

# GENEALOGICAL SOC'Y. OF SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

## “The Black Sheep in Your Family”

A Presentation© by John Shellabear Gleed on 06 February 2014

It would be an unusual family indeed that had NO Black Sheep. And the hobby of genealogy wouldn't be as much fun. Rhonda McClure put it well in her excellent book, “Finding Your Famous (and Infamous) Ancestors” when she opined “—researchers take a little **wicked delight** in knowing their past holds a **colorful character** or two to **spice things up.**”

So just what makes someone a Black Sheep? The definition I like is: “A **Black Sheep** is a **Person who Stands Out in a Negative Way from a Group of which He or She is a Member**”. The behavior regarded as NEGATIVE is not always specified. And it is often about that person in your family whom no one will talk about. Of course, this makes you even more curious about that distant relation. George Bernard Shaw said “If you can't get rid of the Family Skeleton, you may as well make it Dance”. Hopefully, this presentation will help you to make progress in persuading your Black Sheep to Dance, and possibly satisfying your curiosity.

In researching this subject, it became clear to me that there are groups within the Black Sheep Flocks. I have categorized and color coded them as follows:

- Black Hole** ..... Violent Criminals
- White Collar** ..... Non-Violent Criminals
- Scarlet Letter** ..... Love Gone Wrong
- Deep Purple** ..... Mixed Marriage, and
- Gray Areas** ..... All the Many Other Flocks

It also became apparent to me that our current culture no longer regards some past Black Sheep behaviors as completely negative. In fact, some of the behaviors formerly thought to be totally unacceptable come close to acceptable behavior today. I feel this shift started fifty years ago. Around 1960. But many of you predate 1960 and your ancestors certainly do.

Among our Law-breaking Ancestors, there's also a range of bad behavior. If they are outright murderers or violent criminals, we can certainly regard them as the Blackest of our Black Sheep. But if they are Con Men or non-violent crooks, we still regret their existence while being glad that they didn't take any human lives.

Although they may get away with violent behavior for years, most of the **Black Hole** Black Sheep end up in front of juries and in jail. So for them, we should have Court Records, Prison Records and Newspaper stories. The same is true for the **White Collar** non-violent criminals.

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We have a recent book by a Bay Area resident, Ron Arons, which helps us in this part of our research. Its title is “Wanted! US Criminal Records- Sources and Methodology”. Ron had found a direct ancestor convicted of bigamy and sent up the river from New York City to Sing Sing, Ron became fascinated with this topic and the near total absence of help in researching Criminal Records. He was able to access his relative’s file, and wrote his first book titled “The Jews of Sing Sing” while finding out a lot more about his **White Collar** Black Sheep.

Ron then went on a nationwide exploration to find Criminal Records, and he published these findings in “Wanted!” He studied seven types of records in the fifty states, DC, and also in the National Archives. Ron’s seven categories are 1) Prison Records, 2) Criminal Court Records, 3) Parole Records, 4) Pardon Records, 5) Execution Records, 6) Investigative Records and 7) Police Records. Any or all of these may provide you with vital information on your Black Sheep. Ron’s book includes numerous examples of interesting records such as Prison Administration records with physical descriptions and family information. In a perverse kind of way, *the blacker your black sheep are, the more likely you are to find information on them.*

Criminal Records are scattered around the country, and only fragments of them can be found on-line. It’s very unusual to find them digitized and indexed. On this topic, you may have to do your research the old-fashioned way by writing letters, going to courthouses and asking questions. It’s not easy work. And the Information Age we live in isn’t much help yet.

If you want to get your feet wet in researching this subject area, one of the largest and most complete databases on-line is of the Central Criminal Court of London, commonly known as “The Old Bailey”. On their website <http://www.oldbaileyonline.org>, you can see a full range of criminals in a big city population and even the actual testimony in the cases. Their statistical section is excellent and easy to access. Notice all the Gleed listings. Most of them are for one man who wasn’t isn’t a criminal at all. He was a private investigator and regular trial witness.

