

Celtic Connections Conference 2020

Saturday, September 5th, 2020

Question & Answer Log: Chat with Karen Stanbary: DNA / Irish

QUESTION: My brother's Y-DNA test was a perfect match to a gentleman in Canada. His great-grandfather was born illegitimately in 1879 in Kings County, Nova Scotia. In 1879 my grandfather was 28 years old, single and living in Kings County, Nova Scotia (about 4 miles away). He also had two brothers, ages 21 and 17, living there as well. How do we determine which of the brothers was the father?

ANSWER: The first thing I want to say is that the interpretation of Y-DNA tests for genealogy begins with the number of markers tested. So without that detail, I can't provide you with very specific information. However, in general, a perfect match for most Y-DNA tests suggests a common patrilineal ancestor within a genealogical timeframe. For a 37-marker test, there is about a 50/50 chance that the most recent common ancestor is 1 to 3 generations back. There is a 90% probability that the most recent common ancestor is within the past five generations.

But, a Y-DNA test will not provide much evidence to help distinguish a biological father from among a group of brothers. DNA methodology is based on comparison of multiple kits. I recommend you identify and test the autosomal DNA of at least one descendant of each of those three brothers, if you can find them. And then compare those results to the gentleman in Canada. Autosomal DNA testing can help provide resolution and will likely distinguish one of the brothers as the primary hypothetical candidate for the biological father. Of course, you will want to integrate and correlate that DNA genetic evidence with documentary evidence about the time and place of conception.

QUESTION: I'm seeking DNA matches to locate where my husband's 2x great-grandfather Bartley Roddy is from in Ireland. He was born abt 1832 in Ballina. DNA matches with trees are located near Ballina, but our family surname is not found on their trees. There are no Catholic church records as early as 1832, only from 1865 onwards. What next? Will further DNA testing help?

ANSWER: In this kind of a situation you will use genetic evidence as clues to point you to additional documentary records. Before I would do anything else, I would do an analysis of those shared matches to ensure that they are not all siblings from one family. And if the cluster (focal study group) of these matches from this area near Ballina is robust enough (the number of matches and also the amount of shared DNA), then I would use that cluster to point to additional documentary research. I would move right into a documentary research plan to search the

surname of interest as well as the surnames that are in those matches' pedigrees and likely surname variants in that townland. There are many record types you can use for pre-1865 Ireland, I would not just limit myself to the church records. I went to johngrenham.com to identify the Roman Catholic jurisdiction for this location and a quick check shows that Bunnyconnellan West is associated with a Killgarven Civil Parish and the Poor Law Union of Ballina and the Registrar's District of Ballina. It is part of that Roman Catholic diocese of Kilgarvin and the chapel is in the townland of Bunnyconnellan West. The National Library of Ireland holds digitized copies of marriages from 1844 to 1881 and baptisms from 1817 to 1881. They are transcribed on both Ancestry and Findmypast. I realize the baptisms begin in 1844 and are after the date of the baptism, but you can use these registers to build the matches' trees backwards. I would begin with those Catholic baptismal and burial records and extract the information for both your surnames of interest and your key match surnames and variants. Make sure to extract data for the godparents as well. And then I would look for tithe applotment records, estate records, and other kinds of records for the common surnames.

QUESTION: Mary McHale daughter of Edward from Mayo came to the USA in the 1920s. I have found many Mary McHales about the same age in Mayo. Trying to use DNA to identify the correct McHale family is challenging. Matches are no closer than 140 cM and all the "cousins" seem to have McHale's married to McHales in recent generations. Is this the double cousin problem that muddies the actual generation of the common ancestor?

ANSWER: Well, this could be an example of pedigree collapse which indeed complicates autosomal DNA analysis interpretation. And you only have Mary McHale identified to a county, you need to identify the townland in County Mayo. I would begin with a deep dive into all the United States records associated with your Mary and her F.A.N. Club. Those Friends, Associates, and Neighbors that she lived among and interacted with in the United States. The goal of the research is to seek clues that will lead to the identification of that specific townland in County Mayo. You can see in the next slide, a resource for looking at the F.A.N. Club principal – The Historical Biographer's Guide to Cluster Research (The FAN Principle) by Elizabeth Shown Mills – it is a guide you can use to identify the friends, associates, and neighbors to help you with your research. So once all that is identified and documented, a subsequent step would be to employ clustering methodology with those DNA matches to create groups among those McHales and see if you can build common descendant trees among those sub-groups. Use the cluster group as hints to point to a specific townland.

QUESTION: My brother and I match on the X-chromosome in three segments: Roughly 120 total cM. These segments match my Acadian cousins. There is a gap in our match from about the 10 mil to 42 mil segment. I have a match to a gentleman