

# Genealogy Basics: African American Families

John Beaumont

## Topics

- Step one (generic)
  - Taking Stock of what you have
  - Getting started on a 150-year journey
- Step two (specific)
  - Before 1870
  - Tools for the African American Genealogist
- Step three (if we have time)
  - What DNA might reveal

# Step One



Getting Started – back to 1870

# Taking Stock

**What do you or your family members already have that will help your research?**



- Photos
- Documents
- Birth/Marriage/Death certificates
- Family Bibles
- Newspapers
- Letters
- Wills
- Personal items
- Family Stories
- Deeds
- Etc.



**Don't forget the story behind your family's heirlooms or antiques**

# Taking Stock

## Talking to your relatives

Take time to talk to your relatives, and if possible, start with the oldest. Take notes and ideally record the discussion. It is essential to ensure that you respect boundaries and that the person feels comfortable. There may be things that they don't want to discuss. Also, remember that memories are not records, so even if a relative tells you that their father was born in 1901 in Kansas, it may not be accurate.

Ask about:

- Their earliest memories
- Where they were born
- Where they lived
- Their parents
- Their other relatives and relationships
- Their occupations
- Their home
- Their education
- Any immigration or relocation stories
- Significant events in their life
- Stories behind photos or heirlooms

There are several interview questionnaires available on the internet. But videos or sound recordings are best.



# Documenting: Taking Stock

## Inventory, catalog, and document.

- It's time-consuming, but you will thank me later.
- Decide on a filing/storage strategy.
- Scan or photo all original content.
- Create a copy with relevant information on it.
- Transcribe Documents.
- Use genealogy software (examples later) to link items to people.

Greenock Telegraph and Clyde Shipping Gazette -  
Thursday 20 December 1900

**LOSS OF GREENOCK-BUILT STEAMER AND ALL HANDS.**

All hope for the safety of the steamer Falls of Inversnaid has been abandoned, and the vessel may now be looked upon as lost with all on board. She sailed from Newport News for St Lucia and Buenos Ayres, with a cargo of coal, on the 4th of October. Not having been heard of since that date, she was yesterday posted at Lloyd's as missing. The Falls of Inversnaid was a steel screw-steamer of 2,669 tons gross, owned in Glasgow by Messrs Wright, Graham & Co., and commanded by Captain Smith. She was built at Greenock in 1888 by Messrs Russell & Co., and engined by Messrs Rankin & Blackmore.

"LOSS OF GREENOCK-BUILT STEAMER AND ALL HANDS", Greenock Telegraph and Clyde Shipping Gazette, Pub, Thursday 20 December 1900, page 2, col 3, Imaged by British Newspaper Archives ([www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk](http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk)): accessed March 2021) – John Beaumont

Registration District <u>Sculcoates</u>										
Sub-District <u>Drifpool</u>										
19 <u>00</u> . BIRTHS in the Sub-District of <u>Drifpool</u> in the County of <u>Kingston upon Hull</u>										
Columns: — 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10.										
No.	When and Where Born.	Name, if any.	Sex.	Name and Surname of Father.	Name and Maiden Surname of Mother.	Rank or Profession of Father.	Signature, Description, and Residence of Informant.	When Registered.	Signature of Registrar.	Registration Name if added after Registration of Birth.
444	<u>Twenty eighth</u> <u>Robinson</u> <u>1900</u> <u>3 Walker</u> <u>avenue</u> <u>Danson Lane</u> <u>16. 2.</u>	<u>Beatrice</u>	<u>Girl</u>	<u>Stephen</u> <u>Bousfield</u>	<u>Annella</u> <u>Bousfield</u> <u>late Clark</u> <u>Tarnock</u> <u>Worley</u>	<u>Smith's</u> <u>Shirley</u>	<u>G. Bousfield</u> <u>mother</u> <u>3 Walker's Avenue</u> <u>Danson Lane</u> <u>Hull</u>	<u>Birth</u> <u>January</u> <u>1900</u>	<u>G. Bousfield</u> <u>Registrar</u>	
GRO Reference Information										
Year	Qtr	District	Vol	Page	Reg	Ent no	DOR			
1900	Mar	Sculcoates	90	100						

John Beaumont – Feb 2021

# The previous 150 years

This part of the journey is similar for all genealogists.

