

# Piecing Together the Story: Analyzing Records and Drawing Conclusions

## *Class 2: When a Record Gives Minimal Information*

Melanie McComb, [melanie.mccomb@americanancestors.org](mailto:melanie.mccomb@americanancestors.org)

### **The Challenge**

- Not all genealogy records give enough information to confirm it belongs to your ancestor
- Some records may list only a name and date (ex. early passenger lists)

### **Types of Records with Minimal Information**

- Pre-1850 federal census records
- Early death/burial records
- Tax lists
- Early Passenger lists
- Early naturalization records

### **Strategies:**

- Candidates
- Cluster/FAN Club Research
- Correlation

### **Candidates**

- Build a list of candidates
  - This strategy works well with common names when there are multiple persons by the same name in a specific time period and location
  - Format options:
    - Word document
    - Excel spreadsheet
    - Software

## Cluster/FAN Club Research

- Cluster research, also known as “FAN Club” research, is a very thorough, though tedious, method of studying all possible persons connected to your family member to answer a single question.
  - Ex. Finding the father of a person is a typical question for which it helps to look at the FAN Club to identify a candidate(s) to study.
- F = Family
  - This includes all extended family, including siblings and parents of spouse.
- A = Associates
  - Religious (godparents/witnesses, members of a congregation)
  - Educational (alumni of same school)
  - Occupational (same occupation as your ancestors, labor unions)
  - Social Groups (ex. Fraternal, genealogical and hobby organizations)
  - Political (same political party, Loyalists, tribal affiliations)
  - Place and/or Migration – families that traveled together from one location to another, witnesses to naturalization
- N = Neighbors
  - People living at same address (boarders)
  - People living near your ancestor in the census, including same street
  - Abutters in land deeds

## Correlation

- Types of Evidence:
  - Direct – answers question by itself (ex. Record states parents’ names or date of birth)
  - Indirect – relevant information but does not stand alone (ex. Land deed where the transfer from father to son was not detailed)
  - Negative – absence of information (ex. No children noted on 1820 census but enumerated in 1830 census)
- Evidence Questions:
  - Does a single piece of evidence answer my question? (Direct)
  - Do multiple pieces of evidence, when combined, answer my question? (Indirect)
  - What evidence should have been present if the hypothesis was correct?

- Resolving Conflicting Evidence
  - State the conflict
  - Give possible explanations why the conflict exists
  - Solve the conflict through source and information analysis and correlation of different pieces of evidence

## **Case Study: Robert Neill**

- Background:
  - Born circa 1860 Scotland
  - Immigrated circa 1883 to the United States
  - Married Martha in 1886 (also from Scotland)
  - 1910 – Lived in Denver, Colorado with wife Martha and two children (Martha and Jessie). Children were born in New York
  - Died in 1942
- Passenger List Found for Arrival 8 Nov. 1883 from port of Glasgow, Scotland
  - Using address details in census records, naturalization records, and children’s birth records, it was determined that there was only one Robert Neill who emigrated from Scotland and lived in Manhattan and later Brooklyn. Two additional children were identified in the census (Andrew and Christina)
  - Robert first started working as a brass finisher and later worked in the navy yard as an engineer.
- Cluster/FAN Club Research:
  - Neighbor Alexander Craig, carpenter, came from Glasgow, Lanarkshire, Scotland
  - Neighbor John Brand, tile setter, originally came from London, England but may have lived in Glasgow before coming to America.
  - John M. Cruise who provided witness affidavit for naturalization was also a brass finisher. He likely worked with Robert Neill. His origins are unknown in Scotland.
- Correlation
  - Scottish Naming Patterns
    - 1st son named after father's father
    - 2nd son named after mother's father
    - 3rd son named after father
    - 1st daughter named after mother's mother
    - 2nd daughter named after father's mother
    - 3rd daughter named after mother

- Birth Record found for Robert Neill, born 20 Sep. 1860, in Glasgow, Lanarkshire, Scotland. He was the son of Andrew Neill and Christina Meiklem.
  - This date matches his gravestone listed on FindaGrave
  - The birth year was Robert's declaration of intention
  - 1900 census listed Sep. 1861 as birth date
  - This Robert lived with parents in 1861 and 1871 Scotland census.
  - By 1881, Robert was likely the one living with the Pollock family in Glasgow, working as a compass maker. He would have been very comfortable working with brass. His father died in 1879 – he was a steamboat stoker.
- Conclusion: Robert Neill was most likely the son of Andrew Neill and Christina Meiklem born on 20 Sep. 1860 in Glasgow, Lanarkshire, Scotland. He emigrated to the United States in 1883 from Glasgow.

## Books and Articles

Anderson, Robert Charles, *Elements of Genealogical Analysis: How to maximize Your Research Using the Great Migration Study Project Method*, (Boston, Massachusetts: New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2014)

Cyndi's List, Cluster & Collateral Genealogy, <http://www.cyndislist.com/research-methodology/fan-club/>.

Fulton, Lindsay. "Creating a Research Plan for Cluster Research" webinar. 21 May 2020, <https://www.americanancestors.org/video-library/creating-research-plan-cluster-research>.

Mills, Elizabeth Shown. "Quick Lesson 11: Identity Problems & the FAN Principle." *Evidence Explained: Historical Analysis, Citation & Source Usage*, 20 Aug. 2012, <https://www.evidenceexplained.com/content/quicklesson-11-identity-problems-fan-principle>.

Norris, Michele. "Circumstantial Evidence." *Vita Brevis* blog. 20 July 2017, <https://vitabrevis.americanancestors.org/2017/07/circumstantial-evidence/>.