

Your Ancestor's FAN Club: Using Cluster Research to Get Past Brick Walls

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Who is in your ancestor's FAN (Family, Associates, Neighbors) Club?

- Spouses, parents, children, siblings, grandparents, grandchildren, aunts, uncles, cousins, in-laws, step-relatives
- People who worked with your ancestor
- Witnesses and informants
- Buyers and sellers
- People in the same newspaper story
- Attendees of the same church or school
- People who served in the same military unit
- People who mentioned your ancestor in a letter, diary, or journal (or who were mentioned by your ancestor in the same places)
- People who were involved in the same legal cases
- People buried near your ancestor
- Your ancestor's pallbearers (or who your ancestor served as a pallbearer for)
- Neighbors

Records and relationships

- The type of relationship will help determine what type of record to look for and use. For instance, use census records, city directories, and land records to research neighbors.
- The existence of two people on the same record will suggest possible relationships beyond those on the record itself. For instance, witnesses on birth and marriage records are more likely to suggest relatives.
- The more often your ancestor and a member of the FAN Club interacted, the more likely it indicates a closer relationship.

Application of the FAN Club principle

- Two instances of the same name: Same person or two different people? Two different names: Same person or two different people? If it's the same person, they should have the same FAN Club.
- Ancestors who moved from one location to another may be tracked using their FAN Club.
- If direct evidence isn't available, the FAN Club may provide many pieces of indirect evidence.

Types of records to be examined and re-examined

- Census
- City directories
- Birth, marriage, and death records
- SS-5 records
- Newspaper articles and obituaries
- Wills and probate records
- Land and property records
- Family bibles
- Church records
- Record types that employ the use of witnesses and affidavits
- Cemeteries
- Military records, including pension records
- Immigration and naturalization records
- Court records
- Employment records

For further information

Chapter 3 "Go Around the Wall" in *Advanced Genealogy Research Techniques* by George G. Morgan and Drew Smith, published in 2014 by McGraw-Hill Education.