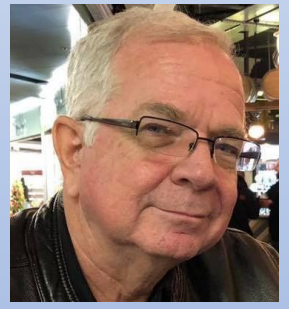
Working With Family Trees

Oct 30, 2025

[Red Mountain Mesa Library]



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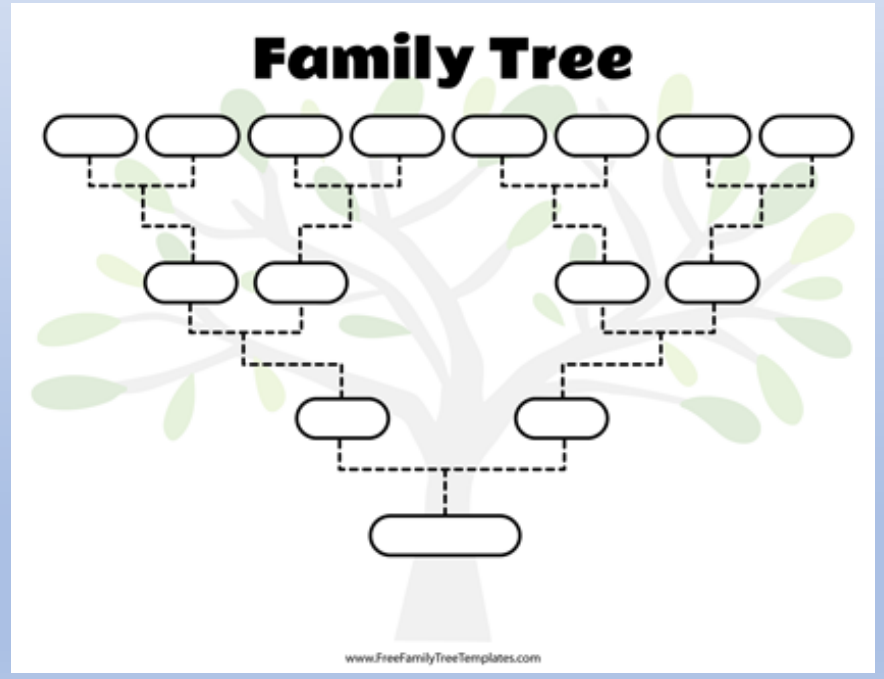
All slides and handouts can be found at:

http://www.familytreeaz.com/Presentations/

Special note: I'm currently in the process of transitioning to a new hosting company so it's possible some links may not be working --- check back soon (~mid November)

QR Code: take photo to open to presentations

The Family Tree is one of two primary components of genealogy



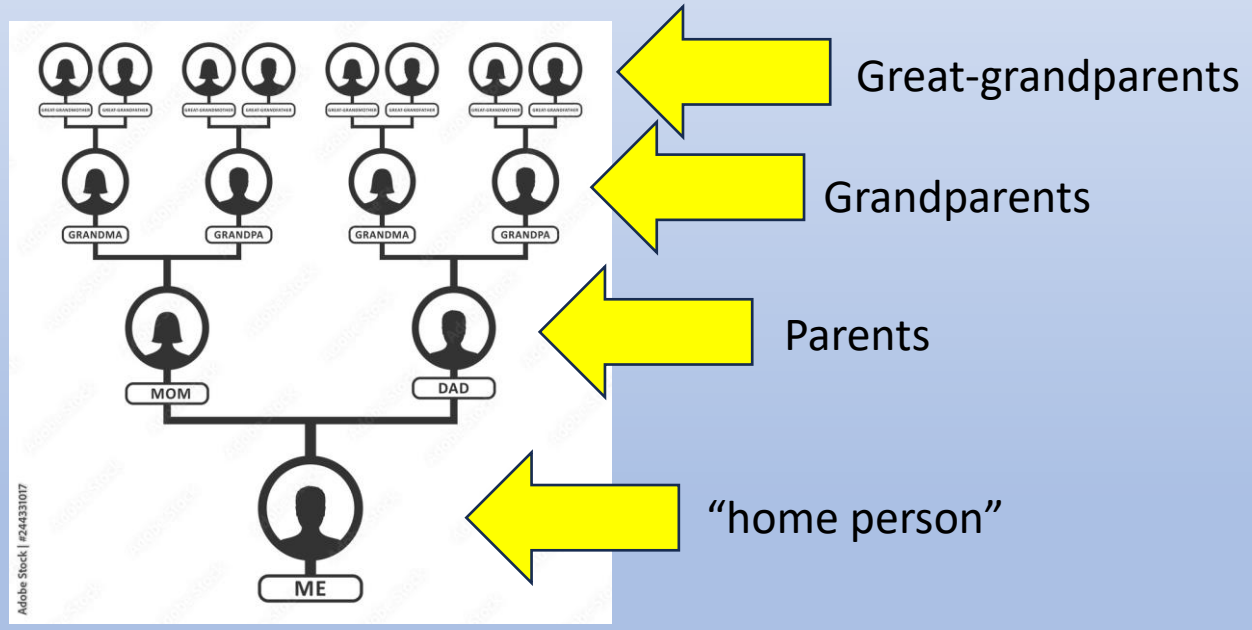
Combined Together --- A greater chance of success to solve your family tree mysteries.

https://freefamilytreetemplates.com/blank-family-tree-template/

https://www.freepnglogos.com/pics/dna

What is a Family Tree?

- An essential part of working family history (also known as genealogy)



Standard convention is to put the male (father) to the left for each couple but this is certainly not required

Ways to Create a Family Tree

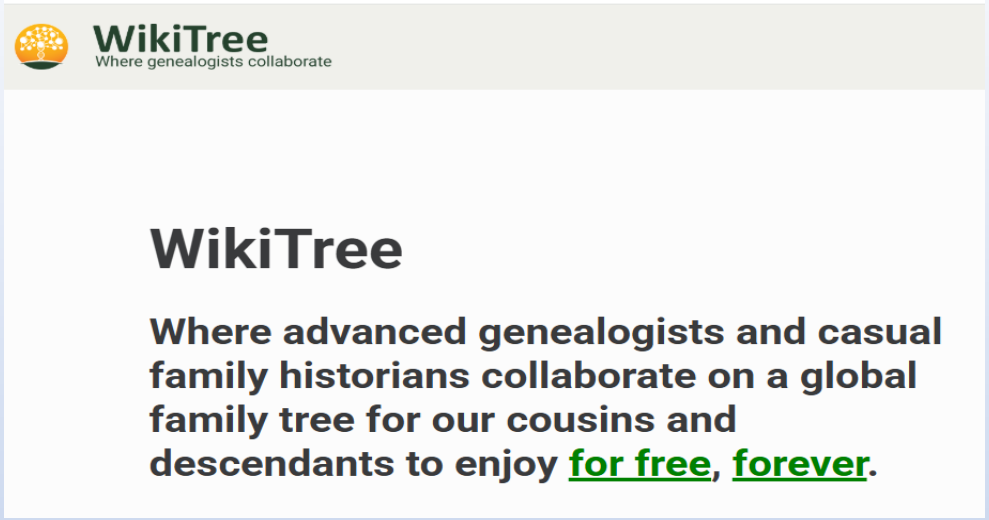
	Local (family tree software)	Online (Ancestry, MyHeritage, WikiLinks)	FamilySearch (one world tree)
Safe storage (can't be deleted or altered by another company)	X		
Ability to use to link to DNA matches		X (Ancestry, MyHeritage)	
Tools to check tree quality	X	X (Ancestry ProTools)	
Export to GEDCOM to share	X	X	
Connect to other persons' trees		X	X (one world tree in this case)

