Seeing the Hidden Evidence: Cluster Research for Your Ancestors’ Friends, Associates and Neighbors (The FAN Club)

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Case study for cluster research

Beginning Information

End result using cluster research
Six Applications for cluster research:

1. In time periods/locations with fewer records
2. For “burned counties” with record loss
3. Finding a female’s maiden name
   - her FAN Club could be her family

“Sherman’s march to the sea,” Library of Congress
(https://www.loc.gov/ : accessed October 2018.)
Six Applications for cluster research:

4. Separating identities of people with the same name

5. Identify earlier migration or immigration

6. Other cases needing indirect evidence

1894 Map of Pennsylvania, Wikimedia Commons
### Possible Robert McCormicks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event from Family Tradition</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Town</th>
<th>County</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Birth</td>
<td>1728</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>PA</td>
<td>Family Tradition</td>
<td>John Hall's Muetzel Tree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage</td>
<td>1756</td>
<td>Penn Valley</td>
<td>County changes</td>
<td>PA</td>
<td>Family Tradition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death</td>
<td>1782</td>
<td>Penn Valley</td>
<td></td>
<td>PA</td>
<td>Family Tradition</td>
<td>Couldn't be correct due to children born after and tax records showing Robert and then Widow Agnes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Robert from Mifflin Co. Headstone</th>
<th>Event Date</th>
<th>Town</th>
<th>County</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Birth</td>
<td>1764</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death</td>
<td>9 Apr 1897</td>
<td>McVeystown</td>
<td>Mifflin</td>
<td>PA</td>
<td>FindAGrave</td>
<td>He couldn't be the same Robert as the one listed in Potter Twp because he would have only been 12 when the 1776 petition was signed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Robert McCormick from Pennsylvania Families</th>
<th>Event Date</th>
<th>Town</th>
<th>County</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Birth</td>
<td>1738</td>
<td>Hanover</td>
<td>Lancaster</td>
<td>PA</td>
<td>Genealogies of Pennsylvania Families by Thomas Hollwak</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moved</td>
<td>alt 1755</td>
<td>Pernsagh</td>
<td>Northumberland</td>
<td>PA</td>
<td></td>
<td>Settled with his brothers, William &amp; Hugh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage</td>
<td>1770</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>to Martha Sanderson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>1771-1780</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>George E., Martha, Elizabeth, William, James &amp; Robert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death</td>
<td>12 Oct 1813</td>
<td>Augusta</td>
<td>VA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>He is buried in Old Providence Cemetery, VA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Robert in Potter Twp according to John Linn - most likely the correct one</th>
<th>Event Date</th>
<th>Town</th>
<th>County</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assessment - No Robert</td>
<td>1774</td>
<td>Potter</td>
<td>Northumberland</td>
<td>PA</td>
<td>History of Centre &amp; Clinton Countesy by John Blair Linn</td>
<td>No Robert. George states he arrived in 1773 with only 4 other settlers there</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petition for Arms</td>
<td>20 Sep 1776</td>
<td>Potter</td>
<td>Northumberland</td>
<td>PA</td>
<td></td>
<td>With George, John &amp; Samuel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>1778</td>
<td>Potter</td>
<td>Northumberland</td>
<td>PA</td>
<td></td>
<td>John &amp; Samuel were single men - No George</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Township list</td>
<td>1789</td>
<td>Potter</td>
<td>Northumberland</td>
<td>PA</td>
<td></td>
<td>With George &amp; John</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment - No Robert</td>
<td>1790</td>
<td>Potter</td>
<td>Northumberland</td>
<td>PA</td>
<td></td>
<td>No Robert. John or Samuel. George is listed under unassigned lands with 100 acres</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Cluster research is time consuming

Exhaust other research options first:

• Re-examine previous research for missed details.
• Are there newly available records to search?
• Search individual collections for a specific goal:
  o Look for sources attached to public trees
  o FamilySearch: Historical Records
  o Ancestry: Card Catalog
  o FindMyPast: “All Record Sets”
  o FamilySearch: Historical Images
Re-examine previous research

View the original when possible:

- It can reveal other details to distinguish your ancestor, such as signatures
- When a list is alphabetized, you lose the community context:
  - Tax lists or petitions which were done by neighborhoods
  - Cemetery lists which can show family plots
  - Ship lists which can reveal people traveling together

Cluster Research: Who’s in the FAN Club?

