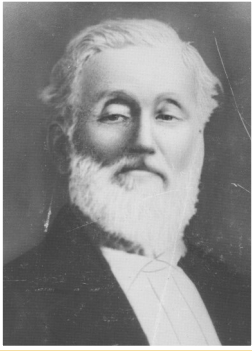


December, 2019



EWING FAMILY NEWS

Descendants of William Alexander Ewing

Modern Technology Is Great... But Can It Be Trusted?

The world we live in today is filled with innovative gadgets that make existence so much easier than it was for our ancestors. Looking back just a generation or two, we can see enormous changes in the way people do everything ... from their work to their food preparation, personal hygiene, health care, communication, education, and even their entertainment. Developments in technology and equipment allow us to do things that our ancestors would never have even considered possible.

Technology has also had a great impact on genealogy research. Many of our ancestors knew very little about their family history, and only knew their immediate family members – the ones who lived nearby or occasionally visited. Beyond that, they relied upon stories told by parents or other family members to gather a glimpse of their heritage. A few of those stories were based on facts and were repeated accurately from generation to generation. Others became more embellished with each repetition.

The first step in genealogy research has always been to sit down with the oldest members of the family and write down everything that they can remember about relatives and family events. That includes the family stories as well as names, birth dates, marriages, relationships, locations, etc. That practice has not changed. The next step in developing family history usually involved spending enormous amounts of time locating and studying public records that would verify, add to, or even change the information that had been collected at the beginning of the process. Sometimes that took a lifetime, and that's why most people never developed a "family tree" or maybe they never even started the search.

Most of the public records were kept where the event took place... birth, death, marriage, real estate transactions, court actions... all were to be found in the courthouse that had jurisdiction when the event occurred. Sometimes that may have been close by, but most families moved around – sometimes the necessary information was in another state, or on the opposite side of the country. The inconvenience, cost of travel, and long-distance communication has always been a major deterrent to genealogists.

That's where modern technology has greatly increased interest and participation in genealogy research. Some of the public records have been digitized and made available through the internet, greatly increasing their availability. Additional resources are being added to those databases every day. There is usually a subscription or per-use fee to be paid before accessing the data, but the cost is less than travelling to the source, and the convenience is far greater. There are also a number of websites, some with subscription fees and some that are free to use, where anyone can upload their entire family tree

Newsletters online

Visit:

williamalexanderewing.info

On this website you will find previous issues of the newsletter as well as numerous photos and historical information about the family of William Alexander Ewing

and allow it to be viewed by all the users of the site. Some of these sites have literally millions of uploaded family trees, which is a “good news/bad news” situation.

The good new is: there is a LOT of information that has been compiled and is readily available for any researcher. The bad news is: there is no way to tell if the information is correct. Looking at a finished family tree, no one can tell how much of it has actually been verified...or if any of it has (unless the author has attached resource documentation). The temptation is great, especially for those who don't feel they have the time to spend on research, to just copy parts (or all) of one of those trees and add it to their own.

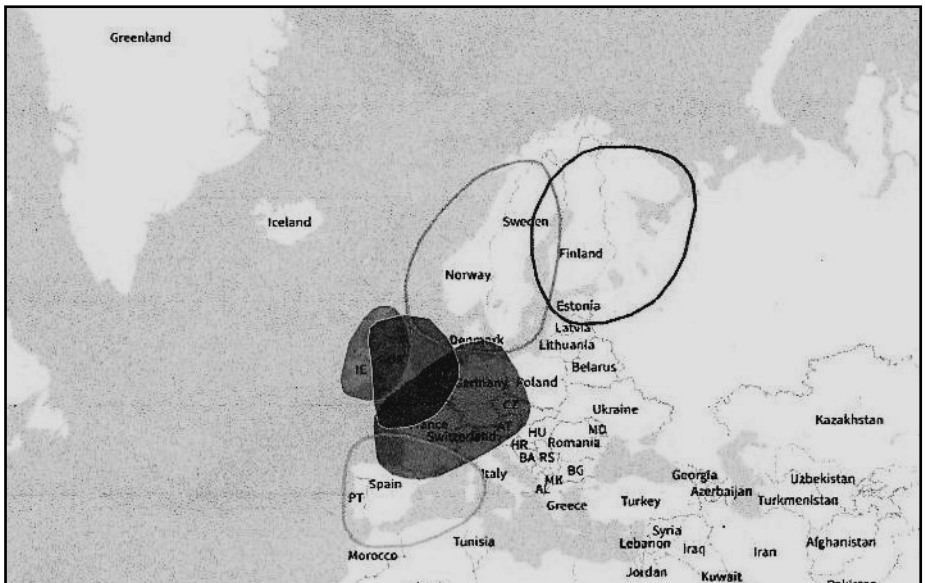
DON'T DO THAT!!

