

Using the New Cluster Tool on Ancestry.com

By Burks Oakley II
10 July 2025

Within this past month, Ancestry.com released a new software tool called “Matches by Cluster”. This tool automates the “Leeds Method” that is commonly used by genetic genealogists. It appears that the “Leeds Method” was developed by Ms. Dana Leeds, and I have to admit that I never previously took the time to figure it out.

Now the Leeds Method, called “Matches by Cluster” on Ancestry.com, is automated and it is being “rolled out” to Ancestry.com users who pay for a “Pro” membership. I found out just a few days ago that I now have access to the “Matches by Cluster” tool, and since that time, I’ve been spending a lot of time trying to figure out how to use it.

The Ancestry.com website has a short piece about this tool:

<https://www.ancestry.com/c/ancestry-blog/dna/dna-matches-by-cluster>

Matches by Cluster is a new feature available to Ancestry Pro Tools members. Clusters are a powerful genetic genealogy tool that allows you to visualize, sort, and group your DNA matches so you can easily see how your matches are related to each other through DNA. Clusters often represent branches of your family tree, making it easier to identify common ancestors and solve genealogical puzzles!

Each group, or “cluster,” represents people who likely share the same common ancestor with you. Instead of looking at hundreds of individual DNA matches, you now have organized groups of matches. This makes it easier for you to figure out which side of your family any individual match belongs to.

As users are experimenting with this new software, they are writing about their experiences:

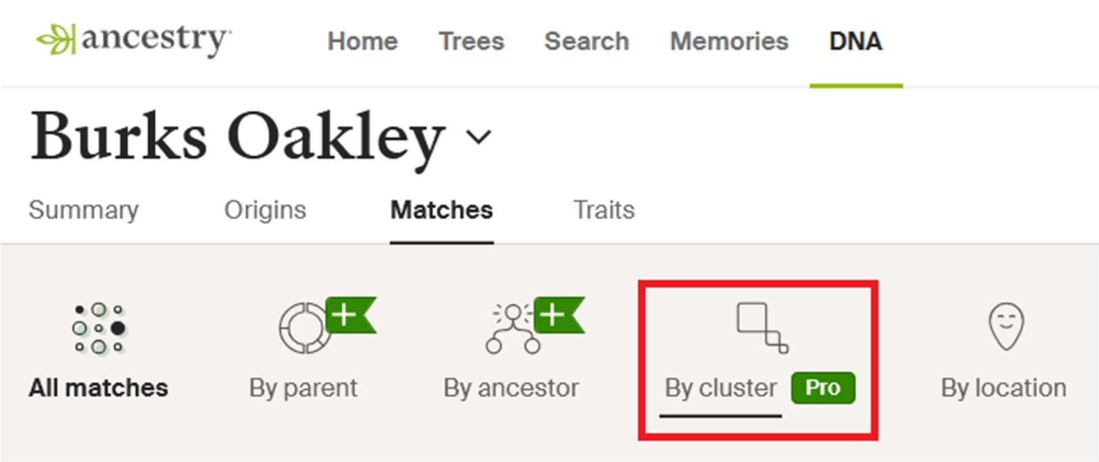
<https://whoareyoumadeof.com/blog/what-are-dna-matches-by-cluster-on-ancestry/>

Ms. Dana Leeds created an excellent YouTube video about interpreting the results from this new tool:

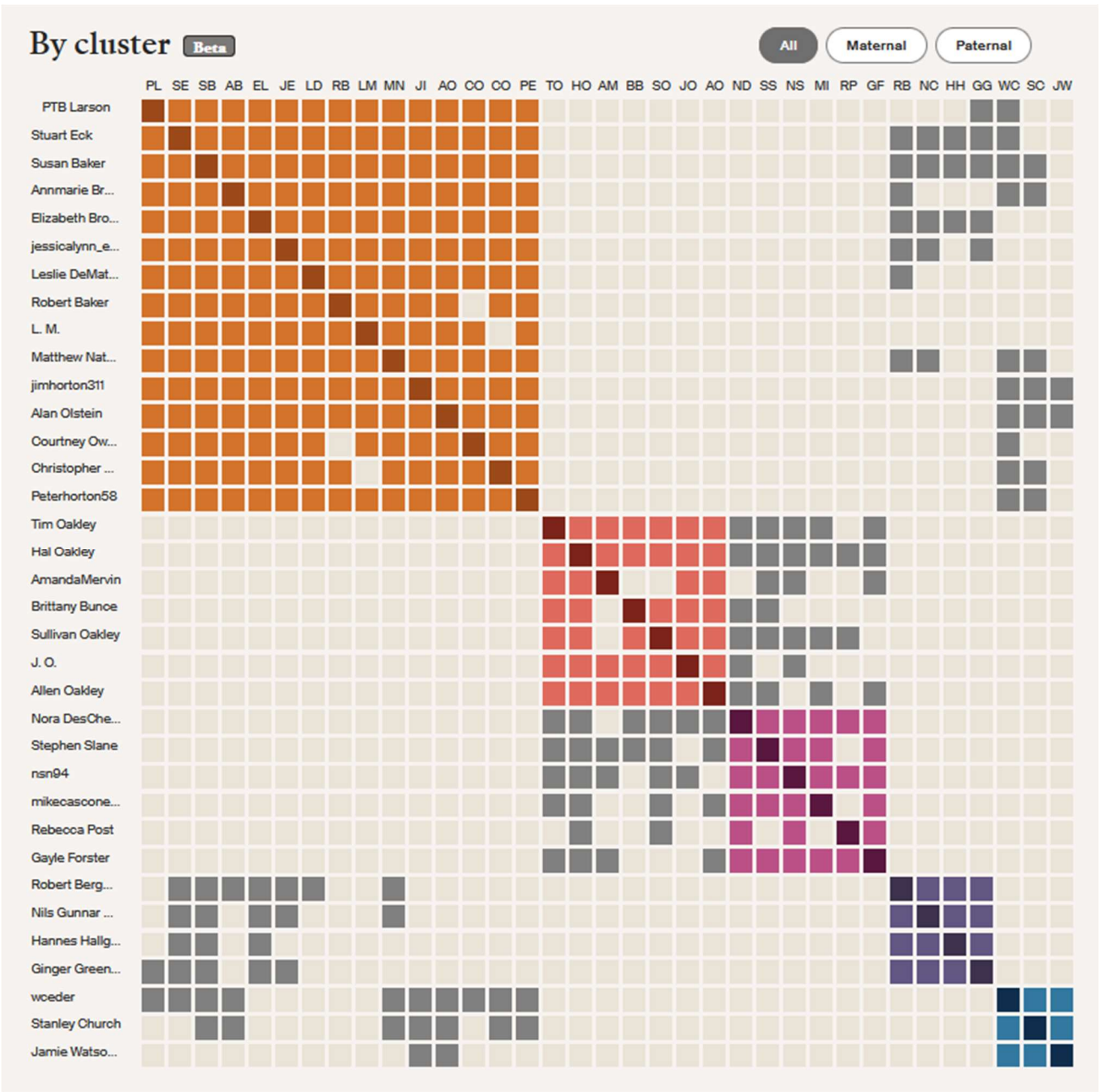
<https://youtu.be/Wg2RTuaU5mw>

In this narrative, I’ll do my best to share my own experiences with the new Cluster Tool on Ancestry.com. Here we go!

