CHAPTER TWELVE

Genealogy and Family History

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Family history has become one of the most widely practiced forms of public history over the last 30 years. It links the past to the present in powerful ways as producers of the phenomenally popular global television series *Who Do You Think You Are?* have revealed. This program, of course, is a work of public and family history. A range of academic historians working in public history share my fascination with the recent growth of genealogy across the world. However, many also choose studiously to ignore its popularity. It is scholars in other disciplines, especially sociology, human and cultural geography, as well as information studies, who have dominated scholarly discussion on its practice and meanings (see Basu 2007; Kramer 2011; Nash 2002, 2015; Yakel 2004; and De Groot 2015). Over the last five years, I have written about the politics of family history in Australia on the basis of my research and interviews with family historians. My work is now focused on understanding the varied ways in which family history is practiced in different countries and what impact this has had on the development of historical consciousness around the world.

The growth of family history

Family historians were once sidelined by libraries and archives, but are now one of their largest client groups. At a workshop on family history held at Macquarie University, Sydney, in September 2014, Anne-Marie Swirtlich, director general of the National Library of Australia (NLA) told the audience that family historians are now a "significant user group of the National Library, representing 25% of visitors to the reading rooms and 12% of reference queries received." The NLA, like libraries and archives around the world, are providing a new suite of services for family historians. The growth of family history from the 1970s has revolutionized access to historical sources within archival institutions and on the Internet. When I started my career as an historian in late 1990s England, researching at the London Metropolitan Archives and The National Archives at Kew, I was intrigued by the ways in which academic and family historians were categorized

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as different, our needs and requirements dichotomized by the cultural institutions within which we worked on many of the same sources and where we shared space. When I moved to Australia from London in October 2008, I learned that family history was especially popular among individuals coming to terms with their convict pasts (Spurway 1989). Family history in Australia, and elsewhere, has become one of the strongest cultural industries over the past 30 years, but we have much to learn about the practice in different contexts.

Family history has captured people's imaginations at different times, in different nations. Before the twentieth century, historians have revealed how it was a practice largely associated with social aspiration. The Genealogical and Historical Society of Britain was established in 1850 and the British Society of Genealogists followed in 1911. Migrants who made their homes throughout the British Empire were among the keenest genealogists, congregating in formal societies as they settled in foreign lands (Kenneally 2014). In Australia, they established the Society of Australian Genealogists in 1938, the same year of the sesquicentenary of white settlement. Elsewhere in the Antipodes, the New Zealand Society of Genealogists came in 1967. In other settler nations, the Genealogical Society of South Africa was founded in 1964. In Canada, there remains no overarching national body of genealogists, but provincial and local organizations have flourished. The Ontario Genealogical Society was founded in 1961, while others followed in the wake of the Centennial of Confederation in 1967, such as the British Columbia Genealogical Society, which was founded in 1971.

In the United States, the Latter Day Saints' Genealogical Bureau was formed in 1888, and the first US national body, the National Genealogical Society, came together in 1903 (Little 2010). François Weil (2013) has charted the ways in which genealogy began as a "private quest for pedigree" among status-seeking settlers in colonial America until the late eighteenth century, becoming increasingly egalitarian and more widely practiced among the middle class and free African Americans from the antebellum era. From the 1860s to the mid-twentieth century, genealogy became an exclusionary practice infused by eugenic concerns and anxieties around race. In the mid-twentieth century, it was profoundly affected by the civil rights movement and multiculturalism, which broadened its practice among all social groups in many nations (Weil 2013).

The practice of family history underwent enormous growth and democratization across the world from the 1970s and became a global phenomenon following the publication of Alex Haley's *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* in the United States (1976). This reached hundreds of millions of people across the world in both book and television series format (De Groot 2009; Weil 2013). Its global success led to the establishment of the African American Family History Association in 1977.

Grassroots, local family history organizations were encouraged to join together nationally, and the United Kingdom–based Federation of Family History Societies provided an umbrella organization in 1974. There are now 180 societies linked to it around the world (De Groot 2015). Its Australian parallel followed four years later in 1978 (Federation of Family History Societies n.d.). These organizations, mainly run by volunteers, have all helped to develop an interest in both local and social history, but many members fret about their aging membership and how best to incorporate young people in order to guarantee their survival.

