



D89 What is a Forensic Genealogist?

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The goal of this presentation is to provide an understanding of the principles of forensic genealogy with specific examples illustrating techniques and unusual resources used in forensic genealogy to establish kinship and identity.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by the creation of an awareness of forensic genealogists as a resource for locating and investigating individuals in cases including those involving inheritance, the location of birth parents, and to serve as family references for DNA identification. Forensic genealogical techniques can be invaluable in providing new leads in cold cases. Attorneys and law enforcement will benefit from the knowledge gained concerning the capabilities of forensic genealogists.

Forensic genealogy deals with matters of kinship and identity. A forensic genealogist does not simply “look things up,” but is often challenged to resolve identity issues with solutions that require insight and intuition. A forensic genealogist is consulted for his specialized knowledge of unusual sources of information. He may create a database pertinent to a case or may derive critical information by correlating data among multiple databases.

Some forensic genealogists are knowledgeable in the application of advanced DNA analysis techniques such as next generation sequencing or autosomal DNA testing. On a more basic level, when a law enforcement search for a DNA match in the Combined DNA Index System (CODIS) database proves unsuccessful, a forensic genealogist may be able to provide investigative leads by searching online genealogical databases for close or exact Y-DNA matches.

A private investigator is licensed to access personal data such as drivers' licenses and bank records that can produce an immediate identification. A forensic genealogist, on the other hand, establishes identity by correlating information that may be fragmented and that is often derived from obscure sources. While a private investigator may have numerous activities apart from personal identification tasks, a forensic genealogist specializes in identification. The scope of resources used by a forensic genealogist is much broader than that traditionally used by a private investigator. A private investigator is a general practitioner; a forensic genealogist is a specialist.

International searches are challenging for more reasons than just the language barrier. Overseas resources can be scattered in foreign repositories, not easy to locate, and subject to unfamiliar regulations. Some of these difficulties are being reduced by social networking and the ability to communicate over email rather than on the phone. Online translators are essential.

This presentation will offer examples drawn from domestic and international case files to illustrate the creative methodology used by and the unusual resources available to forensic genealogists.

Forensic Genealogy, Identification, Kinship