There are several subcategories within the **Scarlet Letter** Category which I have sub-titled “When Love Goes Wrong”. Among these causes of Black Sheephood are Illegitimacy, Adultery, Incest, Abandonment (before Divorce became generally available), Abortion and Prostitution.

Giving birth to a bastard or being a bastard might lead to a life as a Black Sheep. Not even a wealthy, even a royal, father could free the child from the condition of his or her birth. Local parishes and governments didn’t want to be financially responsible either for the mother or her child, and Bastardy records reveal the name of the father in many cases. Copious records of Bastardy Bonds exist for England and Wales, and these policies and procedures followed the colonists to the new colonies in Virginia and Massachusetts.

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No less a person than a Puritan governor of Massachusetts experienced “Scarlet Letter” female descendants. Thomas Dudley came to Massachusetts Bay Colony in the Winthrop Fleet of 1630, and he was deputy governor or governor of the colony for 18 years. Even the virtuous Puritans had their Black Sheep. And for Governor Dudley, in the next three generations, **Eight** of his female progeny either committed adultery or produced illegitimate children. And in one case, a Dudley woman abandoned her husband and four children for the wild life in Boston. This history on Governor Dudley is related in D. Brenton Simons’ book, “Witches, Rakes, and Rogues”

One of the two major Brick Walls we encounter in Black Sheep Research is **Abandonment**. The other one is **Name Change**. Usually, the **Abandoners** are men of the family, but sometimes, they may be the women. These folks seem to disappear off the genealogical screens and may be difficult, but NOT impossible, to find. There are logical places to look for them. Recall that 150 years ago, most people grew up on farms and learned the many skills necessary for that vocation. A person might leave family and homestead, but he/she would be reluctant to give up their hard earned skills. And they may be found on another farm, perhaps in a nearby county or state.

**Abandoners** also go where the jobs are. For men, this might mean building railroads, mining for riches in gold and silver, joining the Army, finding work on a ranch, running off to sea, or becoming a big-city employee like a carpenter or a bartender. When a young man disappears from his family, you might want to check Military Records to see if he took that solution to his problems. For women, the most frequent outlet is working as a servant, possibly in a nearby town or city. Other callings for women who depart the family were textile mills, shoe factories, laundries, or as shop girls in the city. Finally, there are the unfortunate women who become prostitutes. A very dangerous and short life from which very few of them escaped.

Genealogist Jana Broglin found she could make an Occupation Search of the 1880 US census using the Ancestry.com database. She turned up 6,210 women who reported they were prostitutes, whores, sporting women or concubines. Looking only at the 1880 census of Cook County, Illinois, I found an enumerator who wrote ‘House of Prostitution’ for the head of household, but could not bring himself to list the young women Boarders in them as Prostitutes. So even using a big database, Jana Broglin missed some unfortunates. This is common in genealogical databases.

People who **Abandon** their families or branded as Black Sheep are very likely to **Change their Names**. And this becomes the second major brick wall in making your Black Sheep dance for you. The Legal Requirements for Name Change vary all over the map, and they are not really required at all. You can take any name which pleases you.

In California, legal changes of name are made at the County level. You would look for these records in the same courthouse where you find marriage licenses and certificates. You need to have a date and a place to even find a legal name change here. I could not find that California counties had indexed or digitized any of their name change records.

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The most difficult name change situation for your Black Sheep is the completely new name. But this can be hard for the individual Black Sheep to accomplish. People are used to being called by their birth name, especially the first name. They very seldom change the first name unless they absolutely have to such as when they're running from the sheriff or an angry father.

Variations on this subject were explored using “Halliwell’s” book on people in the Hollywood movie business. I don’t suggest that your Black Sheep had the benefit of a movie producer or agent in choosing his or her new name. But there are patterns of name changes to report to you. And thousands of Hollywood people did change their names when they entered the movie business. So there was lots of fun data to analyze.

Many of you will know the most famous name changes of stars. For example, many know that Cary Grant was Archibald Leach when he was born in Bristol (England), Judy Garland was named Frances Gumm, and Marilyn Monroe was Norma Jean Baker. But beyond the ‘most famous’ of the ‘famous’, there were hundreds of actors/writers/directors who adopted new names. The categories of these name changes may be useful to Black Sheep searchers.

