits. The dissuading factor was the price of over \$300. It was about another 8 years before I took the plunge. By then 23& Me had come to Canada and the price had fallen to about \$100. In subsequent years I took DNA tests with Ancestry, MyHeritage and FamilytreeDNA. The reasons for these additional tests is DNA matches only with those populations that test with each company. Eventually these tests contributed to the greatest discovery of 5 generations of ancestors and our three passengers on the Mayflower.

The DNA tests alone provide little information until combined with genealogical research and computer network analysis. My discovery came with a tool recently added to Ancestry. Ancestry boasts the largest database of genealogical data. I had merely to put the names of my 4 grandparents into the tool. Then Ancestry's computer connects all the genealogical research that I have collected over the years together with all the data submitted by other genealogists and test takers. I may have researched back several generations to an individual that another researcher has researched even further back. In the case of the Mayflower passengers who have arrived in North America in 1620, the Mayflower Society has published books detailing the genealogy of descendants for at least 5 generations. It was these 5 generations that I had not yet found. Perhaps, with enough work I would eventually have made the break through but what a savings in time when I got the names, birthdates and death dates of 5 generations. Discovery of leads is not the same thing as proof of ancestry. I bought the book containing our line which provided the proof data such as historical birth and death registrations, census records, church marriage records and Massachusetts and other State Town records. We are not unique in being able to connect to Mayflower passengers. In 1985 it was estimated that over 35 million American's alone could claim to be descendants of Mayflower passengers. DNA tests and modern computer technology simply makes the task of discovery easier.

Both Ancestry and My Heritage has programs that interconnect with the data which search out connections among the various DNA testers and family heritage data submitters. Suggestions are made to individuals as to possible links and the data that led to such suggestions. The more data and the more tests that are submitted every day increases the likelihood of additional connections being made.

Would I recommend you rush out to get a DNA Test. I would recommend some books to read before you do. A quote from Maud Newton's **Ancestor Trouble** comes to mind:

“Spending time with my ancestors is exciting and scary, joyful and sad, expansive to the edges of the universe and confining as the pain in my jaw. Grappling with their legacies is something I know I will never do perfectly.”

I can't guarantee that learning about one's ancestor will be joyful or sad. If you don't want to risk knowing the real truth if it turns out sad - don't ask. You should consider a number of possibilities and determine if the risk of learning bad news is worth the risk. By considering up front several possibilities and whether you can face the “existential angst” pure and simple is certainly desirable.

Another quote from Bill Griffeth, **The Stranger in My Genes: A Memoir** comes to mind:

“This is the story of how a simple DNA test greatly complicated my life. The results suggested that I was not who I thought I was; that—incredibly—my father might not have been my father. It started me on an unsettling journey that had me questioning my most fundamental beliefs about my family and my very identity.”

Bill's world was shaken up, when he learns from an innocent DNA test done to oblige a cousin, that his “father” was not his biological father. In his introduction to his sequel, **Strangers No More**, he indicates,

My previous book exposed the emotions I initially experienced. They were raw and unruly. I was angry. Depressed. Unstable. I felt alone. But I'm in a better place now. The wound has healed. I have had time to process my feelings and gain new perspectives. I'm able to embrace my new normal. I initially believed that my DNA test had changed my identity. I'm not who I thought I was! I bemoaned. I'm not a Griffeth. But I have come to realize that my friends who tried to convince me otherwise were right. My identity didn't change. What changed were relationships. The relationships that define me.

Even if you do not learn of a NPE, “Non Parental Event” you may learn through genealogy, of events or relatives that you do not necessarily admire: a slave owner, a murder, a “petticoat preacher”, an alleged witch, a President of Harvard University fired for cruelly beating a student for alleged misbehavior, or the 1st Lieutenant Governor of Manitoba who allegedly coerce a treaty or two, or of the father of an illegitimate child.

At last week's Rotary meeting the guest speaker suggested that the club consider purchasing a tree <https://queensgreencanopy.org/> to honour Queen Elizabeth 2 Diamond Jubilee. One of the members raised the issue as to whether we should be honouring the descendant of a colonizer given the history of the Residential School in Canada. While I am no monarchist, I do not consider the Queen responsible for her ancestors any more than I consider myself responsible for mine. The present Queen has been generally worthy of recognition. One is not responsible for the actions of one's ancestors but how you respond to the world that you live in.

The additional concern is the learning of information about debilitating dominant disorder in the family such as Huntington disease, or an high risk of breast cancer or heart attacks. There is generally no benefit to alerting someone that they could have an incurable , non-treatable disorder. In fact chances of depression or even suicide may be increased because of your information. On the other hand Medical and genetic research continues to make advances both in terms of diagnosis and treatments. Diseases that once spelled a death sentence have been brought under control by vaccines or may be subject to successful treatment if diagnosed early. Preventive treatments may be advanced by physicians based on probability of occurrence. Probability of occurrence increases for some diseases based on family history and probabilities may be increased marginally based on the presence the presence of genetic variants. In some countries knowledge gained may affect insurance availability or claims.

I believe that the greater number of person that I have known have welcomed getting the truth as best as they can determine it. Finding the truth may set you free from the confusion and uncertainty. It should make you more sympathetic to others with a checkered past or simply victims of wrongs and in justices.

