

Ewing Surname Y-DNA Project

Article 5

This is the fifth in a series of articles about the Ewing surname Y-DNA project. The first four articles have appeared in the last four issues of the *Journal of Clan Ewing*. They are also available on-line at

<http://www.clanewing.org/Y-DNA.html>.

Some of the material in the previous articles has been rather technical, and not everyone is interested enough to spend the time necessary to learn a new vocabulary. In this article, I am going to avoid specialized terms and explain what we are doing in ordinary language.

We have had only three new participants join the project since the last article, and we have results on only one of them as the *Journal* goes to press. The new results are for project participant Janet Ewing Deaton, who is a member of Clan Ewing and persuaded her cousin, Rowe Burton Ewing (RB) to submit a specimen. His results match perfectly with their 4th cousin twice removed, Clan Ewing Chancellor George W. Ewing, so I will not include new results tables with this article.

At the outset of the project, we set the goal of recruiting 100 participants, which we thought would be enough to reveal some amazing things. We now have results on 23 men. This is not enough to fully realize the promise of the DNA project, but we are already getting some results that will be useful for genealogists.

Background

Y-DNA is passed from father to son virtually unchanged, so that usually a boy will have identical Y-DNA to his father and his father's brothers, to his paternal grandfather and his brothers, to his grandfather's father and his brothers, and to all of their sons. But sometimes a small mistake is made when Y-DNA is being passed from father to son, so the son's Y-DNA will be slightly different from that of his male ancestors and their other descendants. The mistake will then be faithfully copied and passed on to all his descendants. This allows us to use DNA to distinguish members of his branch of the family from their cousins. Such mistakes occur at random. There may be no mistake in twenty generations, and then a mistake will be made. Exactly how often these mistakes are to be expected is still being worked out, but even an "exact" answer is going to be expressed in terms of the probability of a mistake. The DNA literature suggests that when we test for 37 different possible mistakes, as we do in the Ewing surname Y-DNA project, we will probably find a mistake once every seven generations, or so. Our results so far suggest that mistakes in our family may actually be a little more common than that.

Results

Let's see what this means with a real life example. John Ewing of Carnashannagh was born in 1648 or so, immigrated to America from County Donegal in 1715, and is the ancestor of quite a number of American Ewings now living. We have been able to test Y-DNA samples from five of his 5th great grandsons and one of his 7th great grandsons—so, men seven and nine generations below him, respectively. We would expect a mistake or two to have been made along the way somewhere, no? And if we are lucky, the pattern of mistakes will help us develop a genetic profile for different branches of the family.

John Ewing of Carnashannagh had four sons who have left male offspring, but so far we have only been able to get specimens from the offspring of two of his sons, James (1721-1801) and William (before 1711-1781). James Ewing often gets called "Pocahontas James" by Ewing genealogists because he lived in Pocahontas County, Virginia. He had two sons by Sarah Mayse, "Indian John" and "Swago Bill." We have tested specimens from one of Indian John's third great grandsons (FE), and from two of Swago Bill's third great grandsons (WK and BE). The Y-DNA from each of these three men differs slightly from the other two in a way that will allow us to distinguish their offspring in the future, but that is not what is most interesting. What is interesting is that all three of them have a mistake in common that is not shared by the three descendants of John Ewing of Carnashannagh through his son William (before 1711-1781). We have been able to conclude with a fair degree of certainty that this "mistake in common" first occurred when John of Carnashannagh was fathering Pocahontas James. When we find the same mistake in any future Ewing DNA project participant, we will have strong reason to suspect that he is also a descendant of Pocahontas James.

We also have three project participants who are descended from one of John of Carnashannagh's other sons, William. Two of them have identical DNA (GW and RB) and the other has a couple differences that will enable us to distinguish his offspring, but again the interesting thing is that all three of these men share a mistake in common that is not shared by the descendants of Pocahontas James. We might suppose that this mistake was first made when John of Carnashannagh was fathering William, but we can't be sure of that because all three of these participants are descended from only one of William's sons, John Ewing (1754-1832). The mistake in this line could have occurred either when William was conceived or when his son, John, was conceived. In order to figure out which of these is the case, we would have to have a DNA specimen from at least one of William's other sons. Meanwhile, we will suspect that any future Ewing DNA project participant who has this same mistake is a descendant of John of Carnashannagh through William.

We are fortunate enough to have good conventional genealogies on all of the descendants of John of Carnashannagh mentioned above. We didn't learn anything new about their relationships from the DNA evidence, but we could see

how the DNA evidence confirmed the relationships, as expected, and how helpful it could be to a person who did not know his immigrant ancestor, but had the same pattern of DNA mistakes as one of these branches of John of Carnashannagh's family.

We have identified a different "mistake in common" in another three DNA program participants, JN, DG and WR, who know on the basis of conventional genealogic evidence that they are descended from the father of Nathaniel Ewing (1693-1748) and his half brothers, James Ewing (1708-1788) and Joshua Ewing (1704-1753), respectively. The name of the father of these three men is not proven, but in the fourth article, I referred to him as "I believe his name was William." So far, so good. Even more interesting is that all three of these men have a second "mistake in common" that they share with three more program participants (EN, RC and EG), with whom they are not known to be related on the basis of conventional genealogic evidence. This fact strongly supports the idea that all six of these men have a common male ancestor, who was an ancestor of "I believe his name was William." This could have been his dad or it could have been his 10th great grandfather, though I'm inclined to think it was within a generation or two.

In my mind, maybe the most interesting result of all continues to be that so many of the Ewing surname project participants all share a common male ancestor from something like 450 years ago—so far, we have 18 of 23 participants that fall into this family. We now have DNA evidence distinguishing two main branches of that family, each represented by six program participants. Within each of these branches, we have evidence of two sub-branches.

Conclusion

The DNA project hit a slow spot through the holidays, but we are hopeful that participation will begin picking up again, now. The latest DNA results we have received exactly match those of Clan Ewing Chancellor George W. Ewing and confirm a hypothesis we had made about being able to identify his branch of the family with DNA. We are anxiously awaiting results on the other new participants. For one of them, research has hit a brick wall at a Ewing ancestor who was adopted and raised by another family, and who may have gotten the Ewing name from his mother, in which case his Y-DNA will show him not to be related genetically to the other Ewings. The project is of value and interest both to people who have well worked out genealogies and to those who have hit brick walls. The other new participant is our first to be named Ewen, which is thought to be a spelling variant of Ewing. We already have one McEwan participant, who was found not to be related to the Ewings in genealogic time. It will be interesting to see what the case may be with our Ewen participant.

To Join or Get More Information

If you are ready to join the project, go to

<http://www.familytreedna.com/public/ewing>

and then click on “Join this group” at the top of the blue section on the left of the page. Participation by Ewing women is also welcome; they can get valuable genealogic information by persuading a male cousin to submit a specimen. You can see a table of our most current results on the FamilyTreeDNA website if you will scroll down to the bottom of the page, but a more easily readable set of results tables is available on the website of Clan Ewing. There are also links on the FamilyTreeDNA website to articles and FAQs. If you want to ask me questions, e-mail me at
davidewing at gmail.com
or call me at 505-764-8704 in the evening.

David Neal Ewing
Albuquerque, NM