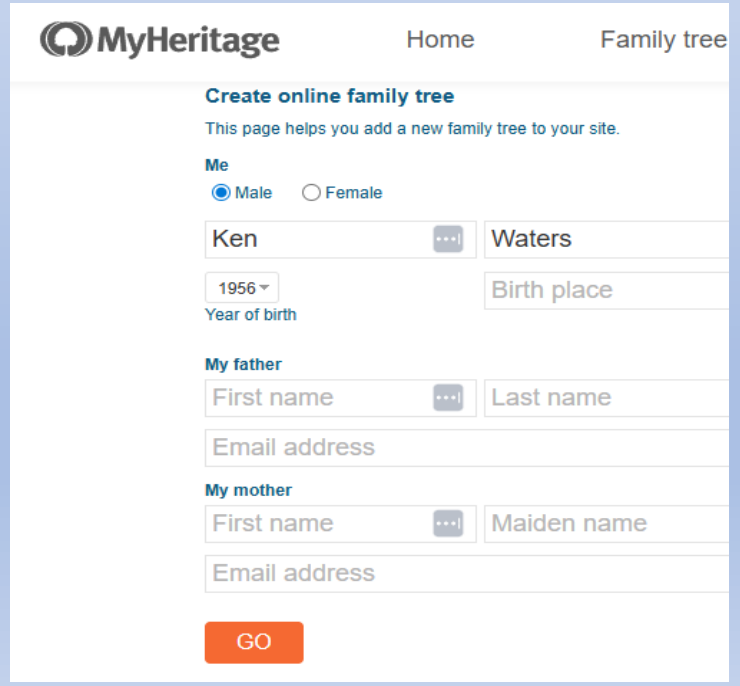
Personal Software

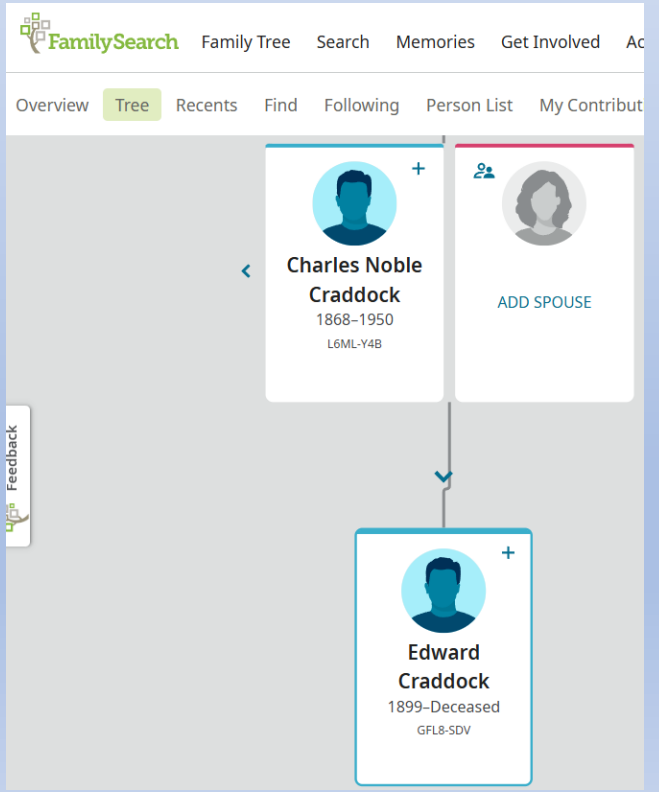
- Usually purchased for a personal computer
- A good practice to keep a full family tree on the computer as insurance in case the online trees are removed, company goes down, etc.
- These are probably the two most common but there are more (I personally use RootsMagic)

