

Oxford genealogist has confirmed more than 15,000 family ties

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By Nicole Carter Advertiser Democrat

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OXFORD — Genealogy is an entertaining and educational pastime and its rising popularity can in part be attributed to the internet. With instant communications and information sharing, one might assume that with a few clicks he can find out where he came from, and from whom. But as dedicated genealogists can attest, it requires more than that.

Greg Sherwood of Oxford became interested in genealogy about 18 years ago. After 20 years in the U.S. Air Force, Sherwood had retired to Colorado.

“When you’re younger you don’t really think about that stuff,” he said. “With your whole life ahead of you, you don’t think about your grandparents and parents passing on, about the loss of their stories.

“It wasn’t until later on in life that I became interested in it, after my cousin in New Hampshire invited me back here for a visit.”

During his visit, Sherwood reconnected with New England relatives. It was right before 9/11. Just a few days after he flew over New York the entire city had changed. Incidentally, cousin Lorrie Sherwood shared with him some genealogy work that she’d started, sending letters to different relatives to gather information. It included data collected from the free sections of Ancestry.com.

“My cousin got me started,” Sherwood said. “I got hooked a lit bit and started doing it by myself, adding to it as I could. It led me to Ancestry.com.

“As I got into it more I learned to look for more sources, such as The Advertiser [Democrat] or other papers. It’s harder to find information on who is living than dead. Every paper, I look for who do I know that has died – once you get older you do that more.”



Greg and Diane Sherwood of Oxford have more than 15,000 connections on their Ancestry.com family trees. Greg has pursued their genealogical ties for the last 18 years. *Submitted photo*

Sherwood uses newspapers and other sources to verify and add to his Ancestry.com tree, looking at obituaries to see if there are any family names already in his genealogy tree.

“Sometimes they’re not in my tree, but the obituary will say this is the daughter of so and so or whatever, said Sherwood. “I can trace it back some to see if and how they tie in. If they do, I’ve got a lot of pertinent information to add to it.”

Amateur genealogists need to carefully consider the information they uncover. Sherwood traced his original namesake ancestor, Thomas Sherwood, as a founding colonist of Connecticut. The issue? There were three Thomas Sherwoods who came from England to Connecticut about the same time.

“These Sherwoods were all about the same age, in the same area at the same time,” said Sherwood. “So when I look at documents who’s to say it’s this one, that one or that one. I only have a 33% chance of hitting it right to trace back from there.

“Some people are looking for famous connections. They take it back to Lord or King so and so. They want to claim royalty or whatever. They will ‘copy a tree’ or information because it leads them down that path they like, but they don’t really verify the information. I’ve seen some people copy from other trees where their ancestors were born after the parents’ they’ve copied were dead. I mean, it’s obvious.”

Sherwood uses both primary and secondary sources to verify his thousands of connections. Aside from newspapers, local history books maintained by historical societies are helpful tools. So are family bibles, and state and local archives and immigration records.

Connecting with other trees in Ancestry.com requires careful review, according to Sherwood. “I look for actual dates, records and sources instead of just making copies. It’s like putting a jigsaw puzzle together. Sometimes pieces look the same and you can put them in the wrong spot if you’re not careful. You have to look for the right patterns.”

That’s how Sherwood discovered that his wife Diane is related to Maine’s Civil War hero Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain.

“I found that connection by looking at the tree of someone she was related to,” said Sherwood, who was able to use the relative’s tree as a source. It listed Chamberlain. Part of Diane’s father’s ancestry had the Chamberlain name and I was able to trace their common



Ruth and Alton Grant, founders of Paris Farmers Union and forebears of Diane Sherwood of Oxford. *Submitted photo*

ancestor.”

While Sherwood is more concerned with accurate ancestral records than famous ones, with more than 15,000 connections from his and Diane’s combined trees notable connections are inevitable. He has confirmed that he descends from at least three presidents, John (third cousin nine times removed) and John Quincy (fourth cousin, eight times removed) Adams and Millard Filmore (a ninth cousin). He can also claim a distant relation to Raquel Welch, a connection his brother was particularly proud to learn.

Sherwood dipped into Ancestry.com’s DNA program about three years ago. Diane Sherwood did the test two years, and last year submitted samples from a maternal and a paternal aunt.

Their profiles confirmed much of what Sherwood had already identified—they mostly descend from England and its affiliated neighbor countries. But as more people have submitted their DNA and added profiles to the database the Sherwoods have seen some shifts in their make-up. Ancestry.com periodically sends them alerts when their analysis is updated.

Diane Sherwood’s original DNA result showed results from the British Isles and also lines from Norway/Iceland. Her paternal aunt showed the same, with some domestic connections a bit west of New England. But her mother’s sister test came back with countries Diane first panel didn’t include, notably Sweden and some Germanic region.

Ancestry.com’s DNA profiles helped resolve a family legend from her mother’s background.

“They always thought my mother’s side had Indian,” Diane said. “Her great-great-grandmother was presumed to be Indian. But not one speck of Native American genetics showed up on our tests.”

For Sherwood, as Ancestry.com’s DNA database has grown it provided confirmation of a particular ancestral off-shoot.

“I had traced a Huguenot ancestor to the 17th century, my 9th great-grandfather,” Sherwood said. “I’d found a couple of French names through research but when my DNA results first came back there was nothing from that region. So I wondered if perhaps I’d made a mistake.

“But just recently Ancestry.com sent me an updated report, and now my lineage includes Belgium/northern France. It took a while, but my DNA information now confirms my own research.”

Sherwood hopes that the DNA database will eventually provide clarity on Thomas Sherwood, founder of Connecticut.

"I'd like some Sherwood in England to do their DNA and get their genetics into the system," he said. "And then I'll know where that line goes back to in England."

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Diane Sherwood's family ties L-R: Ruth (Farrar) Grant; her daughter Gladys (Grant) Nelson, who ran PFU after her father; Ruth's daughter Ava (Grant) Bradbury; and Ava's daughter, Natalie (Bradbury) Johnson. *Submitted photo*