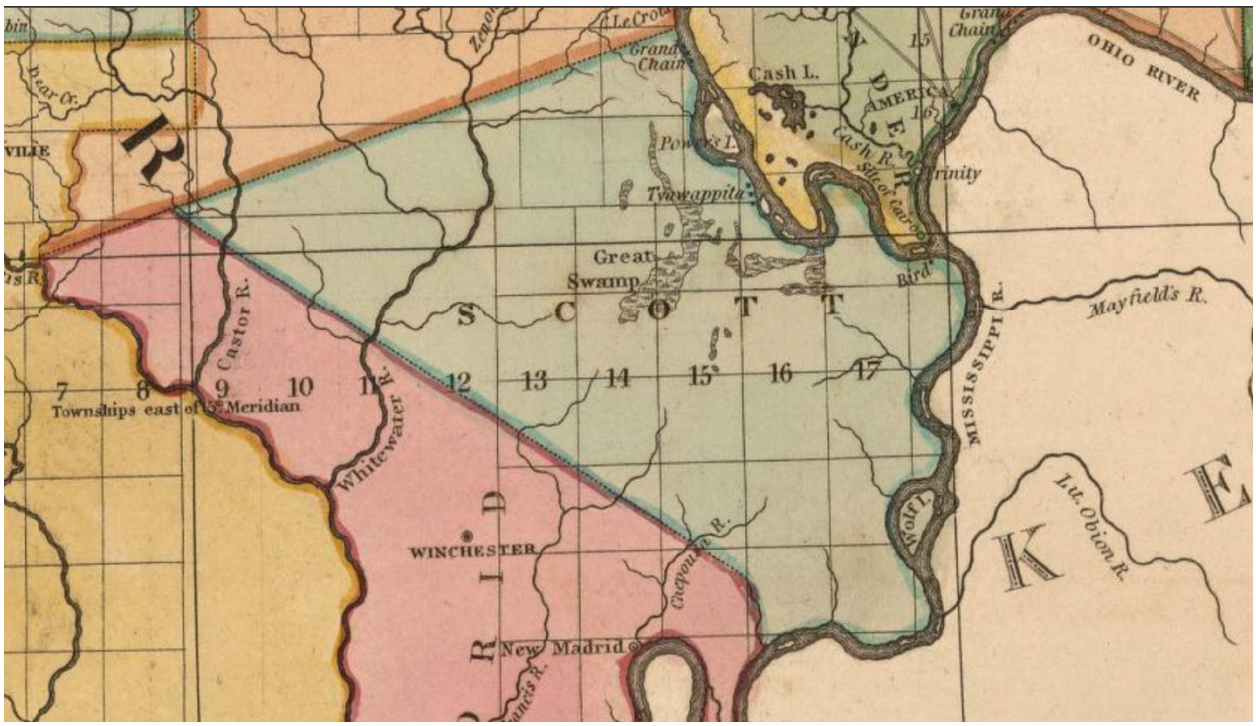

Investigate the Neighborhood to Advance Your Research

JOY REISINGER MEMORIAL LECTURE SERIES

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Why Do Neighborhood Research?

Family historians often begin their genealogical quest by researching only their direct ancestors. For many reasons the direct ancestor they search for may have left few records. The records that survive may not shed light on where the ancestor came from or who his parents were—or any other question about an ancestor. The records that help to answer questions about an ancestor are sometimes only found by researching his relatives, friends, neighbors, associates, or enemies.

Some family historians resist neighborhood research because it is time consuming. They do not want to spend time researching people they are not related to. The rewards for neighborhood research are great for those that take the extra time. Neighborhood research may help you answer questions that cannot be answered any other way. If you have had a brick wall for weeks, months, or years, neighborhood research can save you a lot of time.

We do not live in a vacuum and neither did our ancestors. Humans are social creatures and interact with a variety of people. Neighborhood research involves extending research beyond the person you are interested in and researching individuals important to your ancestor. These neighbors can be close or distant family, those who lived next door or in the neighborhood, or those in other spheres that your ancestor moved around in. Neighborhood research may not be needed for simple genealogical questions, but it may be necessary to solve difficult genealogical problems.

If your descendants look for you in records kept during the past two years, they may find you in records that you made. If your descendants cannot find any records you have made, they may find you in records made by those you have interacted with. They may need to read local, regional, national, or international histories that include the past two years to understand some of the choices that you made. Your descendants may need to read and understand local, regional, or national laws to understand why you may have chosen to do this or that.

Becoming familiar with the people your ancestor interacted with increases the number of records you may find that name your ancestor. The more times your ancestor met with an individual, the more likely it is that you will find information about your ancestor in the other individual' s records.

Common Problems Needing Neighborhood Research

Complex problems involving questions of identity and relationship are good candidates for using neighborhood research. Other problems that might be solved using neighborhood research are those regarding females in the nineteenth century and before. Questions about impoverished, landless, or illiterate men or women also may also be solved using neighborhood research, as well as problems involving separating individuals with common names, migration, and record loss.

