**The Shaffer-Hockemeier Family Tree**

**Why care about a family tree?**

This is a personal question, and the answer will be different for each of us. For me, it’s not a matter of pride, national identity, or cultural heritage. Instead, it’s simple curiosity along with the desire to understand the life, hardships, and joys of my predecessors.

**How to build a family tree**

The lineage between generations is the glue that holds the tree together. Without credible documentation these linkages are weak or nonexistent. In this case the tree becomes a work of fiction and has little value.

After a bit of research, I realized that some citations were more credible than others. The more credible documentation tends to be from government records, church registers, records contemporary with the person’s life, or from recognized genealogists. Less credible citations come from hand-me-down memories and poorly created family trees.

Here are some examples of more credible resources that can be used as citations:

* Original handwritten records from family members, recorded during or soon after the person’s lifetime
* Family history written in bibles
* Government & church census data (including older handwritten records)
* Historic birth, death, baptism, and marriage records
* Church registers
* Wills and probate records
* Court records
* Government records (draft, military service, social security)
* Books that have been researched by genealogists

Less credible resources that should be treated with skepticism:

* family trees from other people
* hand-me-down knowledge that is passed from one generation to the next, and exists only in memory
* Geneanet Community Trees Index (a collection of private family trees)
* Find-a-grave sites where information is submitted by individuals and not vetted

It’s interesting to note that most family trees on Ancestry and other genealogy sites use sources and citations that are not well researched. In many cases the owner cites information that is blatantly incorrect or is simply guesswork.

Therefore, to show a credible lineage between parents and child, I require at least one trusted citation. However even then it’s a game of probabilities. For example, I may be 90% sure of the lineage between parent and child, but after 10 generations, each with a 90% probability of being correct, the probability of correctly identifying the distant ancestor is only 33%. It’s good to keep this in mind as the family tree is pushed further back in time.

Another good practice in creating the family tree includes considering the age between generations. Maternal age at birth was typically between 20 and 40 years. Any record showing a child being born outside of this 20-year maternal window should be viewed with some degree of skepticism.

Another consideration in determining the validity of lineage records is location. As we go back in time families were less mobile than today. People often were born and died in the same village. A record showing birth, marriage, death, and other life experiences in different locations, especially far-off locations, should be viewed with skepticism.

**Challenges and complications**

Name spelling is hit and miss; for example, census takers often misspell names. And many of our more distant ancestors didn’t read or write and were simply unable to spell their names, relying on the expertise of others.

Surnames often varied by generation. It’s well known that fixed surnames are a more recent invention. Before the 19th century many surnames were based on the father’s first name or on place of origin. For example, the Dutch use of patronymic names was common before the 1800s. This was the practice of naming a child “son of” or “daughter of” the father. The suffixes “son, sen, se, sz, s, z, x, dochter, and dr” were commonly appended to the father’s first name, resulting in different surnames for each generation.

Dutch surnames based on locations usually include prefixes like *de*(the), *van*(from), *van de*,*van der*,*or van den*(from the). It was often the case that when a Dutch immigrant came to America these prefixes would become lumped into the surname. As an example, Van Wagenen would become Vanwagenen or simplified to Vanwagen (the originating location in this is example is Wageningen, Netherlands).

A good discussion of surname practices can be found here:

<https://www.legacytree.com/blog/dutch-surnames>

There are many additional complicating factors. For example, 2nd marriages were common when one of the original married pair passed away earlier in life, making it more difficult to trace the lineage of the children. Furthermore, children born out of wedlock were often not recorded and sometimes adopted by other families. And finally, as it is today, certain names were popular and frequently used. It’s common to find records of different individuals with the same name, same location, and similar year of birth.

**Notable families and individuals**

The people I discuss below are my direct ancestors, i.e., parents, grandparents, 1st great grandparents, 2nd great grandparents, etc. I’ve omitted any discussion of aunts, uncles, or stepparents for the sake of brevity.

