



MTGS Messenger
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Jim Long, Editor



September 21 Meeting: *Breathing New Life into Your Boring Ancestors* with Melissa Barker, “The Archive Lady”

Our September 21 meeting is right around the corner! Join us at **1:00pm Central this Saturday** to hear from **Melissa Barker**, County Archivist with the Houston County Archives & Museum. The meeting will be both in-person, at the Tennessee State Library and Archives, and on Zoom.

There is no such thing as a boring ancestor! Many genealogists will say they have boring ancestors because they can't find records or information for them. Learn from a seasoned genealogist and archivist how to locate records and information to bring those boring ancestors back to life!

[Melissa Barker](#) is a Certified Archives Manager and Public Historian currently working at the Houston County, Tennessee Archives and Museum. She lectures, teaches and writes about the genealogy research process, researching in archives and records preservation. She also conducts virtual webinar presentations across the United States for genealogical and historical societies.

This meeting is open to the public and we hope that you can join us, either in-person or via Zoom.

The Zoom link for this meeting

is <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/88516173742?pwd=UiPbwgsvTDhLKJOuFnq1tpMHB7RgZ.1>



Seminar Season is Almost Upon Us

We will be opening Registration for **MTGS' 36th Annual Genealogical Seminar** soon, as we finalize the details on our great lineup of presenters:

- **Chuck Sherrill**, MTGS Journal Editor and former State Librarian & Archivist, will present 2 sessions: *On Solid Ground: Finding Ancestors in Tennessee Land Grant Records*, and *If it Please the Court! Understanding and Using Tennessee Court Records*
- **Gratia Strother**, Conference Archivist for the [Tennessee-Western Kentucky Conference of the United Methodist Church](#) in Nashville, will talk about **records held in the TWKUMC Archives**, and about **the various records that different denominations keep, and how to find them**
- **Taffey Hall**, Director and Archivist for the [Southern Baptist Historical Library & Archives](#) in Nashville, will talk about **records held in the SBHLA and how to use them for genealogical research**

The Seminar will be both in-person at the Tennessee State Library and Archives, and virtual on Zoom. Make plans to join us!

When Seminar Registration opens, current MTGS members and recent Seminar attendees will receive an email announcement with the Seminar brochure and registration details, and of course it will be posted on the Calendar page of our website.

DNA PAINTER

What Are the Odds that I Can Figure Out WATO?

I love using DNA results in my genealogy research, and I'm always trying to educate myself on how to use DNA-related tools. I had already known about the [DNA Painter](#) site for using colors to sort out ancestral segments of DNA. I recently tried out another fascinating tool on the DNA Painter website – called **What Are the Odds? (WATO)**.

The idea behind WATO is to build a simple family tree of a group people who you are *somehow* genetically related to, and who are all kin to each other, and see how you might fit into that family based on how much DNA you share with those people.