Online Family Trees

- Ancestry, MyHeritage, WikiTree, FamilySearch, Geneanet



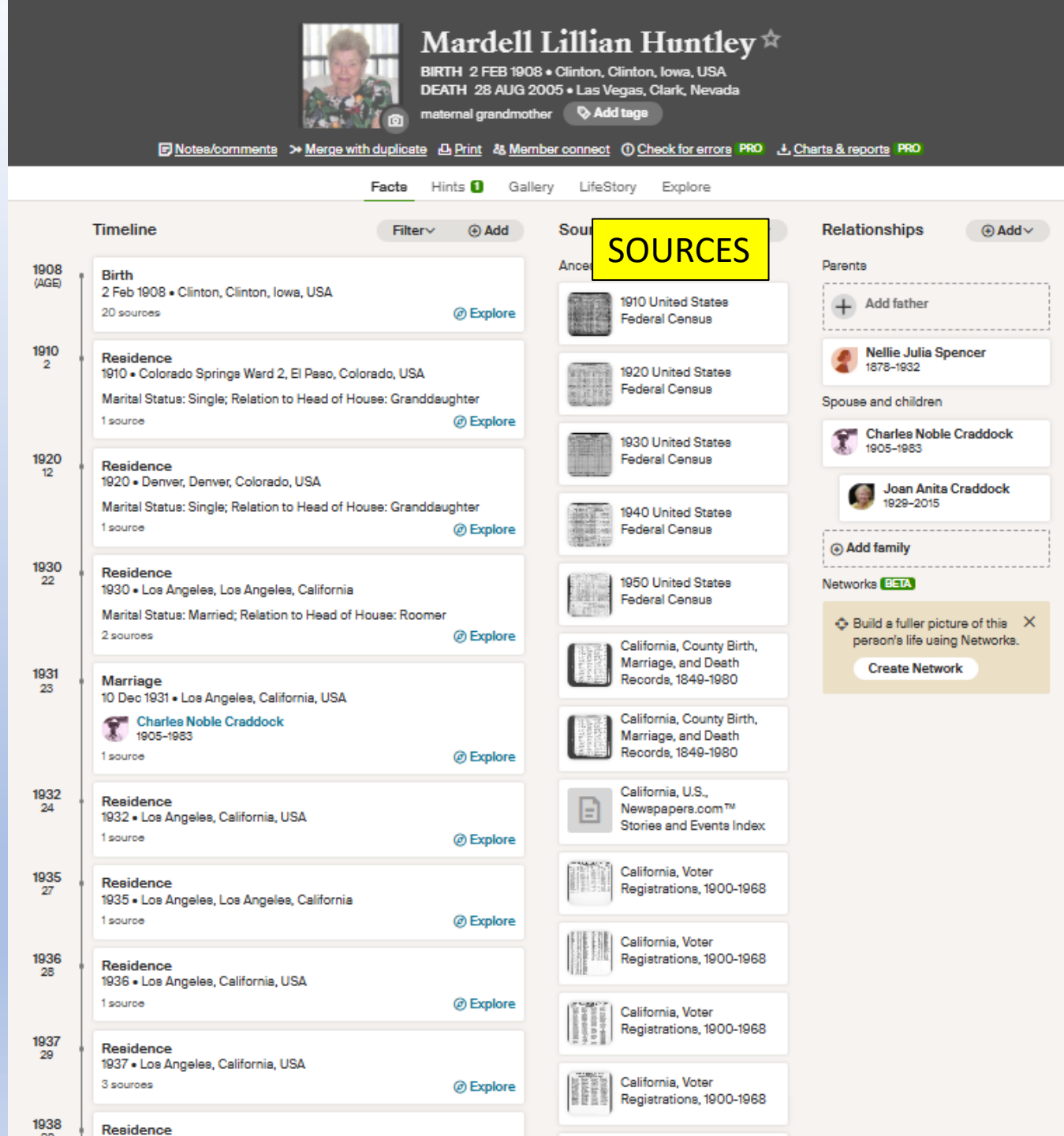




Good Practices

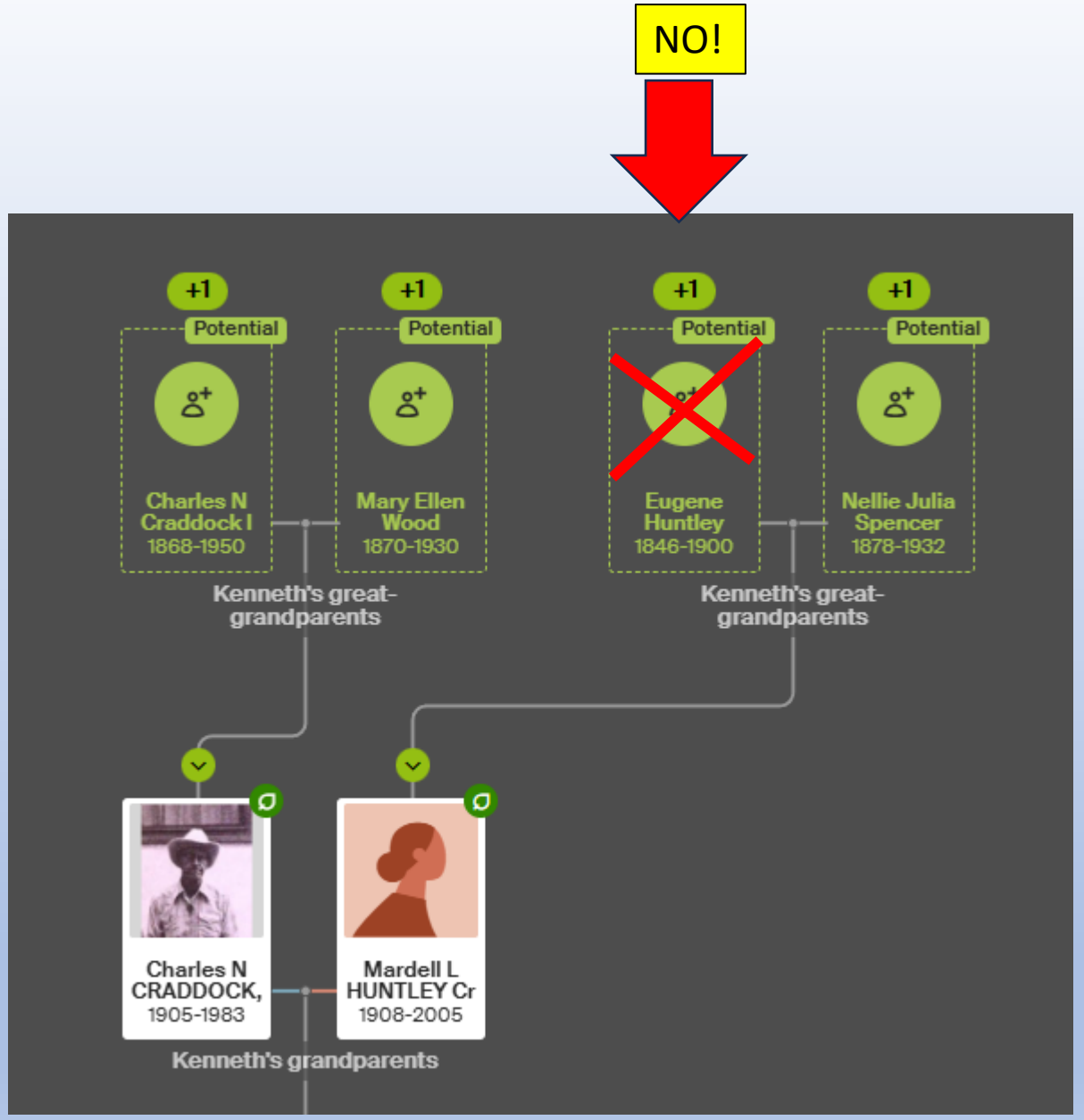
- Enter date/location of birth/marriage/death as much as possible using **known and reliable sources**
  - **Birth certificates or birth indices, Social Security Index *not* other people's trees**
- Use biological birth names and individuals (not adopted parents, etc.)

This is my grandmother's data on my primary family tree in Ancestry (public for all to see)

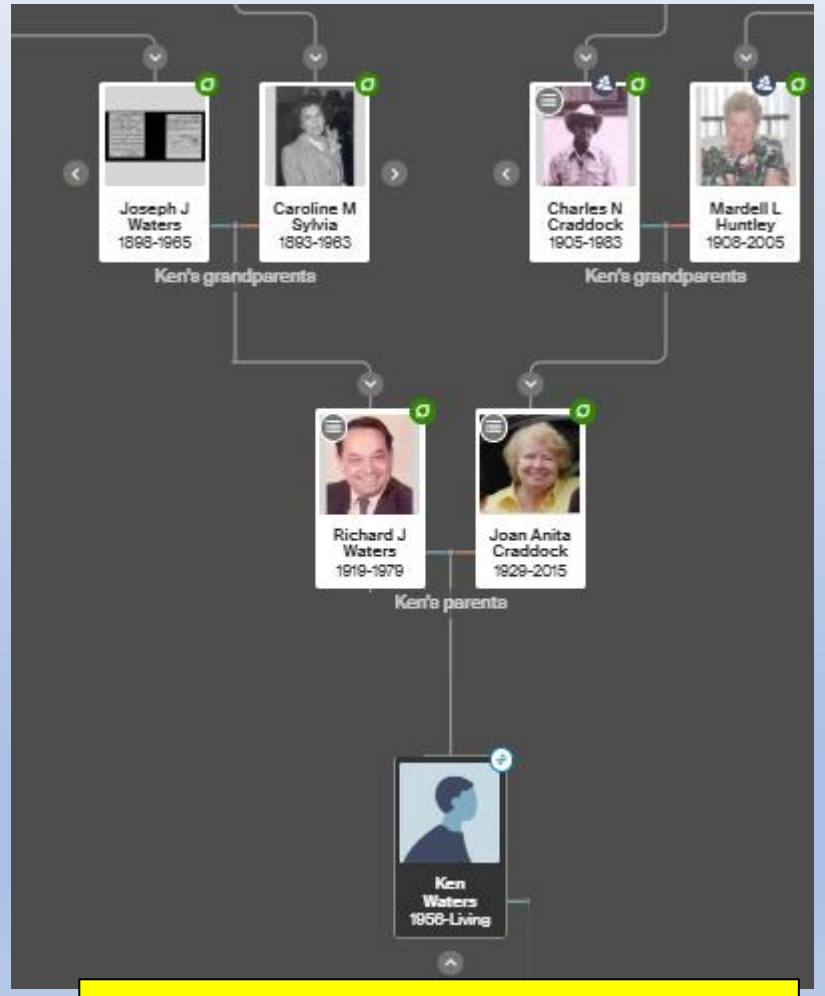


Caution

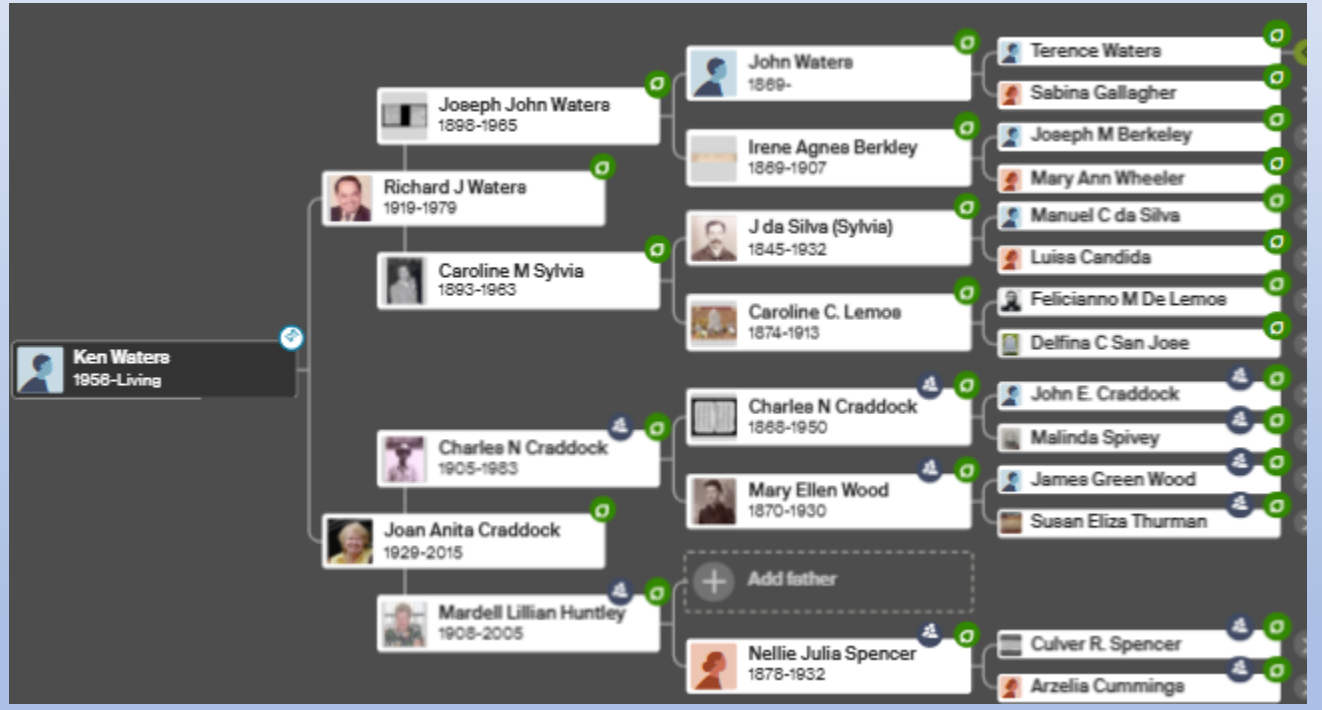
- Be careful with automated “hints” which may be incorrect
- This is what Ancestry tries to hint at being my grandmother’s father (she was born in 1908, he died in 1900!)
- Ancestry clearly is not checking dates on hints to prevent impossible relationships