The **Shaffer** surname can be traced back to Dauphin County, Pennsylvania, where John Steffe Shaffer was born around 1839. Unfortunately, there are no records of his parents and there were lots of families with the Shaffer surname in 1800s Pennsylvania, making it difficult to identify his lineage. John was a carpenter in Pennsylvania and moved to Mound City, Linn Co., Kansas to continue his trade, sometime between 1874 and 1880. In 1887 John moved his family to Beaver Co. Oklahoma where he homesteaded and became a farmer/rancher/stock grower.

John’s son, James Ellsworth Shaffer (b. 1871) continued to manage the family’s business after his father’s death. James’s son, William Shaffer (b. 1925), married Eula June Hockemeier (b. 1930) and settled in Cambridge, Furnace Co. Nebraska. William served in the Korean War and afterwards moved his family to Hastings, Nebraska where he pursued his trade of electronic technician. Around 1968 William moved to Lincoln, Lancaster Co. Nebraska, where he operated his own business, *Shaffer Communications*. William passed away in 2019 but his business continues to this day (<https://www.shaffercomm.com>).

**Jackson**, the maiden name of Siddie Mae Shaffer (b. 1887), wife of James Ellsworth Shaffer (b. 1871), goes back to Churchwell Jackson (b. 1758). Churchwell was originally from Orange Co., Virginia, then moved to Anderson Co. Tennessee, and later to Marion Co. Tennessee. He served in the Over Mountain Men militia during the Revolutionary War, volunteering multiple times (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Overmountain_Men>). Churchwell’s son, Churchwell Jackson Jr. (b. 1794), continued the tradition of military service and served in the East Tennessee Militia during the War of 1812. In later years he made his living as a miller.

Churchwell Jr.’s son, William Coffelt Jackson (b. 1837), originated from Marion Co. Tennessee, later moving to Anderson Co. Tennessee, and marrying Rebecca Jane Garner (b. 1839). During the Civil War he served as a Captain in the 12th Regiment, Tennessee Cavalry, on the side of the Union. In 1870 he was a farmer in Dade Co. Missouri, and in 1880 he was a farmer in Lampasas Co. Texas. In the 1900 census he is recorded as a landlord in the area around Oklahoma City. Wilson Coffelt’s son, George Washington Jackson (b. 1865), father of Siddie Mae Jackson (b. 1887), settled in Cleo Springs, Oklahoma, where he owned a general store.

**Miers**, the maiden name of Addie Jackson (b. 1867), wife of George Washington Jackson (b. 1865), can be traced back to Nathan Miears (b. 1735) from Bertie Co. North Carolina. Nathan’s son, Nathan Miers Jr. (b. 1774), moved from North Carolina to Carroll Co. Mississippi sometime before 1840. Nathan Jr.’s grandson, Isaac Miers (b. 1835), was raised in Mississippi, served in the Confederate Army during the Civil War, and subsequently moved to Texas where he was a prominent sheepman in the town of Sonora. He met an unfortunate demise during an argument with another stockman when he was killed in a gun/knife fight. His house in Sonora still stands and now serves as a museum (<https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=119484>).

**Hockemeier**, the maiden name of Eula June Shaffer (b. 1930), is handed down from Fritz Hockemeier (b. 1854) from Veisbauden, Germany. Fritz’s son, Fredrik Hockemeier (b. 1874), immigrated to the U.S. in 1892 and settled in the area around Cambridge, Nebraska. Fredrik’s son, Henry Hockemeier (b. 1899), was a farmer, shopkeeper, and father of Eula June. Henry’s ancestral families include the surnames Krumme, Mues, Huxoll, Busch, Witte, and Fuerpiels, all from Germany.