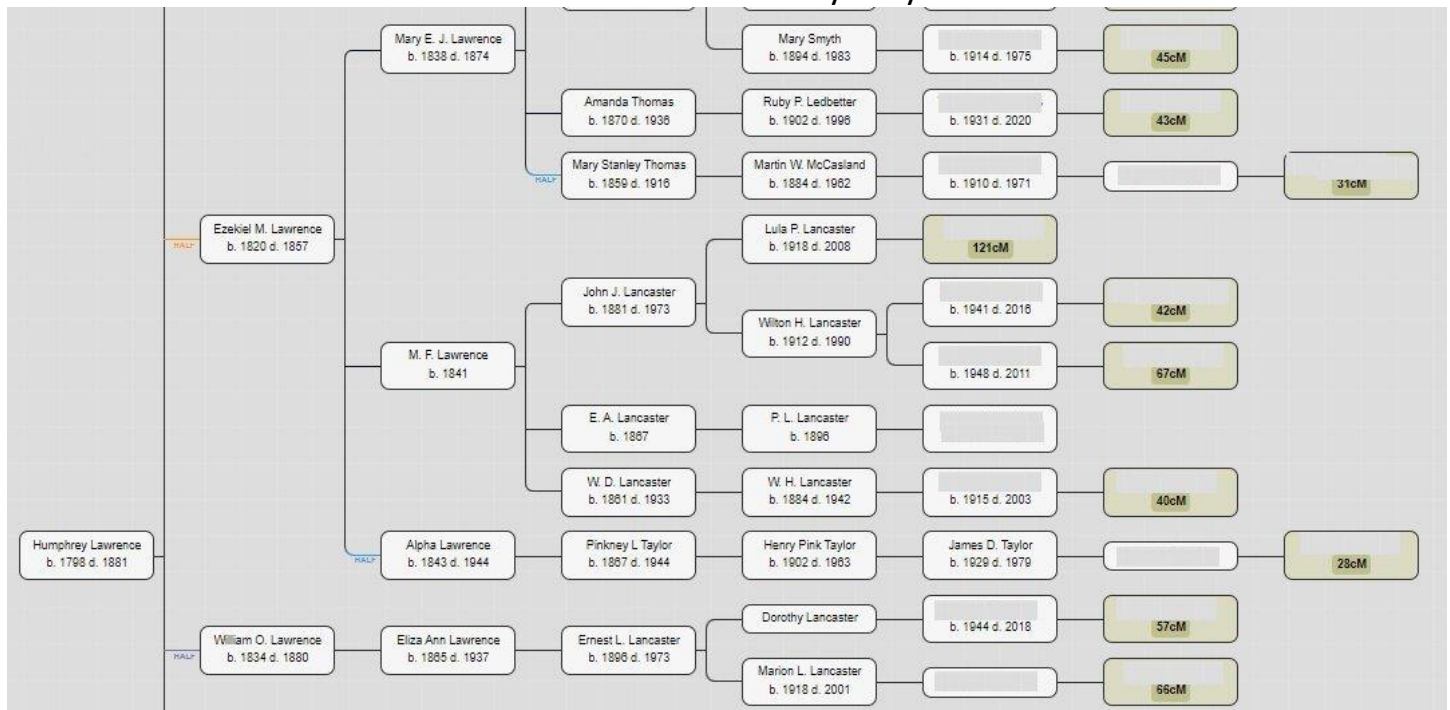
I was trying to help a friend, whom I'll call Vicki, determine the father of her maternal grandfather, whom I'll call Nick. Nick was born in Trigg County, Kentucky in 1880 and always had his mother's surname, as he was born out-of-wedlock to a father he likely never knew.

Vicki had gotten her uncle to take a Y-DNA test, and the most-common surname among her uncle's closest matches was **Lawrence**. Vicki herself had taken an AncestryDNA test, and she asked me to look at her DNA matches and see if I could determine the identity of her grandfather Nick's father. With the Lawrence clue in-hand, I looked through Vicki's matches to see if there were any Lawrence descendants out of Trigg County. To my delight, I found about 25 of them – all descended from a Humphrey Lawrence (1798-1881) of Trigg County. Because of the Lawrence clue from the Y-DNA test, I knew that the solution should be through a direct-male Lawrence line, so I needed to find a male Lawrence in this family who was in Trigg County about 1879 and eligible to be Nick's father. Turns out there were a lot them, though!

Here's where the WATO tool on DNA Painter comes into play. I first watched a [Family History Fanatics YouTube video](#) on how to use the WATO tool, which was helpful, to see a real-life example before trying it out.

I took the 25 people matched to Vicki through DNA, all descended from Humphrey Lawrence, and built their family tree in the WATO tool. The tree-building tool is very easy to use – it took maybe 30 minutes to build it out, adding each generation from Humphrey down to each of the 25 DNA matches, and then adding each matches' number of shared cMs to Vicki.

Here's what a piece of a WATO tree looks like – with the names of recent people and the testers (at right) removed for privacy. But you can see how the tree gets built and how you denote the number of cMs shared with each of the 'mystery' cousins:

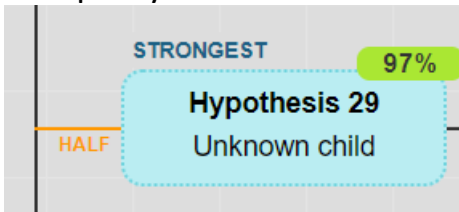


→ SUGGEST HYPOTHESES

Once I had the WATO tree built, I hit the button, and the tool generated a list of 36 hypotheses of where Nick *might* fit into this Lawrence family. Each hypothesis is assigned a *relative* probability, so they could all be wrong, in the absence of better/more testers to plug into this tree.

This tool is very flexible, I must say. You can even construct half-kin relationships by denoting spouses and which testers descend from which spouse. At first I was intimidated by there being 36 hypotheses, but I knew that I could ignore the hypotheses that went through a female Lawrence, since the Y-DNA test told me to focus on a direct-male Lawrence line.

The WATO tool told me that the most-likely scenario among the 36 presented, given the data I had input, is that Nick's father was a son of Humphrey Lawrence. This hypothesis was 51 times more likely than the next-most-likely scenario, that Nick was the son of one of Humphrey Lawrence's sons.



Did the tool *prove* anything? No – it is just giving a statistical analysis of the DNA data and family tree that I've put into the tool. But the WATO tool will really help focus my *next* research - on the sons of Humphrey Lawrence - and rule in/rule out which ones were: (1) still alive by 1879, and (2) still in Trigg County at the time Nick was conceived.