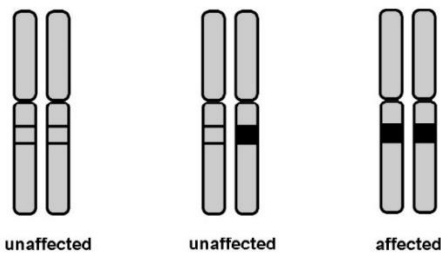
DNA and Medical History

The other area that genealogy software and DNA testing companies are constantly expanding is the area of medical history and trait analysis. By the turn of the last century laboratories had succeed in mapping pout the entire human genetic map for one human individual (Human Genome Project). By comparing points and sequences of genes of an individual against the standard, differences could be mapped to known characteristics and diseases on the individual. Scientist had long known that combinations of genes produced certain characteristics In peas (Gregory Mendelson 1865) .

From these early observations three classic patterns or modes of inheritances were determined: Dominance, recessive and x- linked inheritance.

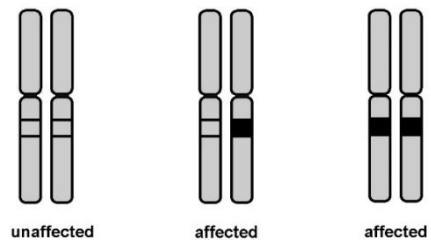
Recessive Inheritance

The mutated gene is shown as shaded. In a "single dose" (middle), the trait is not apparent. This mechanism allows a trait to be carried for generations until pairing with a second mutated gene (a "double dose", right) causes the characteristic to be visible.



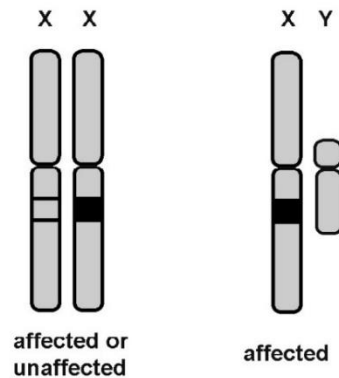
Dominant Mode of Inheritance

The mutant gene is shown as shaded. Whether present in a "single dose" (middle) or a "double dose" (right), the mutant trait will be visible.



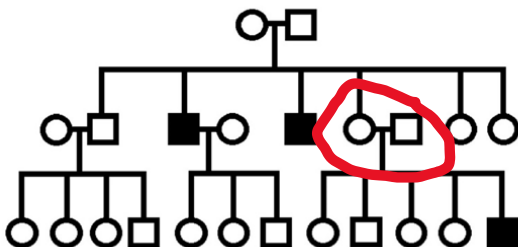
X-Linked Inheritance

The mutated gene is shown as shaded. Genes on the X chromosome are not usually offset by any counterparts on the male Y chromosome.



By mapping out a trait or a disease on a medical pedigree using the symbols below one can draw a x-linked inheritance where a generation (marked by red circle) may be skipped.

Sample Pedigree - Recessive X-Linked



Example of recessive inheritance include, Sickle cell anemia (distorted red cells), Cystic fibrosis (inability to transport salt in and out of lungs), Albinism (absence of pigment in hair, eyes and skin) Tay Sachs disease and Hereditary fructose intolerance (stomach pain caused by hypoglycemia upon eating fructose, sucrose or sorbitol).

Examples of x-linked inheritance, include Red-green colour blindness, Duchenne muscular dystrophy and Hemophilia A-failure to blood clot.

A medical pedigree of your ancestors may produce information of diseases present in family and ancestors that have not heretofore been known.

Every one tends to be interested in where they inherited their hair colouring, the shaped of their noes etc. and genealogists software companies are ever increasing their offering by annual subscriptions which provide updates on health and inherited traits.

23 & Me was the first company to test for variants and provides extensive information about variants tested and increased probability of developing the condition. It probably continues to be the best company for providing this information.

Ancestry DNA has entered the field of reporting on traits. To date they report on such traits as likelihood for hair and eye colour, hair loss, type and thickness, lactose intolerance, deficiencies in beta-carotene, omega 3, vitamin B12, Vitamin C, and Endurance fitness, Heart Rate Recovery, Caffeine Consumption, bitter sensitivity, Asparagus Metabolite Detection and various other traits. For the Asparagus Metabolite Detection the company test looks at the OR2M7 gene, which seems to at least partly control whether you're able to detect the odour asparagus adds to your urine. I must admit I have never thought about that one. Many of the results are affected by environmental, lifestyle and age and may also vary based on the interactions with other genes. I suspect with time improvements will be made with various studies and discoveries.

There are a few inherited diseases or conditions that run in our line has,

Celiac or gluten sensitivity
Late onset Alzheimer
Hypothyroid
Type 2 diabetes
Later age lactose intolerance

I am starting to keep a record of those who are willing to share their experience with various inherited disease or conditions with other family members. I have been diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes, hypothyroid, and after 70 years developed sensitivities to lactose and gluten. One diet that I personally found helpful in diagnosing Gluten and lactose intolerance was the fodmap diet. By googling "fodmap" you will find all sort of information on this and also there is an app that costs about \$10.25 that is extremely useful when shopping at the grocery store.

Additions to <http://www.retson.ca/retsongeneology.html> since August 1 2022

August Newsletter <http://www.retson.ca/retsongeneologynewsletteraug2022.pdf>

This newsletter was sent to individuals who have expressed an interest in this genealogy at some time. If you do not wish to receive future updates, please email me at jretson@shaw.ca and indicate so.