



Finding a Father for Cynthia (Dillard) Royston

Summary of Research To Date

June 2026

Objective

Through DNA and documentary evidence, discover Cynthia (Dillard) Royston's biological father. Cynthia was born about 1815 in Georgia and died on 2 August 1882 in Collin County, Texas. Cynthia married Thomas B. Royston about 1833 or 1834, possibly in Cass County, Georgia.

Background

CYNTHIA (DILLARD) ROYSTON PROJECT OVERVIEW

Cynthia (Dillard) Royston was born about 1815 in Georgia and died on 2 August 1882 in Collin County, Texas.¹ Her maiden name is known only from the death certificates of three of her fourteen children.² She married Thomas Beverly Royston in Georgia or Alabama about 1833 or 1834, but no marriage record has been found.³

¹ For birth, see 1850 U.S. Census, Chambers County, Alabama, population schedule, 19th District, p. 318 (stamped), dwelling 749, family 749, Thomas B Royston household; digital image, *Ancestry* (<http://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 17 August 2016); citing NARA microfilm publication M432, roll 2. Also 1860 U.S. Census, Chambers County, Alabama, population schedule, Northern Division, Milltown Post Office, page 130 (penned), dwelling 915, family 895, Thomas B. Royston household; digital image, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org>: accessed 29 April 2016); citing NARA microfilm publication M653, roll 4. For death, see Chambers County, Alabama Estates, box 26 folder 24, Thomas Beverly Royston, petition papers, 27 March 1875; "Alabama, Wills and Probate Records, 1753-1999," case file for Thos B Royston, 1867-1883, *Ancestry* (<http://www.ancestry.com>: accessed 19 August 2016), digital image 165.

² Death certificates of three of Cynthia's children show her birth name as Dillard: Tex. Board of Health, Bureau of Vital Statistics, death cert. no. 27410 (1920), Mrs. Adline Spears. Also, no. 50544 (1928), R. Royston. Also, no. 10870 (1935), Mrs. Mattie Ann Hogge. For the estimated year of marriage, the oldest child, Mary Elizabeth, was born in 1834/1835 in Alabama: Find A Grave (www.findagrave.com), memorial 43662594, image, 12 Nov 2016, by Bennie Gross, gravestone for Mary Elizabeth (Royston) Slagle (Mount Hickory Cem., Chambers Co., Ala.). For 1835, see "In Memoriam," *LaFayette (Ala.) Sun*, 29 Dec 1915, p. 8, col. 2. Also, 1850 US census, Chambers Co., Ala., p. 318, dwell./fam. 749, Thomas B. Royston household.

³ For broad negative Dillard-Royston marriage searches, see Pauline M.J. Gandrud and Lucille S. Craddock, *Marriage, Death and Legal Notices From Early Alabama Newspapers, 1819-1893*, (Easley, S.C.: Southern Historical Press, 1981). Also, "Georgia, County Marriages, 1785-1950," *FamilySearch* (www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1927197). For specific negative searches in identified Georgia locations from 1830-1835, see Clarke Co., Ga., Marriage Licenses 1800-1923, Pittman-Self, *FamilySearch*, IGN 7730679. Also, Clarke Co., Marriage Licenses Book B 1821-1838, index, *FamilySearch*, IGN 7725047, image 180. Also, Morgan Co., Marriage Record 1822-1836, index, *FamilySearch*, IGN 4848904, image 182. Morgan Co., Marriage Record 1834-1854, index, *FamilySearch*, IGN 4848904, image 345. Also, Cass/Bartow Co., Georgia, Marriages Book B 1836-1843,

Cynthia had fourteen children with Thomas B. Royston, including three sons who died in the Civil War (Ulysses Franklin, Charles Baldwin, and Benjamin).⁴ Thomas settled in DeKalb County, in northeast Alabama, by January 1837 and erected a dwelling house in which he lived with his wife and children until 1840.⁵ DeKalb County was formed on 9 January 1836 after the Cherokee Nation ceded its tribal lands in the Treaty of New Echota.⁶ Settlers, primarily from Georgia, Tennessee, and the Carolinas, moved into the area following the removal of the Cherokee families. Most followed subsistence farming, and few practiced slavery.⁷ In contrast, Thomas enslaved nine people in 1840.⁸ His status as an enslaver suggests he may have originated from a family of similar economic standing. No deed in DeKalb County holds a bill of sale for his enslaved individuals.⁹ He likely acquired them in Georgia, either by purchase or by inheritance from a family member.

