

Case Study:

Identifying the unknown ancestry of a great grandfather through genetic genealogy

The Challenge

A client contacted me after receiving unexpected DNA test results that contradicted her known family history. She expected 75 percent Portuguese ancestry but instead showed 71 percent Scottish ethnicity. Additionally, she didn't recognize any of her DNA matches. These surprise reveals suggested unknown parentage somewhere in her family tree. An initial search revealed her father was an NPE, and one of her paternal great grandfathers was of unknown parentage. The father's paternity was confirmed and DNA matches through his ancestral line were identified.

The remaining mystery centered on her paternal grandmother's father, William Wesner (1885-1936), about whom the family knew almost nothing.

Client → her father → his mother → her father

William Wesner died when his children were young, and no living relatives could provide information about his origins or parents.

Research Objectives

- Identify William Wesner's biological parents
- Explain the unexpected 71% Scottish DNA inheritance
- Provide documented evidence suitable for family records

The Investigation

DNA Analysis Methodology

I began by analyzing the client's DNA matches on AncestryDNA, focusing on matches connected to her paternal side. Most useful matches were under 100 centimorgans - below the typical threshold for Leeds Method analysis, but they were my only leads. I created mirror trees for each match and used cluster analysis to identify distinct family groups representing previously unknown ancestral lines.

Key findings from DNA evidence

- Shared centimorgans (cM) ranging from 20-119 cM with specific clusters
- Geographic concentration of matches in Scotland and Philadelphia area
- Surname patterns pointing to Dobbie and Dea families
- Multiple independent verification branches confirming relationships

Traditional Genealogical Research

DNA evidence directed me to specific families, which I then documented through historical records:

- Scotland Census records (1851-1911)
- U.S. Census records (1910-1950)
- Military draft registration cards
- World War I transport and service records
- Birth, marriage, and death certificates
- Newspaper archives

The Breakthrough

The combination of DNA matches and documentary evidence revealed that William Wesner was likely born in 1885 to:

- **Father:** William Banks Dobbie (Scottish ethnicity, born 1855)
- **Mother:** Daughter of Thomas Dea Jr. (Scottish ethnicity)

The investigation uncovered a complex family history involving:

- A liaison between William Banks Dobbie and Miss Dea resulting in pregnancy; at the time Dobbie was married to another woman
- His mother's eventual marriage to a man of Swiss origin named Wessner
- The couple's relocation to Argentina where William Wesner was born
- William's immigration to the United States
- William's eventual service in the U.S. Army in the Philippines
- His marriage to a Portuguese woman in Hawaii and their move to Oakland, California

The Results

Identities Confirmed:

- William Wesner's biological father: William Banks Dobbie
- William Wesner's maternal grandfather: Thomas Dea Jr.
- Both families: Scottish ancestry

DNA Mystery Solved: The client's 71 percent genetic Scottish inheritance was explained through previously unknown Scottish ancestry on both her paternal AND maternal sides. William Wesner represented an additional unexpected Scottish line. Although the exact name of Wesner's mother was not discovered, additional steps have been taken to try to identify her. Wesner's military records including enlistment documents have been ordered; It's possible his mother's name will be listed there as his next of kin. That will, in turn, allow a search for her in Scotland records. If closer DNA matches from a different family line are found, they may help identify his maternal grandmother.

Documentation Provided

- 70-page comprehensive report with complete citations
- DNA relationship charts and analysis
- Photographs of original historical documents
- Family tree reconstruction spanning three generations
- Timeline of William Wesner's life from birth to death

Timeline and Scope

Duration: 6 weeks from initial consultation to final report delivery

Research Included:

- Analysis of 100+ DNA matches
- Review of 100+ historical documents
- Construction of mirror trees for multiple family lines
- Statistical analysis of genetic relationships

Applications for Legal/Estate Work

This case demonstrates the type of documentation provided for heir identification and estate cases:

- ✓ **Court-ready reports** with full source citations
- ✓ **DNA evidence** with relationship probability analysis
- ✓ **Independent verification** through multiple lines of descent
- ✓ **Professional methodology** following genealogical proof standards
- ✓ **Clear chain of evidence** connecting individuals across generations

About This Research

This investigation was conducted by Julie Mangano, a genetic genealogist with formal training from Boston University's Genealogical Research program. She specializes in complex cases involving unknown parentage, adoption, and heir identification for estate matters.

Services include:

- Heir identification for probate cases
- Unknown parentage investigation
- Adoption searches
- Family history reconstruction
- Expert testimony when needed

For more information or to discuss a case:

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Full anonymized report available upon request