

## Family History Newsletter



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The Family History group supports members in researching their family history research. Members have ancestors from around the globe.

They meet on the first Wednesday of each month at 7pm at the Maple Ridge Library.

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### The Search for My Birth Parents

By Alex Pope

I have always known I was adopted as a baby and grew up with a mild curiosity of where I came from, but not enough to attempt searching for my birth parents. I first thought about searching for my birth parents after my first two kids were born and I realized that they were the only relatives I knew with whom there was a biological connection.

In 2001, I sent away to the BC Government for a copy of my birth certificate and adoption order. What I got back had my birth mother's name blacked out and no information about my birth father. At that time, I wasn't motivated enough to do more searching and I wasn't really sure how to proceed if I did want to search further. It did confirm one piece of information that my adoptive parents had told me and that was that my birth mother was in high school when I was born.

Fast forward to early 2018, a friend suggested that I try locating some relatives using *23andMe*. I sent my DNA in and anxiously awaited the results but was a little disappointed that the closest relatives I found were third cousins. I did make contact with a few of them but didn't feel like I obtained enough information to be able to track down my birth parents.

Then in July 2019, a couple things happened: 1) a second cousin appeared on *23andMe*; and 2) I found a

connection on *23andMe* that had a link to a profile on *WikiTree* that, in turn, had a link to *GEDmatch* (which I had not previously heard of). *GEDmatch* provides a service that allows people to upload their DNA test results from a variety of services, and then in matches with everyone in their database. I uploaded my DNA test results from *23andMe* to *GEDmatch*, waited a couple days for their processing, and then checked my results to find a match to another second cousin who had uploaded his DNA from *Ancestry*. This second cousin appeared to be quite interested in genealogy as he had created his family trees on a couple different websites that I was easily able to find using *Google*.

With matches to two second cousins, and a family tree going back several generations for one of them, I felt like I had enough information in hand to be able to track down one, or both, of my birth parents. But I had some questions as to how to find information to expand on the family tree I had, and how to keep track of all the information in a way that I wouldn't get overwhelmed with information. I knew Andrea Lister did some work with genealogy and family history through the Maple Ridge Historical Society so I sent her a long winded e-mail explaining the information I had so far, and asking for some hints as to how to proceed.

Andrea was very helpful and provided information on a number of tools to use in addition to an obituary of the father of my second cousin, and a link to my second cousin's profile on *Ancestry* which included a more recent copy of his family tree. The tools I found most useful were the links to search vital statistics at the BC Archives and *Newspapers.com* for searching obituaries, and other information, from a variety of newspapers.

Armed with this information, I signed up for subscriptions to *Ancestry* and *Newspapers.com* and

began building a family tree. The first obituary I looked up on my own was for William Hall Macfarlane, the grandfather of my second cousin on *Ancestry*, which listed his six children by name and notes that he had twenty grandchildren and eleven great-grandchildren. Looking at ages, dates, and the DNA match information, I proceeded based on the likelihood that one of those twenty grandchildren was one of my birth parents. I built a family tree by looking up obituaries of all six children and their spouses, and was able to identify all twenty grandchildren, and some of his great-grandchildren.

I then started searching on *23andMe* for DNA relatives who had one of his children's spouse's surnames in their ancestry. I found a couple fourth cousins who had ancestors with the surname Dunbar, which was the same as the maiden name of one of William Hall Macfarlane's daughters-in-law. I did some additional searching, with the help of *Newspapers.com* and hints within *Ancestry*, to identify four generations of Dunbar ancestors before messaging both of my matching fourth cousins. One of them replied with information confirming that we appeared to be related through a line of Dunbars, which determined my likely grandparents. The match on *23andMe* also identified for both of these fourth cousins as having a match to my Maternal Haplogroup, which suggested that we may related through a direct line of female ancestors.

My likely grandparents had three kids, two sons and a daughter. I was able to figure out an address where they lived based on voter's lists and I was able to do a little bit more searching to find some information to estimate their ages such as when they first appeared on a voters list and high school graduation. One of their sons was too young at the time I was born to be my father, and the other had passed away thirty years ago. Their daughter was sixteen when I was born and, I suspected, was my birth mother.

I then returned my attention to my other second cousin that had originally come up as a match on *23andMe*. He didn't appear to be related to the first set of likely grandparents I had identified so I suspected he was related to my other birth parent, who I was thinking was probably my birth father. I went through a similar process, building his family tree back to his great grandparents and narrowing down to a likely set of grandparents. They had two sons and two daughters but only one of them, a son, would have

been old enough to be my birth parent at the time I was born.