By 1842, Thomas and Cynthia had moved south to Chambers County, Alabama, where he paid a poll tax and property tax on five enslaved people, as well as a tax on a metal clock, studs, and jacks.¹⁰ Located in the Alabama Piedmont Upland, this area provided better land for growing the cash crop of cotton and ready access to the Chattahoochee River for shipping.¹¹

Throughout the 1850s and 1860s, Thomas acquired several landholdings and operated a plantation with those he enslaved.¹² In probate papers dated 29 September 1868, Cynthia stated that

FamilySearch, IGN 5190994, images 8–36. For specific negative searches in Alabama, see DeKalb Co., Marriage Records 1836–1850, FamilySearch, IGN 7622388, full-text search.

⁴ For Mary, Ulisses, Charles Baldwin, Adeline, Sarah, Joseph, Benjamin, Robert, and Thomas, see the 1850 US census, pop. sch., Chambers Co., Al., p. 318, (stamped), dwelling 749, family 749, Thomas B Royston household. For Margaret, Richard, and Leonidas, see 1860 US census, Chambers Co., Al., pop. sch., p. 130, (penned), dwelling 915, family 895, Thomas B. Royston household. For Maria and Martha, see the 1870 US census, Chambers Co., Al, p. 4, (penned), p. 22 (stamped), dwelling 24, family 24, Cynthia Royston household.

⁵ Thomas B. Royston (DeKalb Co.) cash entry file, certificate no. 5969 (1842), Lebanon, Alabama, Land Office; Land Entry Papers 1800-1908, Record Group 49: Records of the Bureau of Land Management; National Archives, Washington, D.C. Thomas received his final patent in 1845 and assigned it to John Graves. Thomas B. Royston, (DeKalb Co., Al., Lebanon Land Office, accession AL3080_429; Bureau of Land Management, *General Land Office Records* (www.glorerecords.blm.gov). For the family makeup in 1840 see the 1840 US census, DeKalb Co., Al, p. 7, (penned), line 31, F.B. Royston household.

⁶ “DeKalb County, *Encyclopedia of Alabama* (<https://encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/dekalb-county/>).

⁷ “The History of DeKalb County,” *Landmarks Dekalb* (<https://www.landmarksdekalbal.org/historic-dekalb-county-alabama-history/>).

⁸ 1840 US census, DeKalb Co., Al., p. 7, (penned), line 31, F.B. Royston household. Nine enslaved people are listed, four children under ten and five people between ten and twenty-four.

⁹ Negative search for Royston in DeKalb Co. Judge of Probate, Direct Index to Deeds and Mortgages, 1835-1897, *FamilySearch*, Image Group Number (IGN) 8134412, images 146-154. See also DeKalb Co. Judge of Probate, Reverse Index to Deeds and Mortgages, 1835-1897, *FamilySearch*, IGN 8134412, images 339-347.

¹⁰ Chambers Co., Al., Tax Book, 1842, Beat 16, p. 146 Thomas B. Royston, Alabama Dept. of Archives & History, LG 4976, Montgomery, Al.

¹¹ Komanduri S. Murty, “Cotton Economy and Slavery in Alabama During the Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of Comprehensive Social Science Research* Vol. 1 (2023); *Gexin Publications* (<https://gexinonline.com/uploads/articles/article-jcssr-101.pdf>).

¹² For residence, see 1850 US census, pop. sch., Chambers Co., Al., p. 318, (stamped), dwelling 749, family 749, Thomas B Royston household. For slave holdings, see 1850 US census, slave sch. Chambers Co., Al, dist. 19, p. 457, (penned), col. 2, line 10, Thomas B. Royston owner, thirteen enslaved people listed ages two to thirty-seven. See also 1860 US census, slave sch., Chambers Co., Al., Northern Div. p. 48, co. 2, line 11, Thos. B. Royston owner, sixteen enslaved people listed ages two to forty-six. For land transactions see Chambers Co., Deeds 11:256, William & Sarah Ingram to Thomas Beverly Royston, 6 October 1852, also 11:326, James H. Meritt to Thomas B. Royston, 30 June 1853, also 11:639, Thomas B. Royston to John Daniels, 19 July

Thomas died on 21 September 1868 in Chambers County, Alabama.¹³ She listed eleven living children as heirs. Administration papers from 1875 indicate that Cynthia "removed to the State of Texas," and an account paper of 1 November 1882 states that "Cynthia Royston departed this life in the state of Texas on or about the 2nd day of August 1882."¹⁴

Across four research phases, the objective has been to identify her father, who would have been born before 1795, likely in Virginia, and residing in Georgia during the 1820s and 1830s.

