



The Haleys' "Roots" extend to Scotland

Free Stater Chris Haley -- yep, that's the nephew of **Alex Haley of Roots fame** -- has discovered that a branch of his family hails from Scotland.

Chris Haley, research director for the study of the legacy of slavery at the **Maryland State Archives**, has long been interested in the genetics of the paternal side of his family. So, in 2007, he did a DNA search using cells swabbed from the inside of his cheek.

Alex Haley famously traced his maternal lineage to Kunta Kinte, an African warrior who was captured in 1767 and brought to America on a slave ship that docked in Annapolis, though the veracity of that historic reconstruction was later disputed.



On the advice of his friend, Megan Smolenyak, Chris Haley used a form of DNA technology that wasn't available in 1992, when his uncle died. He found that he shared 45 of 46 genetic markers on his Y chromosome with a 78-year-old Scotsman named Thomas Baff.

The discovery may corroborate the family legend that Alex Haley's paternal great-grandfather was one William Bough, whose last name was pronounced like "laugh."

Because English-language spellings weren't standardized until the 19th century (before then, spelling was entirely phonetic), the genetic evidence was enough to convince Chris Haley that he had found a whole new set of relatives.

In February, he and one of his American cousins met four of their Scottish cousins. In the above photo, Haley is third from left, next to his American cousin, Lynn Holt (in the red jacket), Baff's daughter, June Baff Black (on Chris Haley's left side), her husband, and their two children.

"It's amazing to grasp how readily the six of us felt comfortable with each other," says Chris Haley, 46, who lives in Prince George's County. "Maybe it was the several familiarizing e-mails and couple of phone calls we traded with each other prior to our meeting, but there was no sense of discomfort or awkwardness that I could detect."

Chris says he thinks Alex Haley would have been pleased and excited by the discovery.

"I have decided to take pride and joy in all the people and peoples who have played a part in my being," he says. "So being Scottish is as great to me as being black is. I have no doubt it would be the same for Uncle Alex. As much as I deeply love black history, anything that tamps down the complex and lingering legacies of racial differences is welcome."

Posted by **Mary McCauley** at 5:00 AM, 22 April 2009 in **Marylandia**