RESOLVING DIFFICULT GENEALOGICAL PROBLEMS WITH NEW TOOLS

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The most difficult genealogical research problems may be solved with a solid research plan, NEW techniques, and well proven tools to uncover additional details, persons or events that reveal more of the whole story.

1) RE-Reviewing the Evidence in hand

Find the Neighbors

- Consider the evidence in hand
- Be a creative thinker
- Understand context (history, neighbors)
- Develop a detailed profile for research focus.
- Determine what information is missing.
- Propose several solutions
- Examine a variety of records
- Document each step

Who Are the Neighbors?

People nearby geographically

People associated with the ancestor in records: Executor/Administrator; Guardians; Trustees for Mortgages; Buyers of land; Sellers of land; Bondsman on marriage or other documents; Plaintiffs/Defendants in court cases; Employers/Employees;

Extended Family – siblings, collateral's in-laws & their collaterals; cousins; Uncles/Aunts;

Members of the same church; same fraternal organization; military unit; jury panel; political party; school group; occupation

People buried in the same cemetery plot

What Do You Want To Know?

Stay focused
Look along the line
Study the neighbors and acquaintances
Learn the local history
Listen - listen - listen - listen - listen – listen

Probate Records - Wills and Estate documents often refer to property that belonged to a sibling, parent or grandparent who lives in another area. For later ancestors, don't forget to check death certificates for clues.

Land Records - Deeds often reveal a different location of a grantee or grantor in a land sale than the county of the transfer. First purchases of land in an area may refer to a previous residence.

Grants - Although many grants were made for Military Service, it is important not to assume that a grant implies Military Service was performed or that if performed it was from the state making the grant. Other grants were made by states for other reasons – we should also not assume that the grantee was a resident of the grantor state, (i.e., Preemption Grants from North Carolina for Tennessee.)

Court Records - Often Chancery or Equity Cases will refer to relatives in another location or depositions will state where a given party was born and raised. Neighbors or relatives who have knowledge of facts in a case are often called upon for testimony. Careful analysis of these individuals may give you the clues you need.

Work from the known to the unknown.

Marriage Records - These records may supply the place of birth for the individuals, and occasionally the place of residence or birth of the parents.

Tax Records - Tax lists will often help us determine when an ancestor arrived in or departed from a given location. This information coupled with deeds can help us trace an individual across the country.

Census Records - Don't neglect a single available census year. Every census record can contribute to the profile you are developing for your ancestor. Remember to look at the actual census data, not an index only. Today, numerous commercial websites and volunteer sites provide access to virtually all extant Federal census records online, some sites with a new, improved index.

County Histories - Although a particular ancestor might not have contributed a glowing biography to a county history, it will certainly share a great deal of information about his neighbors and his neighborhood. Often entire churches traveled together to establish settlements.

Church Records - If your ancestor was a member of a local church, it is possible that the records for that church are extant. Often, church records contain information about marriages, births, deaths, new members, problems with church members, ministers, and location changes.

Compiled Records - Once we have some specific information, we can utilize the multitude of submitted and compiled records on the internet to help us determine where to begin the focus of our research. Be sure to remember that records and references submitted by individuals are as accurate as the individual submitting the records.

Letters and Other Documents - A letter to a relative may reveal a location for other relatives and perhaps a place to begin. Typical family records include family Bibles, photographs, letters, diaries, legal documents, furniture, household articles, clothing, and other items.

Depending upon the repository, all these types could be found within their holdings. Since the artifacts are less likely catalogued for public review, we need to plan a strategy for locating the manuscript items (which may lead us to the artifact items as well.)

Half a Century in the School Room: or, Personal Memoirs of Jas. W. Turner ..., James William Turner. 1920. Pp 17,18,22

MY FIRST TEACHERS.

Among my early teachers in Tennessee were Alex Blaine, Andy McGlothen, Harrison Clayton, Sanford Granger, Newton Steele, and James O. Shannon. The buildings in which I attended school were known as the William George schoolhouse, the Isaac Steele schoolhouse, and Bethany, a Freewill Baptist church which was frequently used for school purposes. The William George schoolhouse and Bethany were located in Robertson county, Tennessee, and the Isaac Steele schoolhouse was located on a hill overlooking Spring Brook, near "Dripping Springs" bluff, in Simpson county, Kentucky, and only a few hundred yards from the residence of Isaac Steele. This residence was located immediately on the line between Tennessee and Kentucky, and at the exact point where Logan and Simpson counties, Kentucky, cornered, and joined with Robertson county, Tennessee. The building thus occupied parts of two states and of three counties. It was in this home that my father and mother were married in 1847, the owner, who was a Baptist minister, performing the marriage ceremony. It was at Bethany that father and mother held their church membership until they removed to Illinois. Each of these school buildings had an abundance of spring water nearby, and the pupils greatly enjoyed the privilege of going to the spring for a pail of fresh spring water for the school. Usually two pupils were allowed to go after the water, and when the teacher thought they did not return soon enough he kept them in at recess to pay the penalty. I have paid this penalty myself on many occasions.

LATER TEACHERS.