The Americans, Australians, and Canadians and their Pasts national surveys that gathered data on popular uses of the past have revealed the particular popularity of family history in white settler immigrant nations. Each survey revealed that the personal and

familial remain people's "principal focus for connection with the past" (Ashton and Hamilton 2010: 135; Conrad et al. 2013; Rosenzweig and Thelan 1998). Many individuals began their family history as nations publicly celebrated key nation-making dates. In Australia, genealogy really took off as the country moved toward the bicentenary of white settlement in 1988. In Canada, genealogists were encouraged to begin their research by the Centennial of Confederation in 1967, which was "a seminal moment that encouraged various initiatives in community history that led seamlessly to an interest in family" (Muise 2011). There is clearly a link between national celebrations and intimate lives that deserves further research. The *Canadians and Their Pasts* survey revealed that 1 in 5 of the 3000 respondents had undertaken family history in some form in the past 12 months. The practice of family history differed for individuals of different ethnic and cultural groups but was particularly significant for immigrants (Conrad et al. 2013). In Canada, sociologist Ron Lambert's 1990s research based on a paper survey of 1348 members of a Canadian genealogical society revealed that family historians were motivated to begin research at particular moments in the life cycle. Muise (2011) continued Lambert's extensive national survey on genealogical communities in Canada, which involved large-scale surveys of genealogists. These have revealed that there are many more people practicing this vernacular community history than is often realized. Muise's respondents told him that family history was so important to them because it helped construct a sense of community belonging.

The impact of television on family history

This steady growth in family history at the local, national, and international levels preceded the transmission of the enormously popular television series *Who Do You Think You Are?* in the United Kingdom in 2004, but there is no doubt that the program, now broadcast globally, has encouraged many more individuals to research their family's history across the globe and to engage with the practice. The television program, a plethora of digital sources, and the increasing popularity of family history have had a significant impact on the services of archival offices and libraries across the world in recent years. Until recently, production companies based in different nations produced the programs locally, and versions have been broadcast in Britain, Australia, Canada, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Israel, Norway, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Russia, South Africa, Sweden, and the United States. Warner Brothers recently bought the worldwide rights to the program, and it remains to be seen how it alters as a result.

Following the first broadcast of *Who Do You Think You Are?* the numbers of visitors in some libraries and archives around the world increased, relevant websites were visited far more frequently than before, and there were more e-mailed requests for help. In early 2008, the Society of Australian Genealogists welcomed 77% more new members than for the same period in 2007. Many were family historians who had started family trees but abandoned them when the task became too complicated or tiresome. They now returned to their family trees re-energized by the program and embracing the possibilities promised by the technological revolution and enhanced software. The demand for Web-based services has been identified as the most significant impact of the program (Evans 2011, 2015; Yeats 2008). As Richard Evans suggests, this popular demand for archives and libraries to provide better services to family historians, and the associated need for increased state funding, have the potential "to make a significant contribution to the

revival of public history in Australia" (2008: 82.1). Graeme Davison has also argued that the digitization of many historical sources has enabled more family historians to become active researchers, but he remains concerned (as many of us do) about the marketization of this process by companies like Ancestry.com (Davison 2009). For decades family historians have volunteered their labor and services for free, transcribing historical material to aid family historians in their research. Many are now horrified to discover that companies like Ancestry have the rights to this data, resulting from their labor, and charge genealogists to access it. As De Groot (2015) suggests, we need to think about the impact of Ancestry.com replacing the state as the gatekeeper to many researchers' historical knowledge. Has information about the past become a commodity in our neoliberal age?

Motivations

We still have much more to learn about the motivations and output of family historians as well as the impact of the digitization of historical sources. The NLA survey that I opened this chapter with reveals that family history researchers are looking for much more than "who" they are; they also seek the answers to "what" and "why" questions and to understand more about the historical contexts of their ancestors. The NLA's research reveals that family historians are looking for historical understanding as well as knowledge.