1. Family: extended
2. Friends
3. Others with same surname, same county
4. Associates: witnesses, informants, etc.
5. Neighbors:
   a) may be extended family
   b) may have migrated together

Elizabeth Shown Mills created the acronym, FAN Club.
Who is in the FAN Club?

1. **Immediate family:** direct-line spouse, other spouses, children, parents, and siblings.

2. **Extended family:** grandparents, grandchildren, in-laws, step-parents, step-children, aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces, nephews, grandchildren of siblings, etc.

Who is in the FAN Club?

3. Others of the **same surname** who lived in the same or nearby town –

Check census, probate, land, vital records, etc.

Who is in the FAN Club?

4. Associates:
   - Witnesses, informants, or who paid bond
   - Executors and others listed in probate records, such as whom debts were paid to
   - Signers of affidavits for military pensions, etc.

Who is in the FAN Club?

5. Neighbors:
   - Begin with those who lived nearby in census and land records.
   - In earlier times, people would often migrate in groups.
     - Sometimes they moved with extended family or close friends.
     - Other times they belonged to the same ethnic or religious group.
For years, the only names we recognized on this map were the two with arrows.

More research has shown that surnames in red boxes are related.

The Pauly, Watt, and Gibson families were also located in the records of Northumberland, Pennsylvania.
THE FAN CLUB PROCESS

**TIP:** FAN Club research is often based on indirect evidence –

- **Direct evidence** states the information outright, such as a death date on a death certificate.
- **Indirect evidence** is information combined together to support a conclusion.

Original Certificate in my possession
Example of Indirect Evidence (proof argument)

Prove that Sarah was the daughter of John and Margaret Dick and wife of Samuel Combest.
(Notice each of these records are in Pulaski County, Kentucky.)

- An 1844 will for Samuel Combest in Pulaski County, lists his wife as Sarah.
- Samuel and Sarah Combest had ten children. Three of them were named as follows:
  - John Combest
  - Margaret Combest
  - Samuel Dick Combest
- The 1803 tax list for Pulaski County shows that Samuel Combest and John Dick both lived on Fishing Creek.
- A family history, The Descendants of Samuel Combest, states that Samuel lived in Pulaski County, but was born in Chester County, South Carolina.
- An 1841 pension file from Pulaski County for Margaret Dick, widow of John Dick, lists Sarah's birth in 1778 in Chester County, South Carolina.
The FAN Club Research Process

1. Create a timeline for your ancestor with all possible details:

- Historical events
- Boundary changes
- Occupations
- Economic standing
- Signature
- Known locations
- Etc.
2. Understand the localities and jurisdictions where your ancestor lived.

- Find maps relating to that time period.
  - Google: Trumbull, Ohio Map 1830s or “historic maps.”
- For U.S. locations, check Newberry Library’s “Atlas of Historical County Boundaries.”
Pennsylvania

Historical Borders

Select Date of Border Change:

- 1792-04-03
- 1795-04-13
- 1795-04-17
- 1796-02-09
- 1798-03-21
- 1798-03-29
- 1800-01-22
- 1800-03-01
- 1800-03-12
- 1800-03-21
- 1802-01-22
- 1803-03-30

- 1800-02-13

County/Region: CENTRE

Effective Dates:
Wed Feb 12 1800 - Wed Apr 29 1818

Description of Border Change:
CENTRE created from HUNTINGDON, LYCOMING, MIFFLIN, and NORTHUMBERLAND.
Example of Locality Information: Prove death of Robert McCormick

History of Penn’s Valley

- **1774 Potter Township created**
  1776 - Robert in Potter Twp. Petition
  1789 - Robert in Potter Twp. Tax list