Family Tree (vertical) vs. Pedigree (horizontal)



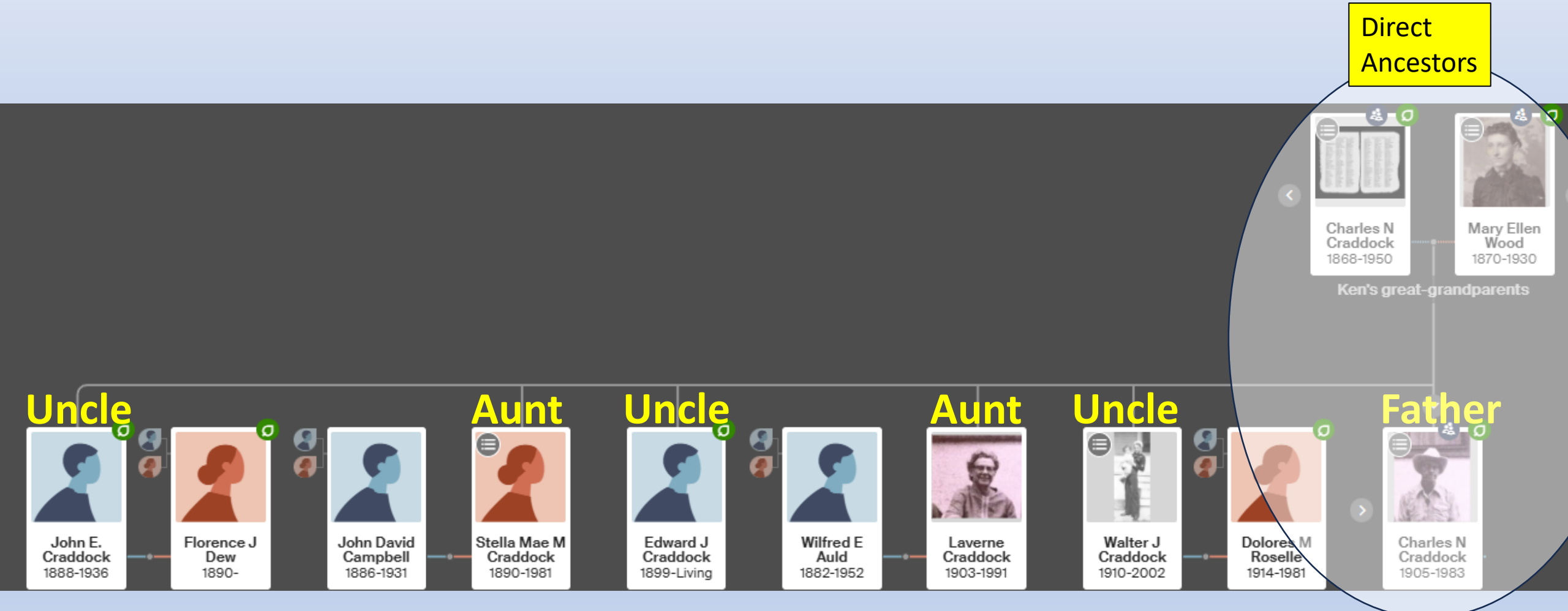
Note: this view often shows persons beyond direct ancestors



Pedigree

Note: this view shows only direct ancestors from the “home person”

Example of family tree showing siblings of a direct ancestor (father in this case)



What is a GEDCOM?

- A common format to save and/or share a family tree
- Plain text format

GEDCOM, an acronym for **GEnealogical Data Communication**, is a standardized file format for exchanging family tree information between different genealogy software and websites. It acts as a universal language for family history data, allowing users to export their research from one program and import it into another, and is widely supported across the industry. This ensures family history isn't locked into a single program and can be backed up and shared.

Inside a GEDCOM

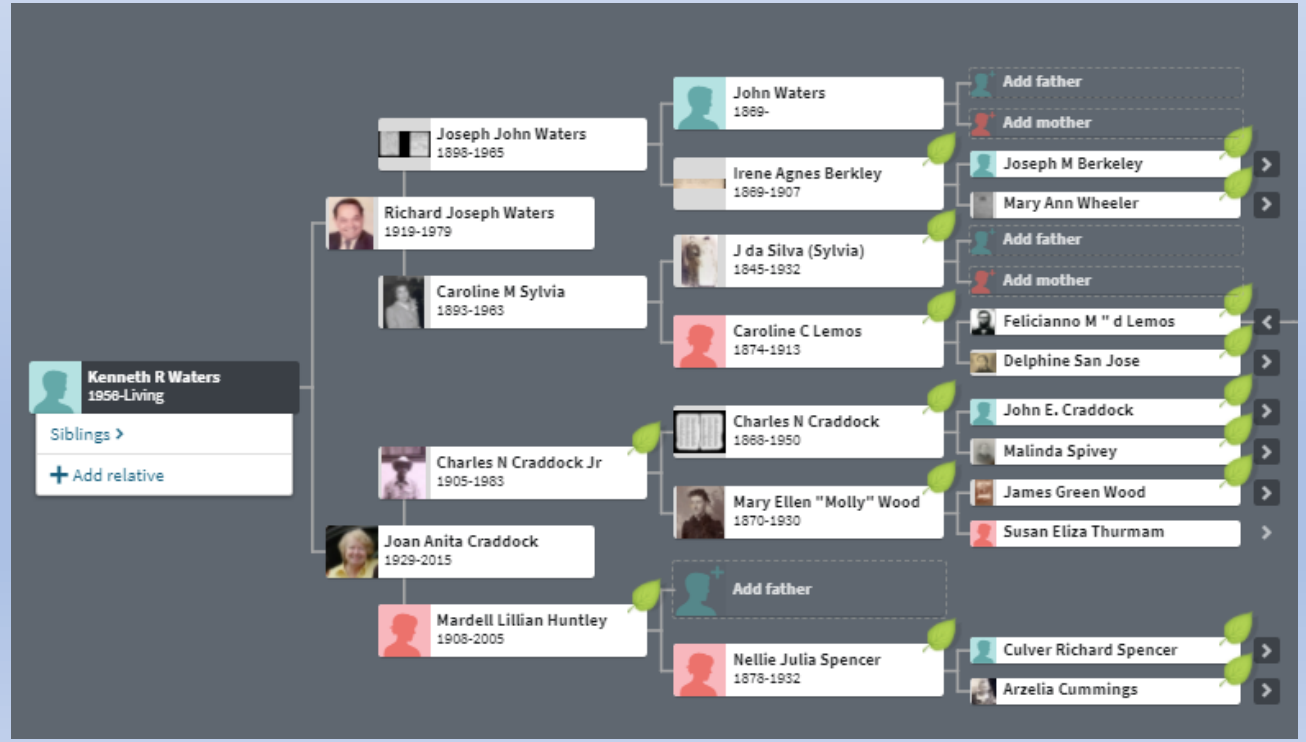
- Full name
- BMD (birth, marriage, death) records
- Standardized format