When I view my DNA matches on Ancestry.com, I now have the option to view them “By cluster”:



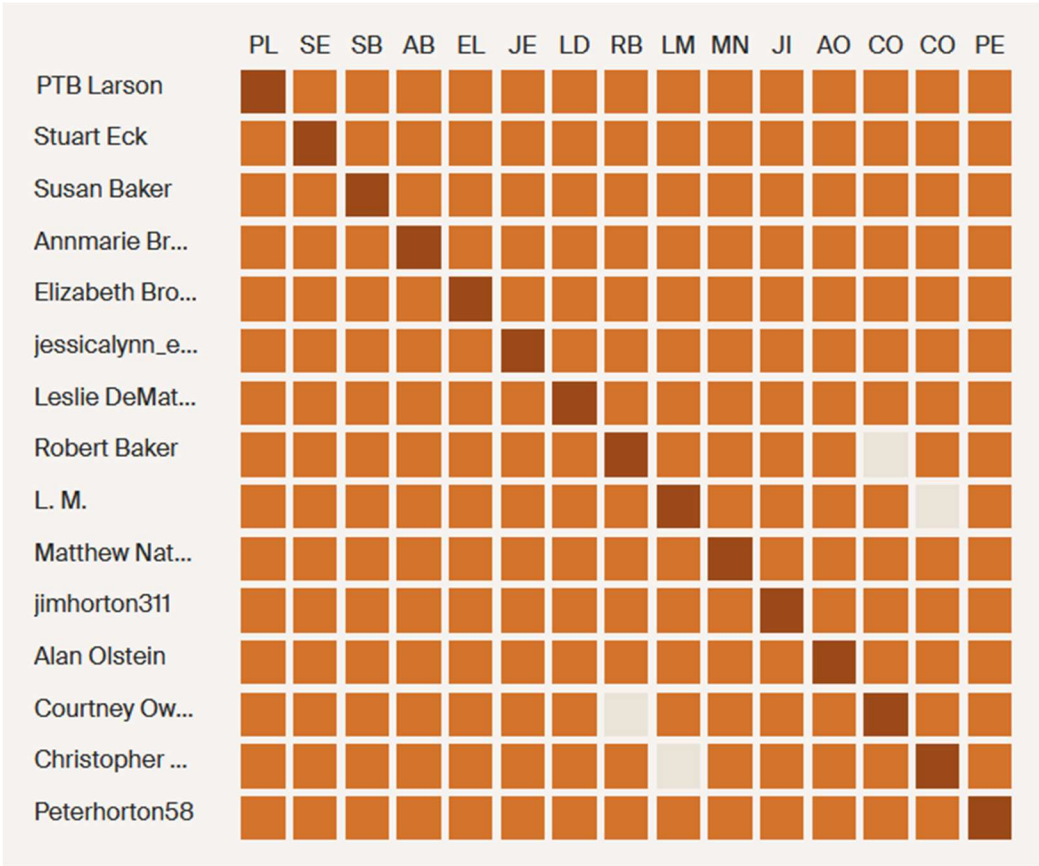
Here is a screenshot showing my clusters:



This cluster chart, which was created automatically by software on Ancestry.com, is rather complex and undoubtedly intimidating at first glance. But when it is broken down into bite-sized pieces, hopefully it will make sense. The overall chart contains thirty-five of my DNA matches (people with whom I have DNA matches). These thirty-five individual DNA matches are all in the range of 65 cM to 1300 cM. This range limitation means that close relatives, such as parents and children, do not appear in this chart.

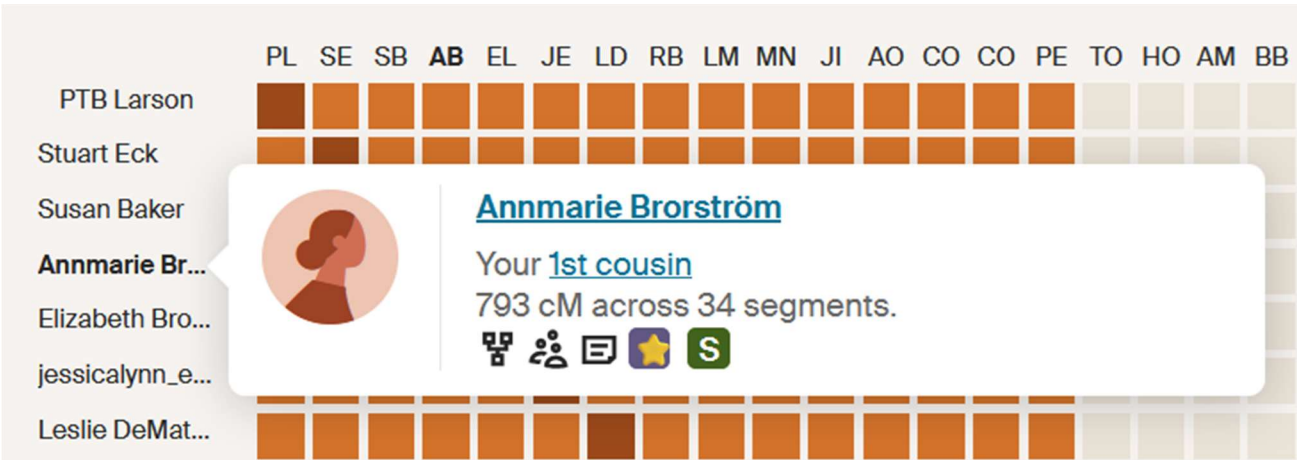
The first important point to make is that I have five clusters running along the diagonal of this chart, from upper-left to lower-right. These clusters are labelled with the colors of burnt-orange, coral, magenta, deep-purple, and blue – or at least this is what these colors look like to me. I know from several genealogy groups on Facebook that other people have different names for these colors.

To simplify things, I'll first look at just the burnt-orange-colored cluster in the upper-left of the overall chart:



This chart shows fifteen of my DNA matches, with their names listed from top-to-bottom along the left side of the cluster, and their initials along the top of the cluster (from left to right). The fifteen DNA matches along the top are in the same order as along the left side. It is important to remember that each of the people in this cluster have a DNA match with me that is at least 65 cM in size.