**Decker** was the maiden name of Myrtle Hockemeier (b. 1902), wife of Henry Hockemeier. The Decker surname has a Dutch lineage and can be traced back 11 generations, to Arien Gerritsen Decker (b. abt. 1620). Arien’s son, Jan Gerretson Decker (b. 1642) immigrated to America sometime before 1664 and settled in Ulster County, NY. Skipping forward a few generations, Gerret Decker (b. 1711) built a house in Shwangunk NY that still stands today and is a historic landmark (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Decker_House>). Gerret’s son, Petrus Decker (b. 1759) served as a private in the Ulster County Militia during the Revolutionary War.

Alfred Decker (b. 1838) moved his family from Ulster Co. NY to Otoe Co. Nebraska sometime between 1867 and 1870. Alfred’s son, Robert Decker (b. 1864), father of Myrtle Decker (b. 1902), moved his family to Furnace County, Nebraska, between 1888 and 1900.

**Van Wagenen** is the maiden name of Geertjen Van Wagenen (b. 1686), wife of Jacob Gerritse Decker (b. 1684), and can be traced back to Aert Jacobsen Van Wagenen (b. 1566) from Wageningen, Netherlands. Aert’s son, Jacob Aartse Van Wagenen (b. 1594) moved his family from the Netherlands to Ulster Co., New York, arriving in 1642. Jacob’s farm and family cemetery are now historic landmarks ( <https://www.waymarking.com/waymarks/wm3B7K_Wagendaal> ).

**Pels**, maiden name of Sara Evertse Van Wagenen (b. 1659), wife of Jacob Aertsen Van Wagenen (b. 1653), is traced back to Evert Pels (b. 1585) from the Netherlands. Evert’s son, Evert Evertsz Pels (b. 1616) moved his family from the Netherlands to New York, arriving in 1642. He was a brewer and farmer, first settling in New Amsterdam, then Albany Co., and finally Ulster Co.

**Van Kortryk** is the maiden name of Geertie Hendricks Schutt (b. 1682), mother of Catharina Decker (b. 1716) who was the wife of Gerret Decker (b. 1711). The Van Kortryk surname is handed down from Sebastian Cortes Van Kortryk (b. 1550), likely from Kortrijk, Belgium. His grandson, Jan Bastiensen Sebastiansen Lowe Van Kortryk (b. 1618), immigrated to America in 1663 and owned a bouwerie (Dutch farm) in Harlem NY (now part or New York City). Jan Bastiensen’s son, Hendrick Jansen Van Kortryk (b. 1648) was also a farmer and eventually settled in Ulster Co. NY.

**Davis**, the maiden name of Ann Decker (b. 1784), wife of Levi Decker (b. 1783), comes from Christoffel Davis (b. 1616) who originated in Durham Co. England. He immigrated to America in 1658 and lived in Orange Co. NY. Christoffel was a trapper, tracker, trader, and hunter and had close ties to the local Indian tribes including the Iroquois and Mohawk. He was often used as an interpreter and served as magistrate for Fort Orange. He was frequently at odds with the Dutch authorities (his transgressions included selling liquor to the Indians) and appears in many court records. In 1656 he was granted land along the Esopus River in Ulster Co. and there built a log cabin where he raised his family, far away from any settlements ( <https://notablecharacters.wordpress.com/2014/03/01/christoffel-kit-davis-esopus-pioneer/>).

Isaac Christoffel Davis (b. 1668) was the son of Christoffel Davis. He built a stone house in Marbletown, Ulster Co. NY that also served as a tavern and meeting house and still stands today (<https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=118541>).

John Davis (b. 1749), grandson of Isaac, served in the Revolutionary War in the Albany Co. Militia. He was taken prisoner in 1780, returned in 1782, and continued to serve as a sergeant.

The **Terwilliger sur**name enters into to the tree in multiple branches. One branch with Elsie Terwilliger (b. 1749), wife of John Davis. Elsie’s father, Isaac Terwilliger (b. 1716) built a stone house in Wallkill, Ulster Co. NY. The house was set fire in 1774 by a local Indian tribe and both Isaac and his wife Rebecca were killed. The house has been rebuilt and is still occupied today (<https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Space:Isaac_Terwilliger_House>).