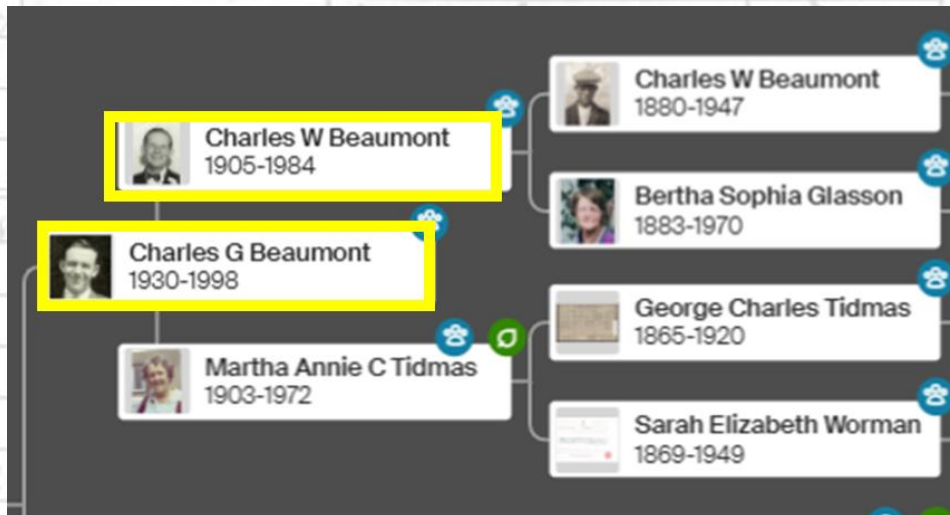
This will take you back to roughly your great-great-grandparents.

Start with you and work backward.

Document your parents, uncles, aunts, grandparents, etc.  
Their birthplace, occupations, and other facts.

You may have some of the information, but now you need to start researching seriously.

You will quickly learn that some of the information you have been told is incorrect, and some family stories don't pan out.



# Types of information

There are many types of records that contain information – These are the main ones, irrespective of where your search is.

**Vital Records:** Birth, marriage, and death certificates.

**Census Records:** In addition to Federal Population censuses, there are also some State Census records

**Church Records:** Birth, marriage, burials, banns, baptisms, volunteers, and wardens.

**Cemetery and gravestones.** (findagrave.com or billiongraves.com are excellent places to start.)

**Immigration, Migration, Naturalization, and Citizenship.** Family groups often traveled together.

**Newspapers & Obituaries.** There are several sites so research the newspapers first.

**Military Records.** Generally, records for officers are easier to find than for enlisted men.

**Land & Property Records.** The Wiki at FamilySearch is an excellent place to start for the next steps by state.

**Wills & Probate.** Availability varies by state and county.

**Courts, Prisons and Crime.** Often public records if you can find them.

**Maps.** Understanding where your family lived helps in other research (friends, associates & neighbors)

**Your family.** Often family 'lore' is incorrect but a good starting point for names and relationships.



# Sources of information

Depending on the type of information you need  
it can be found in various places

**FamilySearch:** The wiki is your source for sources.

**Ancestry.com:** Or other online information integrators.

**Google:** Often, Google is the best place to start.

**Cyndi's List:** ([www.cyndislist.com](http://www.cyndislist.com)), the “Craigs List” for genealogy sites.

**Local family history societies:** May have a help desk or unique records.

**Facebook Pages:** Genealogy or local Facebook pages can be of enormous help.

**State and County Governments:** Often access to public records that are not online.

**Billion Graves/Find a Grave:** Volunteer's photo and tag headstones.

**Local Library:** Normally, libraries provide free access to paid genealogy sites (even from home).

**GenealogyBank: (and others):** Providing access to Newspapers.



# Where to start?

Follow your family back through the census and vital records

1950 — The latest census available

1940

1930

1920

1910

1900

1890

1880

1870

} Major northern migration

**Read the census in detail and be thorough. Take notice of family, friends, and neighbors. Some States had their own censuses.**