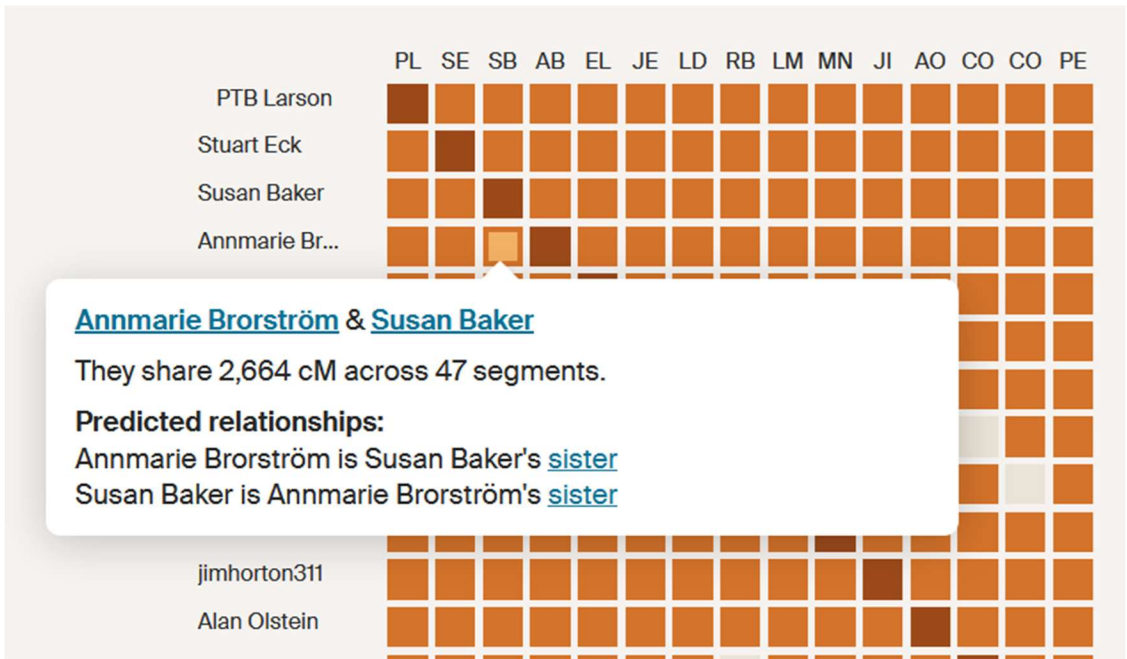
If I hover the mouse pointer over a name at the left, it brings up a pop-up box with information about my match with that person. For example, here is the pop-up box for my DNA match with Annmarie Brorström:



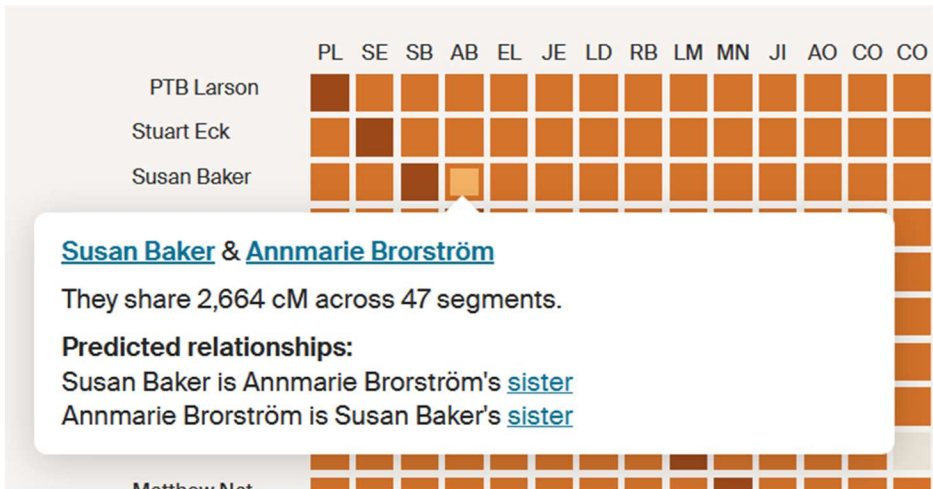
It states that Annmarie is my first-cousin and that we have a 793 cM DNA match. The little icons at the bottom of the pop-up window indicate that Annmarie has a

family tree, we have a shared ancestor, I have written a note about our DNA match, and she is in several of my groups (denoted by the star and the letter S).

Going back to the burnt-orange cluster, each colored cell in this cluster indicates that the two people who intersect in that cell have a DNA match with each other. Hovering the mouse pointer over a cell brings up a pop-up box with information about their DNA match. For example, here is the box representing the DNA match between Annmarie Brorström (horizontal row) and Susan Baker SB (vertical column):

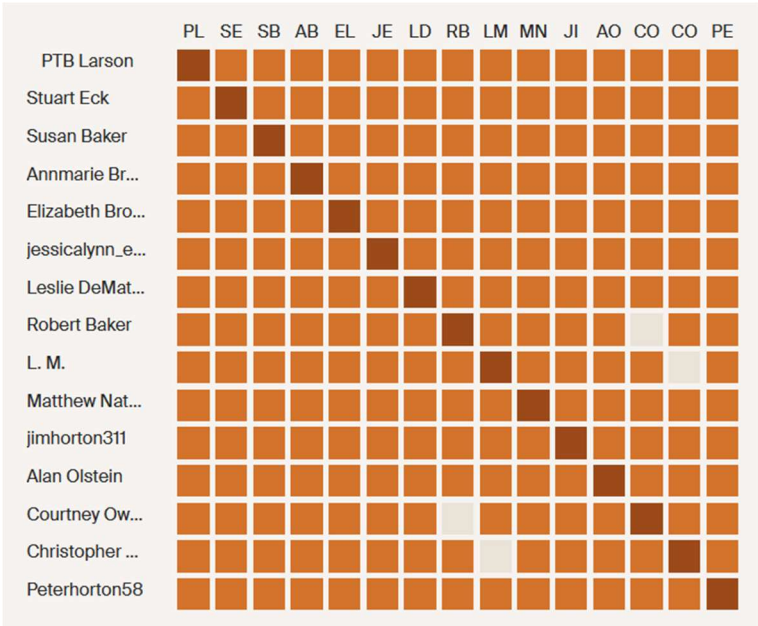


Annmarie and Susan share 2,664 cM of DNA and are sisters. Note that the cluster is symmetrical about the diagonal (from upper-left to lower-right) – so here is the equivalent cell where Susan Baker (horizontal row) intersects Annmarie Brorström – AB (vertical column):



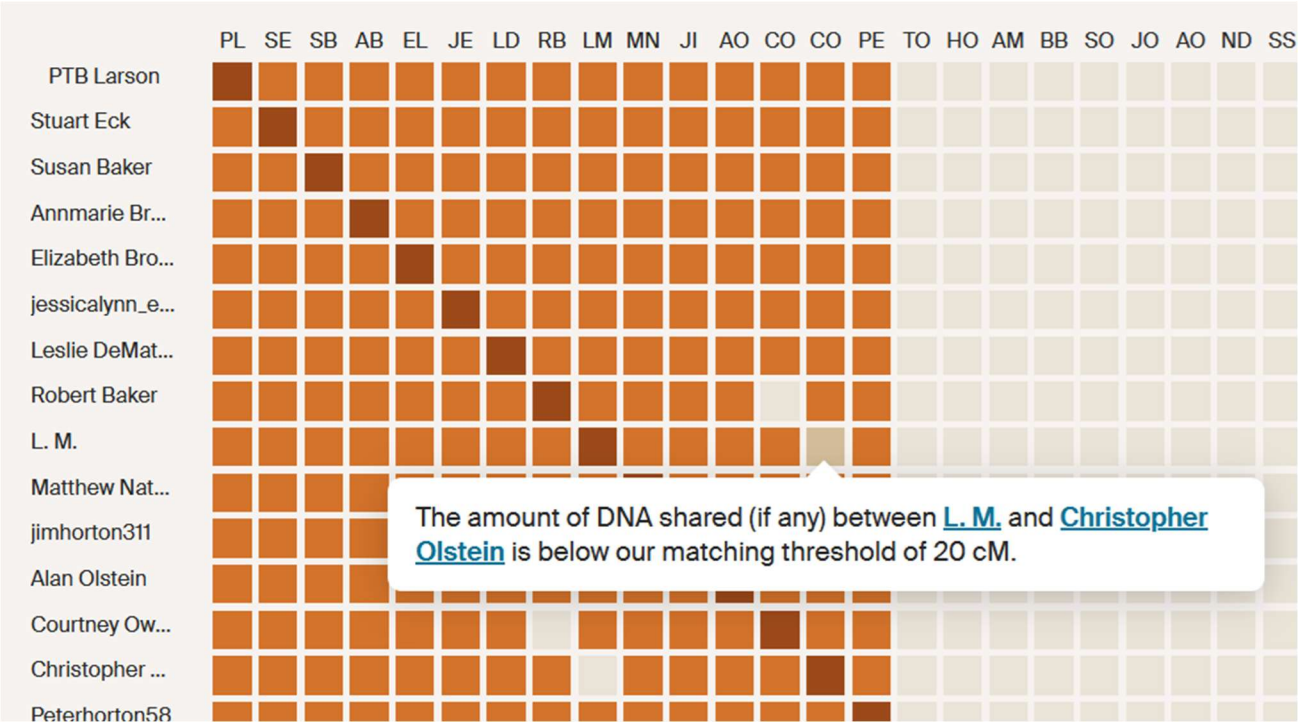
So that is another important point – the cluster is symmetrical about the main diagonal.

