

# THE DISCOVERY OF OUR ANCESTRY USING GENEALOGY RESEARCH AND SCIENTIFIC MEANS

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## I. THE BACKGROUND

Knowing our ancestral history has always been an important part of our Montgomery family's tradition. When armed with a Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) approved lineage, two of our family members decided to apply for "supplemental" lineage approvals in 2002. To our dismay, we were turned down because our "believed to be correct" Montgomery line had been closed. We discovered many more Montgomery DAR approved lines were also closed for reasons similar to ours. In our case, our Montgomery ancestor was proved not to belong to the family we had for decades believed to be ours. We were so sure of our own claim to the ancestry that we began a search to prove the DAR was wrong. After learning all we could about the James and Anne Thompson Montgomery family, we reluctantly agreed with the DAR position that the genealogy book written about our family and widely accepted by us had not been accurate in its conclusions.

When the authors of our family book used the data they had collected to identify a "relationship" to the son of the James and Anne Thompson Montgomery family line, they had made an error. Although disappointed, we agreed that in our particular case, the DAR was correct and we were the ones who were wrong. Because of the error, we became acutely aware that many other genealogists who had researched families without the use of modern day tools and technology could have also made similar mistakes. Advanced computer technology that has created an "information explosion" and the use of the scientific tools now available for measuring the accuracy of genealogists' conclusions have brought genealogy research to a new level in the twenty first century.

Even though information from the web provided some ideas for research, we based all our conclusions on information we got from original source documents. We spent the majority of the time visiting various libraries, cemeteries, state and county depositories for early land records and court case documents. We contacted and spoke with persons who were knowledgeable about the family's history. We visited the Abingdon, Virginia genealogy society and used their local reference resources. Where they were available, we reviewed historical church records from Virginia, Tennessee, Utah and Alabama and also searched through federal and state census and tax records. To help resolve some of our issues, we used a genealogist at the National Society of DAR headquarters in Washington DC.

After the initial disappointment subsided, our mission became to discover our John and Margaret Alexander Montgomery's ancestors. While researching the James and Anne Thompson Montgomery family, we saw the reason for the mistake made by our family's earlier researchers. The John and Esther Houston Montgomery family book that we had

seen in the McClung library in Knoxville, Tennessee made clear what had happened in our family's previous genealogy research. The book's authors briefly discussed how their John and Esther Houston Montgomery family could be easily confused with the James and Anne Thompson Montgomery family. Both families had similar migration patterns from Pennsylvania, both lived in the Borden Land tract in Augusta County, Virginia and both followed the Scotch Irish tradition of naming their children.

There was very good family documentation beginning with our John and Margaret Alexander Montgomery's family and downward to present times. This provided well-documented clues as where to start. In Augusta County, Virginia in 1775 John was born, and his wife Margaret Alexander also was born there a year later. They married in 1798 in Blount County, Tennessee. Their marriage bond was by Margaret's father James Alexander in Jefferson County, Tennessee. The Reverend Gideon Blackburn performed the marriage. All eleven of their children were born in Tennessee and Alabama--the first two in Blount County. They named their first two children by using the family tradition of naming them for their grandparents. The first child, a daughter, was named Sarah Alexander Montgomery for her grandmother Sarah Montgomery. Their first-born son was named Alexander Houston Montgomery for his grandfather Alexander Montgomery. Their second son was named James Madison Montgomery for his grandfather on his mother's side. The rest of the eleven children were named Patsy, Jane, Polly, Louisa, Tabitha, Bertheny, Robert, and Eliza. They were born between 1799 and 1819.

As we followed the migratory path of our family, we learned that both the James and Anne Thompson Montgomery family descendants and ours left Augusta County and moved toward southwestern Virginia in the 1770/1780's era. From there, the descendants of the James and Anne Montgomery family primarily went to Kentucky and those of the John and Esther Montgomery family moved to Tennessee. Since our John and Margaret married in Tennessee and almost all of their children were born in Tennessee, we knew our family migrated from Virginia through Tennessee before finally settling in northern Alabama in Lawrence County before 1819.

To discuss all our genealogy research discoveries in a few brief pages is not possible. But the more detailed discussion and a complete list of references can be found on our web site: <http://206.166.195.12/Montgomery/index.html> It is updated as new information is discovered.

Once we were convinced by our genealogy research that our ancestry was through a different family than what we originally had believed, we charted a new research plan and centered it around Southwestern Virginia and Tennessee. We discovered many different Alexander Montgomerys were in that area. It was a challenge to 'differentiate among them. Therefore, we studied each one separately so that we could logically make a distinction. Our Alexander Montgomery was most often found in the company of his brother James in Augusta and Washington Counties, Virginia, and in Tennessee. Land and tax records were used for tracking their residences.

Alexander Montgomery and his son John were also found in the company of James' children, specifically the daughter Esther. Esther married William W. Craig in Blount County, Tennessee in 1801, and she lived near our John Montgomery in Maury County, Tennessee and in Lawrence County, Alabama. Our John Montgomery's father, Alexander, was last located living in Maury County, Tennessee in 1812 at the same time our John and his cousin Esther were also there. Alexander sold the land he owned in Blount County in 1812 while living in Maury County, Tennessee. He gave his nephew John Montgomery of Blount County his power of attorney to handle the sale and to register it in 1814.

At the time Alexander Montgomery sold his land in 1812, we believe he was planning to migrate with his son and niece's families to Lawrence County, Alabama. He would have been about 62 years old in 1812. It is not clear if he ever removed to Alabama with them or not. If he did go with them to Alabama, he would likely have died and been buried in Lawrence County where many other members of our family are buried. The most likely place of burial would be The Old Prospect Presbyterian Church Cemetery where John and Margaret are believed buried.