Newton Steele, whose schools I attended at the age of about ten or eleven years, was a very quiet, moral, upright man, and was held in high esteem by the entire community. His father, Isaac Steele, was a Baptist minister, and had reared his children with great religious care. Newton was an excellent scholar for that day and had no trouble in securing a school when he wanted one. I attended two or three of his schools, and to his skill in teaching, and to his earnest efforts for my improvement and progress, I owe much. From him I received my first serious inspirations to work upward in educational lines.

Where would they be located?

Perhaps this is the difficult question. However, with the rapid advance of search engines, bibliographic catalogs, and cooperative efforts among librarians and archivists, this question has become more manageable. Let's look at some of the major resources available to answer this question.

National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections (NUCMC)
<http://www.loc.gov/coll/nucmc/>

NUCMC, or the National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections, is a cooperative cataloging program operated by the Library of Congress. The database includes holdings in museums, archives, historical societies, and research libraries. Although the structure is controlled, persistent and careful researchers can use this tool to their advantage. Be creative in your search techniques after reading the guidelines and FAQ's on the web site. This site does not include all entries contained in the printed volumes. (1960-1985) Many manuscript collections have catalogs online and some have online textual documents. In addition to searching NUCMC, specific searches using text search engines will produce good results.

ArchiveGrid: https://beta.worldcat.org/archivegrid/

What records are we likely to find?

Southern Historical Collection - University of North Carolina
www.lib.unc.edu/mss/shc/index.html
Finding Aids: www.lexisnexis.com/academic/2upa/Ash/AnteBellumSouthernPlantations.asp
www.lexisnexis.com/academic/guides/southern_hist/south.asp

The Southern Historical Collection was established in 1930 with a base of manuscripts collected by the North Carolina Historical Society in 1844. The Society continued to collect manuscripts until early in the twentieth century. The collection has grown to over 15 million items organized in more than 4,600 discrete collections.

General Search Engines

Using a general search engine (i.e. Google.com) can help locate references to manuscript collections that contain references to the location or family surname you are researching. It may also lead to journal articles or other periodicals that may contain footnotes that will lead to other collections. One can also use this type of general search to find online manuscript catalogs, which will lead to additional resources.

Don't forget to use Google news archive, Google Scholar and Google books for additional leads.

books.google.com
news.google.com/newspapers
scholar.google.com/

Strategies

Give yourself a large block of time for the research and reading phase with manuscripts. Expect some frustrating moments.

When you ask for reference assistance, be prepared to explain your project clearly and with little detail about your family.

With any database search, do not assume that a search result is comprehensive. You must use your research skills along with finding aids.

Collections generally are not rearranged from the order their creator imposed upon them. You should not expect to find everything on a topic arranged together.

Before visiting a repository, you should always call or write ahead of your visit, to ensure the materials that you wish to examine are available for research.

2) Land Platting, Comparison, and Neighborhood;

Feeling trapped with no where to go? Bad, weak, or missing evidence all contribute to misleading research. Your effort to get back on track should include a review your research findings, an effort to sharpen your techniques, a critical evaluation of your sources, and clearly mapping a new course.

Often in the process of collecting evidence, we omit steps that create later problems with our research. "Haste makes waste," penned by John Heywood in the 15th Century is no less true today when applied to the efforts of genealogical research. We often discount our work by stating that it is only for our families. Would we take less care in preparing nutritional meals for our families? Are we *really* willing to accept poor quality for our family?

Today, genealogical information is everywhere, existing in large quantities and constantly being created and revised. Information is presented with a wide variety of shapes and sizes (facts, opinions, stories, interpretations, and statistical data) and was created for many purposes. We may collect evidence and information on many levels of quality and reliability.

How did our tree get "broken" ?

- **undocumented evidence** - The lack of source citations on documents and notes often lead researchers to make incomplete or inaccurate decisions regarding the evidence. A well-cited source will not resolve questions of unreliability, but will help you gain a better understanding of the source and its purpose.
- **unreliable evidence** - Many published sources and unpublished manuscripts have included information that is neither factual or probable. Often, information is published in a more reliable source, but it actually uses an unreliable source for the citation. Consider the sources of all information in your research. You should train yourself to question the motive and purpose of each piece of evidence. Even the best researchers can change a position on the presentation of additional evidence. The author or source of information should show some evidence of being knowledgeable, reliable, and truthful.
- **reliance on derivative resources** - Using indexes, directories, and abstracts are helpful in gathering evidence, but we should consult the original sources when possible and practical. Compiled genealogies and abstracts are only as good as the author. Missing sources, lack of local knowledge regarding families, and sloppiness are only some of the problems that can creep into derivative works.
- **misinterpretation of evidence** - Careful attention to detail is required to interpret some documents. Occasionally, words or phrases are omitted that change the meaning of the document. Documents often are used as proof of information in an inappropriate manner.

- **lack of knowledge about area** - Knowing local practices and history are sometimes needed in the interpretation of evidence. Living on a military grant in Tennessee did not mean the individual was in the military. The use of Latin terms in legal documents may convey additional meaning to the source.
- **disorganization** - Incomplete or inaccurate information may creep into your research without vigilance and proper notation. Mixing data from other individuals can be detrimental to sound research.