— The first census to include all Americans

Immigration records



**Immigrant after 1870**

**Free person of color**

**Emancipated slave**

# Online searching tips

- It is OK to use estimates, perhaps a date range for birth or death, a state rather than a city.
- Be careful with “exact” searches (most searches default to “similar” or “sounds like”).
- Start with a broad search, then “focus in,” using more parameters.
- Use wildcards. Typically, “\*” for multiple characters and “?” for single characters.
- Use nicknames, married names, and abbreviated names.
- Some children are given their stepfather’s last name while in his household and revert to the given name later.
- If you can’t find someone, try looking for their family or relatives.
- Families often reused the names of children who died.
- Baptism date may not have any bearing on birth date.
- Old naming conventions often lead to multiple people with the same first and last names.
- There are errors, omissions, lies, and guesses in numerous “official” records.
- Many family trees online are incorrect. As a rule, the more people in the tree, the less accurate it is.
- A date of 10/12/1845 is 10<sup>th</sup> December in Europe and 12<sup>th</sup> October in the USA.
- To avoid confusion, the genealogical convention for recording dates is dd mmm yyyy (12 Oct 1845).
- Family lore (e.g., great-grandfather was at the Alamo) often turns out to be incorrect.

# Search Strategy: Family Names

Many families have naming conventions that may lead to multiple closely related people with the same family name in the same place at the same time. First-name groupings can help identify families.

- The first son was named after the paternal grandfather
- The second son was named after the maternal grandfather
- The third son was named after the father
- The fourth son was named after the oldest paternal uncle
- The fifth was named after the second oldest paternal uncle or the oldest maternal uncle
  
- The first daughter was named after the maternal grandmother
- The second daughter was named after the paternal grandmother
- The third daughter was named after the mother
- The fourth daughter was named after the oldest maternal aunt
- The fifth was named after the second oldest maternal aunt or the oldest paternal aunt

([https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/England\\_Personal\\_Names](https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/England_Personal_Names))

# Step Two



**Before 1870 – Genealogy Resources**



# Research before 1870

Free person of color or slave?

## Free person of color

Focus on family and emancipation event

Start with 1860 & 1850 and earlier censuses for your family to attempt to find an emancipation event.

Many states and counties did their own schedules and censuses.

Look for manumission (deed) records for your state (Family Search, Ancestry, State & local archives, Google)

Research State laws for freemen

## Slave

Focus now is on the owner and location

Review the 1870 census again  
Look for the occupation, location, birthplace, household, and family. Look at the images before and after for potential relatives. Are there clues?

Search the 1860 & 1850 Slave Schedules. Can you map your family to a slave owner? This is not proof but the start of your next step.

Manumission (deed) records for your state

Bills of Sale may exist that you can map to the census

# Research before 1870

## Free person of color or slave?

### Free person of color

Focus on family and emancipation event

Did State law require registration? It was important that free persons could distinguish themselves from run away slaves

About 10% of people of color were free

Roughly 179,000 black men (10% of the Union Army) served as soldiers in the U.S. Army

Many records are not digitized or online.

### Slave

Focus now is on the owner and location

Did the family stay in the same location, or did they move post-emancipation?

Forenames often run in the family groups. Last names could be the slave owner but not always. Close families (brothers etc.) could choose different names.

Pay close attention to friends, neighbors, and associates. They may crop up again. For instance, the people who witness documents may be significant.

Look for post Civil War cohabitation records

# Research before 1870

Free person of color or slave?

**Free person of color**

Focus on family and emancipation event

**Slave**

Focus now is on the owner and location

Land Records – State & County Courts/Archives

Probate Records/Wills – State & County Courts/Archives

Personal or Plantation Manuscripts or papers

Freedman Records (1865-1872)

County/Town/Village Directories or Histories

Obituaries/Newspapers (often after 1870)

# Tools, sites and software

There are hundreds if not thousands of internet sites and software tools of interest to the family historian.

I have picked out a few that may be of interest.  
Do your research before paying for subscriptions.  
Many have free trials available.

There are also a lot of unsupported, ghost, and phishing sites, so be careful once outside the mainstream.



# Tools & Resources

## Research and Genealogy: FamilySearch

The World Family Tree contains errors



FamilySearch Family Tree Search Memories Get Involved Activities

1950 U.S. CENSUS COMMUNITY PROJECT

You can help make history.

Find your family. Discover yourself.

Bring to life your family's history by exploring the lives of those that came before you.

Get Started

[FamilySearch.Org](https://www.familysearch.org)

[Historical records: 14+ billion](#)

[DNA testing: No](#)

[Pricing from: FREE](#)

Provided by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, this is a wonderful and free research site based in Salt Lake City. In my experience, the records for the USA are the most comprehensive. Not all records are indexed. It is invaluable to beginners and experienced genealogists. The **Research Wiki** will point you in the right direction for deeper research. But the “World Family Tree” may not be correct.