PHASES 1-4 RESEARCH SUMMARY

Phase 1 tested the hypothesis that George W. Dillard (born about 1781 in Virginia, died 1854 in Lee County, Alabama) was Cynthia's father. His 1820 and 1830 census households contained females of appropriate age to be Cynthia, and he later resided near the Roystons in Russell and Lee counties, Alabama. This hypothesis was definitively disproven by the discovery of a Mahone Family Bible, which revealed the Dillard female born in 1815 was Mariah L. Dillard, who married James Kivlin on 8 April 1830.¹⁵

Phase 2 systematically examined ten additional Dillard candidates from the 1820 Georgia census who had females of appropriate age in their households. All ten — Arthur Dillard, Edmund Dillard, John Dillard, Nathan Dillard, Owen Dillard, Phillip Dillard, Samson Dillard, Thomas Dillard, Theophilus Dillard, and Susan Dillard — were eliminated based on probate records, wills, marriage records, and census analysis.¹⁶

Phase 3 turned to DNA analysis. Autosomal DNA testing of Victor Parker, Cynthia's great-grandson, and Gephi network graph analysis of his matches revealed a distinct cluster that appeared to originate with Elijah Dillard (born about 1814–1816 in Georgia, died 6 September 1886 in Pike County, Alabama), leading to the hypothesis that Elijah was Cynthia's brother, sharing the same unknown parents. Documentary research traced Elijah's life through land patents in Macon, Barbour, and Dale counties, his marriage to Winny Grubbs in Pike County (1855), Civil War service (1863), and subsequent census records. The hypothesis was strengthened by the identification of DNA matches descending from two independent lines of Elijah Dillard — his sons Josiah Dillard and James Monroe Dillard.¹⁷

1853 also 12:46, Thomas B. Royston to Joseph Slagle, 23 December 1854; FamilySearch, IGN 8193157. Digital images are currently unavailable for viewing.

¹³ Chambers County, Alabama Estates, box 26 folder 24, case file for Thos B Royston, 1867-1883; "Alabama, Wills and Probate Records, 1753-1999," *Ancestry* (<http://www.ancestry.com>: accessed 19 August 2016), petition papers 29 September 1868, images 145-146.

¹⁴ Chambers County, Alabama Estates, box 26 folder 24, Thomas Beverly Royston, account paper of 1882, image 165.

¹⁵ Diana Elder, "Is George W. Dillard the Father of Cynthia (Dillard) Royston?" research report, *Research Like a Pro: A Genealogist's Guide*, 2018; Mahone Family Bible, photocopy sent via email, 27 May 2020, Rita Schimpff to Diana Elder.

¹⁶ Diana Elder, "Determining a Father for Cynthia," research report, 8 December 2018.

¹⁷ Diana Elder, "Is Elijah Dillard the Brother of Cynthia (Dillard) Royston?" research report, 2021; land patents, marriage, military, and census records cited therein.

Phase 4 narrowed the geographic focus to Cass County, Georgia, based on newly discovered evidence that Thomas B. Royston served as a 1st Lieutenant in 1833 and as a deputy sheriff in 1834.¹⁸ The 1840 census identified four Dillard households there: Elizabeth, John, William, and Elijah. Elizabeth Dillard was traced to Laurens County, South Carolina, and eliminated based on her distinct origins and migration pattern. John Dillard, William Dillard, and Elijah Dillard of Cass County were identified as a family unit from North Carolina who migrated through Monroe County, Tennessee; an 1849 deed and circa 1853 court records named John Dillard's heirs, and Cynthia was not among them. The Cass County Elijah Dillard (born 1801–1810 in North Carolina) was confirmed to be a different individual from the Elijah Dillard identified through DNA analysis.¹⁹

Analysis of the 1832 Gold Lottery identified three Dillard men who drew lots specifically in Cass County — James Dillard of Pulaski County, Joseph B. Dillard of Oglethorpe County, and Roliver (possibly Toliver) Dillard of Burke County — who represent the highest-priority candidates for future investigation.²⁰ However, documentary research on these three men has not yet been conducted, and the loss of early Cass County deed books limits access to land transactions during the critical period. The central question of who fathered Cynthia Dillard remains unresolved.

DNA Background

DNA INHERITANCE

DNA testing has become a new form of genealogical evidence for difficult genealogical questions. With documentary research not revealing Cynthia's father, DNA opens another avenue for research. Three types of DNA testing are available for genealogy research: mitochondrial DNA, Y-DNA, and autosomal DNA

Mitochondrial (mt) DNA testing traces the matrilineal line, with each person inheriting mtDNA from their mother. Only females can pass on this type of DNA. Because mtDNA is virtually unchanged from generation to generation, it reaches far back on the family tree. This testing could be used in the future if the research identifies a possible mother for Cynthia.

Y-DNA traces the patrilineal line and is passed from father to son. Occasionally, a mutation will occur in the Y-DNA, and by analyzing those, the testing can predict relationships within a few generations. Elijah Dillard was previously identified through autosomal DNA clustering and analysis as a possible brother of Cynthia, so one of his male descendants could take a Y-DNA test. The hope would be that he would match a group of Dillards, providing a clue to the Dillard origins. Finding a descendant willing to test will be the next step in the Dillard research.

