# **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: <a href="https://www.evidenceexplained.com/content/quicklesson-11-identity-problems-fan-principle">https://www.evidenceexplained.com/content/quicklesson-11-identity-problems-fan-principle</a>

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?

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

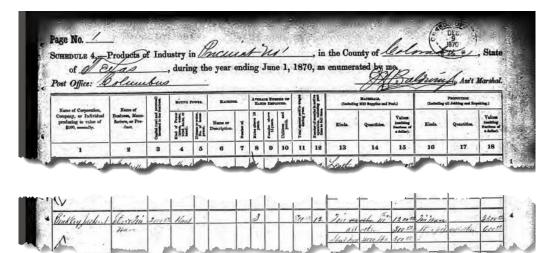


Figure 2 1860 Manf Sch: Precinct 1, Colorado, Texas, J N Binkley

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

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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
arkin Downs SECREST	1828	1904	76 Marshall, MI	Colorado, TX	Colorado, TX	Weimar, Colorado, TX	Colorado, TX
Nary 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, T
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

				1850	186	0	1870	1880	1900
arkin 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
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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=3RxNKutfa0AC