Another branch with Ariaantje Rhinehart (b. 1769), with the maiden name of Terwilliger, who was Alfred Decker’s (b. 1838) 1st great grandmother. All Terwilliger lineage goes back to Dirck Terwilliger (b. 1600), an ancestor from Vianen, Holland. Dirck’s son, Evert Dircksen Van Der Willigen (b. 1630) and Dirck’s grandson, Jan Evertsen Van der Willigen (b. 1657), made the voyage to America sometime between 1657 and 1685, settling in Ulster Co. New York.

**Edsall** is the maiden name of Sara Frances Decker (b. 1834), wife of Alfred Decker (b. 1838). Sara’s father, Levi Edsall (b. 1813) lived in Orange Co. NY until he moved to Otoe Co. NE sometime between 1860 and 1870. There he was granted a homestead of 80 acres in 1875.

**Dunn**, is the maiden name of Nellie Ellen Bridget Decker (b. 1870), wife of Robert W Decker (b. 1864). Nellie’s parents were William Dunn (b. 1835) and Anne Hennessy (b. 1837), both from Moycarkey, Tipperary, Ireland. Sometime between 1857 and 1870 they immigrated from Ireland to Stark Co. Illinois where they farmed. William & Anne’s daughter, Nellie Ellen Bridget Dunn (b. 1870), was born in Illinois, married Robert W Decker (b. 1864) in Otoe Co. Nebraska in 1888, and later moved to Gosper Co. Nebraska. Robert and Nellie’s daughter, Myrtle Lucile Decker (b. 1902) was born in Holbrook, Nebraska and married Henry Hockemeier (b. 1899) in 1921. Henry and Myrtle settled in the area around Cambridge, Nebraska.

As a final note to ancestral surname histories, there have been suggestions of ties to Andrew Jackson (7th U.S. president) and John Morton (signer of the Declaration of Independence). Although both surnames appear in the family tree, I’ve found no evidence of any linkage to these famous individuals.

**Ancestral history and correlation to DNA matches**

My DNA was tested by Ancestry.com and has the following mix, from highest to lowest percentages:

* England and NW Europe
* Germanic Europe, including Germany and Netherlands
* Scotland
* Southern Ireland
* Sweden & Denmark
* Norway

The Ireland and Norway DNA ties come from only from my maternal side, the remainder are common to both maternal and paternal sides. It’s worth noting that DNA ethnicities are passed down unevenly, so the exact percentage of DNA has little meaning.

Even so, it’s worth exploring how well the DNA regions correlate with the family tree history.