¹⁸ "Cass Sheriff's Sales for April," Thomas B. Royston, DS, *Cherokee Intelligencer* (Edahwah, Ga.), 8 Mar 1834, p. 4, col. 1; image, *Georgia Historic Newspapers* (<https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu>).

¹⁹ Diana Elder, "Who is Cynthia Dillard's Father? Phase 4: Discovering a Candidate in Cass County, Georgia." Research report, October 2025.

²⁰ S. Emmett Lucas Jr., *The 1832 Gold Lottery of Georgia: Containing a List of the Fortunate Drawers in Said Lottery* (Easley, South Carolina: Southern Historical Press, 1988)

Autosomal DNA (atDNA) is randomly passed down to descendants regardless of male or female inheritance inherent in Y-DNA and mitochondrial DNA testing. As the DNA is passed from generation to generation, each person receives less of the ancestor's atDNA. For that reason, analyzing the atDNA of a person more closely related to the ancestor in question is important.

This project used the autosomal DNA test results for Victor Parker, Cynthia's great-grandson. Victor inherited about 12.5% of his DNA from Cynthia and up to 6.25% from each of her parents. Victor has over 63,000 DNA matches on AncestryDNA, and isolating DNA matches who also descend from Cynthia's Dillard line could discover family connections for further research.

Before looking for matches that could come from Cynthia's Dillard line, Victor's DNA was compared to other descendants of Cynthia and Thomas B. Royston. His best matches in terms of amount of DNA shared are shown in figure 1 and descend through sons, Robert C. Royston and Richard A. Royston. Victor descends through their sister, Sarah (Royston) Parter. This analysis verified Victor's biological descent from Cynthia and Thomas Royston.

