

How I found my Seventh Cousin

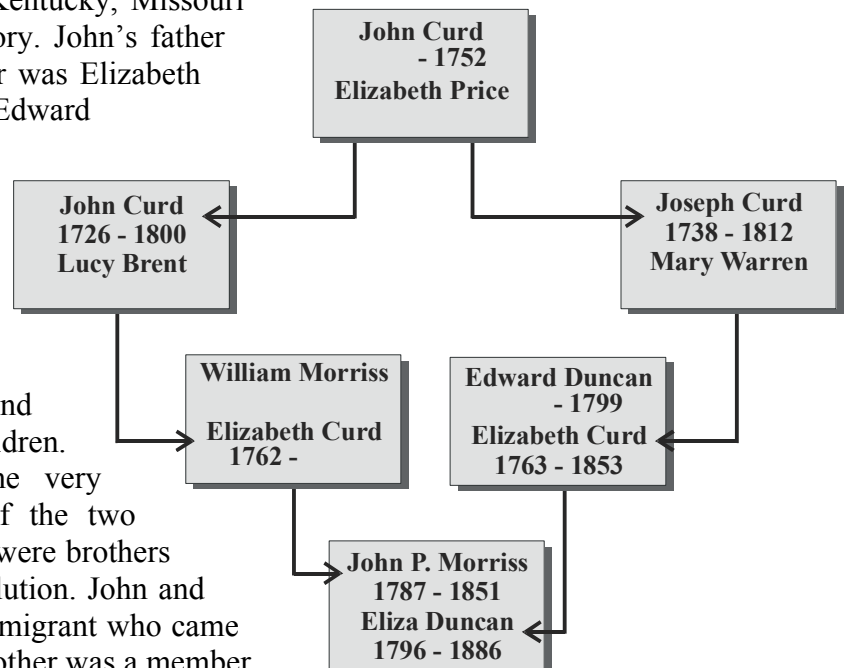
by Jim Morriss
November 2006

There is an amazing amount of genealogical research material available to us all and it seems that more is becoming available and easier to get to every day. As a result, more and more people are becoming interested in finding out something about their ancestors. I was recently looking through a list of queries on an internet bulletin board and saw an E-Mail from someone who found her seventh cousin. I have been researching my own family tree since 1978 and in those 28 years have found hundreds of long-lost kin folks. But I've never been able to communicate with any cousin more remote than my fourth. Even a fourth cousin seems quite remarkable to me. So I have to wonder, "Who in the world can locate a **seventh cousin?**"

We all know that cousins are those family members who are the children of our parent's brothers or sisters. Another way to say it, is that cousins are not siblings but they share the same grand parents. That is just the definition of first cousins. Second cousins share the same great-grand parents and third cousins have common great-great-grand parents. There must be a lot of extended cousins out there. Finding them may not be easy but it should be possible. To do so would require locating as many direct ancestors, and their descendants, as possible. Everyone who shares the hobby of genealogy tries to do exactly that. My own family tree has stretched back several generations and it seemed that with a little luck, locating a seventh cousin just might be done. Though we may not be aware who they are, we should all have two sets of grand parents, four of each great-grandparent, eight of each great-great-grandparent, etc. My own paternal forbearers are pretty well researched and are shown in the table on the right.

Great-great-great Grandparents	John P. Morriss Eliza Duncan	1787 - 1851 1796 - 1886
Great-great Grandparents	Henry S. Morriss Nancy E. McCormick	1818 - 1911 1820 - 1893
Great Grandparents	James N. Morriss Rebecca Culpin	1857 - 1942 1859 - 1940
Grandparents	Wesley N. Morriss M. Ivah Morton	1887 - 1948 1891 - 1984
Parents	James W. Morriss Lois E. Dowden	1914 - 1977 1918 - 1985

My great-great-great-grandfather, John P. Morriss, was certainly an interesting guy. He was born in the Commonwealth of Virginia just at the time that the US Constitution was being created. He was among some of the first to migrate into the new states of Kentucky, Missouri and finally to Texas, but that is another story. John's father was named William Morriss and his mother was Elizabeth Curd. The father of his wife, Eliza, was Edward Duncan and her mother was also named Elizabeth Curd. These two Elizabeths happened to be first cousins. That means that John and his wife Eliza were also each other's second cousins. Even so, they got married on June 15, 1814!



It must have been very interesting for John and Eliza to try to explain it to their eleven children. Both of them descended from the same very prominent Virginia family. The fathers of the two Elizabeths were John and Joseph Curd who were brothers and who both fought in the American Revolution. John and Joseph's father was the son of a Virginia immigrant who came to America sometime prior to 1704. Their mother was a member of an even more established Virginia family whose first member arrived in Jamestown in 1610.

In those times it was not at all uncommon for cousins to marry. Even first cousins would sometimes marry and it created a lot of interesting contortions in the family trees that we try to research. Mark Twain once wrote about circumstances where it would be possible for a man to be his own grandfather. In the 1940's a song was even written about Twain's hypothesis. It was called "*I'm my own Grandpaw*," and it became a fairly popular novelty song for several years. My great-great-great-grandfather's pedigree was not nearly as convoluted as the 23 year old guy in the song, who married an older widow just before the widow's grown daughter was married to the 23-year-old's father.

Since John and Eliza had the same great-grandparents, they were second cousins. All of their children could trace a direct line through their father, and another distinct line through their mother, to the same great-great-grandparents. Thus my great-great-grandfather, Henry Sterling Morriss, was his own third cousin. My own great grandfather, James Newton Morriss was his own fourth cousin. My grandfather, Wesley Newton Morriss, was his own fifth cousin and my father, James Wesley Morriss Sr, was his own sixth cousin. That means that if I had the talent to do it, I could write a song also. If I ever did that, I would call it,

"I'M MY OWN SEVENTH COUSIN"

JWM - 2006

I'M MY OWN GRANDPAW

by Dwight Latham and Moe Jaffe

*Many, many years ago when I was twenty-three
I was married to a widow who was pretty as could be.
This widow had a grown-up daughter who had hair of red.
My father fell in love with her and soon they, too, were wed.*

*This made my dad my son-in-law and changed my very life
For my daughter was my mother, 'cause she was my father's wife.
To complicate the matter, even though it brought me joy
I soon became the father of a bouncing baby boy.*

*My little baby then became a brother-in-law to dad
And so became my uncle, though it made me very sad
For if he was my uncle, then that also made him brother
To the widow's grown-up daughter, who, of course, was my step-mother.*

*My father's wife then had a son who kept them on the run
And he became my grand-child, 'cause he was my daughter's son.
My wife is now my mother's mother, and it makes me blue
Because, although she is my wife, she's my grandmother too.*

*If my wife is my grandmother, then I am her grandchild
And every time I think of it, it nearly drives me wild
This has got to be the strangest thing I ever saw
As husband of my grandmother, I am my own grandpaw.*

*Chorus:
I'm my own grandpaw
I'm my own grandpaw
It sounds funny I know
but it really is so
Oh, I'm my own grandpaw.*