The Hub of the Wheel: How Tracing a Brother with No Children Connected Ten Siblings

Our direct ancestors obviously had children. Otherwise we wouldn't be here. But researching their siblings – even those ones who never married or had children – can lead us to connections to help us trace our family further back.

Universal Lessons

Study the Entire Group:

BCG Standard 12, Topical Breadth, directs genealogists to consult sources naming the subject of interest and their relatives, neighbors and associates. My direct ancestor was a poor farmer and drover who died leaving a widow, seven children and debt. His most prominent brother, a long-lived Catholic priest, provided more records about the Bradley family and its origins than did my direct ancestor.

By studying the entire group of ten siblings, in addition to finding origin information, it became apparent how closely the siblings interacted with one another in Pennsylvania. From that I can infer that they would have been likely to have interacted in a similar way back in Co. Tyrone, Ireland. As I research in Tyrone and discover one sibling, I'll automatically look for one or more others, and the presence of a few of them in the same place will provide evidence that I have located "my" Bradley family.

This Bradley research traces a group of blood relations. But a similar strategy can be used, for example, with a group of differently-named migrant neighbors in 1860s-era Sonoma county, California. It is unlikely that the ten nearby families with origins in Tennessee randomly happened to settle in the exact same area in California. Study any group, be they relatives or neighbors, tracking all their interactions singly and with the others, and you will discover clues that will lead you to origin information for all of them.

Geography is Important:

Land doesn't move, but the jurisdiction under which a place falls may change when counties are formed and borders change. Use historical maps from your research subjects' time period to learn what places were called when they lived there. Maps can also show travel routes. Examine these routes to determine whether it is reasonable that their various activities might have

crossed county or other borders. If records aren't found in the county where an ancestor lived, nearby counties should also be searched.

Sites for Maps:

- *Map of Us* (https://www.mapofus.org/) – Click on the U.S. Maps tab for county formation maps
- *Historic Map Works* (http://www.historicmapworks.com/) – This site has good searching and browsing features. Many of the maps have the ability to be overlaid on a current map.

Understand Broad Context:

BCG Standard 12, Broad Context, says genealogists need to consider among other things migration patterns and routes, as well as the ethnic, historical, religious and social factors that could affect the research plan and scope.

In addition to considering these factors when creating a plan, genealogists also need to reflect on how these concepts impacted the way people at a given time and place lived, the work they did, who they came in contact with, etc. For example, just because the place someone lived in in 1840 is now a small town, it does not necessarily correlate that in 1840 their sphere of influence was limited to that small place.

For the Bradley research, the community Rev. James Bradley served included churches and missions 40 or 50 miles from his home. Today's 60-90 minute car trip would have taken multiple days on horseback in 1840, and brought him into contact with settlers all along the route. These interactions undoubtedly impacted the way generations of Pennsylvanians remembered Rev. Bradley, and help to account for the eminence in which he was held.

Attention to Detail:

BCG Standard 40, Evidence Mining, says "genealogists obtain evidence from information items and sets of information items."[1] Standard 40 also indicates evidence mining requires attention to details, even those which may seem insignificant. Details such as the order in which names are listed in a will, for example, may provide clues to birth order or relationship. Proximity of graves in a cemetery may provide clues to relationships. Uniformness in grave markers in a cemetery may also be a clue to relationship.

Use a Research Checklist:

For this talk I created my "Relative Pursuit Scorecard," to show my progress in fleshing out mere names in a will to become identifiable persons. But using a research checklist can prompt a genealogist to seek out records to fill the holes in an ancestor's profile.

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[1] Board for Certification of Genealogists, *Genealogy Standards, 2nd ed.* (Nashville: Ancestry.com, 2021), p. 24.

Evidence Correlation:

BCG Standard 47, Evidence Correlation, discusses testing evidence by comparing and contrasting information items to discover patterns and inconsistencies.