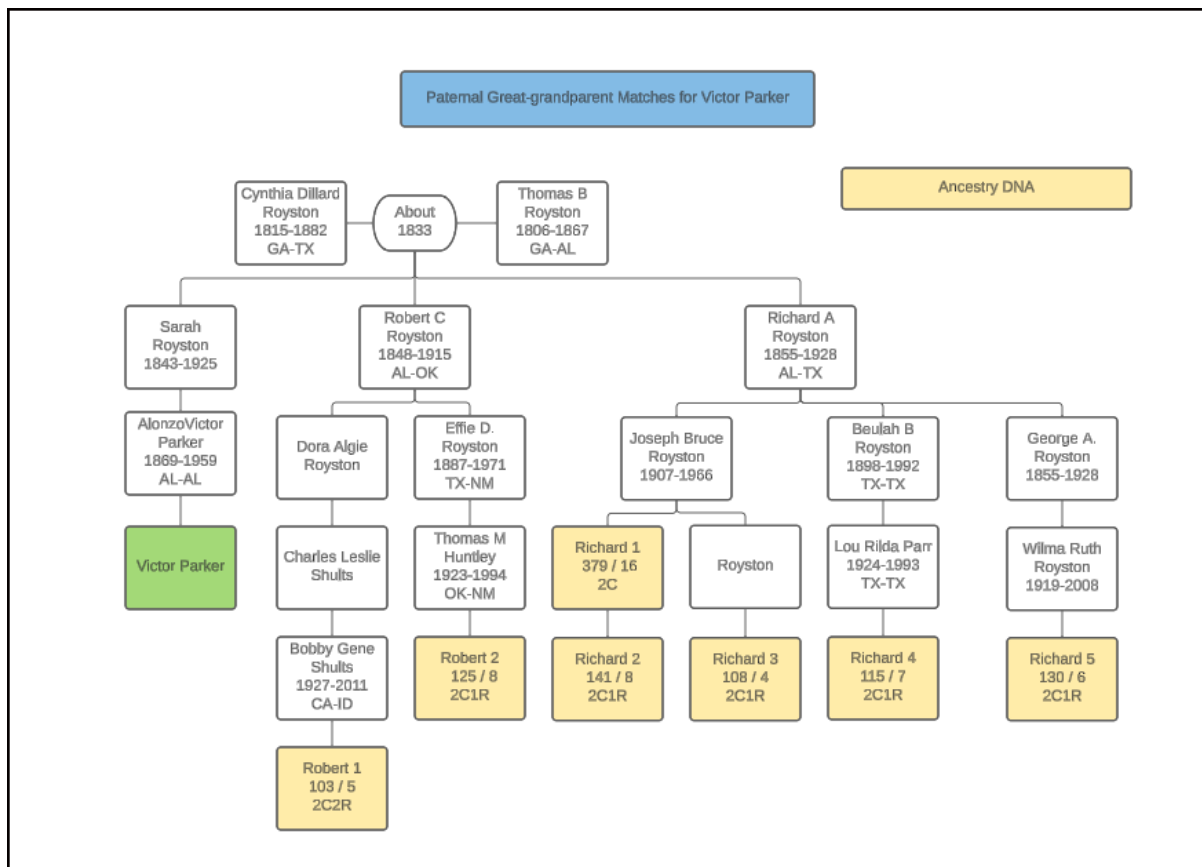


Figure 1. Selected DNA Matches for Victor Parker

DNA CLUSTERING AND NETWORK GRAPH ANALYSIS

Proving genetic relationships through DNA involves identifying the most recent common ancestor (MRCA) between two matches. Each person would have received a segment of DNA from the MRCA. When working with thousands of DNA matches, techniques that can cluster these matches for analysis facilitate the research.

Network graphs provide a view of a person's DNA matches and reveal connections between clusters. Nodes (circles) in a network graph represent DNA matches, and the lines connecting them indicate a shared match to each other. When a group of matches has many connections among themselves, they form a cluster. A network graph created for the Ancestry DNA matches of Victor Parker showed many colored clusters on the outer edges and a large group of interconnected matches in the center of the graph.²¹(See figure 2).

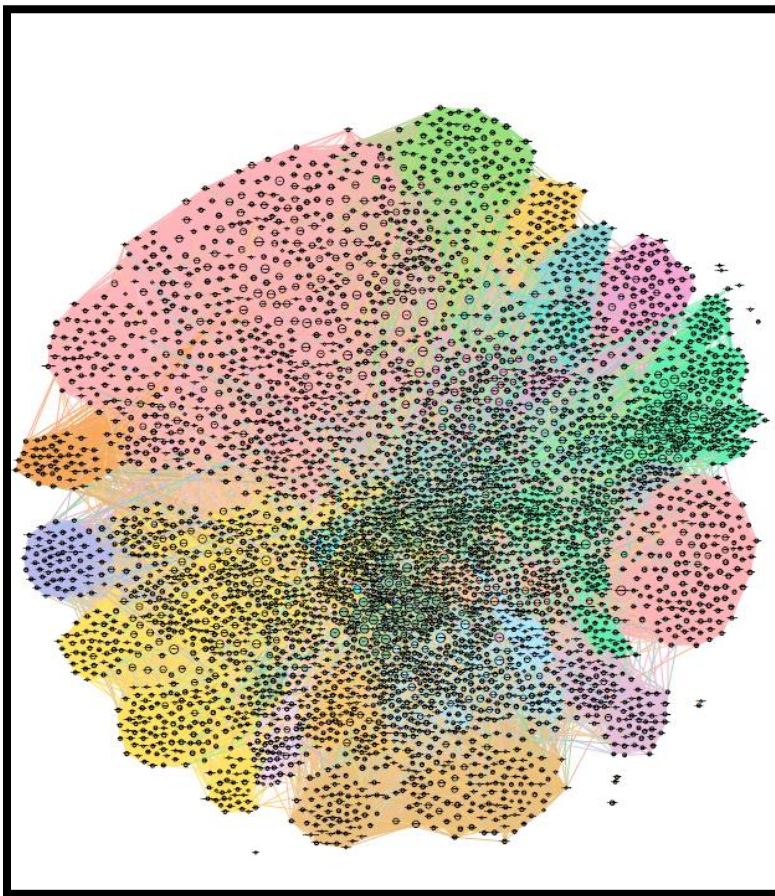


Figure 2 Network Graph for Victor Parker's Ancestry DNA Matches

²¹ Nicole Dyer, Network Graph for Victor Parker using Gephi, created 2 November 2020, Ancestry DNA matches, 20-193 cM.

Separating out the Royston-Dillard clusters from Victor Parker's clusters on the Brown, Heal, and Parker lines resulted in a more focused network graph.²² See figure 3.