Fall Virtual Seminar from our Genealogy Friends in West TN

The Tennessee Genealogical Society in Germantown is having a [Fall Virtual Seminar with Cheri Hudson Passey and Melissa Barker](#), on Saturday, November 2. Topics include:

- Finding the Living: Genealogy in Reverse
- Family Gatherings: Dragging Genealogy Information Out of Your Family
- Somewhere in Time -Placing Ancestors in Historical Context
- Diaries, Journals and Calendars: Preserving and Document Your Ancestor's Day-to-Day Life

Get Your Calendar Ready for 2025 Conferences

It's never too early to check out dates for next year's regional/national conferences. I haven't been to a national conference in a few years, and I want to fix that!

- The Salt Lake Institute of Genealogy will conduct [SLIG 2025 Virtual](#) from January 27-31. Registration is already underway for this highly-popular academy.
- RootsTech, the "World's Largest Family Discovery Event," will be March 6-8 in Salt Lake City. Registration opens next week, on September 25.
- The National Genealogical Society will hold [Tales and Trails](#), from May 23 - May 25, 2025 at the Galt House Hotel in Louisville, Kentucky. As with their 2024 conference, all paid registrants will have online access to all lecture recordings for 3 months following the conference.
- The Institute of Genealogy and Historical Research (IGHR) will host the [IGHR 2025 Virtual Institute](#) from July 27-August 1. It offers 13 courses (3 all-new) from a large, experienced faculty.

My go-to website for reminding myself of all the great conferences out there is [ConferenceKeeper](#).

Oh, "That" Newspaper!



At the Archives where I volunteer, I was contacted by a seasoned researcher planning a cross-country visit to see us. She was skittish about asking for an in-person visit (we are an all-volunteer repository), wondering whether it might be just as well if I could scan/email the documents of interest to her. I, of course, knew that there is always a reason to visit an archives in-person whenever possible, so I encouraged the in-person visit – she was going to fly to Tennessee, regardless, for other research.

When she arrived, she already had a list of the documents she wanted to see (one of the reasons I knew she was a seasoned researcher). I pulled those documents, and she was thrilled to be able to hold the same documents that her ancestor had held 150 years ago when signing them.

Also on her list to see was the March 5, 1875 issue of *The Weekly Record* – the county’s newspaper at the time. My response was, “Oh, *That* Newspaper.” That issue is not on microfilm anywhere, and therefore only accessible through our Archives.

I explained that we were thrilled to have found that issue when first organizing the archives, knowing that it was something *special* because of its age. Then we found a second issue of the March 5, 1875 paper, and a 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th copy. It was then that we more-closely inspected the copies, and saw this:

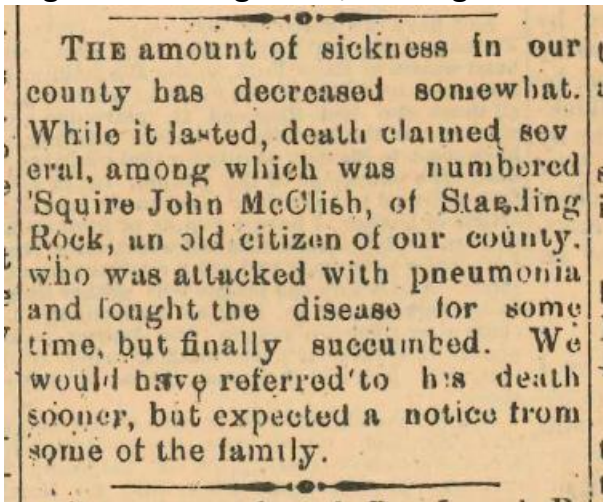


which sure looked like a folded-over flap of newsprint. What we had were all *reproduction* issues.

To this day, we don’t know when this reproduction issue was created, but we think it was a commemorative executed in the 1920s. We now have 12 copies of this same issue. When people come in and say that they have a “really old newspaper” to donate, I immediately guess that it’s this one (but don’t usually let them know that theirs is not unique).

But back to the researcher’s visit – the reason she wanted to see this particular issue is that our online index of the names appearing in this issue included her ancestor, [John McClish](#). From county records, she knew that he was dead by May 3, 1875, when the County Court appointed an administrator of his estate. But the family didn’t have a more-precise death date, nor a cause of death.

There were 8 pages in this issue, so the researcher and her husband divided up the pages and began skimming them, looking for the name of John McClish. Here’s what they found:



“That” newspaper is another great reminder of why it’s important to visit archives in-person.