By contrast, many family historians have been dismissed as "misty-eyed and syrupy" by professional and academic historians, and their findings and practices deemed irrelevant to the wider historical community (Keneally 2014). Some people have categorized genealogists as conservative, with a big and a small "c," for their supposedly nostalgic search for a golden age of the family. Noeline Kyle argues that genealogy provides families with a sense of identity in a period when many of them are undergoing transformation and disruption: it "was once a quest for social status and recognition, but in the 1990s [and beyond], as its base has broadened, it has become a search for identity" (1998: 81). Others have suggested that they search for their family trees to find "something solid in a shifting world" (Davison 2004: 83). Family history research therefore satisfies a need to search for roots in a postmodern and uncertain age. British historian Jerome De Groot suggests that "the increasing desire to delve into origins possibly betrays a contemporary anxiety about social atomisation and the fracturing of family structures." It is often a conservative reaction to change, and he argues that family history provides practitioners with a sense of security and identity, an "insight into self-hood" (2009: 79). Others have argued that the recording of the births, deaths, and marriages of ancestors provides individuals with "narrative machinery" (Brennan 2000: 48). For some, it is a means of providing a scaffold for the past, creating sturdy or precarious foundations for present circumstances and lives; people are now told that they need to understand their pasts in order to look forward to the future. Historical research conducted by individuals, often with little training, provides some practitioners with a sense of identity and enables them to historicize their understandings of the present. One practitioner explains her passion as follows: "In exploring our family tree we immerse ourselves in history and in the process we transform it and make it personal. This is *our* history … part of *our* identity" (Docker 2001: 21; emphasis mine). Research has revealed how family history can have a powerful transformative impact on researchers.

Family historians as new social historians

I have argued elsewhere that family historians can be both new social historians and the protectors of privilege and prestige. In nineteenth-century Australia, elite settler families searched for and referred to British aristocratic lineage when making claim to new social positions in the colony. Members of these pioneer families self-consciously left historical evidence – print, pictorial, and material – in order to cement their legacies and their cultural and political power. Cultural repositories, museums, and galleries reinforced the process. At the turn of the twentieth century, descendants of early colonial elite families helped establish the Royal Australian Historical Society to make their mark on Australian history and the nation's memory (Doyle 2001; Evans 2015). Settlers in other nations made similar claims using the same methods, as Weil (2013) has demonstrated for the United States and others for elsewhere (see Martinez 2008 and Szonyi 2002).

By contrast, many family historians, working since the 1970s and researching their poor white and mixed racial ancestry, are determined to reveal the histories of society's marginalized, of the "ordinary" people in their past (Bashforth n.d.). Australian historian and archaeologist Nick Brodie tells us in his recent book that the "heroes and heroines of this story are everyday folk who helped people a continent and generate a nation. They are my kin, and I share their stories because their joys and struggles echo millions of others that have been forgotten" (2015: ix). As the British National Archives guide to genealogy expresses it, "Family history allows you to bring your ancestors back to life; by telling their stories you are giving a voice to Britain's forgotten sections of society" (Barratt 2004: xi). Family historians working on their poor white ancestors often style themselves as new social historians, the vanguard of the "history from below" movement, determined to reveal the histories of society's marginalized. De Groot (2015) enjoys watching this process of enfranchisement play out, but also frets about the conservative political implications of family history.

The legacies of the post-1970s expansion of mass higher education, the emergence of the new cultural and social history, and the democratization of history has left us knowing much more about the lives of black, mixed-race, poor, and traumatized men and women, who were often previously neglected by the historical record. Public history has been vital to the creation of this knowledge. It has also changed the way in which history is both produced and consumed. We can see how group lives, linked by historical experience, are the cornerstone of numerous public history projects like Find & Connect (2015), and how the digitization of sources has aided their construction. Family historians have been crucial to their success. Such projects have created a space for the articulation and representation of the life stories of traumatized individuals and helped them to trace their families. Public recognition of the suffering of the Stolen Generations, Forgotten Australians, returned soldiers, victims of forced adoptions or sexual abuse, and other troubled social groups, has focused on their neglect in the historical record. These projects show how knowledge of these people's histories is vital in acknowledging their suffering in the past and providing the possibility of reconciliation in the present. These forms of public family history, funded by the state, have important agendas of recognition and inclusion (Swain et al. 2012). This is the flip side to the conservative consequences of family history so often evoked by critics.

The Amateur/Professional divide

Recently, scholars, and public historians in particular, have troubled assumptions about family historians and the demarcation between academics and "amateur" family historians. There has long existed a tension between meanings of professionalism and amateurism in our understanding of family history and genealogy. There is much confusion about these terms, which is not helped by people who use them interchangeably (Foster 2014; Yakel 2004). Scholars have suggested that genealogists and professional historians parted ways in the late nineteenth century as the professionalization of the discipline of history took shape in the universities and was marked by the acquisition of academic degrees. The Royal Historical Society in England was founded in 1862, the English Historical Association in 1906, the American Historical Association in 1884, the Canadian Historical Association in 1922, and the Australian Historical Association coming much later in 1973. These organizations required members to possess university degrees to gain admission, and "amateur" family historians were shunned from their hallowed halls in the process (Weil 2013).

