

# ***Surname Studies: Follow That Surname!***

[RT5424] / RootsTech 2019 – 28 February 2019

Presented by **Michael Cassara** | DigiRoots.net

## **INTRODUCTION**

As genealogists, we regularly come into contact with massive amounts of data: names, dates, places, and more! These are just the tip of the iceberg, however, considering the wealth of information potentially available. At a certain point, much of our work tends to involve deciding which material is *most* relevant to our personal research goals and interests. Some researchers are only interested in tracing and documenting their direct-line ancestors, while others keep large databases with thousands of entries, chronicling distant cousins, others who lived in their ancestral communities, and relatives by marriage.

One-name studies (also known as surname studies) involve doing in-depth research on **all** known instances of *\*one specific surname\** (sometimes including its variant spellings) to learn more about “the big picture”. Many genealogists have opted to pursue a one-name study to isolate common origins and explore the shared (or separate) roots of multiple branches.

Historically, one-name studies have been most popular in the United Kingdom (and with surnames that originate in that region), but with so many available resources, there’s never been a better time to begin a one-name study for surnames of many origins.

Today’s presentation will examine the many ways in which genealogists are using this type of research to add a rich new element to their own work, while creating a powerful and lasting resource.

## **THE HISTORY AND USAGE OF SURNAMES**

Surnames and their usages vary, culturally. In a society where males passed their surnames to their sons, a one-name study could be of great genealogical interest, as it might offer insight on common origins, migration patterns, and more. The patronymic or matronymic naming customs of Sweden, however, might not lend themselves well to this type of project: numerous Johanssons may exist, devoid of a common origin.

## **METHODOLOGY**

There is no “right” way to conduct a one-name study. Membership organizations (such as the Guild of One-Name Studies) have requirements of their members (such as answering all inquiries and studying **all** known occurrences of the given name) but, beyond that, one-name researchers have many different aims and many different approaches.

Some researchers use Excel or Google Sheets spreadsheets and advanced databases to maintain their information – while others use standard genealogy software programs (such as RootsMagic and Family Tree Maker). The important thing is that the methodology makes sense to the researcher, permitting them the easiest access to their work.

What’s most important to you? What’s most interesting? Do you want to prove (or attempt to prove) a common origin for people with the same surname? Do you want to see how many distinct origins there might be? Anything is possible!

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## **CASE STUDIES**

Presentation will include discussion and analysis of some existing one-name studies including:

- **Cuono** [[http://one-name.org/name\\_profile/cuono](http://one-name.org/name_profile/cuono)] (the speaker's own one-name study)
- **Filby** [<http://www.filby.org>]
- **Howes** [<https://www.howesfamilies.com>]

## **DNA**

Over the last 15 years, DNA science has revolutionized genealogical research. Adding scientific proof (for better AND for worse) to the paper trail can illuminate family mysteries and help to break down those dreaded "brickwalls", and offer insight into genealogical discoveries we never knew we were seeking!

Of the three types of DNA, autosomal DNA is the most popular/common type of DNA to be tested (this is what one tests using the popular tests from AncestryDNA, 23andMe, LivingDNA, MyHeritage, and other testing services).

Y-DNA, however, can be invaluable – particularly when studied in conjunction with a one-name study. Much like a surname, Y-DNA is passed from father to son to son, and Y-DNA surname projects are tremendous resources for any one-name study. FamilyTreeDNA [<http://www.familytreedna.com>] holds the largest database of Y-DNA tests, and is also home to many unique surname projects, where male lines are studied in depth.

## **PUBLIC PRESENCE**

By establishing a one-name study, one of the most important goals is often to recruit other researchers (hobbyists or professionals) who are also seeking/collecting information on that name. Some methods of publicizing a study include:

- Website
  - o Programs like <http://www.tngsitebuilding.com/> can help automate website creation.
- Facebook – Page vs. Group, or both
- Mailing list (e-mail or newsletter)
- In-person activities (reunions, etc.)
- Virtual activities (video conferences, etc.)

## **LINKS / REFERENCES / RESOURCES**

**Guild of One-Name Studies** – [<http://www.one-name.org>]

The Guild is comprised of over 2,800 members studying almost 9,000 unique surnames. Registered as a non-profit (charity), the Guild seeks to enrich the field of surname research while its members share information and resources with one another.

Be sure to also check out the Guild's extensive YouTube channel

[<https://www.youtube.com/user/GuildOneNameStudies>], though even more videos are available to members.

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**The Surname Society** – [<https://surname-society.org>]

“Founded by six experienced genealogists from all corners of the globe, The Surname Society was launched in November 2014 to offer an innovative, collaborative, modern approach to the world of surname studies.”

## **Surname Distribution Maps -**

[[https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Surname\\_Distribution\\_Maps](https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Surname_Distribution_Maps)] - this is a great place to start: a terrific compendium of links to relevant surname distribution maps for numerous countries

## **HOW TO GET STARTED / WHAT'S NEXT?**

Begin with what you know. With whatever research you've already done, you can take what you've learned and apply it to your one-name study.

A good next step might be to see if anyone is already doing a one-name study for a surname of interest to you. If a particular surname has intrigued you, you'll want to assess the scope of what a potential study might entail. By using a surname distribution map, you might be able to determine how large the study would ultimately be.

## **RECOMMENDED READING**

Shankland, Anne (editor). *Seven Pillars of Wisdom: The Art of One-Name Studies*. The Guild of One-Name Studies, 2012.

- available through the Guild or on Amazon (also in eBook format)
  - o highlights 7 applicable pillars for any one-name study: Data Collection, Analysis, Synthesis, Responding to Enquiries, Publicising Your Study, Publication of Results, Preserving Your Study

## **ONLINE EDUCATION**

in addition to resources found through the Guild of One-Name Studies and The Surname Society, Pharos Tutors offers introductory and advanced online courses for those who would like to formally study approaches to one-name work. <https://www.pharostutors.com> provides a full course offering.

 <p>Twitter: @DigiRoots Facebook.com/DigiRoots <a href="http://www.DigiRoots.net">http://www.DigiRoots.net</a></p>	<p><b>Michael Cassara</b> New York, NY <a href="mailto:michael@digiroots.net">michael@digiroots.net</a></p> <p>Board Member, Italian Genealogical Group (IGG) Member, Genealogical Speakers Guild (GSG) Member, Guild of One-Name Studies (Cuono Study - #6011) Member, Association of Professional Genealogists (APG)</p> <p>Certificate in Genealogical Research, Boston University (OL19)</p>
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