First of all, the Hollywood name changers tended to *abandon their ethnicity*. They left behind their German, Jewish, Latin and Eastern European roots. An example is Doris Kapelhoff whom we know as Doris Day. They also turned their *middle names into new surnames*. Estelle O’Brien Merle Thompson became Merle Oberon. Phoebe Annie Oakley Mozee reduced her name to just Annie Oakley. Another name change approach was to *shorten the original surname*. One classic example is William Claude Dukinfield whom we know as W.C. Fields. Some celebrities would drop the beginning of the old name. Others would leave out the beginning. Maybe your Black Sheep ancestors also followed these showbiz patterns.

Going against family expectancies in Marriage leads many people into the category of **Deep Purple**, or Mixed Marriage. There are four sub-groups of these Black Sheep. There are mixed marriages by reason of **Race, Religion, Culture** and **Class**. All of these are becoming outmoded in our modern culture. But they certainly were a factor in the lives of our ancestors. And they persist in other countries and cultures.

In my wife’s family, a female ancestor married ‘**beneath**’ herself. The young woman had been sent from Chicago to exclusive eastern schools. But she came home in the summer and fell for a tall, dark and handsome university student. She married him and was immediately persona non grata in the family. She became a Black Sheep. He was the descendant of German immigrants. Not the right class for a New England family which included a signer of the Declaration of Independence. Not until my wife’s generation did this family connection come back together.

There are many reasons for branding someone a Black Sheep. Let’s say you’re an immigrant Polish family going to a Catholic church in Chicago and your son meets and pursues a lovely

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Italian girl who attends a different Catholic church. This might violate an unwritten rule of BOTH families *even though* the youngsters involved are of the **same** religion. Will they still be Black Sheep when the grandchildren start to arrive? Would they be Black Sheep today?

Likewise, the perceived range of offenses against the family’s wishes widens when the issue becomes marrying a person of another religion or another race. Is our culture more accepting of these marriages? You certainly don’t hear much talk about ‘mixed marriages’ today. Is this just ‘political correctness’ or actually a more accepting culture?

One of my closest friends has a grandfather who was cast out when he announced he wanted to leave Scotland for London to become an **actor**. The family didn’t want to see their famous surname on a theater marquee. The offending son then compounded the problem by marrying an **actress**. In the early 1900s, everyone knew that actresses were disreputable, not much better than women of the streets. You may find the casting out in this case when you know the Black Sheep was from a family of clergymen including bishops of the Anglican church.

Among the **Gray Area Black Sheep** are Persons with Addictions, Mental/Physical Disabilities, persons who commit Suicide and Homosexuality. When you find a shunned family member, consider all these gray possibilities. Maybe one of them is the reason why no one will talk about Old Uncle Seth. A person with severe mental problems is not usually regarded as a Black Sheep today. More an unfortunate member of the human race but often a poor soul kept out of sight of polite society. Mental instability in a family can lead to the whole clan being shunned by their neighbors. “Don’t associate with <your name here>, there’s madness in that family”.

The 1880 Census of the US has five columns of “Health” information including “Idiotic” and “Insane” to be checked off by the enumerators. These markings may lead to a Black Sheep label.

Another group of Black Sheep are the **men** whom their families wanted to get out of sight so they wouldn’t wreck the family’s reputation. Their offences usually included failure to pay gambling debts, excessive drinking and carousing, or consorting with the servants, especially that comely upstairs maid. The British shipped them out to the frontiers of Canada, Australia and the United States. Family funds, or remittances, were sent to them periodically or in a lump sum for their support or possible investment.

This group of Black Sheep was known as **Remittance Men**. The British Remittance Men tended to be well educated in classics such as Latin and Greek, but with very little practical or scientific training. Their education included horseback riding, hunting and sports like rugby and cricket. Not bad training for frontier life. Many Remittance Men drank up their funds as they received them, but some became successful in ranching. There are books about their wild exploits. The modern version of Remittance Men, now including ladies, are often called **Trust Fund Babies**.

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