- **1790 Haines Twp. created from Potter**
  1790 - Nancy in Haines Twp. Census
  1793 - Nancy in Haines Twp. Tax list

- **1826 Gregg Twp. created from Haines**
The FAN Club Process

3. Create a list of all known extended family members

- Name the document, role of the individual, etc.
- Excel or a table in Word makes it easy to organize.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>G</th>
<th>H</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td><strong>Those Listed in Documents with Robert McCormick of Penn's Valley, PA</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>McCormick, George</td>
<td>1776 Petition</td>
<td>petitioner</td>
<td>1776 Sep 20</td>
<td>PA</td>
<td>Northumber.</td>
<td>Potter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Watt, John</td>
<td>PA Rangers 1778-83</td>
<td>soldier</td>
<td>1778</td>
<td>PA</td>
<td>Northumber.</td>
<td>In Cornelius Atkinson's Company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Watt, John</td>
<td>1789 tax list</td>
<td>resident</td>
<td>1789</td>
<td>PA</td>
<td>Northumber.</td>
<td>Potter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Gibson, James</td>
<td>1789 tax list</td>
<td>resident</td>
<td>1789</td>
<td>PA</td>
<td>Northumber.</td>
<td>Potter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>McCormick, Samuel</td>
<td>1776 Petition</td>
<td>Petitioner</td>
<td>1776 Sep 20</td>
<td>PA</td>
<td>Northumber.</td>
<td>Potter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>McCormick, John</td>
<td>1776 Petition</td>
<td>Petitioner</td>
<td>1776 Sep 20</td>
<td>PA</td>
<td>Northumber.</td>
<td>Potter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. List other people found in your documents
   a. To make sorting easier, make a separate entry for each person in each document.
   b. Add all details including role, occupation, literacy, etc.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>County</th>
<th>Township</th>
<th>EVENT</th>
<th>McCormick, Robert/Agnes</th>
<th>George or his Children</th>
<th>Other FAN Research</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1778</td>
<td>PA</td>
<td>Northumb.</td>
<td>PA Rangers</td>
<td></td>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>George</td>
<td>John &amp; James Watt, Alex Gibson</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1779</td>
<td>PA</td>
<td>Northumb.</td>
<td>Penn's Valley</td>
<td>Birth of Rebecca McCormick</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1790</td>
<td>PA</td>
<td>Northumb.</td>
<td>Potter Twp.</td>
<td>1790 Tax List</td>
<td>A Robert is listed with no land</td>
<td>George owned 150 acre</td>
<td></td>
<td>Spangler</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The table contains information about land transactions, births, tax assessments, and other legal and historical records related to the McCormick family in Pennsylvania.
The FAN Club Process

5. Review FAN criteria to determine which order to research FAN Club people*

1. **Strength of the connection** – Ex. a witness at a wedding is more likely to be related than the judge who married them.

2. **Frequency of connections** – How often do they show up in a document, such as a neighbor in a census in Virginia & Kentucky.

3. **The quality of the source** – how reliable is the information? Ex. an unsourced family tree might not be accurate.

*Elizabeth Shown Mills, QuickSheet: The Historical Biographer’s Guide to Cluster Research (the FAN Principle), (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 2012.)
The FAN Club Process

6. Begin researching at the top of your list and work your way down.
   Assess the evidence as you research and adjust your order of research accordingly.

7. Use DNA to provide additional evidence and identify more members of the extended family.
RESIDENTS OF CENTRE, HAINES, AND MILES TOWNSHIPS.

