

Guinness World (Reunion) Records

Many years ago in 1998, the Busse Family Reunion was the first Guinness World Record for the largest family reunion. Their application was apparently met with some misgivings because the Guinness folks contacted me (editor of *Reunions magazine*) to explain why reunions should be considered for their record. While the Busse Family had an application to complete, the Guinness folks had lots for me to verify as well. And this was all before the reunion because the family wanted to generate as much attendance as possible to go for the record.

The Guinness Book people, however, were dealing with a category they not only had not dealt with before, but which they also did not seem to understand. The Guinness folks decided that to be included, members had to be related by blood. Married spouses (parents of the progeny) were not to be counted.

I spent time convincing Guinness that the progeny were rather unlikely without the “other parent,” thus, the married (into) Busses were counted.

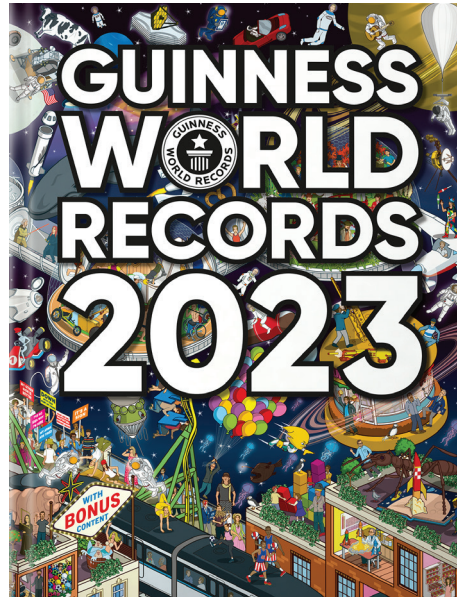
The Busse Family Reunion, held at the Lake County Fairgrounds in Grays Lake, Illinois, celebrated the 150th anniversary of Friedrich and Johanna Busse’s arrival in America from Germany. I attended the reunion and can vouch that a fairground was an appropriate venue for such a large crowd! It was a record-breaking affair.

Busses lined up everyone by branch and photographed them. It was, of course, the first family to hold the Guinness Record at 2,369 members.

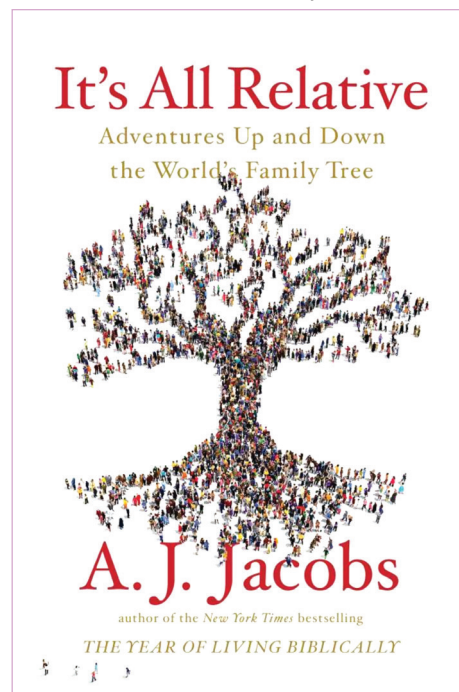
Eleven years later, the 80th annual Lilly Family Reunion in Flat Top, West Virginia, in 2009 achieved 2,585 members. Planners said “It is going to be a big-crowd social statement on the importance of family. The world record is something neat to say you have accomplished in your life, but the event is really a testament to the strength of the American family, the fact that this type of life still exists, that these people still care about each other.” And, as I recall, Senator Joe Manchin, then West Virginia governor, was there to congratulate them.

Then, in 2012, the Porteau-Boileve Family Reunion blew the Americans out of the water

with 4,514 at their reunion in Saint-Paul-Mont-Pénit, Vendée, France. And they still hold the Guinness record.