- Can be exported and imported by:
  - WikiTree
  - Ancestry
  - MyHeritage
  - RootsMagic
  - FamilyTreeMaker

```
1 NAME Kenneth /Waters/
2 GIVN Kenneth
2 SURN Waters
1 SEX M
1 FAMC @F2@
1 BIRT
2 DATE 1956
0 @I362714388214@ INDI
1 NAME Richard /Waters/
2 GIVN Richard
2 SURN Waters
1 SEX M
1 FAMC @F1@
1 FAMS @F2@
1 BIRT
2 DATE 1919
1 DEAT
2 DATE 1979
0 @I362714388255@ INDI
1 NAME Joan /Craddock/
2 GIVN Joan
2 SURN Craddock
1 SEX F
1 FAMC @F3@
1 FAMS @F2@
1 BIRT
2 DATE 1929
2 PLAC Los Angeles, Los Angeles, California, USA
1 DEAT
2 DATE 2015
2 PLAC Mesa, Maricopa, Arizona, USA
0 @I362714388266@ INDI
1 NAME Joseph John /Waters/
2 GIVN Joseph John
2 SURN Waters
```

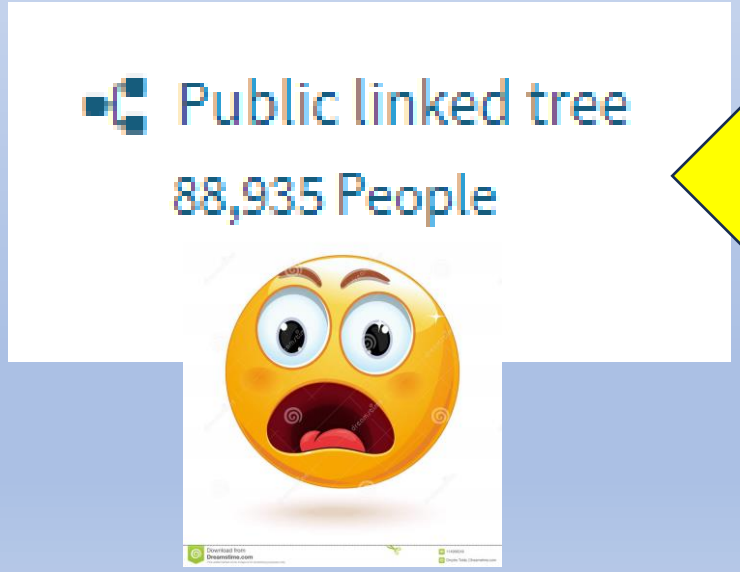
For persons taking DNA tests --- some suggestions

- Be sure to always have a good tree, 5+ generations if possible
- On Ancestry, keep it **public** and attached to your DNA kit (you can always have other trees private)
- Backup your tree (store on local software)
- Export your tree in GEDCOM format
- Upload your tree (GEDCOM file) to GedMatch and WikiTree



Don’t copy other person’s tree unless you’ve thoroughly verified it

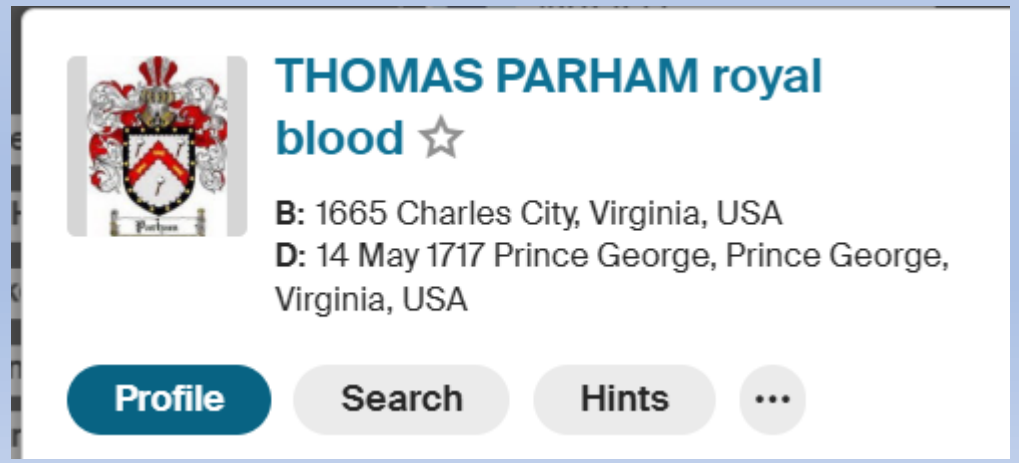
- This is a common problem on Ancestry and possibly other services in an effort to “grow” one’s tree easily and quickly
  - There will often be errors in other people’s trees and you’re just multiplying to the problem by blindly copying



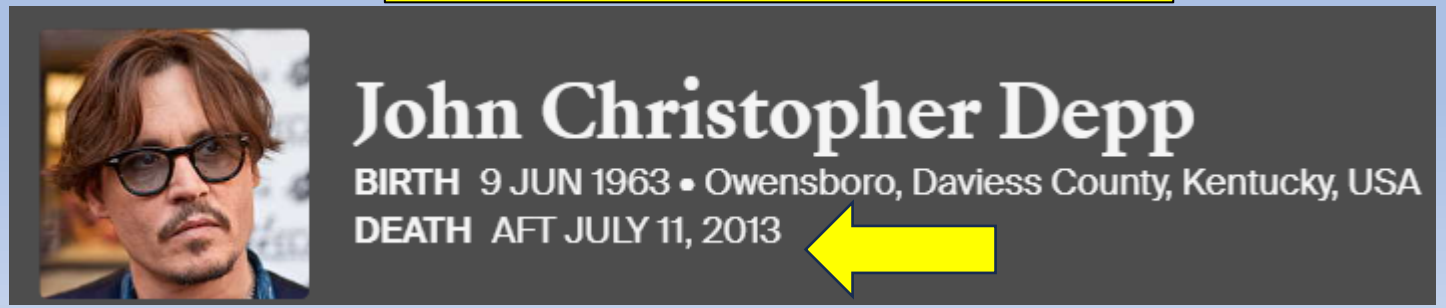
Has the owner of this tree actually carefully researched and documented all 88,935 persons in it?!

Good Practice

- Keep names in your trees to just their names---avoid other qualifiers such as “great grandpa”, “royal blood”, etc.