Review and evaluate each piece of evidence

Society values important decisions based on authentic and reliable evidence. If you hear a report indicating your town will experience a major earthquake this year, would you believe the information?. Some questions you might ask would include (*What makes this source believable (or not)?; How does this source know this information?; Do other authorities support this source?)*

Include negative findings

Any source that presents conclusions or claims to give a full and rounded story, should indicate the level of completeness and accuracy. In other words, the information should be comprehensive. No single piece of information will offer the truly complete story–that's why we rely on multiple evidence. On the other hand, an resource that deliberately leaves out important facts, qualifications, consequences, or alternatives, may be misleading or even intentionally deceptive.

Use the proper tools - Be careful not to damage the "original"

Maintain a focus using your plan

Honing a Research Plan

The first stage of evaluating your sources takes place before you begin researching. Take a minute to ask yourself, "What am I doing?" Do you want birth dates, names, proof of location, land ownership records, tax payments or other information? Is the purpose of your research to get new ideas, to support others factual or reasoned statements, or to lead somewhere else?

What size net should I use?

Where should I look?

Once you decide on a direction, you will identify sources that lead to evidence for evaluation against your research goal. Determine which sources can be quickly passed by and which deserve a closer look, simply by asking whether each source appears to offer facts or just unsupported claims.

Finding new resources

You must therefore be careful to note when the information you find was created, and then decide whether it is still of value (and how much value). we must remember to check and re-check our data from time to time, and realize that we will always need to update our facts.

Careful documentation

Corroboration or confirmability is an important test of truth.

3) Mapping and Geography; 4) Historical Perspective 5) Bringing In Court Records (Local and Appellate) and 6) DNA Testing.

Define the Problem, Follow the Path & Don't Get Lost!

This is often where people struggle. They react to what they have seen before and assume the solution is the same. Instead, seek to understand more about the unique circumstances of this project.

In my experience, a consultation with a fellow researcher should be ongoing in the development of both the conceptual and logistic areas of a research plan. A conversation with a fellow researcher will bring a different viewpoint, improve research questions and generate new ones. In addition, others may have experienced different logistical problems. These problems and possible solutions can be included in the plan as developed.

A good colleague will often be the thermostat you need to adjust your workflow.

Six Steps to Becoming a Better Researcher

- Have confidence in your ability to learn
- Practice being methodical and using the appropriate techniques
- Be patient with your progress
- Analyze your mistakes and learn from them
- If your working environment is not conducive to effective research, either try to change it or learn how to avoid its effects
- Don't be afraid to ask for help in the form of advice or training

Using the basic tools of family history research, discover additional family information with these records and writings. Learn the importance of analyzing the information that you find and realizing how important collateral/cluster line research is in helping to move you toward success in the genealogical process.

A Typical Research Approach

1. Describe the research problem.
2. Summarize the known details. (Include the names, dates, and relationships)
3. Identify fully all records and repositories included in the project.
4. Identify any limitations on the research. (time, inaccessible records, knowledge)
5. Present both positive and negative findings. Be sure to include the reasoning and details.
6. Summarize the findings.
7. Develop a work plan for continuing the research. This plan should be based on the findings of this part of the project.

Readings and Resources

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http://www.slcl.org/content/guide-researching-southern-claims-commission-records
and FamilySearch
https://familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/Southern_Claims_Commission
American Memory Collection https://www.loc.gov/collections/
Documenting the American South www.docsouth.unc.edu
Civil War Soldiers & Sailors System www.itd.nps.gov
National Union Catalogue of Manuscripts Collections (NUCMC) http://www.loc.gov/coll/nucmc
This website provides access to the manuscript collections held by repositories located throughout the United States and its territories through archival and manuscript cataloging in *OCLCWorldCat.*
Civilian Conservation Corps Legacy (CCC Legacy) http://www.ccclegacy.org/
Farm Security Administration photograph collection (Library of Congress) http://photogrammar.yale.edu/
Federal Theatre Project Collection http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/fedtp/ftwpa.html
Federal Theatre Project Materials Collection http://ebot.gmu.edu/handle/1920/3478
Library of Congress – New Deal Program Resources http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/newdeal/
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Rural Electrification Administration – History http://www.greatachievements.org/?id=2990
WPA – American Made http://www.randomhouse.com/bantamdell/wpa/
WPA Progress Report for 1936 http://archive.org/details/reportonworkspro00unit_0
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American Folklife Center, Library of Congress www.loc.gov/folklife
FDR Library www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu
National New Deal Preservation Association www.newdeallegacy.org
The New Deal Information Service www.fdrheritage.org
New Deal Network www.newdeal.feri.org
The New Deal 75 Year Celebration www.newdeal75.org
StoryCorps www.StoryCorps.net
Timberline Lodge www.timberlinelodge.com
The WPA Federal Art project www.wpamurals.com
WorldCat – Library Catalog www.worldcat.org/
Project Gutenberg www.gutenberg.org/wiki/Main_Page
Million Book Program www.archive.org/details/millionbooks
HathiTrust www.hathitrust.org