Tables are an excellent tool for correlation. When ages or birthplaces from various census records are compared side-by-side, similarities and differences become readily apparent. Similar data from other sources such as obituaries or death certificates can also be included. Note, for publication purposes, too much data from too many sources may over-complicate the presentation of evidence, but within a researcher's notes, whatever makes sense to solve the problem is fair game.

Tables can be created in a word processor or spreadsheet program. But a spreadsheet gives the easy ability to "do math" for calculations such as maternal age.

Passenger Lists and Immigration Records:

Pre-20th century passenger lists typically hold little information beyond name, age-(ish), occupation and country of origin. With a "lone wolf" passenger, a single man or woman traveling alone, particularly one with a common name, it can be difficult to establish that the entry refers to the specific person of interest.

Conversely, a family group consisting of one or more adults and a few children is far easier to recognize on a passenger list. A possibly illiterate 40-year-old adult might be listed on a manifest with an age +/- 10 or more years of their actual age. But a child under 10 is unlikely to be shown with an age more than 2 years different from the actual age. Further, a group of 4 or 5 "stair-step" children, ages 2 to 10, are even less likely to be shown with ages significantly different from their actual age. These family groups are easier to locate on passenger lists, and confirmation that a specific group is the subject of interest is also easier.

Due to illiteracy, poor penmanship, and sketchy ink, passenger lists are frequently mis-written and/or mis-transcribed. Be generous with your use of wildcards. Other strategies:

- Do complete biographical research on every person in the suspected traveling group. A death certificate, census record, naturalization document, or obituary, perhaps 70+ years after immigration, may provide a clue to immigration year. Conflicting information may be found in different siblings' information, but careful analysis of all the information should lead to a target timeframe to begin your search.
- Search for the names of every person in the suspected traveling group. "James" and "John" are more likely to be correctly spelled and transcribed than "Felix", but even a simple name like "Mary" could have been badly butchered in the recording or transcription process.
- Follow up on every possible candidate discovered in an index by looking at the original passenger manifest for the others in the suspected traveling group.
- Once you discover your family on a passenger list, look carefully at the other passengers. The ones listed immediately before or after the family could be possible relatives or neighbors from the place of origin. But even passengers a page or more away may be

part of the group. If possible, download the entire passenger list to a spreadsheet for use in trying to identify other possible traveling companions.
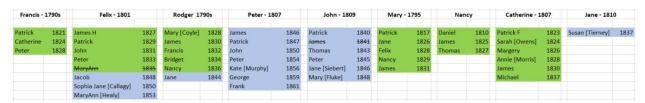
Activity Patterns:

The Irish Bradley family appeared eager to assimilate into their new country. Nearly all appear to have naturalized, and they did so quickly, nearly as soon as was legally possible. As I saw these activities with the first one or two siblings I researched, I began to look for that same pattern with the others. For example, when I saw Roger declare his intention to naturalize in April 1839, I hypothesized he was likely to have arrived a year or so earlier, and I easily found a passenger list for him, even though his name was poorly transcribed. Paying attention to the activity patterns was instrumental in finding additional records for many members of the family.

Naming Patterns:

Many cultures have traditional naming patterns that may help to establish birth order of family members, or the names of ancestors in a previous generation. But the use of specific names can also serve as a "family signature" that might help in recognizing that a particular nuclear family is part of the group of interest. I researched all ten Bradley siblings – Rev. James who had no children and the other nine who had one or more children. Almost without exception several children of each of the immigrant siblings shared a name with one or more of their cousins. James, John, Patrick, Jane, and Catherine were repeated over and over. While these were not uncommon names among Irish Catholics, other names such as Cornelius and Jeremiah never appear. Any names outside the "Bradley signature" may be clues to ancestors in their in-law's families.

Differentiating Same-named Individuals:

When researching a family like the Bradleys who demonstrated little imagination when it comes to names, create a "cheat sheet" showing differentiating characteristics such as birth year, birth place, residence, spouse, etc.