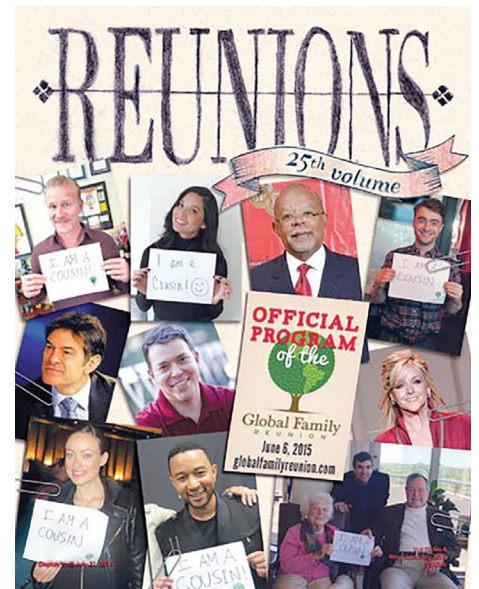
Then, along came A.J. Jacobs’ best-selling author and *New York Times* writer with the idea of organizing the World’s Largest Global Family Reunion! It happened in the New York Hall of Science and its 11 surrounding acres in Queens, New York, in June 2015 based on Jacobs’ assumption that “we’re all cousins ... many times removed!” He did manage to recruit many famous people to participate at the actual event. It was a family reunion



meets a TED conference meets Burning Man (without the nudity or drugs). There were presentations by celebrities and famous scientists. There was music, comedy, games, interactive exhibits and food. An outcome of Mr. Jacobs efforts is a book called *It's All Relative: Up and Down the World's Family Tree* (Simon and Schuster, 352 page, paperback).

Many others have tried but not yet made the Guinness size reunion.

It looks like this is becoming a crowded, albeit interesting sport! And it’s not an inexpensive endeavor.



Note: some of the cousins in the *Reunions* magazine cover celebrating Jacobs’ effort!

The Vela family gathered in McAllen, Texas, in 2007 to try to break the Guinness record. Vela family members from all 50 states and six foreign countries made up the 2,300 in attendance. It took 28 members and their committees over a year to plan the reunion. While branches have had individual reunions, this was their third reunion of this size.

The William Elder of Maryland Descendants Association hosted its Tercentennial (300 Year) Family Reunion in 2011 at Mount St. Mary’s University in Emmitsburg, Maryland. William Elder’s contemporary relations from around the country came to visit the ancestral homeland in an attempt to set a new Guinness World record for the number of people attending a family reunion.

Goals of the association include reestab-

lishing familial ties among Elder descendants, preserving family records, establishing an archival repository, and to study Elder Family history and the work of Elder family historians.

An article by Joan Griffis in her *Illinois Ancestors* column suggests that planners of a Steeves Family Reunion were taking “aim at the Guinness record.” They hoped in 2016 that enough descendants of the German emigrant,

Johann Heinrich Stief, with that Steeves name would attend their 250-year family reunion in Hillsborough, New Brunswick, Canada, to break the Guinness record. This was the first Steeves Family Reunion since in 1966 when more than 9,000 Steeves family descendants from around the world were reported to have attended. No number was reported so it’s



Schmidt Family Reunion logo chosen in a contest.

assumed the Steeves family did not make a record.

Also trying in vain were two additional Canadian families, the Piercy Family Reunion in Comox Valley, British Columbia, and the Robichaud Family, one of the founding families of Acadia held in Tracadie-Sheila, New Brunswick. The Robichaud reunion was the largest of 90 family reunions held during the World Acadian Congress, a three week long cultural celebration held every five years and the largest

gathering of Acadians in the world.

In 2016, descendants of Hans Heinrich and Barbara (Rimbach) Schmidt from Machtlos, Germany, tried for the record. Young Josiah Schmidt traced so many branches of American Schmidts from the same common ancestor in Germany that there were enough to break the Porteau-Boileve family’s

Guinness World Record, if they attended a reunion in West Bend, Iowa. Josiah was in close contact with the Guinness World Record Association for a year, jumping through all the complicated hoops in a long, rigorous verification process necessary to legitimately break the record and be recognized by Guinness. The Guinness attempt entails copious record-keeping. While not breaking any world or US records, the Schmidt Family Reunion did break the record for largest family reunion ever held in the state of Iowa, surpassing the 1980 Osterhaus Reunion’s 900 attendees in Dyersville, Iowa, with a total attendance of 1,005 Schmidt descendants.

But, of course, it’s not just family reunions. In 2015, in Tacoma, Washington, 3,299 former students attended a Stadium High School reunion. Originally planned for all Weyburn Comp students from the 1950s to the 1990s, then to make it a huge celebration and a city-wide event, the reunion was opened to anyone in Weyburn and district to attend.



Schmidt Family Reunion

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