

FERGUS(S)ON DNA Project

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Analysis of the y chromosome handed down from father to son is offered by a variety of vendors as a genealogical tool. Databases exist wherein if you know your DNA characteristics then you can compare them with other persons in the database to discover a heretofore unknown relationship.

In using DNA you are hopeful that you will closely match some other person who knows more about their line than you do yours. By comparing notes you hope to discover your common ancestor or at the very least have a new lead as to a locale that you have not yet considered. DNA testing does not replace genealogical research, it is best used to confirm it or provide clues. It is particularly strong at showing that two people do not have a common ancestor.

Project Summary

The FERGUS(S)ON DNA project was organized in August of 2003. Currently there are 300 participants whose y-chromosome has been analyzed. Our goals are as follows:

- Foremost is the use of DNA as a tool to supplement conventional genealogy.
- Create a database of DNA corresponding to different Scottish and Irish subdivisions such as those discussed in *Records of the Clan and Name of Fergusson, Ferguson and Fergus*, by James Ferguson and Robert Menzies Fergusson, Edinburgh, 1895.
- See if a linkage can be established between the Irish and Scots Ferguson.

Some of the problems we are addressing at this time include:

- Discovery of the ancestral locales of the Ferguson who settled in colonial America.
- See if a linkage can be established between Irish and Scottish Fergus(s)ons. Due to a lack of records, Fergus(s)ons of Irish descent are generally unable to demonstrate that their ancestors emigrated from Scotland to Ireland as is generally assumed..
- Identification of any genetic linkage to other clans who also claim descent from Fergus Mór mac Eirc the legendary king of Dál Riata circa 500 AD or from Fergus first of the ancient Lords of Galloway who died in 1161.

The Science

The definition of match seems straightforward enough but in reality it is quite technical. If it were not for mutations all men would have the same yDNA as their genetic patriarch, e.g. Eve's husband Adam. The code in the DNA contains millions of parameters and it is probable that a father's son will differ in some small respect. Over the ages those small differences have evolved to large differences between groups of men and it is those differences that allow us to distinguish a FERGUSON from say a CAMPBELL or even another FERGUSON with different ancestry.

A photographer can take a good picture without knowing how a camera. Likewise a genealogist can use DNA without knowing the science used to analyze the differences between two persons DNA. The vendor

provides a project participant with a personal webpage that allows comparison of their DNA with others in the project. A typical result might appear as such:

The probability that Wayne and Garnet shared a common ancestor within the last...

250 - 350 years is 46%

550 years is 86%

750 years is 97%

Furthermore the project maintains a mailing list (FERGUSON-DNA-L) wherein participants and interested parties interact with each other via EMAIL. If you need help understanding your results then you need only send your question to the list and someone will reply with an answer.

Nevertheless it is true that a photographer who understands their camera, lighting and film can take a better picture. A genealogist who understands the analysis and especially its limitations can make better use of DNA as a tool. Any of the following books should help the person who wants to better understand the science behind use of DNA as a genealogical tool:

1. *Trace Your Roots with DNA : Using Genetic Tests to Explore Your Family Tree* by Megan Smolenyak, Ann Turner
2. *DNA & Genealogy*, by Colleen Fitzpatrick, Andrew Yeiser
3. *DNA and Family History: How Genetic Testing Can Advance Your Genealogical Research* by Steve Jones (Foreword), Chris Pomery

Some Results

About two-thirds of all Ferguson have a DNA type called "R1b" which is the most common type in European populations. Most Celtic persons are of this type. One of the more interesting results of the DNA project has been the discovery that about 20% of all Ferguson have DNA type "I" and they may be of Viking origin. A small number Ferguson are "R1a" and these are definitely Viking in origin.

Several people now have clues as to their immigrant ancestor's place of birth. For example, Wayne William Ferguson and Robert Dale Ferguson are both close matches to Garnet Bernell Ferguson. Their respective genealogies lead one to believe that they do not have a common ancestor within the past ten generations. The probability then that they share a common ancestor within the next ten generations is estimated to be about 90%. Heretofore Wayne knew only that his ancestors emigrated from Ireland to the USA. Robert knew only that his ancestors first appeared in Virginia. Now they both have reason to believe they may have originated in County Cavan, Ireland where Garnet's ancestors are found.

Genealogist Geraldine Littleton of the Searcy County Library in Arkansas is working on the genealogy of the library's founder James G. Ferguson, a descendant of Andrew Ferguson (1724-1810) of North Carolina. To this end five persons who descend from Andrew have been tested and the DNA signature of the line definitively established. That genealogy is now being pushed back one more generation and an attempt is being made to connect to one related lines that has also been DNA tested.

We have six participants who are descendents of the Virginia family of John Ferguson and Ann Stubbleton. Their DNA matches thus corroborating their respective genealogies. Other participants who

once suspected a connection to this line have been able to rule this out. A similar situation is evolving for descendants of yet another Virginia family, that of Robert Ferguson and Martha Baugh.