Don't get me wrong... it's okay to be guided by someone else's information, but VERIFY it before you add it to your own. There is so much incorrect information mixed into the user-contributed data that it is difficult to have faith in any of it. The problem is, too many people have copied and pasted the same errors numerous times. Like the family legends of our ancestors, if the same “story” is told enough times, it will eventually be perceived as the truth. Well-known and trusted websites that provide search-engine-generated information constantly pick up the duplicated errors and present them as facts, simply because they have been repeated so many times. Take some time and verify the leads that you get from other people... find it in the public records (which, unfortunately, can contain incorrect information also) and cross-check more than one source of records before accepting the information as correct. Help prevent the spread of errors and the proliferation of “garbage in, garbage out” genealogy.

Use of DNA

Probably the hottest trend in genealogy at the moment is the use of DNA to track our ancestry. This trend started a few years ago (probably more years than it seems). Such a project was started by [Ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com), the largest genealogy database in the world. They have been collecting and sharing family tree information for decades, and a few years ago started to collect DNA samples from people all over the world, especially from groups of people of the same ethnicity that were known to have lived in the same region for many generations. By comparing DNA analysis of those groups and subjecting the data to a thorough selection process, they have developed a baseline of DNA indicators that are indicative of 26 different global regions. By comparing an individual's DNA analysis to the baseline indicators, Ancestry.com can project an estimate of ethnicity for an individual (in percentage amounts). For example, they estimated my ethnicity to be:

- 55% - **Europe West** (includes a number of countries whose boundaries have changed many times over the centuries)
- 25% - **Ireland**
- 11% - **Great Britain** (includes England, Wales, Scotland)
- 5% - **Iberian Peninsula** (ancient Spain)
- 3% - **Scandinavia** (primarily Norway, Sweden, and Denmark)
- Less than 1% - **Finland/Northwest Russia**



Is it accurate? Even Ancestry.com says that this is an estimate. It's impossible to be 100% correct, since every

generation receives DNA from two different sources (Mother and Father). And that can get really complicated when someone looks back a number of generations.

From my standpoint, the ethnicity estimate holds no surprises. Since “Europe West” would include Germany, Belgium, Netherlands, and others, that certainly agrees with what we know about our Coxley heritage. The percentage from Ireland and Great Britain also fits with what we know about our Ewing family, plus my Mother had ancestry from that region.

Some might wonder why Irish heritage is shown separately and not considered to be part of Great Britain. I think the short answer is that Ireland is a separate island, and was not as accessible to the numerous European invaders that occupied England, Wales and the Scottish lowlands. The Romans, Vikings and Normans each maintained control over Britain at different times... the Romans for centuries. During each period of foreign occupation, invaders would take local wives, changing the DNA for Britain over the centuries. While the Vikings and the Normans also invaded parts of Ireland, they controlled only part of the country, thus having much less influence on the bloodlines. Even during the long occupation of Northern Ireland, newcomers more often married within their own groups, having a different effect on Irish DNA.

Speaking of “Family Legends”

It is worth noting that my ethnicity estimate does not show any Native American DNA. That would seem to answer a question that has been floating around the family for many years. My understanding is that Native American DNA has some very specific characteristics that are not easy to overlook, so there isn’t much chance that it was missed in this analysis.

DNA analysis isn’t exclusively offered by Ancestry.com. Other organizations are also working in that arena, and some offer a different type of analysis. [Ewing Family Association](#), an east coast organization that began as “Clan Ewing in America,” has been compiling information for decades. Their efforts have been focused on Ewing (and similar) surnames... like Ewings, Ewen, Ewin, etc. Over the years, the organization became embroiled in a raging debate over the origin of the Ewing name and its ancestry. The belief that Ewing families all originated in Scottish highland Clans was challenged by research that showed the surname had been used in various forms in the lowlands as well as in Wales, hundreds of years before the Clans were formed. Part of that discussion can be referenced [here](#).

The debate over our origin resulted in so much turmoil that it threatened to tear the organization apart. They decided that it would be better to re-focus their efforts, and use modern technology in an effort to sort it all out. They began a project that collects volunteer DNA from men with the Ewing surname (no, ladies, it isn’t discrimination...there’s a definite difference between male and female DNA and they have to be analyzed differently). Samples received are grouped by similarities.

It’s important to know that analyzing DNA for ethnicity is different from analyzing for direct family connection. There are a number of “markers” in each DNA string that can be extremely variable and each marker has a different significance. Even identical twins can have differences in DNA. The analysis has to consider variations at certain markers as well as the overall similarities.

Unfortunately, Ewing Family Association doesn’t have any DNA from the small group of known Ewing immigrants who first came to America, so direct comparison is not possible. But what they do is, ask DNA donors to also provide a family tree if available. They can then look for similarities in the DNA as well as compare the genealogy data submitted, to see if the person’s research has connected them to any of the known original immigrants. If they can get enough people with DNA similarities that also share an ancestor, the analysis can begin to compile a profile for the ancestor’s DNA. Wow... that’s incredible.

I submitted a sample to Ewing Family Association, hoping to get confirmation of our earliest ancestor in America. Their response was that they have temporarily aligned me with James Ewing of Hunterdon County, New Jersey, which seems to confirm what we already know... but they added a cautionary notation that the indication is not strong enough to be certain. They have not yet received enough samples of that group to firmly define it.

Merry Christmas



*... and may all your
Christmases be bright!*