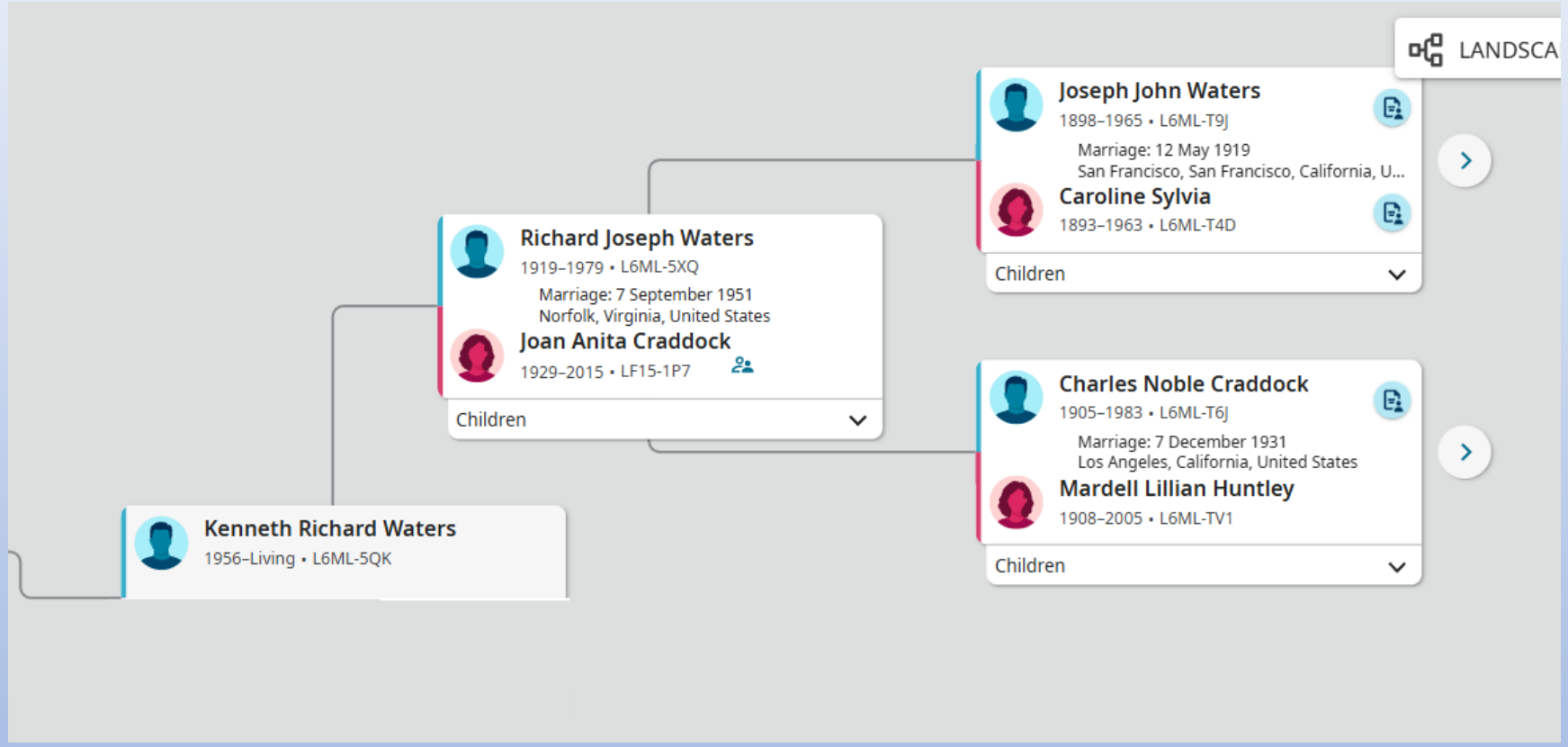


This one amused me a bit; I wasn’t aware Johnny Depp had passed away



FamilySearch Tree

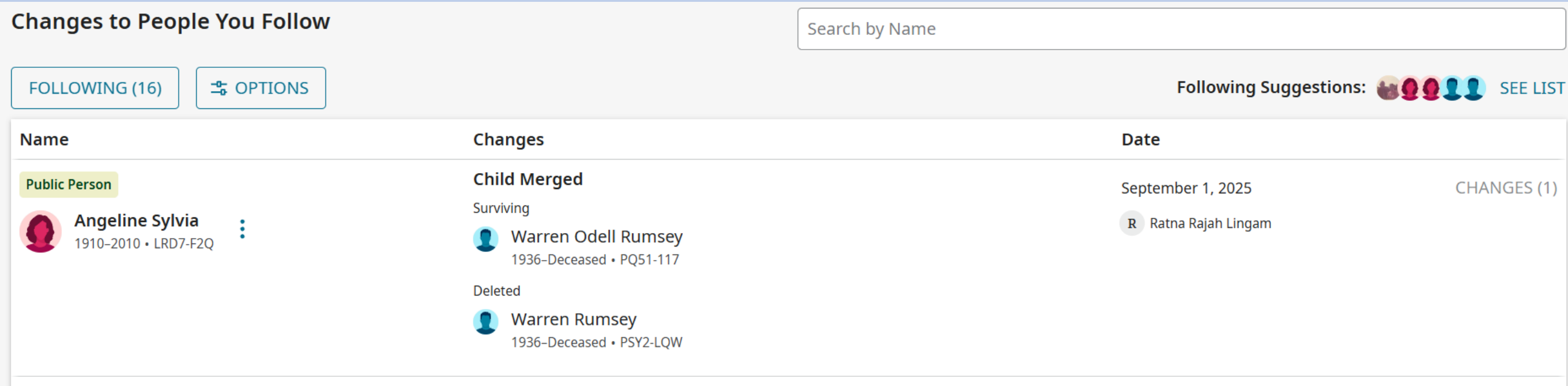
- Different concept--- individual enters tree information but this is then incorporated into a single world tree



FamilySearch Tree

- Contributions made by one person can be edited by others (for better or worse)

This is an example of someone whom I do not know and am not related to who merged two individuals into one---in this case the husband of a grand-aunt of mine.

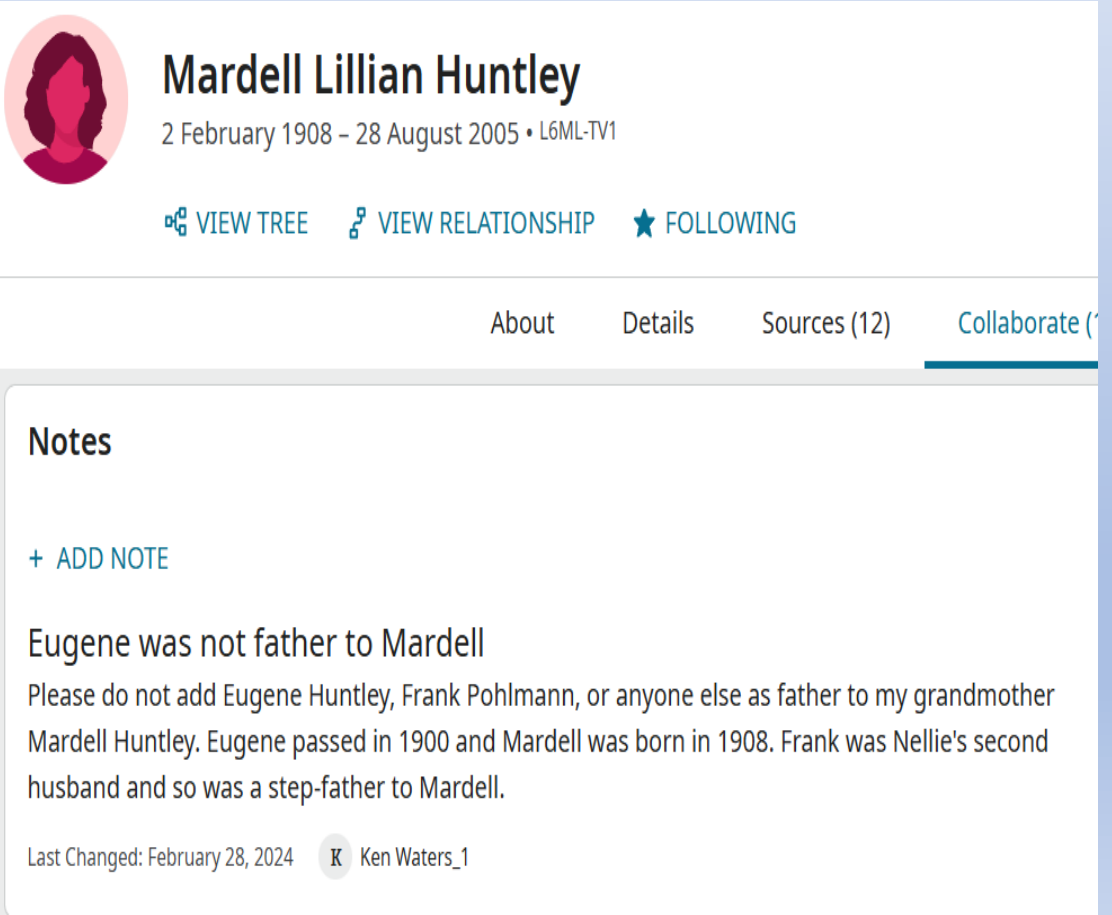


FamilySearch Tree

- Other people unknowingly making significant changes to people in my tree!
- My experience has been poor in this regard as others made changes that were not correct
  - Examples: changing the father (currently unknown) of my grandmother to match her given birth name (!!!)
  - Changing my mother's surname because her birth certificate indicated her surname to her mother's name because her parents were not married at the time (!!!)

