

Breaking Down Brick Walls: Strategies for Success

Knowing the Neighbors: How Neighbors Can Help Solve Genealogical Mysteries

Lindsay Fulton, VP of Research and Library Services lindsay.fulton@nehgs.org

Neighbors

Reasons to Research Neighbors:

1. Provide clues about migration patterns
2. Inform us of ancestor's immigrant origins
3. Supply missing information
4. Help us trace women and reveal maiden names

Sources that can define neighbors:

| | | |
|------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| Census records | Newspapers | Diaries |
| City Directories | Societies | Cemeteries |
| Land records | Military pensions | Church records |
| Maps | Court records | Town records |
| Atlases | Probate records | |
| Tax records | Vital records | |

Looking at sources in a new way

1. Military Pensions
 - a. Affidavits of fellow soldiers can prove information about origins
 - b. May also provide additional detail about military service

Pensions on Fold3:

Tip: Search Pensions for Names, Places, Regiments, or Companies

1. Search for your ancestor to determine if they have provided an affidavit for another soldier
 2. Can help you learn more about their military service
 3. Can be helpful to attribute military service to your ancestor if they have a common name
2. Town Records
 - a. Land grants can inform of communities' origins
 - b. May reveal a migration pattern to community
3. Diaries and Day Books
 - a. Reveals info about the community
 - b. Often include birth, marriage, and death information
 - c. Biographical information
 - d. Movements of neighbors
 - e. Notable events



Locating Diaries and Day Books

Tip: Search local repositories for diaries

- a. ArchiveGrid.org
 - b. Family papers
 - c. Regional libraries
 - d. State Archives
 - e. State Libraries
 - f. Local Historical Societies
 - g. Archives of Universities and Colleges
4. Church Records
 - a. Can contain pew rentals and church seating plans
 - b. These records depict church community
 - c. Great source to determine neighbors
 5. Probate Records
 - a. Comprised of several types of documents - Will, Administration, Inventory, Account Documents, Claims against the estate, Debts owed to the estate
 - b. Important Question to ask yourself
 - i. Who was the administrator?
 - ii. Who was the bondsman?
 - iii. Who were the estate appraisers?
 - iv. Who witnessed the will?
 - v. Which individuals appear on multiple occasions?
 - c. It is very important to examine all documents, and determine the relationship between your ancestor and these individuals.
 5. Cemeteries
 - a. Are there contemporaries of your ancestor buried here?
 - b. What other early families are buried here?
 - c. Can you identify a pattern?
 6. Court Records
 - a. Civil court records can provide important information about our ancestors, particularly their residence, position in community, and those living in their community
 - b. If our ancestor has a common name, can be helpful in identifying records.

Example : Chain of Title

In this case, we were tasked with tracing the chain of title of a property in Tisbury, Massachusetts from present day to its original owner.

- At Dukes County Registry of Deeds, we're able to trace chain of title to Eva S. Birdsall, who owned the property in 1962. She received the property from her husband, Elmer S. Birdsall upon his death.
- Could not find a single instance of Elmer S. Birdsall buying or selling land in Dukes County, Mass.
- Researching Elmer S. Birdsall further revealed that he was born in New Jersey. In the 1900 US Census, he was enumerated in the household of Gilbert L. Smith. Here, he was listed as a cousin.

- Reluctant to trace the parents, grandparents, and relatives of Elmer S. Birdsall because he may have received property from another individual. Also very time consuming. Researching abutters of property may provide important information.

Why do we research abutters?

- Previous ownership of property
- Physical location of property
- Family members
- Neighbors from previous community
- Turned our attention to abutters Dorothy Bigelow, Harold Tigh, and Harold Conhaim. By researching abutters, we hoped to learn who may have owned the property before Elmer S. Birdsall.

Tip: Understand the location of your ancestor's property. Make you sure have an understanding of where the property is located geographically

- Take note of roads, buildings, bodies of water, or geographic features
- Atlases and maps can help place parcels
- Keep track of the abutters to the property
- After searching the grantee indexes for Bigelow, Tigh, and Conhaim, we discovered the 1958 deed of Harold and Bettie Conhaim. The couple purchased a parcel on the west side of Meadow Path and on the east side of Lake Tashmoo. The Conhaim land abutted "land now or formerly of Gilbert L. Smith."
- Elmer S. Birdsall was enumerated in the 1900 US Census in the household of a Gilbert L. Smith
- Examined 1928 probate proceedings of Gilbert L. Smith, made his wife's niece, Mary Elizabeth Cannon, his sole heir. Willed her a camp and land at Lake Tashmoo. We felt that this was the Birdsall property.
- Mary E. Cannon's probate was recorded in 1957 in Dukes County. She made her nephew, Elmer S. Birdsall her sole heir, and will him 25 acres of land and a bungalow at Lake Tashmoo.
- Searching the deeds for the abutters of the Birdsall property allowed us to determine how Elmer S. Birdsall obtained the property.

Websites

Fold3 www.fold3.com

Ancestry.com www.ancestry.com

FamilySearch www.familysearch.org

American Ancestors www.americanancestors.org

Archive Grid <https://researchworks.oclc.org/archivegrid/>