Some records are only available through a library or LDS center.



FamilySearch Research Wiki

A Genealogy Resource Guide

100,912 articles

Find the birth, death, marriage, census records, and other genealogy resources for your ancestor by selecting the region and country below.

Search by place or topic Find Search Tips

North America Europe Asia

List of all Localities

Jump-start your research

Guided Research will help you find the best databases for select locations.

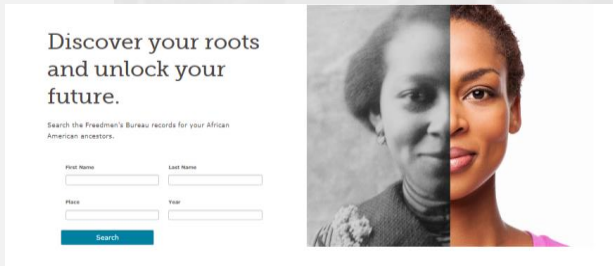
Guided Research

# Tools & Resources

## Research and Genealogy sites aimed at African American researcher



[AfriGeneas](#) ~ African Ancestored Genealogy  
Specialises in African American genealogy  
Numerous searchable databases and active social media



### [Freedmen's Bureau Project](#)

In collaboration with FamilySearch, this site allows you to search nearly 1.8 million records of the formerly enslaved created by the Freedmen's Bureau, which was chartered to help the newly emancipated after the Civil War.



### [Enslaved: Peoples of the Historical Slave Trade.](#)

Learn about those who were enslaved, owned slaves, or participated in the slave trade through more than 950,000 searchable records.

# Tools & Resources

## Research and Genealogy for the African American researcher



### [Ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com)

Historical records: 27+ billion  
DNA testing: Yes  
Pricing from: \$16.50 - \$49.99 monthly  
Lots of records and users  
Great DNA tools  
Easy to use and collaborate  
Expensive



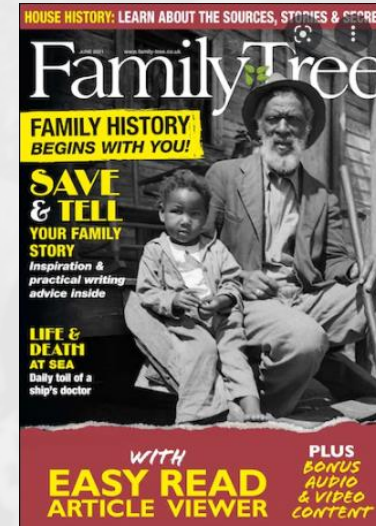
### [Cyndi's List](https://www.cyndislist.com)

Lists Genealogy sites  
(much like craigslist)  
Specific section on African American research



### [US GENWEB](https://www.usgenweb.org)

Archives, advice, and shared projects cover almost every US state



### [Family Tree Magazine](https://www.familytreemagazine.com)

(make sure you get the US version)  
I find this a wonderful genealogy resource with a lot of online articles



### Your Local Library

Will typically have research facilities for genealogy including free access to paid sites and extended access to FamilySearch.com



# Research Sites

## Research and Genealogy: Composite Sites



### [Allen County Public Library, Fort Wayne, Indiana](#)

Special collections include African American and a Native American Gateways



### [Bureau of Land Management](#)

access to Federal land conveyance records for the Public Land States



### [National Archives](#)

Preserved records from the United States federal government (most countries have one)



### [LIBRARY of CONGRESS](#)

Digital Collections and some newspapers.

One-Step Webpages by Stephen P. Morse  
(<http://www.stevemorse.org/>)