My grand-uncle was erroneously deleted by someone

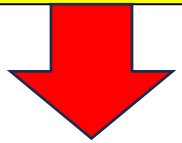
Name	Change	Date
Edward Craddock 1899-Deceased • GFL8-SDV	Person Restored	March 8, 2024



FamilySearch Tree

- Each of these errors I had to correct manually

People unrelated to me making erroneous changes to my tree contributions, often based on inaccurate sources (e.g. wrong census name or date of birth)



Sources (12)

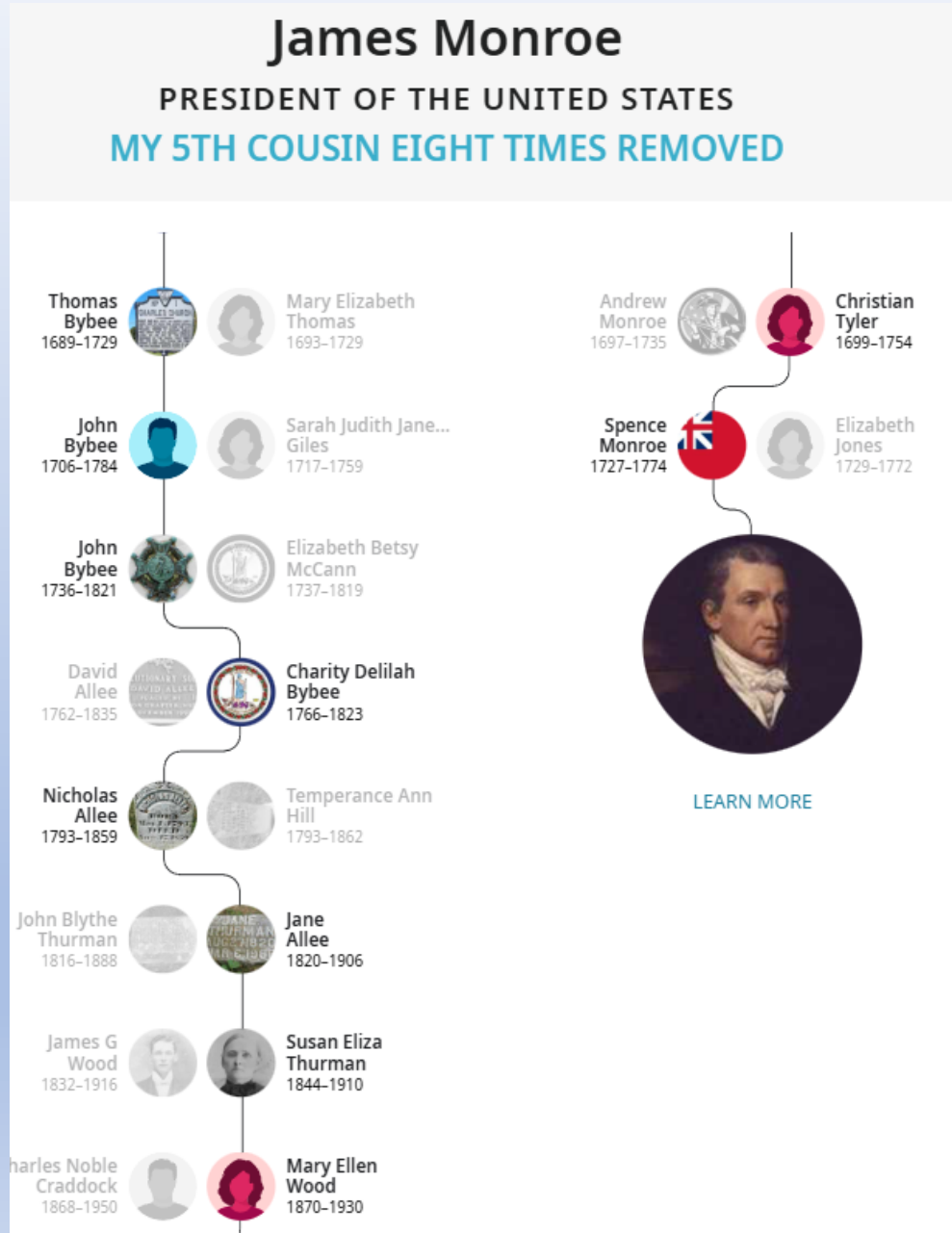
Detail View + ADD SOURCE OPTIONS

Date	Title	Created
1910	Mardell Huntley, "United States, Census, 1910"	December 2, 2014 L La [redacted]
1920	Mardel Huntley, "United States, Census, 1920"	December 2, 2014 L La [redacted]
1929	Mardell Lillian Huntley, "California, County Birth and Death Records, 1800-1994"	June 9, 2018 R R [redacted]
1929	Huntley, "California, Birth Index, 1905-1995"	June 28, 2019 R R [redacted]
1930	Mardell Huntley, "United States, Census, 1930"	December 2, 2014 L L [redacted]

One Last Thing on FamilySearch Trees

- The site uses this one world tree to imply relationships to famous people
  - While fascinating and fun, proper vigilance needs to be taken as there are many errors in that tree
  - When I try to verify a relationship I'm often left with an impossible ancestor in the connecting path

Always carefully verify these relationships to ensure the ancestral line is correct and is possible.



WikiTree

- Completely free with a good carefully sourced reputation
- Strongly recommend uploading a copy of your tree here

How does WikiTree work?

1 Collaboration on modern family history is private and tightly-controlled through Trusted Lists. Non-genealogist family members you invite probably won't move beyond this level.

2 Collaboration on deeper ancestry is between genealogists who are committed to accuracy and cite sources. We trust each other to abide by a special Honor Code.

It all comes together as one on our single family tree. See our Help Pages for more information. There are also tutorials for new members and lots of help in the community.