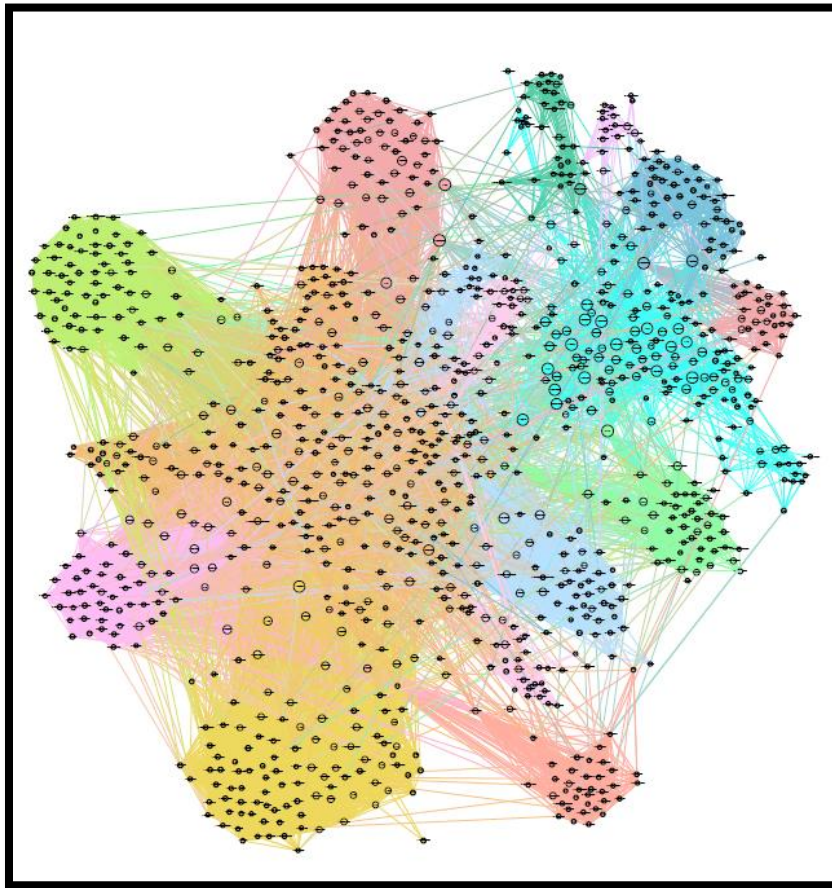


Figure 3 Royston-Dillard Network Graph for Victor Parker's Ancestry DNA Matches

Analyzing the Royston-Dillard network graph revealed the peach cluster in the top-right section. This cluster connects to the blue and aqua clusters, which contain known descendants of Cynthia (Dillard) Royston through two of her sons, Richard A. and Robert C. Royston. Examining the trees of some of the matches in the peach cluster found the MRCA to be Elijah Dillard, born about 1814 in Georgia and died about 1886 in Alabama. (See figure 4.)

²² Nicole Dyer, Network Graph for Victor Parker using Gephi, created 2 November 2020, Ancestry DNA matches, 20-193 cM, Royston clusters separated out.