Of course, the main diagonal is where a person intersects with himself or herself, and the cells on this diagonal are shown with a darker color than the other cells in the cluster:



One more important point about my burnt-orange cluster – note that there are four cells within the cluster that are not colored (there are two cells above the diagonal and their mirror images below the diagonal).

Hovering the mouse pointer over one of these uncolored cells brings up a pop-up window with more information:



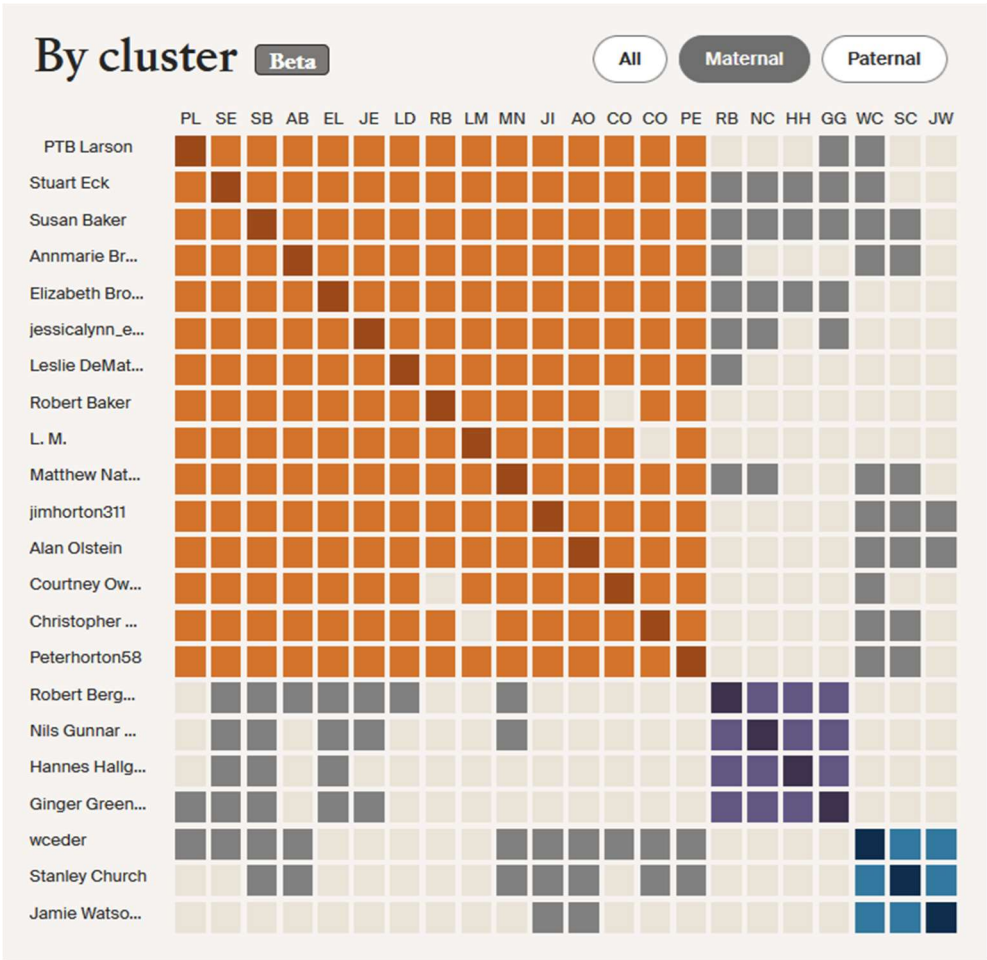
This screenshot shows that if **L.M.** (Lauren Meier) and Christopher Olstein have a DNA match, it is below the threshold of 20 cM. I know that Lauren Meier and Christopher Olstein are both second-great grandchildren of Paulus Brorström (1859-1932) and his wife Bernhardine Wennström (1855-1932). This couple were my mother’s paternal grandparents.

In fact, from my family tree, I know that fourteen of the fifteen people in the burnt-orange cluster are descended from the **Brorström-Wennström** couple, who immigrated from Sweden to the United States on their honeymoon in 1882.

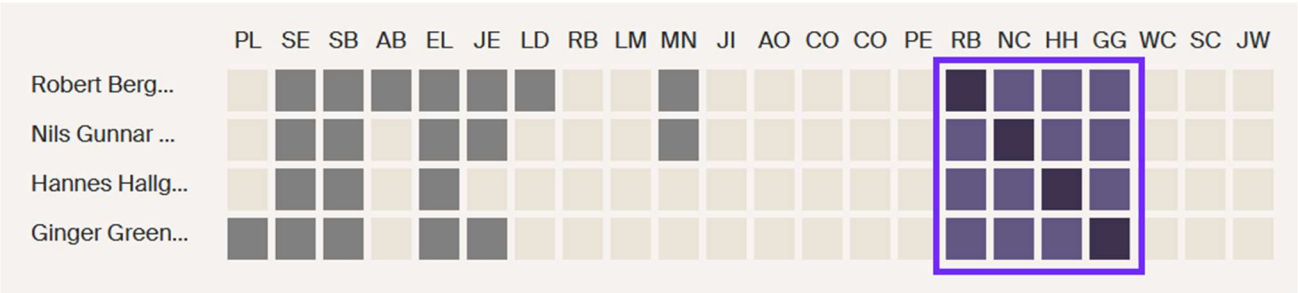
The only person in my burnt-orange cluster who I never have been able to figure out is Courtney Owens, but since she is a member of this cluster, she most likely also is descended from the **Brorström-Wennström** couple. Hopefully, I’ll be able to come back to her in another narrative.

To review, I have thirty-five DNA matches on Ancestry.com that are in the range of 65 cM to 1300 cM. Software on Ancestry.com has grouped these thirty-five people into five clusters. The largest cluster, which appears in burnt-orange, contains fifteen descendants of Paulus Brorström (1859-1932) and his wife Bernhardine Wennström (1855-1932).