Having identified both my birth mother and birth father with a reasonable level of confidence, I started thinking about how I wanted to contact them. But I also felt like I wanted to get a little more information to increase my level of confidence.

To increase my level of confidence, I requested another copy of my birth certificate and submitted an FOI request to the Ministry of Children and Families for any information they had from my adoption. I also ordered and submitted a DNA test for *Ancestry* to see if I could find any other close relatives.

Waiting for all this gave me some time to do some searching online for recommendations on contacting birth parents. I found a post on The DNA Geek (<https://thednageek.com/letter-to-a-birth-parent/>) which recommended not phoning or emailing, but sending a letter and a photo. The post also included a template for a letter.

When the FOI request to the Ministry of Children and Families came back, it had anonymized profile information on both my birth parents, which matched details I already knew. The Ancestry DNA test found three additional second cousins, two on my birth mother's side and one on my birth father's side, which confirmed the information I had already documented in my family tree.

With an increased level of confidence in my research, I used the template to write a letter to each of my birth parents and mailed both letters, including photos of myself and all three of my kids.

My mom phoned me the following week and we talked on the phone for an hour. Since that time, I have taken the whole family to meet my mom and her husband, met my brother and sister and their families, and then spent thanksgiving weekend at my mom's place with quite a few extended family. It has been an incredible, positive experience being able to reconnect and to be able to be a part of my mom's family going forward.

My dad sent a letter back with some more information about himself, including some useful medical history. We're now Facebook friends and he is open to corresponding occasionally by email to keep in touch.

Just thinking about what I've learned about genealogy during my searching, if I were doing this again, I

think I would suggest starting with Ancestry because their database is much larger. I also used *Family Tree Maker* to save a copy of all the information I put on the *Ancestry* tree, and saved a copy of every document I found using *DropBox*.

My daughter became quite interested in the genealogy research I have been doing and, as a result, we have started building my wife's family tree on *Ancestry*, as well as sending in DNA for my wife and two of our kids. And I still have a couple close relatives that are DNA matches but I haven't figured out how they connect to my family tree. It seems like family history research is a little bit addictive and I suspect I will continue doing some research to find out more about our family's history and origins.

### Links

- [www.23andme.com/](http://www.23andme.com/)
- [www.gedmatch.com](http://www.gedmatch.com)
- [www.ancestry.ca/dna/](http://www.ancestry.ca/dna/)
- [www.newspapers.com](http://www.newspapers.com)
- <https://thednageek.com/letter-to-a-birth-parent/>

## DNA Tests Remain Illegal in France

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*From Ontario Ancestors*

The National Assembly of France has rejected amendments proposed for a bill to legalize consumer DNA tests. In fact, members made the law more strict. An amendment to ban advertising for "recreational" genetic testing was accepted, adding strength to the existing ban on such advertising on TV and online.

There is already a €3750 fine for people who buy DNA tests, although enforcing this could be problematic, with online sales of the tests.

## Online Resources

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### French Records

<https://en.filae.com/>

Filae.com has launched an English language site and facilitates access to 1.5 billion names from French records starting as early as 1500.

- Parish registers
- Civil records
- Census and vital records

- Passenger lists
- Military records
- and more

### FindMyPast

[www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk)

- Norfolk records covering 500 parishes
- Scotland, Forfarshire (Angus), Dundee Trade & Postal Directories 1783-1842
- Scotland, Will and Testament Index 1481-1807
- Westmorland Vitals

### Alberta Women's Memory Project

<http://awmp.athabascau.ca/>

The Alberta Women's Memory Project provides: an inventory of all material related to women held in archives in Alberta; direct links to related resources on women's history; collections of writings by women and about women; information on gathering women's records and what this can include; information about donating women's records; and expertise on a wide range of topics in women's history and women's archives.

### Mennonite Heritage Archives

[www.mharchives.ca](http://www.mharchives.ca)

As an inter-Mennonite facility the Mennonite Heritage Archives holds the records of individuals, families, congregations, and organizations within the Mennonite community. It is the official repository for a number of organizations.

The archives specializes in the preservation of Prussian, Russian, and Canadian Mennonite community documents.