Kreamer, Daniel.
Kreamer, Michael (saddler).
Kreamer, John (carpenter).
Kreps, Christian (tanner).
Kreigbaum, John (grist-and saw-mill).
Kreigisbaum, William.
Kritzer, John (house and lot).
Kryder, Jacob.
Loiser, Matthias.
Lewis, Thomas (mill at Cook’s).
Lilly, George (tanner).
Lutz, Widow (oil-mill).
Lutz, John.
McBeth, John.
McClurkey, Thomas (cooper).
McCormick, Agnes (widow).
McElwree, William.
Merk, David.
Merk, Rudolph.
Miller, Abraham.
Miller, David.
Miller, Daniel.
Miller, Jacob.
Miller, Martin.
Minnich, George.
Mitchell, John (house and lot).
Mickel, Nicholas.
Stover, Adam, Sr.
Stover, Adam, Jr.
Stover, Frederick.
Stover, Jacob, Sr.
Stover, Jacob, Jr.
Stover, John.
Strow, Frederick (house and lot).
Swartz, George.
Trautner, Jeremiah.
Trexler, Martin.
Vaneida, Henry.
Wagner, John.
Waltzberger, Daniel.
Weis, George.
Weis, John.
Weaver, Adam.
Weaver, David.
Weaver, Jacob.
Weaver, John.
Weaver, Michael, Sr.
Weaver, Michael, Jr.
Wileman, John.
Wileman, Leonard.
Winkert, John (house and lot).
Wise, Henry (house and lot).
Wolf, George.
Wolf, Michael.
Young, John (house and lot).

Single Men.
McCormick, Robert.
Paley, Elijah.
Paley, James.
Paley, Michael.
Ritter, Jacob.
Rishel, John.
Ross, James.
Row, Peter.
Shook, Charles.
Spelt, George.
Strohe, Nicholas.
Stover, John.
Wise, David.
Wise, Martin.

Miles township, besides its present territory, included that part of Gregg between Brush and Nittany Mountains which is east of the head of Penn’s Creek, all of Logan, and the southwestern portion of Greene townships (now in Clinton); the northeastern portion of Greene (now) was annexed to Miles township from Lycoming County March 23, 1818.

The inhabitants of Miles township in 1801 were:
Summary

By researching the FAN club of James Pawley in Trumbull, Ohio, I was able to identify his prior residence in Northumberland County, Pennsylvania.

Steps to FAN Club Research

1. Review all documents
2. Create a timeline
3. List all extended family members
4. List all others named in documents
5. Sort your list based on criteria for success
6. Research your list and adjust as necessary
7. Use DNA to provide additional evidence
Organizing FAN Club Records

1. Keep a research log- it saves time in the long run

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Repository/Call #</th>
<th>Searching For</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Results or Scope of Search</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4/14/15</td>
<td>Google</td>
<td>Obituary for Rebecca McCormick Cowdery</td>
<td><a href="http://www.google.com">www.google.com</a></td>
<td>NONE obituary Cowdery, Rebecca Ohio 1862 obituary &quot;cowdry, rebecca&quot; ohio 1862 obituary &quot;rebecca * cowdery&quot;, ohio 1862 obituary &quot;rebecca * cowdery&quot;, ohio 1862 -fuller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/14/15</td>
<td><a href="https://www.archive.org">www.archive.org</a></td>
<td>County History for Robert McCormick Linn, John Blair. <em>History of Centre and Clinton Counties, Pennsylvania.</em> (Philadelphia: Louis H. Everts, 1883.) p 17. <a href="https://archive.org/stream/historyofcentrec00linn/page/16/mode/2up">https://archive.org/stream/historyofcentrec00linn/page/16/mode/2up</a></td>
<td><a href="https://archive.org/stream/historyofcentrec00linn/page/16/mode/2up">1776 Potter Township – Petition for Arms &amp; Ammo</a></td>
<td>&quot;From a petition of date Sept. 20, 1776, on file in the office of the Secretary of the Commonwealth, it will appear that the following were inhabitants of Potter township. George McCormick &amp; Robert McCormick”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Goal (Family or Person): Robert McCormick & Agnes Gibson Family

Locality: Penn’s Valley, Centre, PA  
Researcher: Julie Stoddard

2. Use an organization system for your digital files
   a. Find one that works with how you think.
   b. By naming individual files as shown, the files are organized by year like a timeline.
Organizing FAN Club Records (continued)

Benefits of this filing system:

- Within 4 clicks I can find any document on any person.
- It is easy to share a surname or individual with someone.
- Use “Localities” to keep maps, county & local histories, etc.