

# Verifying Your Mayflower Lineage

## Class 3: Advanced Strategies and Next Steps

Christopher C. Child, [cchild@nehgs.org](mailto:cchild@nehgs.org)

### Using Onomastic\* Evidence

- Some cultures may have defined naming patterns, while others may be less rigid.
- Surnames as first names or less-common first names can be clues of earlier kinships and origins.
- Can be circumstantial evidence but may be a starting point or provide a working theory.

\**Onomastics is the study of proper names.*

TIP: Naming patterns are not always a guarantee of kinship.

#### Case Study: Jonathan Pinney of Plymouth, Vt.

C. C. Child, "Identifying the Parents of Jonathan Pinney (ca. 1754-1812) of Guilford and Plymouth, Vermont," *Register* 163 (2009):100-101

### Challenge: Determining maternity when a father has two wives

- Sometimes a man may be married to two women with the same first name, two sisters, or even (rarely) women who have the same full name!
- Research a complete timeline with probate, land records, military, pensions, etc.
- Follow leads on family members of male subject and both of his wives

#### Case Study: Rogers family of Norwich, Ct.

C. C. Child, "George Rogers of Norwich and Lebanon, Conn., Conway and Whatley, Mass., and his Two Wives, Margaret Caswell and Ann Brewster: A New Francis Eaton Line," *Mayflower Descendant* 53 (2004): 19-28

### Using DNA in Your Mayflower Research

DNA has been used successfully to verify *Mayflower* lineage. In most cases, however, you will be using Y-DNA and mtDNA testing (rarely autosomal, unless verifying more recent generations). You will also need to develop a hypothesis you wish to test, do descendancy research to see if DNA testing will help, and seek out multiple test takers. For more on the *basics* of DNA testing visit our subject guide:

<https://www.americanancestors.org/education/learning-resources/read/dna-and-genealogy>

## Y-DNA

Men inherit their Y-DNA only from their father so it is a patrilineal-derived part of DNA. Y-DNA can corroborate the paternity of a male ancestor, but it is important to recognize the extent of the surname in the given area, and the particular circumstances at hand. If the male has been identified as the plausible father already, and there are no near kin of his as candidates, this can usually be sufficient. However, if no candidate has been tested already, and the number of candidates is considerable, Y-DNA may only provide a surname, and would not be sufficient for establishing the paternity of a single individual. Since this will often be used for situations in the revolutionary and colonial era, conclusions can usually be published in a peer-reviewed journal such as the *Mayflower Descendant*, and lineages of tested participants can be complete or abbreviated, provided a genealogist can replicate the lineage of the person.

## mtDNA

Men and women inherit their mtDNA only from their mother, and only women pass it on to their offspring, so it is a matrilineal-derived part of DNA. This can be used in very specific instances of establishing maternity of a female ancestor. Since the surname usually changes every generation, an mtDNA connection can be more specific than a Y-DNA connection. Similar to Y-DNA, as this can extend to the revolutionary or colonial era, conclusions can usually be published in a peer-reviewed journal such as the *Mayflower Descendant*, and the lineages can be complete or abbreviated, provided a genealogist can replicate the lineage of the tested participant.

## Autosomal DNA

While DNA can be very useful in identifying relatives within the past five generations, especially for adoptees or for people with an unknown parent, it can have its limitations for being used in an article for the *Mayflower Descendant* because of so many possible other explanations. The example of Laura Brown's paternity in this article is one specific time where autosomal DNA can be used, as it involves a New England Yankee father that went to Louisiana alone, and had a child with a free woman of color of mostly African and French ancestry.

## Is DNA necessary?

While DNA can be used to test several genealogical theories, just because it can be used, does not necessarily mean it *has* to be used. Many theories can be argued without DNA. If your argument is solid without DNA, you should not feel you have to delay publication for the drawn-out process of DNA analysis.

## Making a Plan

When using DNA in *Mayflower* research, you must first develop a hypothesis that you hope to test. Most often a hypothesis will revolve around verifying parentage/children of a certain individual. By outlining your goals, you will be able to determine which tests must be used and who needs to test.

## **How to find and approach participants**

Generally, trace descendants through vital records and state and federal censuses. Then use obituaries from the late 20th and early 21st centuries to find surviving children. Next, find current addresses through [whitepages.com](http://whitepages.com), [familytreenow.com](http://familytreenow.com), and various other online state and local assessor databases. Call them on the phone or send them an e-mail. Letters can also be used as another means of contact.