### [Stephen Morse](#)

Immigration and other links



### [AAHGS](#)

Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society



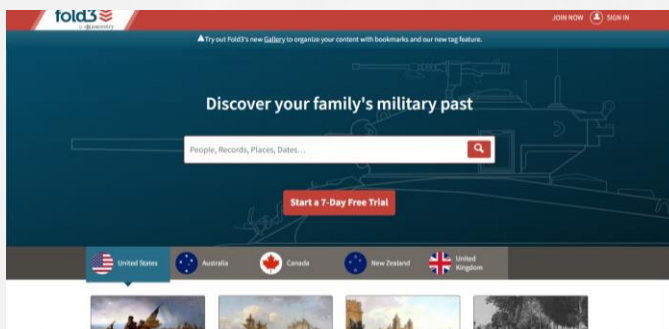
# Research

## Research and Genealogy: Specialty Sites



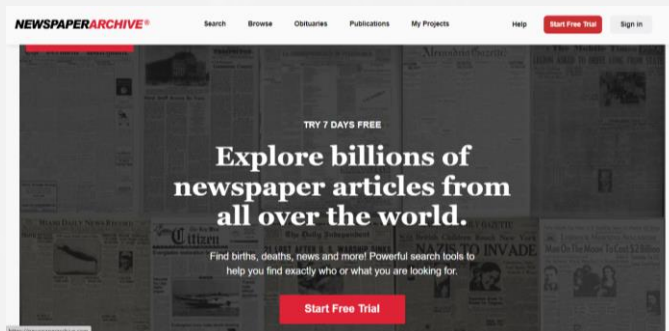
### Regional Sites

Almost every state has its own site. Often free to join



### Military Sites

There are general sites and sites for specific wars, regiments etc.



### Newspaper Archives

Several sites – check that they have your newspaper transcribed before subscribing



### Genealogical Societies

Deep focus, educational and other resources



### Trades & Occupations

An understanding of what your ancestor's work was like.



### Country Sites

And ethnic groups focused on a specific country or group of people

# Software

## Storing your tree and work: Personal Software



Family Tree Builder ([www.myheritage.com](http://www.myheritage.com))  
Links with MyHeritage, FamilySearch



Legacy (<https://legacyfamilytree.com/>)  
Links to FindMyPast, FamilySearch, GenealogyBank, MyHeritage



RootsMagic (<https://www.rootsmagic.com/>)  
Links to FamilySearch, Ancestry Version 8 – free trial

I use RootsMagic to  
backup Ancestry

## My Top Rules for [Ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com) users

- Regularly back up your tree.
  - GEDCOM for the basics.
  - Desktop software such as RootsMagic for everything, including Images.
- Never EVER copy someone else's tree directly into yours.
  - Every tree is a work in progress.
- Add your citations directly to any image you upload.
- Treat hints as HINTS – always qualify them before copying them to your tree.
- Always check the image – sometimes, the Ancestry transcription is incorrect.
- Another user cannot change your tree unless you permit them.
- Searching directly from a profile does not always give the best results.
- Read the “*about this collection*” for any collection of your source; it may explain missing information.
- If a collection cites LDS (FamilySearch), check out FamilySearch. There may be more info there.
- There are errors, omissions, lies, and guesses in numerous “official” records.
- Baptism date is rarely the birthdate and may be completely different (my pet peeve...sorry).
- If you use someone's family photos in your tree – send them a thank you message.
- If you think someone else's tree is incorrect, don't worry about it.
- Most Ancestry users are diligent genealogists, historians, and archivists doing their best.





Step Three

DNA



# DNA basics

## Ethnicity Estimates and Matches

Exercise caution and pause before taking (or asking someone to take) a DNA test. DNA can reveal emotionally sensitive information about family and ancestors. In addition, some DNA tests could disclose health information that could create unwarranted concerns. Privacy for DNA test-takers is paramount. Even if you have arranged and paid for a DNA test for someone else, the results still belong to them.