Notable Lineages

Some of the more interesting lineages for which we have a DNA sample are listed below. We cannot guarantee that they are correct because the claims are only as good as their respective genealogies and the possibility of some unknown non-paternal event such as adoption or infidelity exists in any lineage.

- Each of the principal seats of the ancient Ferguson in Scotland are represented, i.e. Aberdeenshire, Dumfriesshire, Atholl, Strachur and Ayrshire.
- Robert Ferguson *the Plotter* - of Aberdeenshire, in later part of the 17th century he played a leading part in many a treasonable scheme against the last two Stuart kings, and twice had to flee the kingdom.
- Patrick Ferguson - developed the breechloading 'Ferguson Rifle'. At Brandywine in September 1777, Ferguson had the chance to shoot a senior-looking Rebel officer but, as he later wrote, the idea of shooting in the back someone who was going about his duties so coolly, and did not pose a threat, "disgusted" him. The officer in question is thought by many to be George Washington.
- Adam Ferguson - born in Logierait, Perthshire. He became professor first of natural philosophy (1759) then of moral philosophy (1764) at Edinburgh, and was a member of the Scottish 'common sense' school of philosophy. He traveled to Philadelphia as secretary to the commission sent out by Lord North to negotiate with the American colonists in 1778–9.
- James Edward Ferguson - born near Salado, Texas, the husband of 'Ma' Ferguson. He won two elections as a Democratic governor of Texas (1915–17) but was impeached for misusing state funds and forbidden ever to hold public office, he helped his wife become governor, and then governed through her.
- "Squire" John Hunter Ferguson - born on December 25, 1838 in Warren Hill, Dumfries Scotland. Served in the U.S. Civil War with Company M of the 3rd Regiment, Missouri Cavalry Volunteers.
- William Ferguson - rumored to have run away from home as a boy of 13 and traveled with his uncle on a British Man of War to the states. He then jumped ship and joined the Continental Army in Pennsylvania and served throughout the Revolutionary War.
- Harry Ferguson - developed a better plow and later hooked up with Henry Ford to create the forerunner of the modern tractor, the "Ford Ferguson 9N". Harry was born 4 Nov 1884 in Northern Ireland.

General Fund

The project has a small general fund contributed to by project participants and interested parties. The fund is used to recruit DNA donors from persons who would not otherwise participate and who are of interest to the project as a whole. For example, Adam Ferguson, of Woodhill, Scotland and later Canada, was a founder of the town of Fergus, Ontario. His ancestor settled West Haugh, Perthshire in 1329 and is the progenitor of the ancient Fergusson of Dunfallandy. Your author researched his genealogy forward was able to discover and recruit Andrew Ashraf Fergusson. He has no interest in genealogy but recognized his lineage and was pleased to assist.

How to Participate

Participation in the project requires collection of DNA from a living male whose surname is Ferguson, Fergusson, Fergus or some variant thereof. Unfortunately females cannot provide a sample because they do not have a y chromosome which is the basis of the test. Likewise the son of a woman whose maiden name is Ferguson cannot provide a sample because she does not pass a y chromosome to her son. Several people in the project have researched branches in their family to find a distant cousin to serve as a DNA donor.

Collection of the DNA sample is simple, painless and done at home. One simply rubs a sterile swab on the inside of their cheek for 60 seconds and then puts it in a sterile mailing tube. Eight hours later the process is repeated thereby collecting two samples in case problems arise with the first. The vendor which does the analysis provides the swabs and mailing tubes in the form of a kit which is mailed upon receipt of application to the project.

It is recommended that one purchase at least a 37 marker kit. This is adequate resolution to say that two people have a common ancestor and thus begin exploration of each other's genealogies. The current cost of a 37 marker kit is \$148.00 plus shipping and handling. The higher resolution 67 marker kit allows one to make a better estimate of how many generations ago two people share a common ancestor. The higher resolution is necessary when one must examine conflicting genealogies or provide corroborating evidence to support a hypothesis or theory. The current cost of a 67 marker kit is \$248.00 plus shipping and handling.

Finally

The FERGUS(S)ON DNA project has a website at <http://dna.cfsna.net/>

Therein you will find more detail on the project's goals, a description of the participants, results obtained to date, instructions on how to join, research on target lineages, frequently asked questions, links to other sites and instructions on how to subscribe to the mailing list. The website also has a link wherein the vendor provides a group discount when joining our project.

If you do not have EMAIL you can still participate. In this case, call Family Tree DNA at (713) 868-1438 and tell the person who answers that you would like to join the FERGUSON DNA Project. Our success depends in part on recruiting a large number of participants and we hope that you will join us.



Colin Ferguson, born in Oakland, is the first generation American in his family. His father was from Brisbane, Australia and his ancient ancestors are from county Cavan, Ireland. He is a graduate of the University of California at Davis and holds a PhD from MIT. He retired as a fire captain for the state's CAL FIRE. He and his wife Kassy reside in Auburn, California which is about an hour east of Sacramento. Their son Sean is an editor for a video gaming company and daughter Zara is a teacher.