I will next look at only the clusters that Ancestry.com has determined to be on my mother’s side of my family tree. I clicked on the “Maternal” button in the upper-right corner of the window (see next screenshot), and that left me with my three maternal clusters:



My three maternal clusters have the colors burnt-orange, deep-purple, and blue. Here is the deep-purple cluster:



The deep-purple cluster contains just four of my DNA matches – and they are with Robert Bergmark, Nils Gunnar Carlsson, Hannes Halgren, and Ginger Greenzang. I know who all these people are, and I have written about my DNA matches with three of them previously:

<http://www.burksoakley.com/SwedishGenealogy/BergmarkLarssonConnection.pdf>

<http://www.burksoakley.com/SwedishGenealogy/HannesHallgren-LarssonConnection.pdf>

<http://www.burksoakley.com/SwedishGenealogy/GingerWalgren-HanssonCousin.pdf>

And Nils Gunnar Carlsson is Hannes Hallgren’s father:

Shared match:

Hannes Hallgren

Your:

Half 2nd cousin 1x removed or 2nd cousin 2x removed

98 cM

Maternal side

Nils Gunnar Carlsson's:

Son

3,475 cM

All four of my DNA matches in the deep-purple cluster (Robert Bergmark, Nils Gunnar Carlsson, Hannes Halgren, and Ginger Greenzang) are descended from Börje Larsson (1835-1878) and his wife Anna Helena Andersdotter (born 1837). This couple were my second-great grandparents and they lived in Fjärås, Halland County, Sweden. Their son, Lars Emil Larsson (1864-1945), was my great-grandfather, and Lars Emil immigrated to the United States in the mid-1880’s.

Here again is the screenshot showing my three maternal clusters:

	PL	SE	SB	AB	EL	JE	LD	RB	LM	MN	JI	AO	CO	CO	PE	RB	NC	HH	GG	WC	SC	JW
PTB Larson	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange
Stuart Eck	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange
Susan Baker	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange
Annmari Br...	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange
Elizabeth Bro...	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange
jessicalynn_e...	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange
Leslie DeMat...	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange
Robert Baker	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange
L. M.	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange
Matthew Nat...	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange
jimhorton311	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange
Alan Olstein	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange
Courtney Ow...	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange
Christopher ...	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange
Peterhorton58	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange
Robert Berg...	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange
Nils Gunnar ...	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange
Hannes Hallg...	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange
Ginger Green...	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange
wceder	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange
Stanley Church	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange
Jamie Watso...	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange

The last cluster to discuss is the blue cluster in the lower-right of the chart. Here is the blue cluster:

	PL	SE	SB	AB	EL	JE	LD	RB	LM	MN	JI	AO	CO	CO	PE	RB	NC	HH	GG	WC	SC	JW
wceder	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange
Stanley Church	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange
Jamie Watso...	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange

The blue cluster contains just three DNA matches, and they are with Walter Cederholm, Stanley Church, and Jamie Watson-Chatelain-McGuire. Stanley and Jamie are siblings, and their mother was Eleanor Cederholm (1917-2011). Eleanor and Walter Cederholm were siblings.

Based on DNA, I was able to show that my second-great grandfather, Malte Brorström (1816-1877), fathered a son “out of marriage”, and this son was

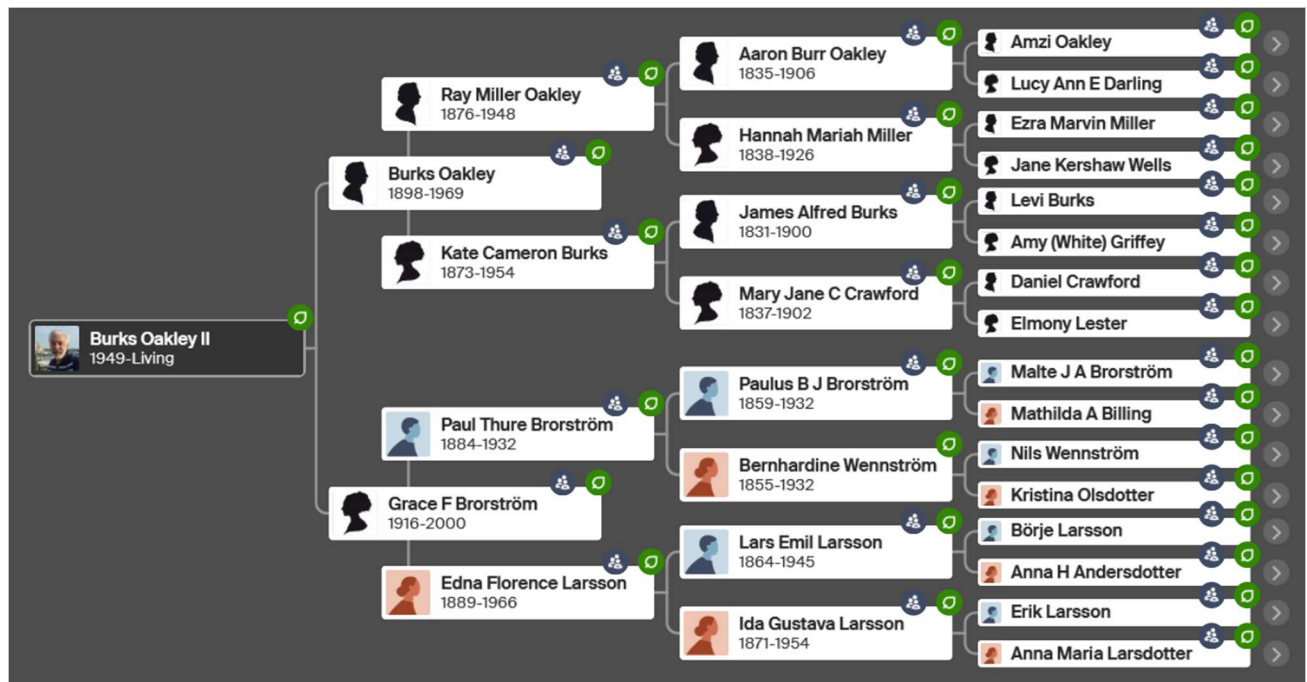
Gustav Göran Cederholm (1841-1901). Actually, Gustav Göran took the inheritable surname of Cederholm as an adult. And Gustav Göran Cederholm was Walter Cederholm's great-grandfather – see:

<http://www.burksoakley.com/SwedishGenealogy/CederholmRelationship.pdf>

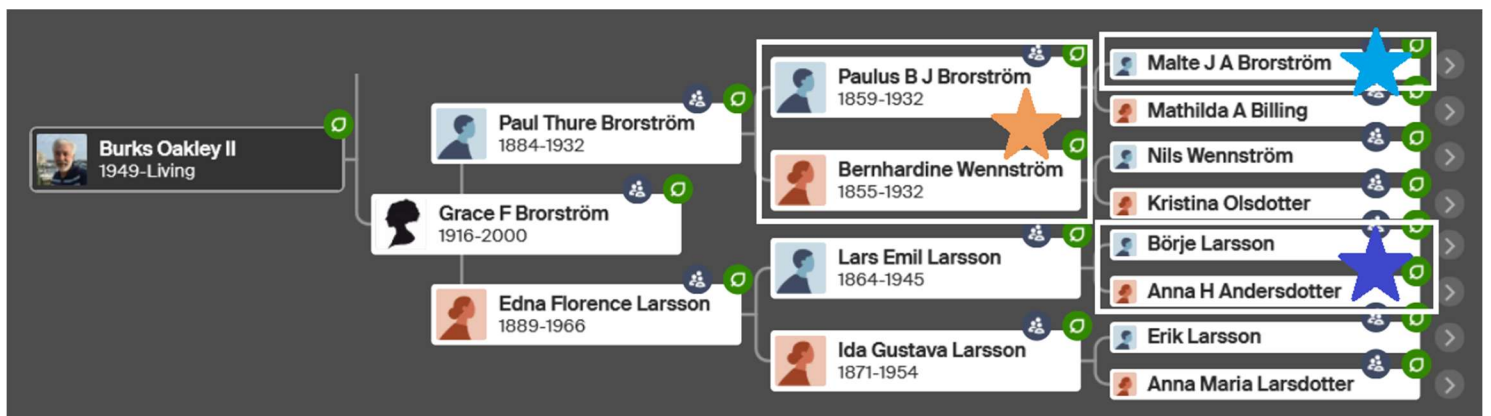
http://www.burksoakley.com/SwedishGenealogy/CederholmPresentation_21Feb22.pptx

So all three DNA matches in my blue cluster are descended from Malte Brorström.

Here is my overall pedigree chart from Ancestry.com:



And here is just the maternal side of this chart:

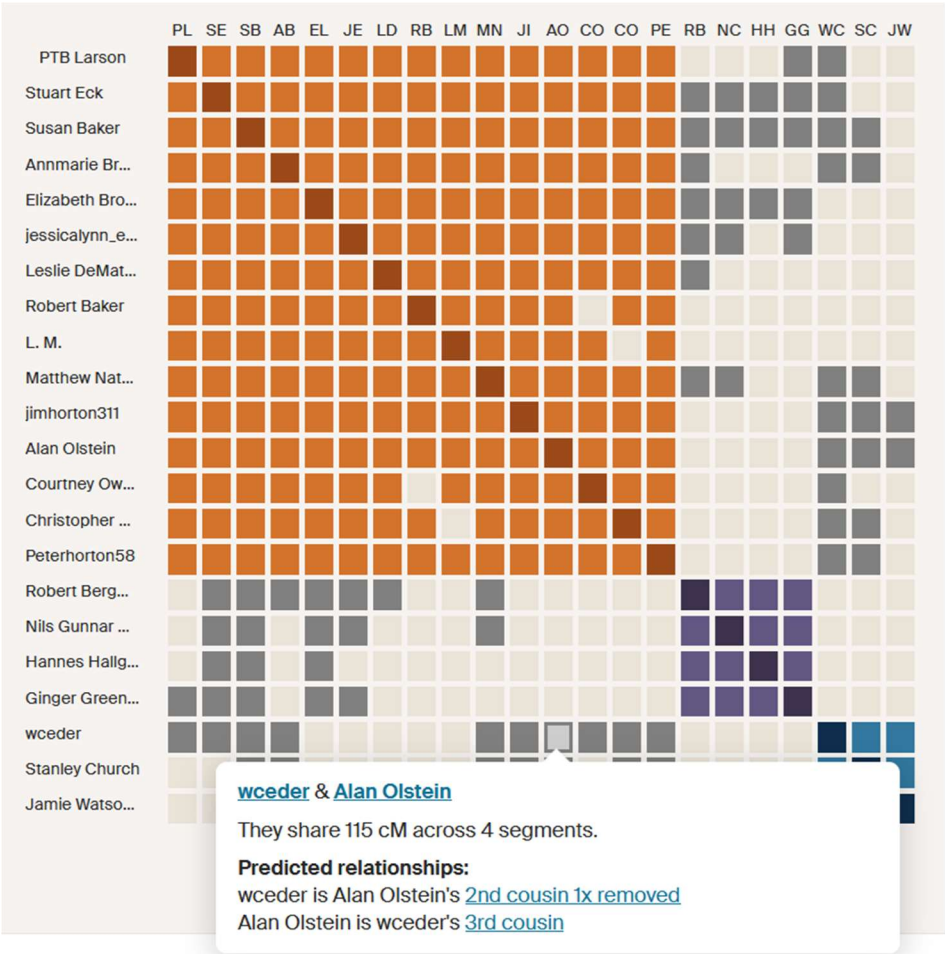


Recall that I have three maternal clusters:

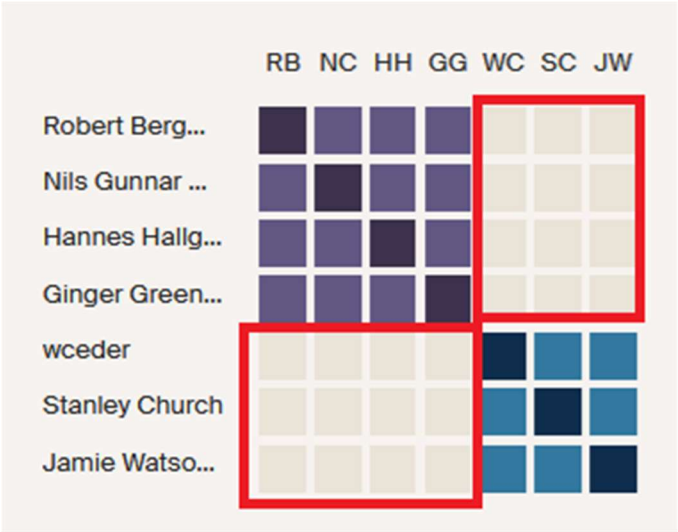
- Burnt-orange cluster – everyone in the cluster is descended from Paulus Brorström and his wife Bernhardine Wennström (white rectangle with orange star in the pedigree chart shown above)
- Deep-purple cluster – everyone in the cluster is descended from Börje Larsson and Anna Helena Andersdotter (white rectangle with the purple star in the pedigree chart shown above)
- Blue cluster – everyone in the cluster is descended from Malte Brorström (white rectangle with the blue star in the pedigree chart shown above).

The gray cells indicate that Walter has DNA matches that are at least 20 cM in size with Peter Larson, Stuart Eck, Susan Baker, Annmarie Brorström, Matthew Nathe, Jim Horton, Alan Olstein, Courtney Owens, Christopher Olstein, and Peter Horton. Of course, none of these people are in the blue cluster.