From The Old Prospect Church's records, John Montgomery was a founder in 1820 and an elder until his death in 1856. Alexander Montgomery's great grandson, Robert Craig Montgomery, maintained later church records and kept them when the church dissolved. They were recently found by one of his descendants and have been transcribed. (See the web site for photographs and for the history of this cemetery).

Margaret Alexander, the wife of John Montgomery, was not so difficult to trace. Her grandfather, a founder of the historical Tinkling Springs Presbyterian Church of Augusta County, Virginia, left a will in which he named his children. Horace Martin Alexander, who is the son of Margaret's brother James, left his home in Virginia at age 19 and became a follower during the earliest stages of the Mormon Church formation. He was a corporal in the Mormon battalion from Utah when he fought in the war against Mexico in 1846 and 1847. There is much information on Margaret Alexander's family in the Mormon Church records in Salt Lake City, Utah.

## II. THE SCIENTIFIC TEST DEFINED

Our genealogical research provides substantial proof 1) that our John Montgomery is a descendant of John and Esther Houston Montgomery and 2) that John's father is Alexander--one of the four sons of John and Esther Montgomery. As a way to be even more certain our conclusions were accurate, two descendants of John and Margaret Montgomery entered The Montgomery Clan DNA Test Project.

Cousins Joe and Russell Montgomery who positively are descendants of John and Margaret participated in the DNA project. Only Russell's DNA results were used for comparison with other participants. Russell did the 67- marker test and Joe did the 12-marker test. Russell's more numerous markers provided the most information.

Three descendants of John and Esther Houston Montgomery were also involved in the DNA test project. Two did the same 67 marker test as Russell. Both John and Esther Montgomery participants have well-documented lineages that are described in the books, *John and Esther Houston Montgomery 1719-1973* by Anderson, Montgomery, and Vawter and *The Montgomery Family of Franklin County* by Erick D. Montgomery. When the results of the tests were compared, Russell was a perfect 67- marker match with two known descendants of John and Esther Montgomery. One descendant line was the Reverend John Montgomery's and the other was his brother James'.

### III. ANALYZING THE RESULTS

The DNA testing service considers it "rare" to get such good matches except with close cousins or brothers. The perfect matches at 67 markers left virtually no doubt that the two John and Esther subjects and our Russell share a common ancestor. Therefore, using the DNA results and the Probability for Most Recent Common Ancestor (MRCA) table, there is a 98.16% probability of a common ancestor between Russell and the John and Esther participants within 7 generations. Counting backwards in the family's ancestry, the 7th generation is John and Esther Houston Montgomery in the already known ancestry of the two participants of John and Esther. By doing the same "count back" (seven generations) in Russell's known ancestry it also pinpointed that John and Esther would be the same ancestor in his line at seven generations back. This analysis is how we pinpointed John and Esther Montgomery as the "common ancestor" of all three 67-marker participants in the study.

Through our genealogy study of the John and Esther Houston Montgomery family, we discovered that Robert and his brother Reverend John both had marriage dates that were too late for either to have had a son born in 1775. James, although old enough to have been our John's father, already had a son named John. Therefore, of the four sons of John and Esther, only Alexander could be the father of our John. Alexander also fit the naming traditions of the family that were followed by our John where the other brother's names did not. Since the DNA tests proved there was an almost 100% probable genetic relationship, we determined that Alexander Montgomery is highly likely the father of our earliest known ancestor, John Montgomery.

From our genealogy research, we determined Alexander was born in Virginia about 1750. From a land deed of 1778 Augusta County, Virginia, we discovered his wife was Sarah. They married about 1773. Their son John was born May, 1775. We believe there are other sons of the marriage who also may have settled along with John in Limestone and Lawrence Counties, Alabama about 1819. The first census in 1820 for Lawrence and Limestone Counties identified, including our John, seven male "head of households" that carried the Montgomery surname.

A quote taken from Clan Montgomery's DNA Testing Service says the following: "When combined with conventional methods of genealogical research, DNA testing can be a very valuable tool. Test results can be used to confirm or to deny a suspected family connection between two subjects. Although it is impossible to pinpoint a common

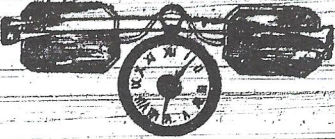
ancestor from the test results alone, with a proper paper trail you may be able to do so". In the case of our John Montgomery, we discovered strong genealogical evidence of a relationship to the John and Esther Houston Montgomery family and also found strong scientific evidence through DNA matches with at least two of their family's descendants.

Sometimes the discovery of a "non match" with a particular participant may be just as important when proving relationships as finding a positive match can be. When the test results of our Russell were compared with a descendant of Samuel Montgomery and his wife Margaret Nichols of the James and Anne Thompson Montgomery family, the results of the tests completely nullified the possibility of our John being a descendant of their family. Therefore, the previously embraced opinions of our John Montgomery's ancestry claims to James and Anne Montgomery were proven to be **not true**. The "non-match" of the two participants also confirms that the DAR is correct that our John Montgomery is not of the James and Anne Montgomery family. The 'non match' of Russell to their James and Anne Montgomery participant further strengthened our conclusion that our John Montgomery's ancestors are probably John and Esther Houston Montgomery.

Whenever a situation occurs such as happened in our family and new information is discovered that "disproves" older, long accepted family beliefs, it is often not readily accepted. This has been true with those in our own smaller family circle and will likely be true in our "extended" family as well. But no matter how our conclusions are received, we hope that at least someone will gain insight from our family's experience and perhaps be inspired to use some of our ideas to sort it all out. From our perspective, this study has been both challenging and at times very discouraging, yet it has also been one of the most exciting and rewarding experiences we've ever had as a family.

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