

African American Family with Poindexter Ties Found Using DNA

Through DNA testing and research information gathered by volunteers over the years, the Poindexter Descendants Association Research Committee believes we have connected to the family an African-American family which uses the Poindexter surname, but carries a Y chromosome of the Howle family of New Kent County, Virginia. We expected DNA to show male (Y) chromosome connections to the Poindexter family.

The story begins with Richard, born a slave, was freed and fathered a large family. Richard's granddaughter (referred to here as "Nan") contacted the PDA over a decade ago. Nan told us her grandfather Richard passed the story to his children that he was born a slave on a plantation in Virginia around 1830. He also said his father was the master of that plantation and his surname was Poindexter. We didn't have DNA testing and with no paper trail, we had little to go on ten years ago.

When Richard was about 4 years old, he, along with his mother were sold to a Mr. Rankin and taken to Mr. Rankin's plantation near Burnt Corn, Alabama. Richard grew up in Alabama and was there during the Civil War. With emancipation, following the Civil War, former slaves selected a surname for themselves. Richard asked his former master, Mr. Rankin, if it would be alright for him to use Poindexter since that was the surname of his birth father. Mr. Rankin said it was ok with him. All of Richard's male-line descendants have since carried the surname of Poindexter and today live in Alabama, Florida, Illinois, Michigan, Mississippi and many other parts of the country.

The DNA Test. Nan, now along in years and anxious to determine who Richard's father might have been, asked her brother Jim (as we will call him here) if he would participate in DNA testing. This past spring, Jim took the test. This is where the search took a twist. His 67 marker FamilyTree DNA test indicated he carried the Y chromosome of the Howle family and not the Poindexter family. The Y chromosome is the genetic marker which is passed as an exact copy from father to son, with few mutations over generations. It is passed down only through a direct male line. This meant that Richard did not descend from a male Poindexter line.

PDA's Genealogical Database. The Poindexter Descendants Association's research database held the key to solving this HOWLE-POINDEXTER mystery. For almost 30 years, Poindexter researchers have contributed their research to the database. Their contributions have paid off for Jim, his sister Nan and all of Richard's descendants.

From the database, we know that Jaquelin Lewis HOWLE, who was born circa 1796 in New Kent County, Virginia to Thomas Parke HOWLE and Anne (or Anna) Lewis POINDEXTER, legally changed his surname to Poindexter in 1833. Why?

The Records Tell Us Why. Jaquelin's biological father, Thomas Parke HOWLE, had died when Jaquelin was only 9 years old. Census records tell us that following the death of her husband, Jaquelin's widowed mother, Anne POINDEXTER Howle, along with her dependent children, moved into her brother John Lewis POINDEXTER's home at Cedar Lane Plantation in New Kent County, Virginia, the same home she grew up in with her brother John and her parents. From that point forward, John could have become more than Jaquelin's uncle, he likely became his father figure.

According to parish and other records, Jaquelin married his first cousin, Ann Lewis POINDEXTER, also of Cedar Lane (Ann's father was Jaquelin's uncle John, who owned Cedar Lane. John and his wife had only two children, Ann (who married Jaquelin) and William Carter POINDEXTER, who died as a young child.

Ann and Jaquelin had no known living children at the time of her death about 1824. Jaquelin, John's son-in-law and nephew, had resided with his father-in-law and mother-in-law and worked on their plantation prior to the death of his wife Ann. Sadly, Ann produced no progeny for her husband or father.

Since John now had no living children, he offered to make Jaquelin his heir, bequeathing him Cedar Lane if he and his second wife (Martha Collier APPERSON) would legally change their surname to Poindexter. A petition from Jaquelin L. Howle & Company “praying that a law may pass changing their names from Howle to Poindexter” dated 9 December 1833 was sent to the state senate of Virginia. The senate honored Jaquelin’s request.

Conclusion: Jaquelin is Likely Richard’s Father. Through FamilyTree DNA’s database, the YDNA 67 marker test taken by Jim, the descendant of the emancipated Richard, indicates his DNA closely matches tests done by Howle descendants whose common ancestor is Jaquelin’s grandfather, Epaphroditus HOWLE of New Kent County, Virginia.

This, along with written documentation of Jaquelin’s actions and his parentage, has enabled us to connect Richard’s family into both HOWLE and POINDEXTER lineages (through Jaquelin’s mother, Anne Lewis Poindexter) with a high level of confidence. To be most confident, according to Tom Howle of the Howle DNA Project, “We need one other person (the right person) to test at the 67 marker level to be sure”. This, and further records searching will close the gap so we can be assured this connection to the Howle and Poindexter lines is entirely accurate.

Meanwhile, we welcome Richard’s descendants to the Poindexter family and hope the rest of their genealogy searches prove as fruitful.

Notes:

1. At the time of Jim’s DNA test and the writing of this story, no located records have revealed any other instance of a male Howle having changed their surname to Poindexter.
2. Jaquelin’s only son died young with no known children, so we do not expect to find later Poindexters with the Howle DNA.
3. Currently, we are seeking the correct spelling of Jaquelin’s first name as written in the above article, or with a “c” inserted after the “a”. Different genealogists have transcribed records using either or both of the alternate spellings. For reading clarity purposes only, we have spelled it without the “c” for this article and continue our research as to the actual way he spelled his name during his lifetime. The same is true with Jaquelin’s mother Anne Lewis Poindexter; she has been transcribed as Anne and as Anna.
4. In writing this article, Nan and Jim were consulted as was Tom Howle, administrator for the Howle DNA Project at FamilyTreeDNA.com. Article was written by Robin Daviet and Jamie Poindexter, Poindexter Descendants Association Research Committee, poindexterfamily.org. September, 2011.
5. Poindexter lineage of Jaquelin: Jaquelin > Anne Lewis P > John Lewis P > William > Jacob > George > George

Howle DNA in a Poindexter