When I hover the mouse pointer over one of the gray cells, it brings up a pop-up box with information about the DNA match. For example, here is a cell for Walter Cederholm and Alan Olstein:

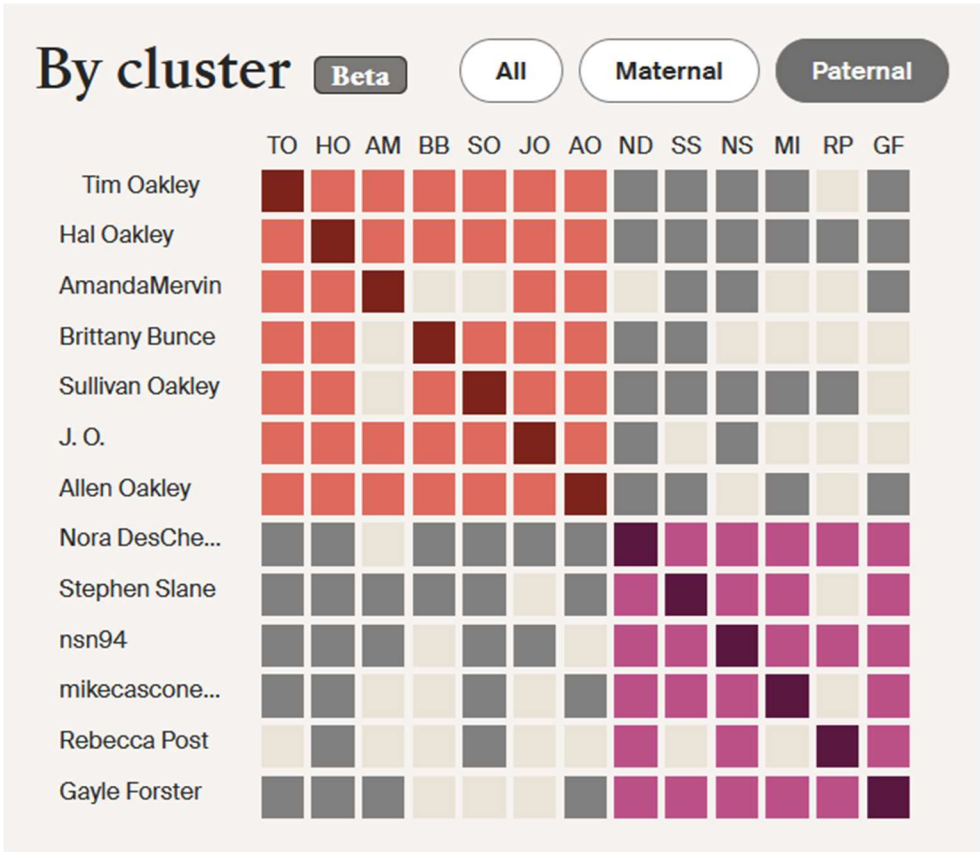


Let me make one more point about my maternal cluster chart. Recall that my deep-purple cluster involves descendants of my *Larsson-Andersdotter* ancestors, while my blue cluster involves descendants of Malte Brorström. This means that the people in my deep-purple cluster do not have ancestors in common with the people in my blue cluster. And indeed, the relevant parts of the cluster chart (marked by the red boxes in the chart below) show the absence of gray cells:



OK, at this point, if you have been understanding everything, give yourself a big pat on the back. If you are lost, well, sorry for wasting your time....

Let me now go on to my paternal clusters:



These two clusters are colored coral and magenta. The good news is that all thirteen people in these two clusters are known to me. And very roughly, the seven people in the coral-colored cluster are **Oakley** descendants, while the six people in the magenta-colored cluster are **Burks** descendants.

The people in my coral cluster all are descended from my paternal grandparents, Ray Miller Oakley and his wife Kate Cameron Burks:

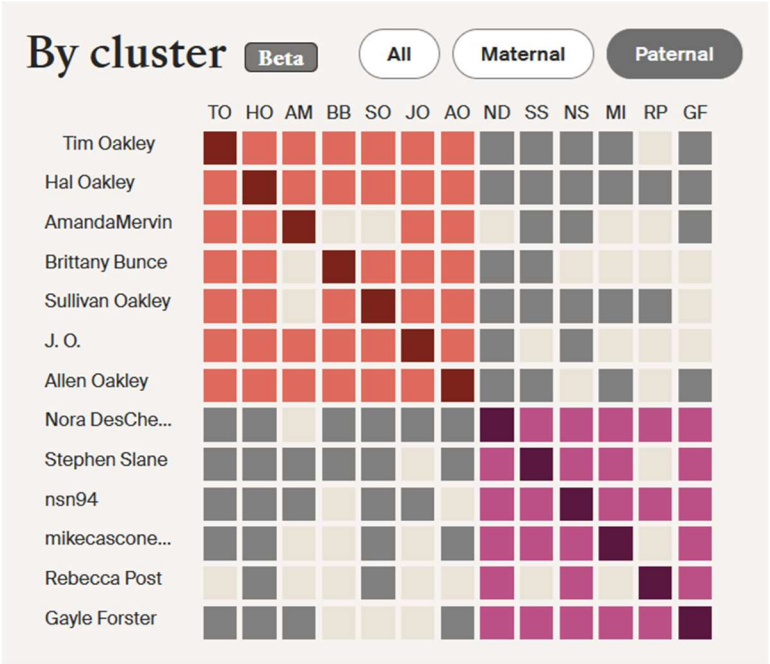
- Tim Oakley (great-grandson)
- Hal Oakley (great-grandson)
- Amanda Mervin (second-great granddaughter)
- Brittany Bunce (second-great granddaughter)
- Sullivan Oakley (second-great granddaughter)
- Josh Oakley (second-great grandson)
- Allen Oakley (second-great grandson)

The people in my magenta cluster all are descended from my father’s maternal grandparents, James Alfred Burks and his wife Mary Jane Cameron Crawford):

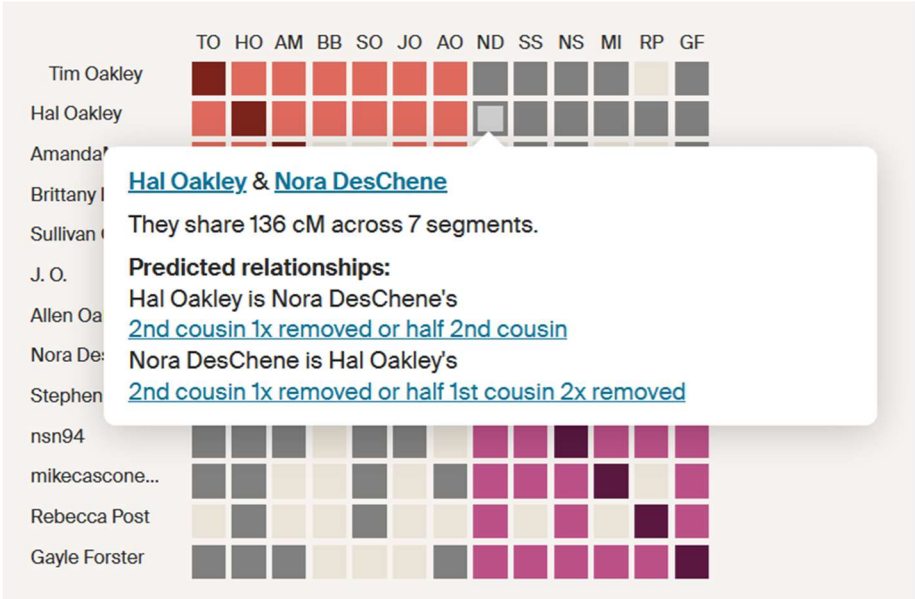
- Nora DesChene (second-great granddaughter)
- Stephen Slane (great-grandson)
- nsn94 (great-grandson)
- Mike Cascone (second-great grandson)
- Rebecca Post (second-great granddaughter)
- Gayle Forster (second-great granddaughter; sister of Rebecca Post)

Since all of the people in my coral cluster are descended from Kate Cameron Burks, and since all of the people in my magenta cluster are descended from

Kate’s parents, James Alfred Burks and his wife Mary Jane Crawford, all of the people in these two clusters are related to each other. This becomes apparent when you see all of the gray cells associated with my two paternal clusters:



Again, the gray-colored cells indicate that two people from different clusters have DNA matches that are at least 20 cM in size. For example, Hal Oakley is in the coral cluster, while Nora DesChene (ND) is in the magenta cluster. Hovering the mouse pointer over the cell where they intersect brings up a pop-up box showing that Hal and Nora share 136 cM of DNA:



As I look at my paternal clusters, I can’t help but ask the question “Where is Mark Eidem?” Mark is the son of my first-cousin Mary Cameron Oakley. Mark and I share 418 cM of DNA and we both are descended from Ray Miller Oakley and his wife Kate Cameron Burks. Why doesn’t he appear in my coral-colored group?