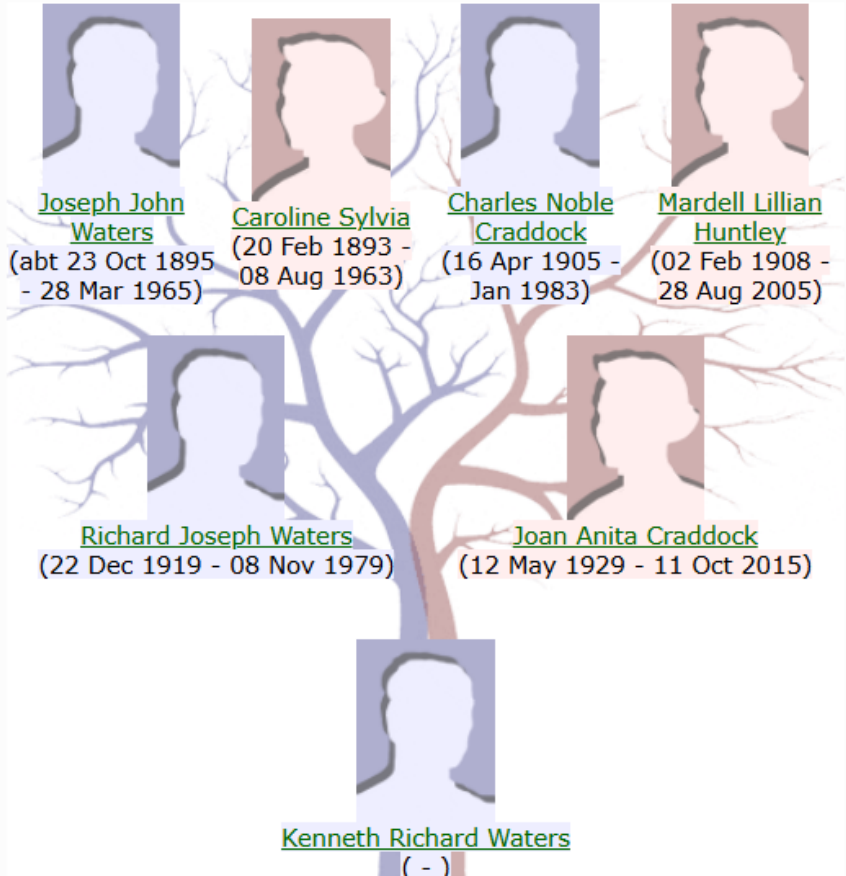
WikiTree
Where genealogists collaborate

Ken Waters

My WikiTree: Navigation Home

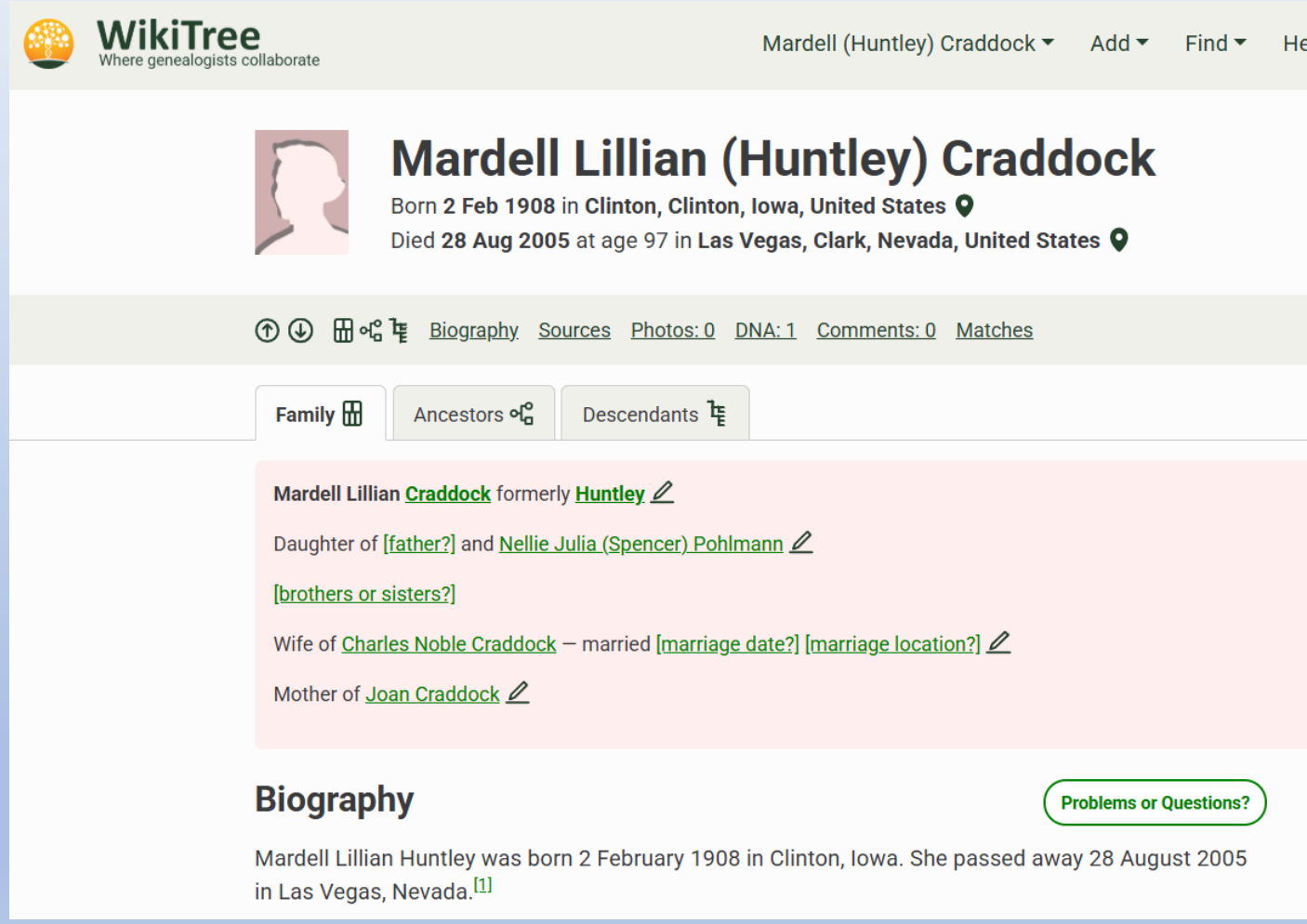
Tree Badges Intro Scratch Activity Thanks

You can cust



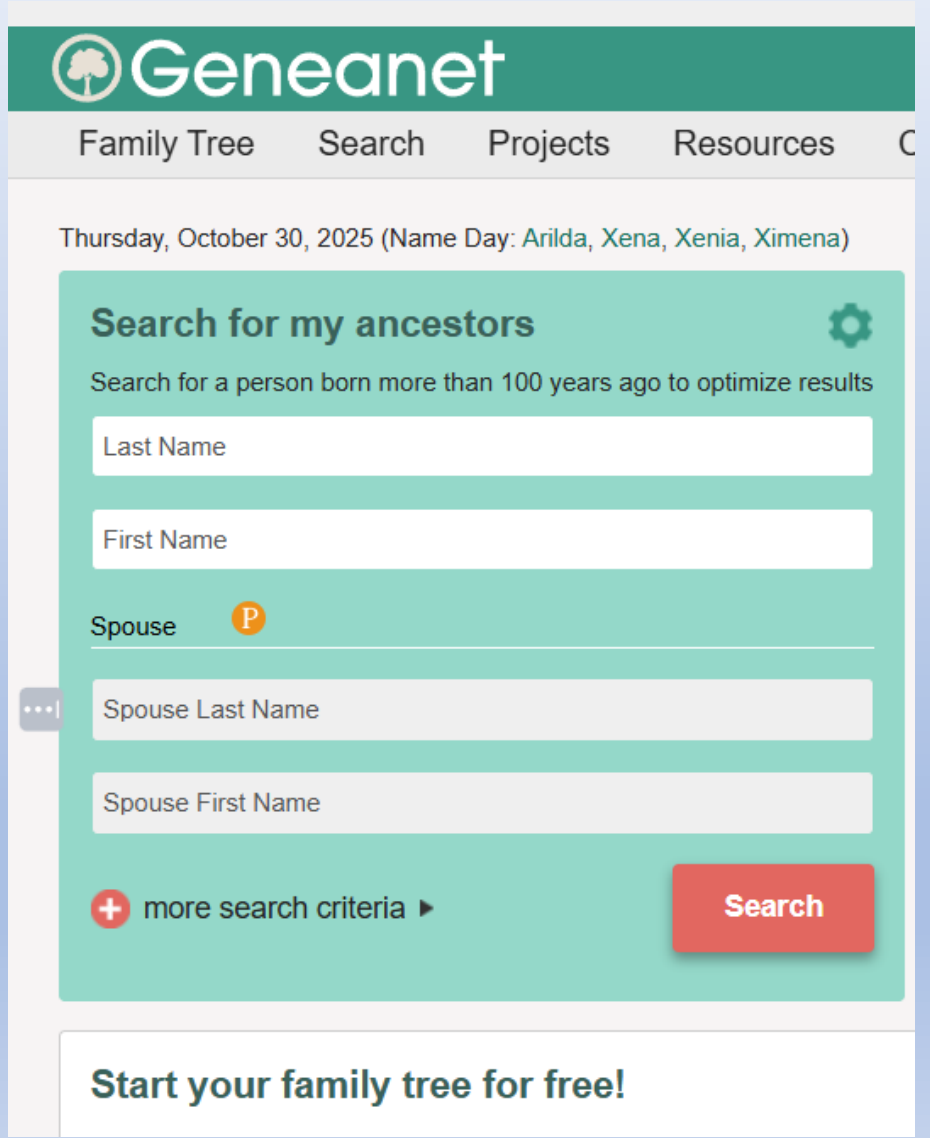
WikiTree

- This is the entry for my maternal grandmother; most of the information and sources were entered by myself
- Note the father information is not entered as his identity is unknown



One more out there -- Geneanet

- Free to enter a tree but does have a premium ($$) aspect to it
-



FamilyTreeAZ.com

Presentations:
http://familytreeaz.com/Presentations

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