## **Having a Plan A, B, C, and D**

Ideally you should have at least two different descendants match at the most distant number of generations. When a participant does not match, this does not necessarily mean your theory is wrong, as there are many reasons for a misattributed parentage within a line—mistaken genealogical conclusion, adoption, or a parentage outside of the married parties. Also sometimes a person may agree to take a test, then have second thoughts, so it's always good to have multiple people to ask in case your first few routes go astray.

## **Ethical Obligations**

You do need to tell participants of the possible complications that may arise from taking this type of test, even including that the participant might not be the child of their own parent. While this is less likely to happen versus discoveries made through autosomal testing (since Y and mtDNA only test of “spur” of one's ancestry), it can happen, and you should prepare the person for that possibility, even if this means the person may not agree to taking the test. Depending if the DNA study is within your own family (and your own DNA is not applicable), you may be able to identify a participant within your own autosomal results, which would limit these surprise results.

## **Possible Consequences**

When a DNA test you provide reveals one of these more unexpected surprises, you may be in the position to help a participant in a tangential project to discover their genetic origins. While this is not your obligation, consider helping especially if they only learned about this because you solicited them for a test.

## **Publishing Your Findings**

While the privacy of living descendants is important, so is the value of presenting a lineage that can be corroborated by other genealogists. Consider publishing your project in a scholarly journal! While you may include the documented lineage of your participating descendant, this can take a substantial amount of space in your article. Many articles use the initials only for at least the living generations.

Learn more about the *Mayflower Descendant*

<https://www.americanancestors.org/publications/mayflower-descendant> and submission guidelines:

<https://www.americanancestors.org/publications/mayflower-descendant>

## Final Thoughts

While DNA can certainly be used to corroborate a generational link, which can lead to ancestors that qualify for a lineage society, how the particular lineage society will accept this evidence needs to be consulted as there is not a universal practice among them. Some will accept your evidence without much trouble and others will not. Just because a lineage society does not accept this evidence does not mean your ancestral line is incorrect, and the practices of the lineage society may change in the future.

## Suggested Journal Articles

C.C. Child, "Genetic Surprises at 77," *American Ancestors*, 16.2 (2015): 54-56, 59

C. C. Child, "Lt. John Sprague (ca. 1655-1727/8) of Duxbury, Mass., and Lebanon, Conn., an illegitimate son of Samuel<sup>2</sup> Fuller (*Samuel*<sup>1</sup>)," *Mayflower Descendant* 67 (2019):117-49

C. C. Child, "The Fuller BigY DNA Study: An Update on the Paternity of Lt. John Sprague," *Mayflower Descendant*, 70 (2022):125-126

Pamela R. Paschke and Raymond T. Wing, "The Fuller Family of Redenhall, Norfolk, England: Initial Report on the Fuller Big Y DNA Project," *Mayflower Descendant* 70 (2022):101-120

Jari C. Honora, "A Vermont Engineer and a Free Woman of Color in Louisiana Sugar Country – The Paternity of Laura (Brown) Doley (1846-1928): A George Soule Line," *Mayflower Descendant* , 68 (2020): 196-209

Michael Sean Dunn, "The Parents and Siblings of Sarah Church, Wife of Nathaniel Crandall, of Little Compton and Tiverton, Rhode Island, A Richard Warren Line," *Mayflower Descendant* 68 (2020): 157-186

Katrina Fahy and Alessandro Ferzoco, "The Parents of Adoniram Allen of Clay County, Kentucky: A William White Line," *Mayflower Descendant* 67 (2019): 150-56

Michael Sean Dunn, "The Parents of Esther (Dyer) Flanders (1790-1876) of Braintree, Vermont, and Livingston County, New York: A Matrilineal Priscilla Mullins Descent", *Mayflower Descendant*, 66 (2018):23-48, 178

## Group Projects on FamilyTreeDNA.com

- Horton
- Mayflower
- Fuller
- Sprague
- Hawes

## DNA Companies

- [www.familytreedna.com](http://www.familytreedna.com)
- [www.ancestry.com/dna/insights](http://www.ancestry.com/dna/insights)
- [www.MyHeritage.com](http://www.MyHeritage.com)
- [www.23andme.com](http://www.23andme.com)