Francis - 1790s		Felix - 1801		Rodger 1790s		Peter - 1807		John - 1809		Mary - 1795		Nancy		Catherine - 1807		Jane - 1810	
Patrick	1821	James H	1827	Mary [Coyle]	1828	James	1846	Patrick	1840	Patrick	1817	Daniel	1810	Patrick F	1823	Susan [Tierney]	1837
Catherine	1824	Patrick	1829	James	1830	Patrick	1847	James	1841	Jane	1826	James	1825	Sarah [Owens]	1824		
Peter	1828	John	1831	Francis	1832	John	1850	Thomas	1843	Felix	1828	Thomas	1827	Margery	1826		
		Peter	1833	Bridget	1834	Peter	1854	Peter	1845	Nancy	1829			Annie [Morris]	1828		
		MaryAnn	1835	Nancy	1836	Kate [Murphy]	1856	Jane [Siebert]	1846	James	1831			James	1830		
		Jacob	1848	Jane	1844	George	1859	Mary [Fluke]	1848					Michael	1837		
		Sophia Jane [Callagy]	1850			Frank	1861										
		MaryAnn [Healy]	1853														

The table used in my example was color-coded by birth place – green for Ireland and blue for Pennsylvania. When I found naturalization records for same-named people, I was able to recognize which records might have applied to which person. (Note: this table has sparse information. More items could be added.)

Search Strategies for Common Names:

Felix and Roger are relatively easy to search for. Brainstorm a few spelling variants, i.e. Phelix, and you're off and running. But John and James will occupy the next ten years of your life with false positives. To make your searches more manageable:

- Throw in a unique identifier into your online search, such as a place name, i.e. Duncansville or Bodoney
- Go directly to smaller websites, for example the *USGenWeb* page for a particular county, or a page devoted to a specific locality and/or ethnic group, such as *CelticCousins: The Irish in Iowa* (http://www.celticcousins.net/)
- On the major subscription websites, ignore the overall umbrella search and go directly to specific relevant collections, such as "Search for Missing Friends: Irish Immigrant Advertisements Placed in 'The Boston Pilot,' 1831-1920" at https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/5060/

Local Genealogy Societies and Libraries Where Your Ancestor Lived:

Reach out to the local genealogy societies for the states and counties where your ancestor lived. What kinds of original records do they have in their collection? As governments decide they don't need to store 150-year-old records, they may offer them to the local genealogy society. Has the local society published any books or databases with local records? These small societies may have undigitized records available nowhere else.

Original and Derivative Records:

BCG Standard 38, Source Preference, says that genealogists prefer original records but understand that less desirable sources may be the only records available.

Such less desirable sources include abstracts and transcriptions. Multiple transcriptions of the same records may be available, and if so, all such sources should be consulted. In the case of the church records from St. Patrick's Catholic Church, Newry, Pennsylvania, an alphabetical transcription covering 1823 to 1907 records was prepared by Blair County Genealogical Society in 1984. Between 1993 and 1996, Rev. Albert H. Ledoux published a chronological, five-volume series, *Catholic Records of Central Pennsylvania,* covering 1793-1869, which includes the

To the extent that the two transcriptions agree, it is likely the information is accurate as far as what was recorded in the original registers. The two different formats each have their advantages and disadvantages. The alphabetical transcription is easier to search and does not require consultation of an index. But by examining the chronological transcription it is apparent there may be some missing entries, perhaps due to poor recordkeeping or missing or damaged pages. The possibility of missing records is not at all discernable with the alphabetical transcription.

Chapter 3 of *Genealogy Standards*, particularly standards 13 and 14, suggest types of sources and topics that should be consulted for reasonably exhaustive research.

Resources

Resources mentioned in the presentation:

Blair County Genealogical Society. *St Patrick's Church Newry, Pennsylvania, Volume 1, 1828-1844 and Volume 2, 1845-1907.* Altoona, Pennsylvania: Blair County Genealogical Society, 1984.

Board for Certification of Genealogists. *Genealogy Standards, 2nd ed. rev*. Washington, D.C.: Ancestry.com, 2021.

Ledoux, Albert H., *Catholic Records of Central Pennsylvania, 1793–1869.* 5 volumes. Altoona, Pennsylvania: The author, 1993-96.