Many of us who work in the field of family history are familiar with the way that family historians continue to be derided, although academic disdain for genealogists remains hard to document because it is usually articulated orally and rarely in writing. Academics have been quick to distance themselves from genealogists in their desire to set themselves apart from and above those "amateur" family historians; from those who supposedly "wallow in self-indulgent nostalgia" (Bashforth n.d.). Australian historian Victoria Haskins has written thoughtfully about her engagement with family history on behalf of her grandmother in the late 1990s, as she took a break from a PhD, on the relationship between white Australian and Aboriginal women: "At the time, I viewed family history with a serious cringe factor, and felt that this despised pursuit was appropriate to my general uselessness as a 'real historian'" (Haskins 1998: 15). Professional historians who practiced family history used to do so on the sly, rarely drawing attention to their work. There were, however, always exceptions and in Australia these included Grace Karskens, Victoria Haskins, Maria Nugent, Babette Smith, Carol Liston, Perry McIntyre, Lucy Frost, and Cassandra Pybus (Evans 2011).

A recent trend troubling the boundary between academic and family history in America, England, and Australia is the flurry of historians publishing work based around their own family histories. This seems set to continue for some years yet. As De Groot (2015) suggests, family history troubles the binary between amateur and professional and is therefore something that public historians need to engage with.

In England, Alison Light's *Common People: The History of an English Family* was published in October 2014. It is a living, breathing history of how the Industrial Revolution made its impact on English lives. Light reveals her immensely evocative family history in four sections, which begin with each of her grandparents' stories. What follows is a "history of being paupers" that her grandmother never told. We read how her forebears coped, or did not, with fortune, fate, disease, and accidents, and how they never escaped the poverty that framed their lives. The book is her response to the death of her father and leads her to claim the workhouse as her ancestral home. Light allows us to make some sense of the intimate lives of the English poor over the past 200 years. Using family history, she successfully makes the micro, macro. In her notes, Light states that she hopes her book will "encourage others to write their family history as a public history" (2014: 255).

We can link her work on the migratory habits of nineteenth-century English families with that of historians working on their family histories elsewhere. Joseph Amato in the United States has traced seven generations of his family from Sicily, Prussia, Acadia, England, Ireland, New England, and the Midwest of the United States to reveal a broader history of America's poor, and its movement from farm and village to town and city in *Jacob's Well: A Case for Rethinking Family History* (2008). In Australia, Penny Russell (2014) is currently researching her Congregationalist family who migrated from the East End of London to Sydney. This trend is less developed among historians in Canada, but here labor historians have often relied on genealogy to piece together the histories they write. Novelists have also been heavily reliant on the techniques of family history for their own research (Caron 2006; Hodgins 1998; Munroe 1991, 1995, 1999).

Many of the above historians' nineteenth-century ancestors seemed frequently on the move across the globe, trying to "better themselves." Most, of course, failed in that endeavor. As these examples show, and there are many others I could list (as Light (2014) states on her first page, "everyone does family history nowadays"), we should reap the evidence accumulated by these researchers to understand more about the global transformations within which these lives were located.

Some people, mainly the well-to-do, have been doing family history for centuries, but it is time for all of us to recognize the political significance and consequences of others reclaiming their past in these ways. As Amato states, "individuals can now give themselves a history" (2008: 234). Public historians should encourage amateurs and professionals alike to take up Light's rallying cry on behalf of family historians, and scholars also need to acknowledge the value of family historians' labor as well as their important contributions to historical knowledge and consciousness.

Gender and family history

There is a powerful relationship between feminism and family history, which builds on the genealogy of women's engagement with alternative modes of making history. Bonnie Smith (1998) and Mary Spongberg (2002) have shown the many ways in which women's diverse contributions to history have been marginalized by male (and later, female) academics since the early nineteenth century. Women have always made significant contributions to family and local history, often outside of the academy (Thirsk 1996). Women also came to dominate public history, in all its varied forms, as it emerged as a sub-discipline in the twentieth century (West 1999).

