Adding DNA To Your One-Name Study

Susan Meates takes a look at adding DNA to your one-name toolkit.

DNA testing for genealogy became available to consumers in 2000, and every day attracts more participants. The vendor with the largest database reports over 200,000 test result records in their database, showing how quickly this new science has been adopted by genealogists.

The Genographic Project by National Geographic, in partnership with IBM and Family Tree DNA, brought DNA testing for discovery to the mainstream. Their launch was so successful, that they ran out of test kits in the first month, when the anticipated demand for a year was sold in a month. Many of the people buying these kits are getting their first exposure to genealogy, when they upload their results from the Genographic Project to the Family Tree DNA database. The Genographic Project has sold over 255,000 test kits in a little over 3 years.

In just a few years, DNA testing has moved from a few DNA Projects by the early adapters, to over 4800 projects with participants in over 190 countries. We are still at the beginning of this new discipline, and the rate of testing is increasing every day.

A test kit is sent in the mail. The tester must swab the inside of their mouth and place the brush heads in the tubes of preserving fluid.

DNA and the Guild

Years before DNA testing was available to the general public, one Guild member, Alan Savin, was a pioneer when he started his project in 1997. From 1997 to 1999 Alan, with Dr. Mark Thomas of University College, London, pioneered the use of Y-chromosome DNA in the world's first DNA surname study.

In 2000, two more Guild members started projects, Orin Wells and Chris Pomery. Orin's project started as a special case study under the Brigham Young Molecular Genealogy project, and later moved to a commercial vendor. In addition to his DNA Project, Chris Pomery also pioneered a DNA Portal, which was an early source of information about DNA testing.

2001 saw 3 Guild members start projects, Arthur Carden, Susan Meates, and Keith Plant collaborating with John Plant. The number of markers tested were limited at this time, ranging from 10 to 12, depending on the vendor. Today, significantly more markers are tested, ranging up to 67.
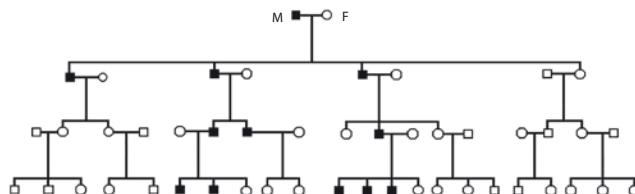
The rate of Guild members starting projects began to increase over the intervening years, with 145 Guild members having projects as of July 1, 2008.

The vast majority of Guild members are electing to be the Project Administrator, and this route sometimes requires problems to be solved at the vendor selected, because their registered surname was initially involved in another project. Many times the Guild surname was not a valid variant of the main surname of the project, and an extraction of the surname from the project could be negotiated. In addition to Project Administrators, some Guild members are co-administrators or collaborators, often because a project was in existence for their registered surname.

It takes many years for a DNA Project to build up a large group of participants, and the rate of participants joining a project varies significantly, based on a variety of factors, including the population of the surname, whether time is spent recruiting, and the number of years the project has been in existence, providing time for vendor marketing efforts and/or Project Administrator recruiting efforts to bring participants to the project. Nine projects by Guild members have over 100 participants. In 2008, two additional projects will most likely exceed 100 participants. In addition, two projects have over 200 participants, the Wells DNA Project with 430 participants, and the Meates DNA Project, with 295 participants, which will pass 300 participants in 2008.

The Value of a DNA Project

DNA data is another source of information about a surname, and provides information not available in the paper records. The information can be invaluable in solving genealogical questions, and will tell you which family trees are related.

The Y chromosome, found only in men, is passed from father to son, typically unchanged. By testing locations on the Y chromosome, called markers, you can determine if two men share a common ancestor, and the approximate time frame of the common ancestor.

Combining the information about which family trees are related, with surname distribution maps and early records, will tell you more about the origin of the surname than just the paper records alone.

For those that have been conducting their one-name studies for decades, and have exhausted documentary sources, DNA testing will provide additional information, as well as an opportunity to validate the family trees constructed.

From a genealogical perspective, DNA testing has many applications, too numerous to list here. These include confirming migrations, and sorting out multiple families in the same location.

From the perspective of a one-name study, DNA testing provides the opportunity to:

- Confirm surname variants or find previously unknown variants
- Discover information to define the major branches of each tree going back to the origin of the surname
- Discover information about the evolution of the surname
- Discover clues regarding the origin of the surname
- Combine DNA results with research in early records and surname distribution maps to determine the number of points of origin for the surname

DNA testing is a very valuable tool for a one-name study. DNA testing is just one component of family history research, though an important component because it provides information not available from the paper records, and can provide information about the origin and evolution of the surname.

The question then becomes, do you include DNA testing as a source in your one-name study? If you decide to include DNA testing, do you wait or start a project now?

Wait or Start a Project

There are many reasons to wait. There isn't any time, it costs money, it will take time to learn, it is uncomfortable to ask people to participate, you don't have any male contacts with your surname, and it all seems overwhelming.

There are also many compelling reasons not to wait. For example, there are probably key males, perhaps the last living male for important family trees, and they are elderly. You want to get a sample and get it stored while they are still here.

DNA storage is important to take advantage of future scientific advances. I am biased on this factor, having started my project when my brother was killed in an automobile accident, and since then, 2001, I have upgraded his test 4 times, as well as ordered other tests that became available. We are just at the beginning of DNA testing for genealogy, and many new tests will be developed in the future.

Another reason to start a project may be to store your own sample, if you are male, and leave it for future generations.