* The **Shaffer** surname is no doubt of German origin. Almost all Shaffer families who immigrated in the 18th and 19th centuries settled in Pennsylvania (<https://www.houseofnames.com/shaffer-family-crest> ), the same state where the most distant known Shaffer ancestor, John Shaffer (b. 1839), was born.
* **Jackson** is likely of English/Scottish origin. It’s interesting to note that many Jacksons immigrated and settled in Virginia in the 17th and 18th centuries ([https://www.houseofnames.com/jackson-family-crest](https://www.houseofnames.com/jackson-family-crest#:~:text=The%20distinguished%20surname%20Jackson%20first,%22a%20son%20of%20Jack.%22)) . This is the same state where the most distant known Jackson ancestor, Churchwell Jackson (b. 1758), was born.
* The **Miers** surname is likely of German origin, but possibly English as well. Unfortunately, there are no records to show a specific lineage to either location.
* **Hockemeie**rhas definite roots in Germany, where the oldest known Hockemeier, Fritz Hockemeier (b. 1854), originated. It’s worth noting that Henry Hockemeier’s (b. 1899) other ancestral names, Krumme, Mues, Huxoll, Busch, Witte, and Fuerpiels, also originated from Germany.
* **Decker** is traced back to the Arnhem, Netherlands, where the first known Decker, Arien Gerritsen Decker (b. abt. 1620), originated. This municipality is in eastern Netherlands, close to the German border.
* **Van Wagenen** can be traced back to Aert Jacobsen Van Wagenen (b. 1566) from Wageningen, Gelderland, Netherlands, a municipality close to Arnhem, mentioned above.
* **Pels**, is traced back to Evert Pels (b. 1585) from Amsterdam, in western Netherlands.
* **Van Kortryk** is handed down from Sebastian Cortes Van Kortryk (b. 1550), from Kortrijk, in western Belgium.
* **Davis** comes from Christoffel Davis (b. 1616) who originated in Durham, England.
* The **Terwilliger sur**name comes from Dirck Terwilliger (b. 1600), an ancestor from Vianen, Holland, now part of the Netherlands. The name has Dutch origins and a well-documented history of settlers in New Amsterdam (New York City), then Albany County, and then Ulster County, all along the Hudson River (<https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Space:Terwilliger_Name_Study>).
* The **Edsall** surname has its origins from England (<https://www.surnamedb.com/Surname/Edsall>).
* The **Dunn** surname comes from southern Ireland, where both William Dunn (b. 1835) and Anne Hennessy (b. 1837) originated.

So, the tree has strong correlations to the DNA results for Germanic Europe, both Germany and Netherlands, and to England and southern Ireland. Less so to Scotland. And none (so far) to Denmark, Sweden, or Norway. However, there are many additional surnames in the tree not discussed here. And many more yet to be discovered, especially for some of the shorter branches in the tree (the Shaffer branch only goes back to 1839).

**In closing…**

Much of the family history has been lost to the fog of time… lack of records, lost documents, and the preoccupation with the struggle to survive. Daily life was seldom written about, and the information we have tends to focus on males. Female contributions were often overlooked or not recorded. Nonetheless we’re able to glean some idea of their lives, families, and occupations.

Male occupations included farmers, stock growers, craftsmen, shopkeepers, and soldiers. Motherhood was the primary occupation of most females. This itself is significant, keeping in mind the hardships and risks of childbirth, when not only infant mortality was high, but the mother was also at risk of death from complications and lack of hygiene during the delivery. Not to mention the ongoing struggle of raising multiple children (often 10 or more).

Their bravery and fortitude are to be admired, especially those that were forced or chose to resettle from one place to another. Travel was hard, expensive, and dangerous. Yet they journeyed from the old world to the new, from civilization to wilderness, from safety to places fraught with danger and hardships. They embraced the challenge and adventure, making new lives for themselves, their children, and ultimately their many generations of grandchildren.

* Richard James Shaffer (b. 1953), son of William (b. 1925) and Eula June (b. 1930)
* For my children, Jesse, Breanne, Jacob; my grandchildren Jackson, Jameson; and generations yet to come

**Appendix**

The S-H family tree can be downloaded in standard gedcom format (a standardized format for family trees) that can then be used to build your own version. There are many online and app-based family tree services, including a free Windows application (My Family Tree).

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Or if you prefer to view the family tree on ancestry.com, you can create a free guest account. Then send me (rickjshaffer@gmail.com) your email address and I’ll give you guest access.

Notes on the S-H family tree:

1. I use “(?)” in the name to designate a parent that has incomplete or questionable lineage to their child. Ancestors may be included in the tree branch beyond this point (further back in time) but they should be considered highly skeptical.
2. I use the “verified” tag to show when a parent’s lineage is verified to their child. This is based on a trusted resource that documents the parent/child relationship, such as a birth or baptism record.
3. If you look at a person’s profile, you can see the facts (events) associated with the person’s life and the associated citations. It’s also worth looking at the person’s gallery. Quite often important documents or photographs are stored in the gallery.