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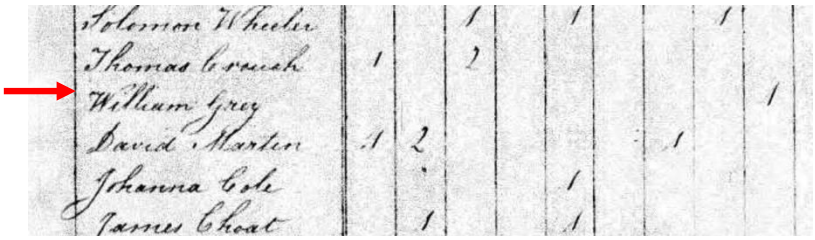
Map on the previous page, part of H.S. Tanner, *Illinois and Missouri*, (Philadelphia: H.S. Tanner, 1823); *David Rumsey Map Collection* http:www.davidrumsey.com).

Neighborhood research has been known by many names since the 1980s. Whether it is called neighborhood research, the FAN (family, associates, and neighbors) Club, the FAN Principle, FANs, whole family research, community research, assemblages, or cluster research—expanding your research to include the relatives, friends, neighbors, associates, and even the enemies of your ancestor may help you break down brick walls in your research.[1]

What Is a Neighbor?

In neighborhood research, a neighbor is anyone that comes into contact with your person of interest. In this census example, Thomas Croush and David Martin are William Grey's neighbors.



1830 U.S. census, Livingston County, Kentucky, Smithland, p. 30, William Grey; digital image, *Ancestry.com* (http://www.ancestry.com); citing National Archives microfilm publication M19, roll 39.

What Is a Neighborhood?

There are many types of neighborhoods in genealogical research, such as census neighborhoods, tax list neighborhoods, religious neighborhoods, land neighborhoods, ship manifest neighborhoods, and cemetery neighborhoods. The use of these genealogical neighborhoods is limited only by the existence of records that name the ancestor and/or his associates and the researcher's ability to conceive of them as a neighborhood.

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[1] For an example using the FAN Principle see Elizabeth Shown Mills, "QuickLesson 11: Identity Problem & the FAN Principle," *Evidence Explained: Historical Analysis, Citation & Source Usage* (https://www.evidenceexplained.com/content/quicklesson-11-identity-problems-fan-principle). For a thorough explanation of cluster research and how it might be used, see Elizabeth Shown Mills, *Quick Sheet: The Historical Biographer's Guide to Cluster Research (the FAN Principle)*, (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 2012).

Neighborhood Research Strategies

These strategies are used in neighborhood research
(these strategies can be used in all genealogical research)

Reasonably Exhaustive Research

⇒ Identify a person to study that you have identified as living in a specific place at a specific time—the ancestor.

⇒ Identify a specific question to answer about that ancestor concerning events he might have participated in, his relationships, or his identity.

⇒ Collect all records currently existing that name the ancestor in that location. Locate and use original documents if they exist.

Analysis and Correlation

⇒ Assess the *reliability* of each document by asking the questions who, what, when, where, and why. Was the informant giving first-hand or second-hand information? Can a record created by a *different* first-hand informant confirm the information in the document?

⇒ Analyze each document in relation to the specific question you are trying to answer. Again, who, what, where, when, and why are important questions to ponder while analyzing.

Timelines

⇒ Arrange the information gathered about the ancestor into a timeline. A timeline is useful for identifying more than one individual with the same name living in the same location. Two different individuals will likely have different neighbors, land, religion, literacy, and economic status. A timeline will also reveal periods of time in which you cannot identify your ancestor.

⇒ Write a biography of the ancestor with the information you have found so far.

⇒ You may begin to see the ancestor with a family, a religion, an occupation, a literacy level, some friends, and maybe some enemies.

Context

⇒ Put the ancestor into his social, economic, religious, legal, and political context. Our ancestor lived at a particular place when he was ten and perhaps a different place when he was twenty. When he was thirty, his circumstances and his group of family members and associates may have been different. Perhaps the laws of the time and place affected the choices he made. Perhaps his religion affected the choices he made. Perhaps his political beliefs affected the choices he made.

Location

⇒ Put the *ancestor* into a location on the ground. Even if the ancestor did not own land, his location can be placed on a map by using his neighbors in census or tax records.

⇒ Put the *neighbors* into a location on the ground and in relation to the ancestor.

Neighborhood Lists

⇒ Make a list of all persons identified in the records naming the ancestor in that location. These are the ancestor' s known neighbors. Those appearing more frequently may rise to the top of the list. Those appearing in more than one genealogical neighborhood also rise to the top of the list. Those working in an official position can be eliminated if they are unlikely to be family members or answer the research question.

⇒ Analyze the lists in relation to the specific question you are trying to answer. Who, what, where, when, and why are important questions to ponder while analyzing.

Research the Neighbors

⇒ Begin researching the names in your list of neighbors. Begin with the neighbors that appear frequently and on more than one list.

Hypothesize

⇒ Form a hypothesis to answer the question. Try to *disprove* your hypothesis.

Repeat Strategies

⇒ Repeat these strategies as many times as necessary and with as many neighbors as necessary—until you have reached a conclusion (the answer to your question).

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