A major reason to start a project now is that some one else may start a DNA Project for your registered surnames. If this occurs, where someone has started a project for your registered surname(s), you may think that the solution is just to start a project at a different vendor. Unfortunately, this will most likely lead to both projects not being successful. The pool of prospective participants is not large enough to support two projects. One project will end up as the larger project, yet still be missing participants because they are in another project.

A comparison of the largest vendor's database to Guild registered surnames, shows that for over 90% of members, at least one person has tested with a registered surname, and many of these participants are not yet in DNA Projects. Some of these persons tested may start a project for your registered surname. In other cases, DNA Projects exist that contain Guild registered surnames, though the surname selection for the DNA Project may not accurately reflect information you know about your registered surnames. This is often accidental. The genealogists starting these projects are usually not experienced in one-name studies and don't have a knowledge base about your surnames, so they may select incorrect variants, which include your registered surnames. This problem can usually be solved.
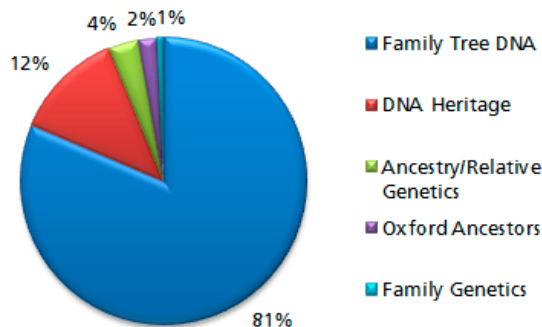

Various Project Administrator reports.
(reports may vary per vendor)

A Project Exists for Your Registered Surname

If a project is already started that includes your registered surnames, it is important to gather information and analyze the situation, to determine the best course of action. For example, the project could contain surnames that are not variants, due to the lack of knowledge of the Project Administrator. This can be solved. Perhaps the surname is with a project, because the administrator thought he needed to do this to let a friend test with the surname at a discount. As you can see, there are many possible causes. If you

want to start a DNA Project, and find your registered surname in an existing DNA Project, please consult with me regarding the situation at DNA@one-name. org. In most cases, I can find a solution. The answer is not just to join the DNA Project.

Guild DNA Projects by Vendor

Starting a DNA Project provides an opportunity for all those interested with your surname(s) to take a test at a discount, even if you aren't yet ready to move forward. A DNA Project is about discoveries, especially discoveries that can't be made from the written records.

DNA Projects are being started every day by genealogists all over the world. Although most Guild registered surnames are rare or low frequency - these surnames are in the population, and someone may eventually step up and start a project.

It All Seems Overwhelming

When I first read about DNA testing - it seemed overwhelming to me also. As with any new record source, there is a learning curve. In this case, the learning curve appears a lot steeper than it actually is. Once you remove the jargon, and get to the basics, it is actually quite easy.

For zero investment of money and a small amount of time, you can start a DNA Project, and proceed forth at your own speed, learning as you go. Once your project has a few results, you will see that DNA testing is actually easier than many of the record sources you have dealt with. After you ask the first person to participate, this also gets easier.

Getting Started Today

The steps to getting started are easy, and even if you are not ready to test your tree, you can get started today for zero investment of money, and a small amount of time. Follow these easy steps:

1. Write to DNA@one-name.org

Guidance and information will be provided. Any problems, questions, or concerns will be addressed.

2. Select a vendor

Referrals will be provided to third party comparison charts, vendor demos, and your questions answered. This step is not as difficult as it appears. Once you select a vendor, simply inform me.

3. DNA Project Set up

As part of the help provided, your project will be requested from the vendor and then the project will be set up, including the project profile, and if the vendor provides free hosting, the project web site. Standard text is used that was developed from a marketing perspective, and standard option selection is done. You can easily change anything at any time. This step will save you time, and get you started with proven marketing material.

4. Getting Started Guide

You will receive an email with a set of easy steps to follow at your own pace. These steps are tailored to your situation, and include a wide variety of small tasks, such as checking your project profile and web site, how to modify these items, and how to invite persons already tested in the vendor database to join your project.

Journey of Discovery

At this point, you can be done, and spend no further time, and you haven't spent any money. Ideally you will want to make a small investment of time, to learn the basics so you can help any participants who find your DNA Project and order a test kit. You may also want to test the direct male line of your tree. You can spend as little or as much time as you want recruiting other participants, or just wait and see who finds your project. At a minimum, you have protected your registered surname, and provided a discount to any participants with the surnames in your project.

If you need help at any time, you can post to the Guild Forum, or contact me at DNA@one-name.org.

It couldn't be easier to get started today.

Already Have a DNA Project?

• If your vendor offers the Guild Logo option, and you want the Guild logo to appear, notify DNA@one-name.org for Family Tree DNA customers or see your Project Page at DNA Heritage for those customers.

• Use the link below to add your DNA Project web site to the Guild online Register: www.one-name.org/cgi-bin/user-maintenance/ multiplewebsitefrontpage.cgi

• Update your Guild Profile, by completing the DNA section. If you don't have a Guild Profile, you can create one, and then link your DNA Project Profile and/or your Project web site to your Guild Profile, and vice versa.

Further Reading

Genographic Project: - http://www5.nationalgeo-graphic.com/genographic/index.html

Free monthly educational newsletter from FamilyTreeDNA - http://www.familytreeDNA.com/fgregis-ter.aspx

Past Issues of the FamilyTreeDNA newsletter http://www.familytreeDNA.com/facts_genes. aspx?act=past