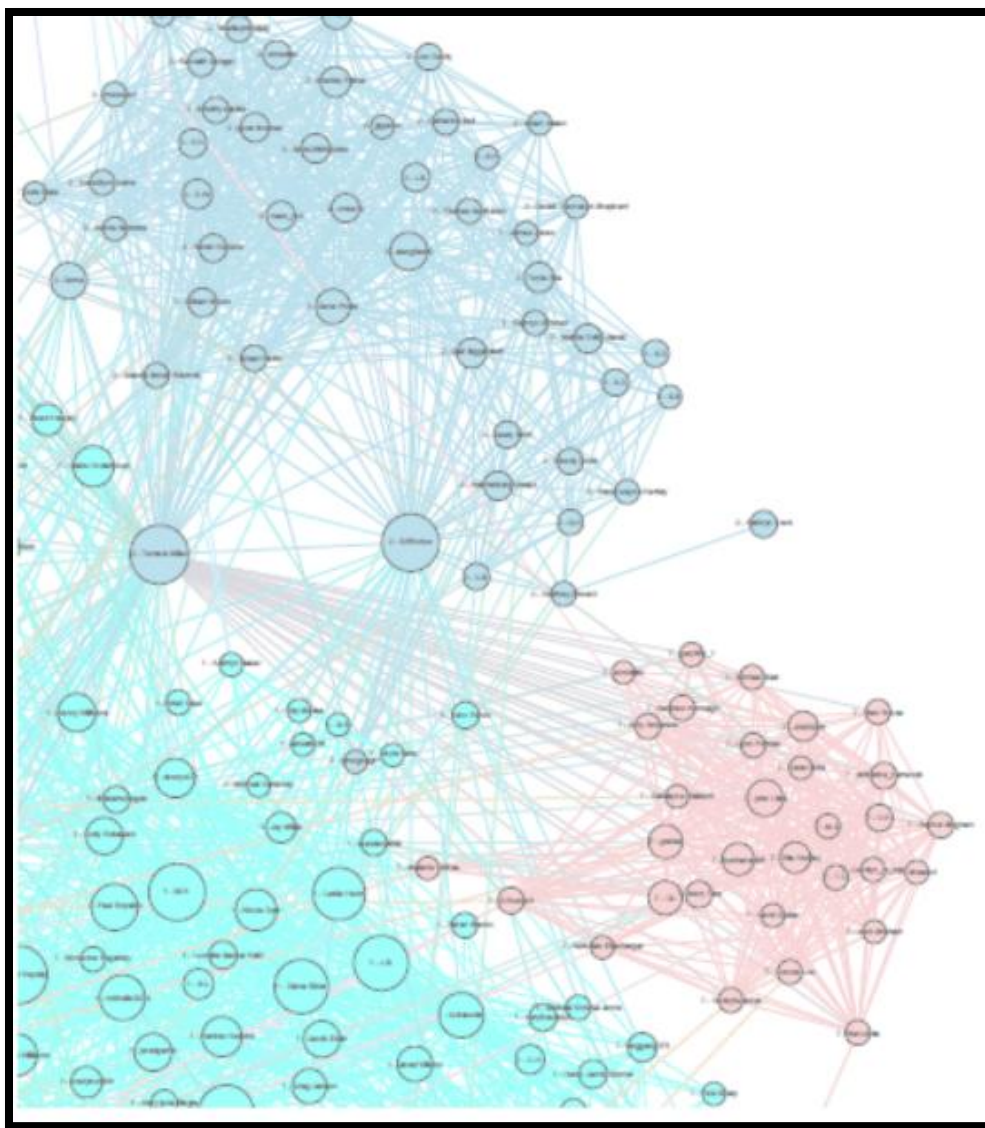


Figure 4 Peach cluster MRCA = Elijah Royston, Aqua Cluster MRCA = Robert C. Royston (son of Cynthia), Blue Cluster MRCA = Richard A. Royston (son of Cynthia)

The diagram in Figure 5 illustrates the lines of descent from Elijah Dillard to four DNA matches in the peach cluster. Each comes through either Elijah's son, Josiah Dillard, or James Monroe Dillard, and has the relationship of 3C1R (3rd cousin once remove), 3C2R, or 3C3R to Victor Parker.²³ The matches

²³ "Public Member Trees," database, *Ancestry* (<http://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 21 October 2021), "Glenn Tate - Kay Snell Tate Family Tree," by Chad and Brooke Whisnant, profile for Elijah Dillard (1816-1886), attached to DNA match Mary Tate.

"Public Member Trees," database, *Ancestry* (<http://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 21 October 2021), "Rita Hartley Family Tree," by Rita Hartley, profile for Josiah D. Dillard (1862-1941), attached to DNA match Rita Harley.

"Public Member Trees," database, *Ancestry* (<http://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 21 October 2021), "Carroll-Coxwell Family Tree," by Stephanie Coxwell, profile for Elijah Dillard (1816-1886), attached to DNA match Stephen Coxwell.

"Public Member Trees," database, *Ancestry* (<http://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 16 November 2021), "O'Shea Family Tree: family tree by Melanie O'Shea, pedigree view.

share between 20 and 29 cM of DNA with Victor Parker, well within the proposed relationships of 3C1R, 3C2R, and 3C3R.²⁴

