

In a Clarion news feature last month, the Kenai Totem Tracers Genealogical Society was introduced along with the printed resources the Society maintains in the Kenai Library. This month's focus is on genetic genealogy, or commonly referred to as DNA genealogy, with resources and assistance available through the Kenai Totem Tracers.

With the increased use of technology, researching family history isn't as cumbersome as it traditionally had been, say twenty plus years ago when a genealogist combed through printed books and sifted archives for a simple fact or sent away for legal record copies. Genealogy has truly progressed into the electronic age which enables more folks to participate in this hobby from their desks, kitchen tables, or where ever location they choose. Having accessible resources and databases in Alaska is key to being able to commence a family history search for those of us who have migrated here from another state or country.

Scientific technology has also advanced. Genetic genealogy is now available to complement the genealogical paper-based sources Totem Tracers maintains or to use as a starting point for investigating family history. In the United States, three main companies offer autosomal DNA testing along with a few smaller businesses. Autosomal tests detect DNA from both parents. Information that these companies offer are world geographic origins of your specific DNA, a DNA relatives list revealing familial distance between you and another participant if you opt-in to join this feature, and a DNA health profile for an additional fee. The best company for a person to use depends on what type of information an individual would like to explore. In general, the larger the participant database, a larger number of relatives will show up on your match list, such as in Ancestry.com. If you are concerned about a detailed health analysis, check into options provided by 23andMe's. FamilyTreeDNA has the ability to track specific family lines such as mtDNA, the maternal side of both males and females, and YDNA, the paternal generations of males.

Common goals for using genetic genealogy may include searching for parents, siblings, or cousins, verifying relationships between individuals, breaking down genealogical "brick walls" through connecting with unknown relatives, solving geographic mysteries of ancestor immigration, resolving or discovering inherited family medical challenges, uncovering ancient surnames or those altered during immigration, learning about fun family traits, or pure curiosity.

Things to consider if genetic genealogy is right for you are: What are your goals? Are you and your family open to a new way of thinking about your ancestors? Are you willing to possibly correspond with distant relatives, perhaps sharing stories and ancestor photos? Feel free to attend the Totem Tracers' monthly meetings and gain additional perspective from other family history researchers.

If the science jargon and/or statistical calculations of genealogical DNA totally confuse you, you aren't alone. DNA testing sites do provide guides, explanations, and online tools for assistance.

Still need help deciphering your DNA test results? Perplexed about the types of genetic testing offered by the companies? Have questions regarding personal experiences others may have had?

Many Kenai Totem Tracers members have explored the DNA genealogical option and gained skills interpreting their results. Also, experienced members opted-in to share within Relatives-in-Common databases and, in the past, the club offered monthly meeting informational talks to inform its members. With the help of patient Totem Tracers members who have navigated through the various DNA processing companies' tools, you can bring your family history to life. Deciphering your genetic genealogy is not as overwhelming as you may think!

If a DNA relative appears on your list that you want to contact, the Kenai Totem Tracers can assist you with formulating a respectful inquiry message. Gentle questions generally produce friendlier and more frequent responses.

The group meets for about two hours on the second Saturday of each month at 1p.m. (except June through August) at the Kenai Community Library. A meeting program with information and ideas is presented, and afterwards, members can provide help with family research. The printed genealogy collection is available every day the library is open.

Two large DNA companies offer an opportunity to post a person's family tree. By completing this activity and linking the tree to your DNA results, relatives in common can easily be viewed and common relatives confirmed. A beginning genealogy research class will be taught by long time member Tracy Miller each Saturday in June at the Kenai Community Library so take advantage of this educational opportunity to create your family tree. Sign up at the desk. The class size limit will be 25, so register early.