

Family Chronicle Article

One of my clients looked forward to learning whether she had African American heritage. She thought it likely because her hair was coarse. Relatives told her she was probably a throw back. Did they know something? Her grandfather was often stared at because he was so dark and his wife was not.

Findings

To start, she provided a four-generation hand-written pedigree chart. From the chart, starting with the census and a search on ancestry.com, I found an amazing amount of information about the family. Almost every record a genealogist would hope to find was extant. It was great fun. Not all the information was on ancestry.com, that was just a beginning.

This possible ancestry was on her paternal side, which included Pennsylvania Dutch and German. The Pennsylvania Dutch was traced to 1820, but didn't bring any possibilities. However, her German ancestor Johann Schmidt (not his real name) came from Germany in 1854 with his family. He was in the Civil War and married Easter Brown (not her real name) in Hamilton County, Tennessee in 1865. Using the soundex tool on ancestry.com and variant spellings and also searching by first name and approximate birth date with the birth place Tennessee, the one constant, I was unable to find anyone close to her born in Tennessee on the 1850 and 1860 censuses. In later censuses Easter was always listed as white and her parents having been born in Tennessee. Her death certificate says her father was V. Brown. The closest I could come, using the slave schedules, was a slave owning family named Brown in Grundy County, Tennessee that had a female slave the right age to be Easter. Hamilton County adjoins Grundy County.

It seems logical to assume if she was a former slave and that she was passing for white or she would not have been able to marry in Tennessee. They moved to Wisconsin where his family settled after the birth of her first child, a girl. Perhaps this child was darker than what would have been expected and inspired this move.

19th century Germans did not have the American prejudice towards Negroes and were very much opposed to slavery.

It is very likely that she does have African American Heritage. DNA testing would prove this conclusion. My client is very proud of this heritage and tells everyone about it.