Both Spongberg and Smith have revealed the ways in which the professionalization of history in the nineteenth century and the "birth of the seminar," undertaken in the wake of Leopold Von Ranke, split the practice of history into scientific/professional and unscientific/unprofessional approaches. This split was gendered, as women were excluded from the academy and shunned from the seminar room. Spongberg (2002) has shown the diverse ways in which women wrote history for centuries before the emergence of the Women's Liberation Movement in the 1960s, when we normally date the arrival of women's history in the white Western world. Women's liberationists from the 1960s produced a plethora of historical work revealing the lost histories of women, both "ordinary" and "extraordinary." As Spongberg suggests, this work was presented as pioneering and the centuries of female contributions to scholarship including family history, practiced outside of the academy, was left largely ignored. It is important for current scholars to revalue this work and not to ignore the significance of historical research

being undertaken outside of the academy at all times. Feminist historians in particular should embrace the "amateurish" and the "other" pursuits of often-female family historians and recognize its political significance.

Women's contribution to their family history has often been material, visual, and oral rather than textual (Evans 2012). The historical profession has been slow to value these contributions to broader historical consciousness and knowledge, and it is really only in the last ten years or so that cultural history has forged a space for the analysis of objects and the ways in which they can be used to make history. While male lines of descent have been prioritized in Western European family history, women challenged these by producing their family history using material culture including clothes, quilts, art, and jewelry. They used these to challenge and renegotiate their power relationships within families and their local communities. Patriarchs and matriarchs often nurtured women, especially those who never married, as historians within their family before the twentieth century (Weil 2013). Women used material culture to record their history, and it was a culture within which they predominated. Feminist art historians Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock (1981) urge us to revalue this form of women's labor and its products, and to recognize women's varied contributions to making history. Current research by younger scholars is continuing their project (Cramer 2017; Parker and Pollock 1981).

The work of pre-twentieth-century family historians was often also linked to their contributions to local historical scholarship as they established their homes and communities. This was especially the case for those women who moved to nurture families and settle properties in distant lands, far from the homes of their birth and large family support networks. Local knowledge gave women power and authority within their new communities and friends they might rely upon in times of need (Lovell 2005; Stabile 2004). It is for this reason that family history is particularly strong within migrant, settler nations like Australia, Canada, South Africa, and New Zealand.

Family history has always been understood as a gendered practice, a pursuit dominated by women of a certain age. The increasingly close relationship between military and family history has begun to trouble these assumptions, and men are becoming more prominent as family historians as they trace the military paths of their ancestors, aided by the digitization of military records (Stanley 2014; Thompson 2013). Technological transformation has also brought different demographics into the family history fold (Davison 2009). Rootsweb and Genealogy.com, together with the global behemoth of Ancestry.com, are among the world's most visited Internet sites. Researchers need to concentrate on what meaning is being made of the research being undertaken using these portals. When I began my research on family history, I hypothesized that research conducted in the 1970s and 1980s might have been focused on how a family's lives slotted into national narratives. However, I discovered that family historians have always used their research to try to "know themselves," to search for their personal identity. Family history has allowed people to craft stories about their past in order to understand their lives in the present. Those lives can be traced through complex networks around the world, which enable us to trouble national historical narratives using the details of myriad intimate lives to do so.

The political uses of family history

I have argued for the radical political potential of family history if public historians work on the history of the family collaboratively and with members of diverse communities. My research explores some of the ways in which family history can empower researchers

and how different categories of researchers might cooperate. I have undertaken collaborative research with genealogical communities in Australia, including the Society of Australian Genealogists and descendants of clients of The Benevolent Society (Australia's oldest surviving charity established in 1813), to show the ways in which Australian history has been transformed by the contributions of family historians. I have argued that previously marginal histories of Aboriginal, mixed-race, and "illegitimate" families have been discovered by thousands of their descendants who reveal a deliberately forgotten history. Brought together with pioneer narratives and other stories about the colonial past, family history thus challenges our understanding of Australian history (Evans 2015).

I have not worked on my own family tree, but the techniques of family history are key to my historical method. It is well known that practitioners of public history celebrate history as "a social form of knowledge" (Kean 2004; Samuel 1994: 8). Many hope that historical projects based on collaborative endeavors using the labor of those both inside and outside the academy will create "shared authority" (Frisch 1990; Rosenzweig n.d.; Swain, Sheedy, and O'Neill 2012). Most public historians have been influenced by Alistair Thomson and Michael Frisch's work on shared authority, and many aim to integrate this method into their research, while also acknowledging its limits and the complex power relations involved (Adair, Filene, and Koloski 2011).