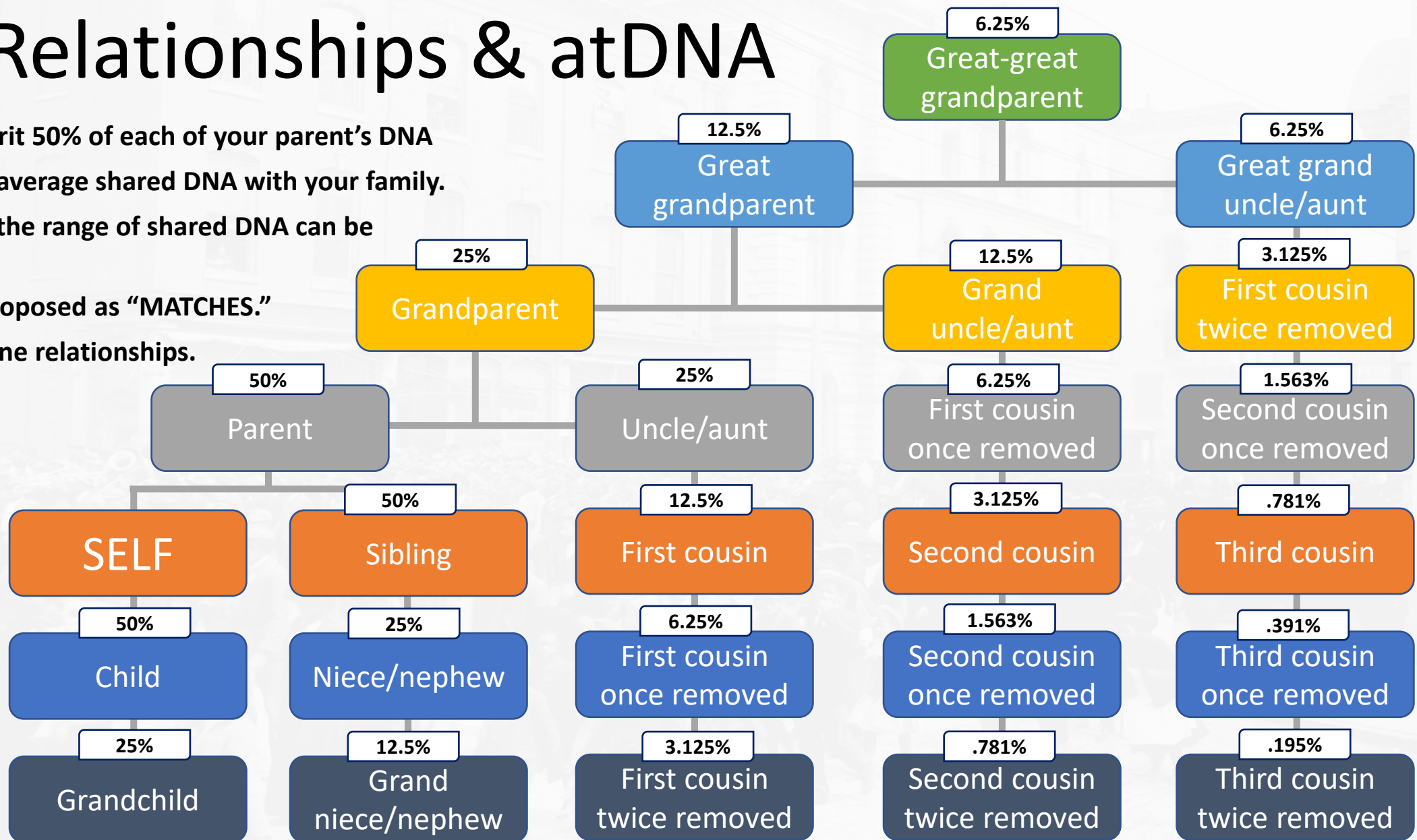
# Family Relationships & atDNA

On average, you inherit 50% of each of your parent's DNA  
 This table shows the average shared DNA with your family.

For distant relatives, the range of shared DNA can be significant.

This shared DNA is proposed as "MATCHES."

MATCHES do not define relationships.