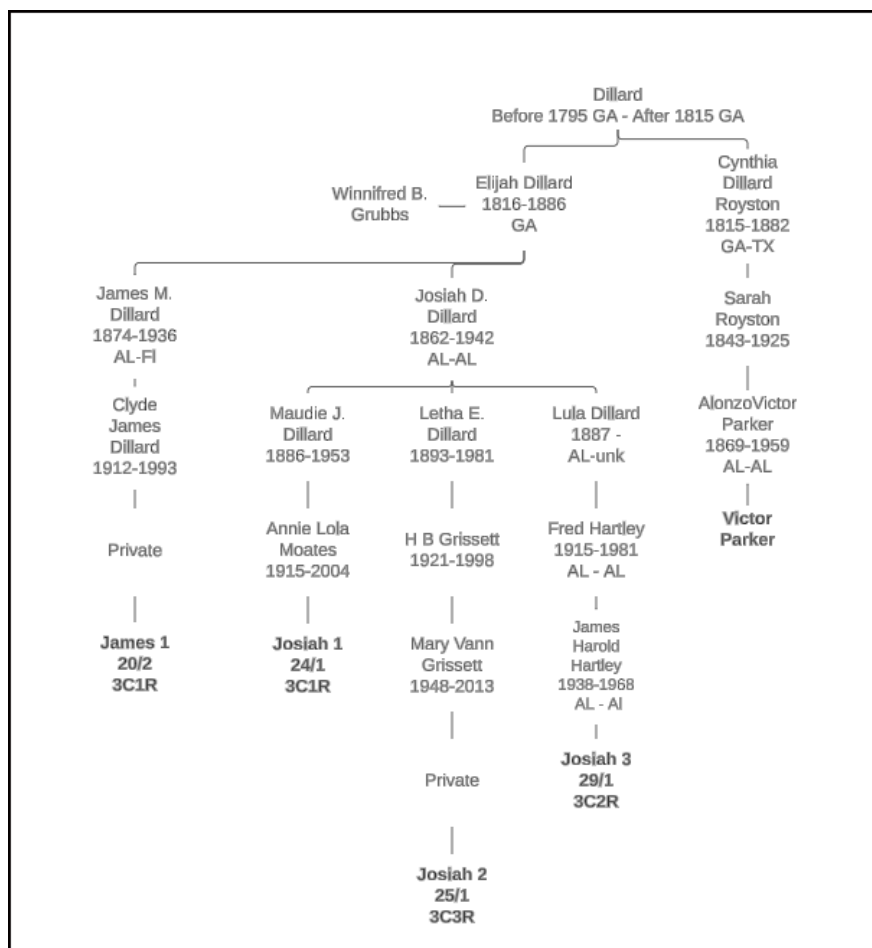


Figure 5 Dillard DNA Matches for Victor Parker

Y-DNA

With Elijah Dillard identified as a possible brother to Cynthia (Dillard) Royston. Finding a Y-DNA test-taker would provide additional evidence to place Elijah's Dillard line within the broad Dillard and Dill** Surname Y-DNA project hosted by FamilyTree DNA.²⁵ The project has many participants who could be compared with a Dillard male descendant of Elijah Dillard.

²⁴ Jonny Perl and Blaine Bettinger, "The Shared cM Project 4.0 tool v4," *DNA Painter* (<https://dnapainter.com/tools/sharedcmv4> : created 17 June 2020), calculating probable relationships for # 24, 25, and 29 cM shared by Victor Parker and DNA matches

²⁵ Mags Gaulden, Administrator, "Dillard and Dill**," Y-DNA Surname Project, *FamilyTree DNA* (<https://www.familytreedna.com/groups/dillard/about> : accessed 21 July 2026).

Research in the census, obituaries, family trees, and other public records yielded several possibilities of living male descendants through Elijah's sons, Josiah and James. Some of their sons had no male descendants. The diagram below illustrates the lines that have living male descendants. Any male descendant from Murse, Pearlie, Curtis, or Gordon would be a candidate for Y-DNA testing.

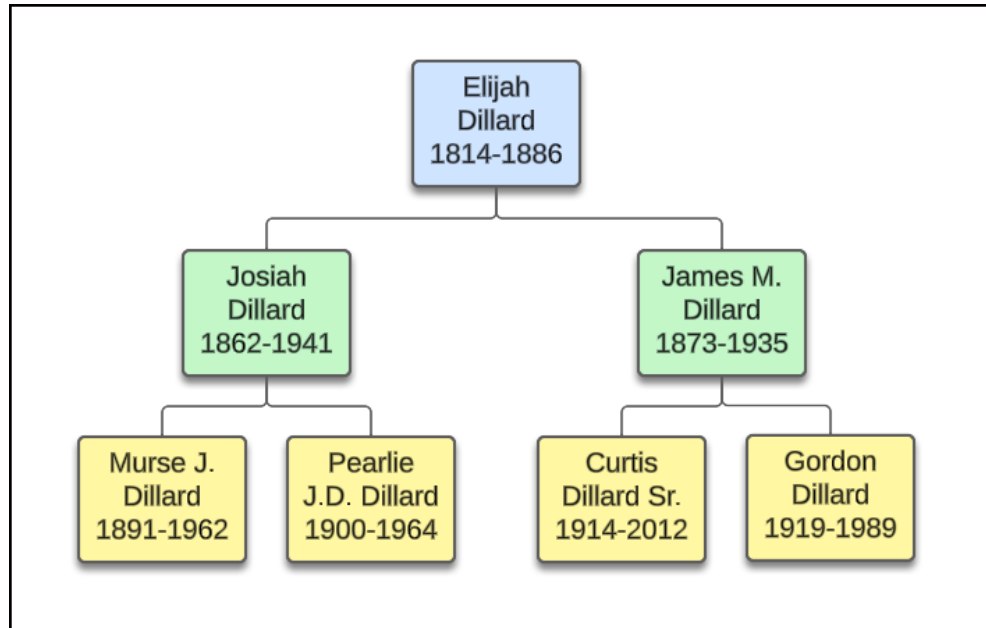


Figure 6 Male Descendancy Line for Elijah Dillard

Next Steps

- Reach out to male descendants of Elijah Dillard who carry the Dillard surname. Ask them to take the 37-marker Y-DNA test at FamilyTree DNA.
- Add each Y-DNA test to the Dillard Surname project to compare with other men carrying the Dillard surname.
- Perform documentary research on close Dillard matches to identify a common Dillard ancestor who may have been the father of Cynthia and Elijah Dillard