When I worked on The Benevolent Society project, I argued that there were significant personal, intellectual, and political reasons for collaborating with family historians. I hoped that we could do more than allow family historians to merely participate in it. I was determined that a new history of the organization should be different from histories written by former staff members of the charity, which are mostly uncritical and celebratory, and that it should be communally produced. I believed that it was vital to incorporate the life stories of lone mothers into a history of The Benevolent Society in its 200th year because they have remained one of the largest client groups of the charity since its establishment. They continue to be among the most disadvantaged members of Australian society. Including the biographies of lone mothers and their children in a broader history of the organization gives these women's lives legitimacy which they lacked during their lifetimes. I also hoped that the contributions of family historians would have political purpose. The past is connected with the present in this research to demonstrate the reasons for the continued poverty of lone mothers today and to make an argument for contemporary policy change.

Our project began with a call out to family historians via local and national media who had undertaken research using the charity's archives. The Benevolent Society requires written permission to access their archives at the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, and library staff informed me that the largest numbers of users of The Benevolent Society archive are family historians. It became clear that thousands of descendants of women who gave birth at the Benevolent Asylum during the nineteenth century have searched for their "illegitimate" ancestors. Their histories reveal the legacy of social inequality for women, non-whites, and the poor.

All of the family historians I have collaborated with have found their research satisfying on both an intellectual and an emotional level. It is understood as an ongoing process, and it has undoubtedly changed their lives. They do not want their research to end, and they are not seeking the truth about their family's history. They might be driven by an emotional engagement with the past, the desire to learn more about their family's

past in order to learn more about their present selves, but that is not the only concern of their inquiries. Their knowledge about the past has a significant transformative impact on their present lives. Emotions do not blind family historians to structural issues or broader social contexts, and many (if not all) family historians embrace the challenging nature of their discoveries. Researchers need to better understand family historians as historical subjects, and how their research has changed their lives. Scholars need to ask: how do family historians engage with the self when reconstructing the life stories of their ancestors, and what impact has that had upon their lives?

Sociologist Anne Marie Kramer used Mass Observation data from the University of Sussex to survey the motivations of genealogists in England and argues for the ways in which family histories were used to map connectedness, kinship, and create a resource for "identity-work" and "belonging in time" (Kramer 2011). Roots tourism as explored by Paul Basu (2007) encourages the Scottish, Irish, and other diasporas to travel the world, undertaking family research. These practices enable family historians who visit sites of migration to better understand their place within the globe and the ways in which their identities might transcend national and racial boundaries. Cultural geographer Catherine Nash suggests that family history can be used to make claim to "pure" ethnic positions but also to trouble national identities and "exclusive models of national belonging" (2015: 133). This does not mean we must remain blind to the exclusionary practices of genealogy, especially at historical moments when anxieties about race and eugenics have been particularly powerful (see Martinez 2008; Weil 2013).

Many family historians have moved beyond the archive and online resources to learn about their family history from other sources. DNA is allowing new connections, between people and space, to be made by researchers across the world. The company 23andMe allows individuals to bring their "ancestry to life through their DNA" and to "find relatives across continents or the street." In exchange for a sample of their saliva and US$99, customers are provided with details about their family history as well as their genetic makeup. Individuals are increasingly turning to science to "prove" their family history, and Ancestry.com is now cashing in on this market along with a host of other companies offering DNA searches. We might suggest that this turn to science has bulldozed over any claims that history might make to this production of knowledge, but Kenneally's research reveals that genetics is "not as determinative as we feared" and that cultural history continues to shape individuals more than we might assume (2014: 314).

Conclusion

An examination of the exponential growth and impact of family history around the world reveals the democratic possibilities of public history, the different constituencies involved with historical production and consumption, and the complex ways in which all of us make meaning of the past through our own family story. It is important for public historians and historians of the family to engage with family historians by disseminating their research and knowledge, and to collaborate with them on a variety of local, national, and transnational projects. Different historical constituencies, professional and amateur alike, have much to learn from each other, and we need to value our different contributions. Academic, public, and family historians need to be comfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity; but the further work we do together, the greater the potential to learn more about our subjects. Our knowledge, however,

always remains provisional, conflicted, and in a constant state of flux. De Groot suggests that genealogy can be argued to be "a mournful and doomed attempt at constructing meaning .... Yet it is also something that is happening despite theory, and needs to be further understood before it can be coherently critiqued" (2015: 126). Researchers should heed his clarion cry.