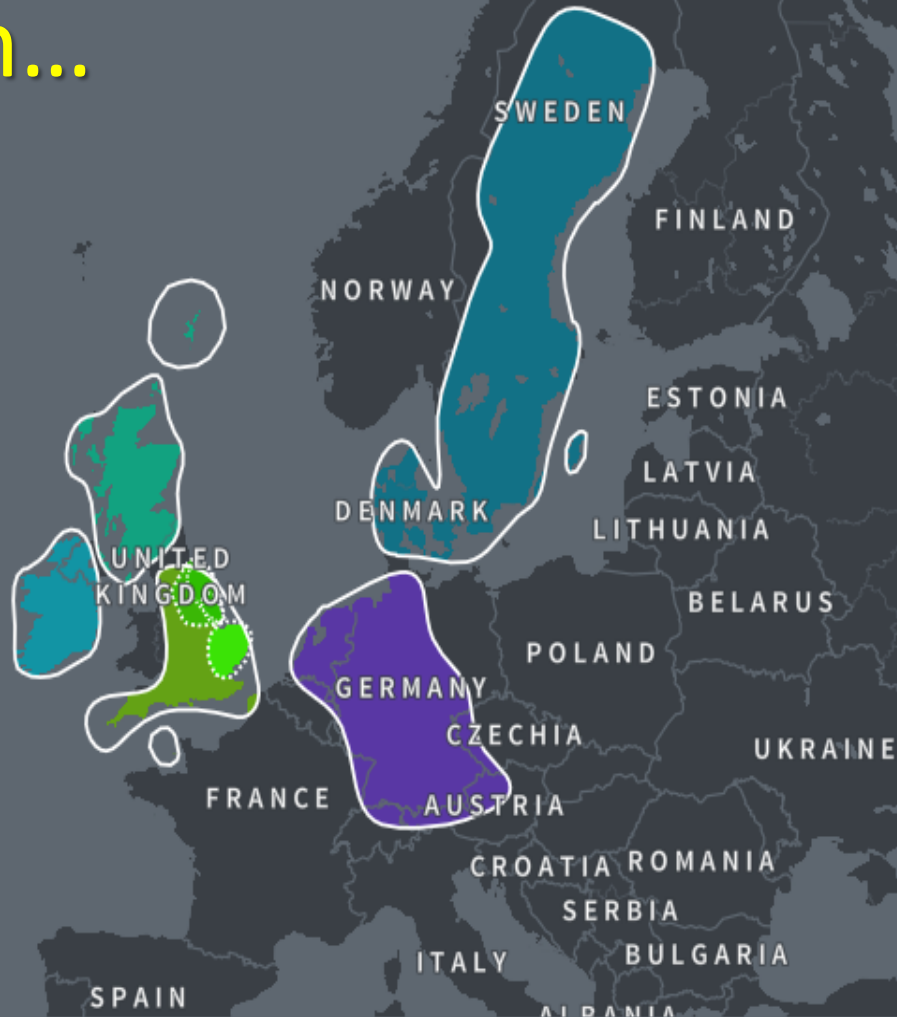


Data from The International Society of Genetic Genealogy (ISOGG) Wiki ([https://isogg.org/wiki/International\\_Society\\_of\\_Genetic\\_Genealogy](https://isogg.org/wiki/International_Society_of_Genetic_Genealogy))

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# Ethnicity Estimate Ancestry

Easy to see which region I am from...



- England & Northwestern Europe 57% >
- Your communities with a connection to this ethnicity region @
- Yorkshire & East Midlands, England >
- North Yorkshire, East Riding & Lincolnshire
- Lincolnshire
- East of England >

● Scotland 19% >

● Ireland 10% >

● Sweden & Denmark 8% >

● Germanic Europe 6% >

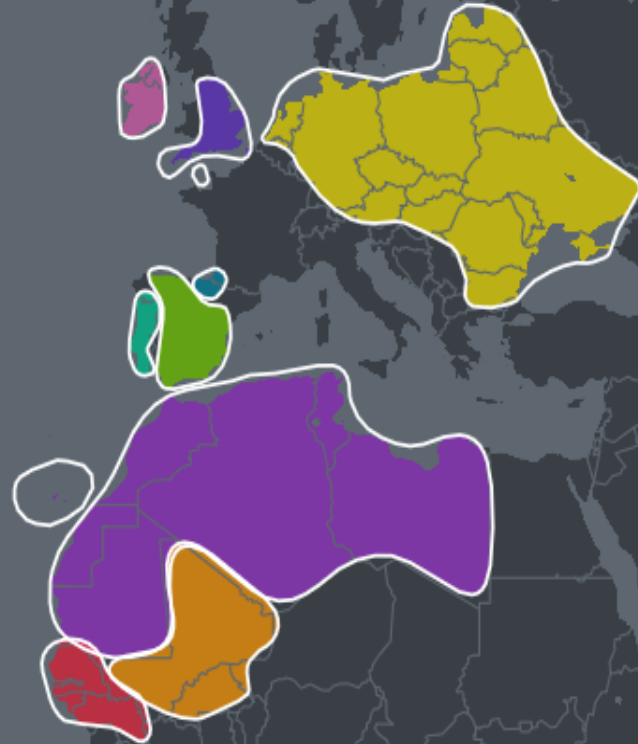
[View all 1,800+ regions tested](#)

Updated June 2022

[View previous estimate & FAQs](#)

# Ethnicity Estimate Ancestry

My wife not so much...



● Spain	57% >
● Portugal	16% >
● Indigenous Cuba	8% >
● Basque	5% >
● England & Northwestern Europe	5% >
● Northern Africa	4% >
● Ireland	2% >
● Senegal	1% >
● Mali	1% >
● Jewish Peoples of Europe	1% >

[View all 1,800+ regions tested](#)



# Questions?



## Good luck with your research