

## **RT81017: Cluster, Huddle or Flock: Strategies for Research Problems**

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Everyone has brick walls in their genealogy research. People who appear to have been dropped out of the sky. Women whose maiden names seem to be unknowable. Cluster research will give you new avenues break down those brick walls by researching their family members, their neighbors and anyone and everyone they were associated with. We will explore methodologies that will help you uncover new information about your family.

### **What is Cluster Research?**

We build trees that go back in time in straight lines. Everyone has two parents. But the clues to finding who the previous generation is not always found in the documents of the person you are researching. Your ancestor's brothers and sisters may hold the key. Or cousins or aunts and uncles. Or maybe it is the next door neighbor. And even if you can map the next generation, you may be missing part of the story.

Cluster research goes beyond researching one person and all of their ancestors and branches out, pardon the pun, to everyone around them.

### **Collateral Research**

Unless you come from long lines of only children, you will find brothers and sisters in almost every generation. And half siblings and step siblings as well. Do you know everything about them?

First step is to work the census. Find every brother and sister you can and map them in every census record that you can find. Note the birth dates and locations. Use spreadsheets and maps to pinpoint where they were every 10 years. Look for unexpected surnames in the household. Do not ignore those people!

Look at everyone's vital records – birth, marriage and death. What names and locations are consistent across the board? Who are the witnesses? What families did they marry into?

Did your family have a family cemetery? Which members of the family were buried there? Are their graves you can't locate? Have you found all of the probate records and obituaries for all of the siblings? Who were witnesses and executors and who was mentioned in the obituaries? Which families went to the same churches?

## **Descendancy Research**

Pick a couple that you are researching and identify their descendants one generation at a time working your way back to the present, or at least as far forward as you can. Research each generation like you would your collateral ancestors. For every person in a generation identify:

- Spouses as well as direct descendants.
- Census records and where they lived.
- Vital records. Take note of locations and witnesses.
- Probate records. Take note of witnesses and who is mentioned as receiving property.
- Newspaper articles.
- Cemeteries. Record who is buried in the same cemeteries and where they are.
- Veterans. Track who fought in which wars and which units.

## **FAN Research: Friends, Acquaintances, and Neighbors**

It's not enough to track just the people you are related to. When you can't find what you are looking for, you must next branch out to the people around them. This concept has been made famous through the work of Elizabeth Shown Mills. You can find more about her research at: <https://www.evidenceexplained.com/content/quicklesson-11-identity-problems-fan-principle>

So who do you start looking at?

- Know everyone who lived in the households of your ancestor.
- Document the timelines of children and their spouses. They may have clues that you had not seen originally.
- Can you identify who everyone was around your family on a census record and did they have a relationship to the family?
- Witnesses on vital records and other legal documents – who were they and how are they related to the family.
- Land records – who are the neighbors and are they related.

## **Genetic Clusters – Using DNA to identify Clusters**

Distant Ancestry

- Very distant ancestry
- Represents populations formed in distant past over large geographic areas

Recent Ancestry

- More recent ancestry
- Represents more recently formed populations in smaller geographic areas
- Specific migration stories

Where did Michael Snavely come from and how did he get to Texas?

1	Name of Corporation, Company, or Individual producing to the value of \$200 annually.	2	Name of Business, Manufacture, or Product.	3	Capital (real and personal) invested in the business.	4	Greatest number of hands employed at any one time during the year.	5			6				7			8				13	14	15	16	17	18	19
								Average number of hands employed.			Wages and Hours of Labor.				Months in Operation.													
							Males above 14 years.	Females above 14 years.	Children and youth.	May to November.	November to May.	Average day's wages for a skilled mechanic.	Average day's wages for an ordinary laborer.	Total amount paid in wages during the year.	On full time.	On 3/4 time only.	On 1/2 time only.	On 1/4 time only.	Idic.	Value of Material (including Mill Supplies and Fuel, Omitting Fractions of a Dollar).	Value of Product (including Jobbing and Repairing, Omitting Fractions of a Dollar).							
1	Baker B. M. Printing Estab.	1500	Printing	5	1500	5	5	0	0	10	8	12	15	940	12					1000	3000							
2	Miller Hays Printing Estab.	1200	Printing	7	1200	7	7	0	0	10	8	25	100	600	12					400	1600							
3	Binkley J. W. Printing Estab.	3000	Printing	7	3000	7	7	0	0	10	8	25	100	800	12					1000	2800							

Figure 1 1870 Manf Sch: Columbus, Colorado, Texas, J N Binkley

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SCHEDULE 4. Products of Industry in Precinct No. 1, in the County of Colorado, State of Texas, during the year ending June 1, 1870, as enumerated by me, J. N. Binkley, Asst Marshal.

Post Office: Columbus

1	2	3	4		5	6	7				8	9	10			11		12	
			Name of Power.	MACHINES			Number of	Value of	Kind.	Quantity.			Value	Kind.	Quantity.				

Figure 2 1860 Manf Sch: Precinct 1, Colorado, Texas, J N Binkley

278	N. A. Snavely	42	M	Farmer	5000	1340														
	Leah Snavely	45	F																	
	M. A. Snavely	17	F																	
	B. C. Snavely	14	F																	
	M. L. Snavely	13	M																	
	H. L. S.	11	F																	

Figure 3 Colorado County, Texas, population schedule, Columbus, dwelling 294, family 278, N A Snavely

15	872	882	Nicholas A Snavely	33	M		"	1000	"
16			Leah	35	F				MS
17			Sally E	9	F				"
18			Mary A	7	F				"
19			Elyza E	4	F				"
20			Michael S	3	M				"
21			James B	1	M				"

Figure 4 1850 U.S. Census, Smyth County, Virginia, population schedule, District 60, dwelling 972, family 882, Nicholas Snavely

### Follow the locations

				1850	1860	1870	1880	1900
Larkin Downs SECREST	1828	1904	76	Marshall, MI	Colorado, TX	Colorado, TX	Weimar, Colorado, TX	Colorado, TX
Mary Jane DODSON	1840	1901	61	Unknown	Colorado, TX	Colorado, TX	Weimar, Colorado, TX	Colorado, TX
Martha Eliza Mattie SECREST BISHOP	1857	1917	60		Colorado, TX	Colorado, TX	Weimar, Colorado, TX	Weimar, Colorado, TX
Blanch Mary SECREST SNAVELY LAWRENCE	1861	1960	99			Colorado, TX	Weimar, Colorado, TX	Luling, Caldwell, TX
Ida Frances SECREST BARNETT	1864	1936	72			Colorado, TX	Weimar, Colorado, TX	Galveston, Galveston, TX
Maude Della SECREST WHITE	1870	1901	31			Colorado, TX	Weimar, Colorado, TX	Colorado, TX
Larkie SECREST SANDERS SHERRILL	1873	1962	89				Weimar, Colorado, TX	San Marcos, Hays, TX
Flora Alice SECREST DUNLAVY	1875	1942	67				Weimar, Colorado, TX	Colorado, TX
John Dodson SECREST	1877	1932	55					Colorado, TX
Willia Myrtle SECREST MINTER	1881	1955	74					Colorado, TX
Clyle L SECREST	1884	1973	89					Colorado, TX

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### Recommended Reading:

*Communities of Kinship: Antebellum Families and the Settlement of the Cotton Frontier* by Carolyn Earle Billingsley

<https://books.google.com/books?id=3RrNKutfa0AC>