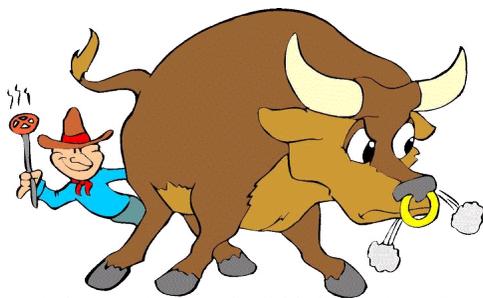


Ancestor Rustling Rampant on the Internet Range



By [Myra Vanderpool Gormley](#)

My Cousin Jack might have gone too far finally, but then his side of the family has always had a tendency to shoot first and ask questions later, being cursed with that Quick-Draw Gene Disorder (QDGD) and all. He's joined the Anti-Ancestor Rustling Rangers (AARR) and is waging an Internet range war. The old fool is going to get his pedigree blown up and he probably is going to lose his web-surfing license, not to mention he is antagonizing all our cousins who are willing to share their research.



What happened is Cousin Jack thinks he *owns* exclusive rights to his ancestors, especially those he thinks he has found first. He says he is tired of those he calls Internet Ancestor Rustlers (IARs) — folks who nab his ancestors and stick them in their trees. I've tried to tell Cousin Jack that you can't *own* ancestors like they were little dogies, but he won't listen — not after someone stole (his words, not mine) a bunch of folks right off his tree that he had posted on a website. Well, the old fool had enabled the download GEDCOM option. What did he think people were going to do with a GEDCOM—drink it?

Now he is engaged in a virtual shootout at the Not-OK Corral with some folks who posted information about a SCHUETTPELZ line. Cousin Jack claims they stole his copyrighted information, even though I pointed out that he can't copyright facts, such as names, dates and places — and Cousin Jack doesn't have anything else on this family (he doesn't even remember where he "found" some of the information, so I don't know what set him off). That is what worries me.



Cousin Jack even put me on his "reject" e-mail list for while because he didn't believe me about copyright vs. discovery until his friendly backyard attorney told him the same thing. Just because you are the first one to discover a bit of genealogical information — in a census, in a transcription, a published genealogy, or even in some musty old church records that reveal your Hildegarde SCHUETTPELZ married Heinrich WAGNER in 1687 that does not give you exclusive rights to Hilde and Heine, their marriage record or their descendants and the biographical and genealogical facts about them. Of course, if you write something creative and original about them and their lives, that might be copyrightable; but the facts still aren't and anyone can use those facts in their family trees. I don't think Cousin Jack "gets" it — he's wild-eyed lately.



He has fallen into a bad crowd of Internet vigilantes — this AARR Wild Bunch is out to string up anyone they catch with *their* ancestors in their GEDCOMS, in their personal files, or on their websites. Silly old fools. Why, I have a 3-great-

grandpa who had four wives and sired 35 known children. He might have had a few more (wives and children) that we don't know about too — the randy devil. Even I can figure out that I don't own old Jake Jones and not sure I want to if the truth be known — and that most likely there are thousands of other people out there who descend from him since he spread his genes around rather freely. Just because I dug up (so to speak) old Jake many years ago doesn't mean I *own* him or his genealogy facts. And, what about those people who can trace back to the Mayflower progenitors? They number in the millions I hear. I suppose Cousin Jack would think he owns them too —if he ever quits whining about IARs and goes back to doing some real research, that is.

I finally had to tell Cousin Jack that if he doesn't get out of this AARR group and stop claiming he owns his and everybody else's ancestors, I'm going to prune him right off my tree. So what does he do? Sends me information about some new GEDCOM-creating software program that will put your exclusive brand on your ancestors. Just what I need — branded progenitors. Then yesterday he sent me a petition to sign to force governments to give genealogists free vital records. I guess the next thing he will be demanding is that golf courses let grass lovers play free and that airlines give us free trips to visit the cemeteries where our ancestors are buried.

I hate to do it, but I got to turn Cousin Jack in — into "GGODE" (Genealogists Gone Off the Deep End) so he can get treatment.



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