

# RECONSTRUCTING THE MURPHY FAMILY USING DNA & DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Presented by Melissa A. Johnson, CG®  
mjohnson@johnsongenealogyservices.com

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## BACKGROUND\*

William J. Murphy was born about 1800 in England; settled in New Jersey between 1828 and 1830 with his wife, Mary Ann, and their children; and died in 1851 in Newark, New Jersey.

The following details about William and his family have been established through various New Jersey documentary sources:

- William was a shoemaker
- William and Mary were Methodist
- Records consistently identify William and Mary as born in England (not Ireland, like most Murphys of this time period)
- Vital records for the couple's children identify Mary's maiden name as Owen or Owens

## RESEARCH QUESTION

Who were the parents of William J. Murphy, who was born about 1800 in England; settled in Newark, New Jersey between 1828 and 1830; and died in 1851 in Newark?

## CHALLENGES

- Records left behind by William and Mary do not identify their parents or a specific place of birth or origin in England
- William and Mary died in the mid-1800s and left behind few New Jersey records
- Vital records in New Jersey do not begin until 1848, and provide little information in the early years
- No immigration record has been found for William, Mary, or their children

## APPROACH

### CONNECTING WILLIAM TO HENRY

Documentary evidence connects William to another Murphy who lived in Newark: Henry Wilson Murphy. The men lived at the same address in 1835, and led similar lives as English immigrants, Methodists, and shoemakers. Henry can be identified via his unique middle name on his baptismal record, as the son of James and Susannah Murphy. He lived in Reading, Berkshire, England, before immigrating to the U.S.

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## **WILLIAM'S OTHER CONNECTIONS**

William Murphy and his family are buried in the same lot as an individual whose stone is marked: “Grandfather: 1760-1841.” Cemetery records do not identify this person by name, and the cemetery was not established until 1844, but obituaries identify only one candidate: James Murphy (d. 1841), whose death notice identifies his son as “William on the Camptown Road...”

## **JAMES MURPHY**

William Murphy’s father was the James Murphy who died in New Jersey in 1841. Henry Wilson Murphy’s father was also a James Murphy, as identified from his baptismal record in England. Are William and Henry brothers?

## **INDIRECT EVIDENCE**

Indirect evidence is information that does not directly answer the research question, but that we analyze, interpret as being relevant, and combine with other clues to answer the research question. Indirect evidence can be used to resolve many types of research questions, including questions of relationship (connecting an individual to his or her parent/parents); questions of identity (differentiating between individuals of the same name); and questions of circumstance (identifying immigrant experiences, for example). Indirect evidence is especially useful in cases involving significant record loss, unrecorded events, and undocumented events—and it can often be more compelling than direct evidence.

Successful genealogical research relies on exploring different classes of evidence. A lack of direct evidence (in this case, a lack of records left behind by William that name his parents or origin) does not mean that a research question can’t be solved (and that William’s parents can’t be identified). When we are faced with challenging research problems, the ability to work with indirect evidence can be a valuable skill for problem solving and breaking through brick walls. Indirect evidence points toward a possible connection between William and Henry (as brothers), and points toward the possibility that Henry’s father James Murphy is the same James Murphy who was the father of William.

The information gathered at this point does not prove a conclusion. Additional evidence (both documentary and genetic) is still needed to fully identify William’s father as the same James Murphy who is Henry’s father. Using indirect evidence involves skillful analysis and correlation to make a compelling case, and the totality can be presented to help prove our conclusion. A conclusion based on any type of evidence—including indirect evidence—can be considered proven when it satisfies the

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five elements of the Genealogical Proof Standard:

1. reasonably exhaustive research into a variety of sources
2. complete and accurate source citations
3. careful analysis and correlation
4. resolution of conflicting evidence
5. a sound, written conclusion<sup>1</sup>

### ADDITIONAL EVIDENCE

#### JAMES MURPHY

The James Murphy who died in 1841 left a small footprint in other New Jersey records, often speculatively and never by name. There are tentative connections between James of Newark and Henry, but record loss prevents verification of these theories.

#### RECORDS FROM BERKSHIRE

William Murphy and his wife Mary Ann Owen can be connected to Bradfield and Newbury, Berkshire, England, which are not far from Reading. A James Murphy and wife Susannah can be documented in Reading as early as 1814, and the couple lived on the same street as Henry Murphy and his wife Jane. James, also a shoemaker, can be documented in Berkshire through about 1828, which coincides with the approximate timing of William and Henry's immigration to the United States.

#### MURPHY SIBLINGS

Conducting reasonably exhaustive research on the extended Murphy family, including James and Susannah Murphy's other children, leads to finding those siblings in Newark, New Jersey. The siblings (and their families) can be connected to both William's family and Henry's families over several generations.

### SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE

In this case, both William and Henry are documented as having a father named James. William's father James was the 81-year-old man who died in 1841 in New Jersey. Henry's father James was the man named on his baptismal record, and the man who was a shoemaker in Reading up until 1828. A body of indirect evidence related to Henry, William, Caroline and James Murphy, suggests that James of Newark and James of Berkshire were one and the same, and helps prove that William's father was James of Berkshire and Newark.

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<sup>1</sup> Board for Certification of Genealogists, *Genealogy Standards*, 2nd edition (Nashville, Tennessee: Ancestry, 2019), Chapter 1.

## **DNA AS A GENEALOGICAL SOURCE**

DNA testing has become increasingly popular in the genealogical community over the past few years, and DNA test results are now often used to help establish proof of relationships. In this case, James Murphy's death notice directly identified his son as the research subject, William. However, indirect evidence proves that William's father is a specific man named James Murphy—the man who lived in Berkshire, was married to Susannah, and had several other children (Henry, James and Caroline). The documentary evidence in this case is strong, but where DNA is available, it can be used to support, supplement, and test the conclusions that come from a body of documentary evidence.

## **AUTOSOMAL DNA**

Autosomal DNA passes from parent to child when two copies of the parent's chromosome combine. This process occurs with both parents over many generations, resulting in living individuals who carry the autosomal DNA from many of their ancestors. Consumer DNA testing companies search test takers' DNA for identical patterns on the same sections of the same chromosomes, indicating that those individuals inherited a segment of DNA from a common ancestor. The amounts of shared DNA between two people are measured in centimorgans.

Using DNA test results as genealogical source can help add evidence to an argument where circumstantial or indirect evidence suggests a conclusion. Autosomal DNA testing of more than 50 descendants of William, Henry, James, and Caroline Jane Murphy establishes a body of genetic evidence that supports the documentary evidence. The descendants of these individuals who took DNA tests are third, fourth and fifth cousins (sometimes 1-2 generations removed) to each other. Some do not share any autosomal DNA, but the vast majority share amounts of DNA that are consistent with the relationships between these individuals. In this case, Y-DNA testing was not feasible, but would have been a viable tool if test takers were available.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The individuals who took DNA tests were targeted based on several factors. Living descendants closest in generation to James Murphy and Susannah Terriere were given preference. Additionally, descendants of William, Henry, James, and Caroline Jane from different lines of descent were sought.

The use of DNA as a genealogical source requires eliminating or reducing the possibility that shared DNA among test takers could derive from multiple common ancestors. Test takers who had the potential to share X-DNA were selected, in an

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attempt to use X-DNA's unique inheritance pattern to eliminate certain family lines as sources of test takers' shared DNA. Although the potential existed, the individuals in this study whose DNA was analyzed were not found to share amounts of X-DNA that were useful in eliminating other family lines as sources of the test takers' shared DNA. Full pedigrees were developed for test takers who participated in the study; no common ancestors were discovered aside from those on lines leading up the Murphy line.

Triangulation is when three or more individuals share an identical pattern of DNA in the same location on the same chromosome. In DNA analysis, triangulated segments provide a higher level of confidence that the test takers have a common ancestor who is the source of their shared DNA. No significant triangulated segments of DNA were found when comparing DNA between the third, fourth and fifth cousins (sometimes 1-2 generations removed) who participated in this study. Individuals at these relationship levels often do not inherit triangulated segments; rather, each pair of matches inherits segment(s) of DNA from their shared ancestor, but not necessarily the same segment(s) as another pair of matches. The amounts of DNA shared between descendants of William, Henry, James and Caroline Jane ranged from extremely small, less meaningful amounts of DNA such as 9 cM, up to about 115 cM, for individuals who were third, fourth and fifth cousins, sometimes 1-2 generations removed.

### **ONE LAST CLUE...FROM DNA!**

Documentary research failed to identify an individual named Johanna Murphy who appeared to be connected to the family, based on her appearance on an 1831 passenger list with William's siblings James Murphy and Caroline Murphy. However, examining shared matches between various descendants of James and Susannah Murphy helped identify Johanna. Many of the descendants who participated in the DNA study share DNA with individuals who descend from Johanna (Murphy) Lyon of Luzerne County, Pennsylvania. A body of evidence related to Johanna connects her back to Newark through her husband, and she shares many characteristics with the Murphy family (she born in England and was a Methodist). Although Johanna (Murphy) Lyon can be reliably identified as the woman who traveled in 1831, her exact connection to the larger Murphy family is unclear, as records for her in England have not been found.

### **MEETING THE GPS WITH DNA & DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE**

The body of evidence presented in this lecture (when considered along with the written proof argument, yet to be published) meets the Genealogical Proof Standard and thus proves the question of William's parentage. The evidence related to Johanna (Murphy) Lyon is not sufficient to tie her in as another sibling to this Murphy family, which has been reconstructed using a combination of documentary evidence and DNA.

## FOR FURTHER STUDY

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