### MyHeritage

[www.myheritage.com](http://www.myheritage.com)

- 1940 Demark Census
- 1910 Norway Census
- 1900 Norway Census
- 1891 Norway Census
- Australia Electoral Rolls, 1893-1949
- Australian World War II Nominal Roll, 1939-1945
- Baltimore, Maryland Passenger Lists, 1891-1943

## Scotland Mental Health Institutions Registers & Admissions 1808-1883

[www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk)

Over 63,000 additional records have been added to the collection. The additions consist of transcripts taken from the National Records of Scotland series; General Register of Lunatics in Asylum (MC7). Most records include a combination of your ancestor's birth year, death year, former residence, and next of kin.

## Rejected CEF Volunteers

[www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/personnel-records/Pages/search.aspx](http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/personnel-records/Pages/search.aspx)

Shortly after the British declaration of war in August 1914, Canada offered an initial contingent of 25,000 men for service overseas. This first contingent of men was gathered at a camp in Valcartier, Quebec, prior to being sent overseas. These are the files of the volunteers who were rejected for service at that camp. Most files contain only an attestation paper.

## London, Ontario

[www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.N00255](http://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.N00255)

*London Advertiser* 1890-1922 (with a select few years missing)

## GenealogyQuebec.com

[www.genealogiequebec.com/en/](http://www.genealogiequebec.com/en/)

These new documents, from the State of New York and the province of New Brunswick, can be browsed in the Drouin Collection Records.

- New Brunswick Parish Registers: St. Andre parish records from the second half of the 20th century.

- American Records: Civil War Veterans 1890
- More New York State records - images covering St. Lawrence and Clinton Counties (Canton, Hogansburg, Norfolk, Schuyler Falls and Potsdam) in the State of New York

## Family History Events

### Abbotsford Genealogical Society

Studio 2 The Reach

<http://abbygs.ca/index.html>

- **British Home Children**, November 21, 2019, 1:30 pm.
- **Christmas Social**, December 19, 2019, 2:00 pm.

### BC Genealogical Society

[www.bcgs.ca](http://www.bcgs.ca)

6010 Kincaid Street, Burnaby, BC

- **Records of Military Service** with Colin MacGregor Stevens, Wednesday, November 13, 2019, 7:30 pm.
- **Christmas Social**, Wednesday, December 11, 2019, 7:30 pm.

### Maple Ridge Public Library

[www.fvrl.bc.ca](http://www.fvrl.bc.ca)

- **Local Voices**, Mondays: Nov 4, Dec 2, 2019, 7:00 pm.

### Port Moody Museum

<http://portmoodymuseum.org/>

- **Great War Talk: War Brides**, with Annette Fulford followed by the annual candle light vigil. Sunday: Nov 10, 2019, 7:00 pm.

### Surrey Libraries

[www.surreylibraries.ca](http://www.surreylibraries.ca)

- **Writing and Publishing your Family History** – A Cloverdale Library Outreach Program with Brenda L. Smith and Andrea Lister, Saturday, November 23, 2019 10 am – 4

pm. Cloverdale Recreation Centre. Fee: \$15 includes a light lunch/refreshment.

### Vancouver Public Library

[www.vpl.ca](http://www.vpl.ca)

- **In the Trenches: Digitized First World War Records - A Library and Archives Canada Introductory Workshop**, Wednesday, Nov 6, 2019, 7:00 pm – 8:30 pm, Kitsilano Branch.
- **Genealogy: Trace Your Ancestors with Ancestry Library Edition**, Wednesday, Dec 11, 2019, 2:30 p.m. – 4:00 p.m., Computer Training Lab, Level 3, Central Branch.

### West Vancouver Library

[www.vpl.ca](http://www.vpl.ca)

- **Adding DNA to Your Genealogy and Family History Tools** with Diane Rogers, Thursday, November 7, 7:00 – 8:30 p.m., Welsh Hall
- **Genealogy Learning Circle – Taking Care of Your Family's Artifacts**, with Brenda L. Smith, Friday, November 15, 2:00 – 3:30 p.m., Welsh Hall
- **Using FamilySearch** with Peter Claydon, Wednesday, November 27, 7:00 – 8:30 p.m., The Lab

Maple Ridge Family History Group, first Wednesday of the month, 7 pm at the Maple Ridge Library.

November 6, 2019: Maple Ridge Cenotaph with Annette Fulford plus time to share stories of your military ancestors from the FWW and SWW

December 4, 2019: Fact or Fiction? with Andrea Lister

Members are encouraged to suggest themes/topics for the Short Program.