I’m dumbfounded. Flummoxed. Flabbergasted.

Oh well, as I learn more about the new “cluster tool” on Ancestry.com, perhaps I’ll understand this glaring omission. Or perhaps this is just a glitch, since this software is clearly marked being in “beta” (as of early July 2025).

This completes my broad overview of the “Clusters Tool” on Ancestry.com.

As I thought about all of this, I wondered why I didn't have more of my DNA matches in my overall cluster map.

I went to the Ancestry.com website and I filtered ALL of my DNA matches so that I would only view those matches that were between 65 cM and 1300 cM – here is what the filter looks like:

Filters

Filter DNA matches by:

☐ Unviewed matches

☐ Common ancestor

☐ New 25

☐ Notes

☐ Hidden matches

Trees

Shared DNA 1

☐ All matches (56,321)

☐ Close matches - 4th cousin or closer (3,732)

☐ Distant matches (52,589)

☒ Custom centimorgan range

65

min of 6 cM

1300

max of 3,490 cM

Groups

Journeys +

Apply filters

Reset filters

When I applied this filter, I saw that I had forty-seven matches in this size range. But I only have thirty-five matches in my overall cluster map. I wonder why twelve of my DNA matches are excluded from my cluster maps. Who knows?

At this point, let me summarize my initial thoughts about the new Cluster Tool.

Did the new Cluster Tool give me any new insight about my family tree? No, it didn't. Perhaps this is because I already had such a good understanding of my tree.

Did it help me figure out who Courtney Owens is? No, it didn't.

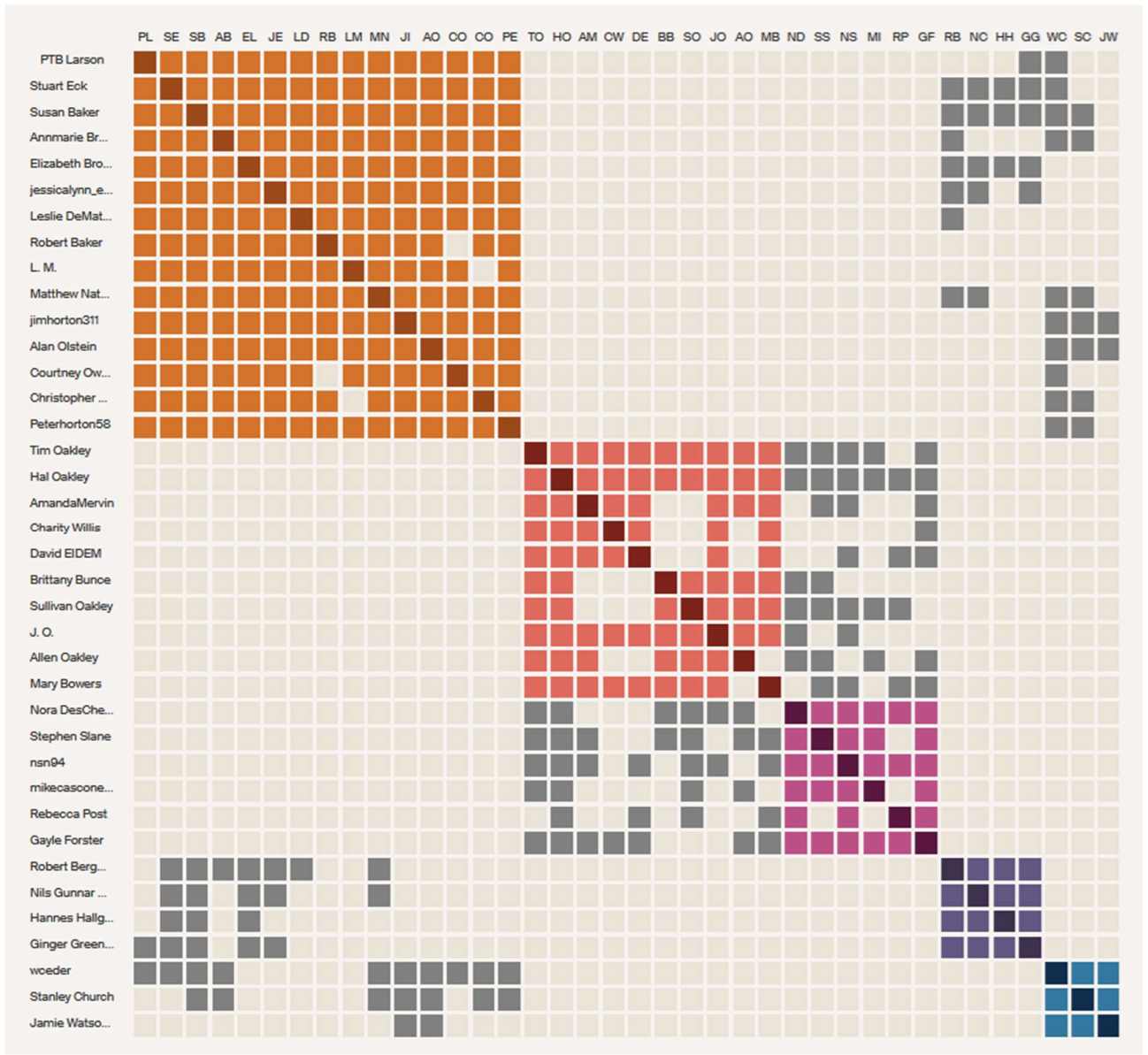
Why did the Cluster Tool omit a number of close relatives, such as Mark Eidem and his children Mary Bowers and David Eidem? My DNA matches with them are 418 cM (Mark), 140 cM (Mary), and 246 cM (David). And I know that all three of them have DNA matches with a number of my *Oakley* relatives that are greater than 25 cM.

While the Cluster Tool provided a nice view of my close DNA relatives, it really didn't tell me anything at all new. With all the hype I have read about this new tool, I was hoping for something more. Perhaps it will be improved as time goes on.

One more thing – see the next page.

Note added after what I thought was the final edit:

Just now (6:25 am on 10 July 2025), I went back and looked at my cluster map one last time. I was pleasantly surprised to see that the overall map now has thirty-eight people (it had thirty-five people when I wrote this narrative). Here is the updated cluster map:



The coral-colored cluster now includes David Eidem and Mary Bowers, who are the children of Mark Eidem. This cluster also includes Charity Willis (née Mervin), who is a sister of Amanda Mervin.

Maybe the new Cluster Tool on Ancestry.com requires a lot of computing power and therefore is taking time to process cluster maps across a large number of users.

So this is encouraging!