

# A Matrimonial Advertiser: Tracing the Treacherous Trail of an Early 20th-Century Romance Scammer

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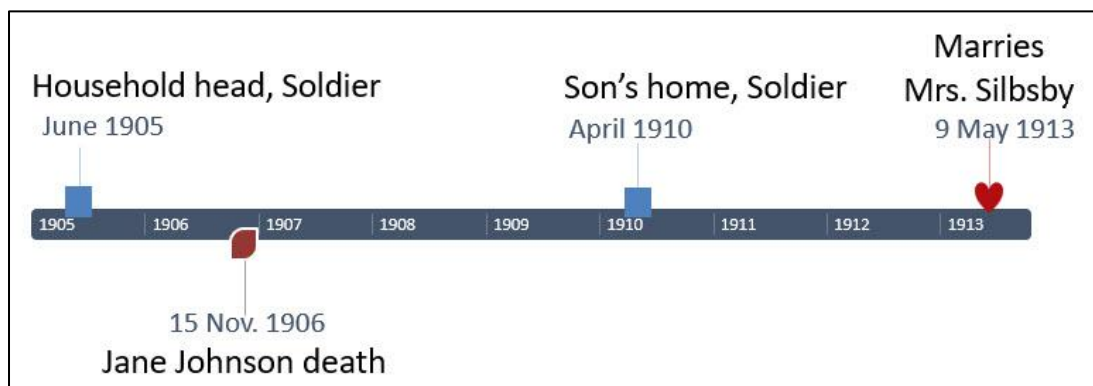
Long before online dating, men and women advertised through matrimonial agencies. Some were looking for companionship, but others used marriage bureaus to prey on lonely people by marrying, bilking, and then abandoning their unfortunate victims.

Identifying matrimonial scammers can be challenging. Because they might have advertised over a wide geographic area, they may move long distances to marry new spouses, leaving records in many locations. They may also use aliases or nicknames and provide unreliable or conflicting personal information to hide their identities. Tracking them requires careful analysis of their records and those of their spouses.

## Spotting an Unexpected Marriage

Think of research as an ongoing process and continue to regularly research your ancestors even after you have a good understanding of their lives. Newly digitized collections or updated indexes can help you find subtle clues that can reveal an entirely new chapter in your ancestor's story, like a brief marriage late in life.

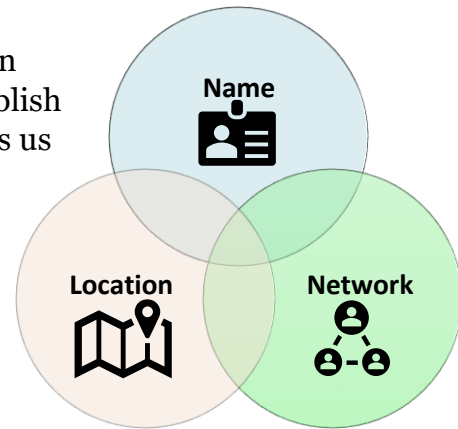
Create a timeline of your ancestor's life to organize events and to highlight any gaps when a marriage might have occurred. Timelines are an excellent tool to show gaps in research or to verify that events could have occurred within a specific period.



Creating and comparing timelines for spouses can be a useful way to spot when a separation occurred even without a divorce. Newspapers, city directories, voting registers, tax and court records, land deeds, and military pensions are some of the many records that may provide useful information to fill in a timeline.

## Research Strategy

When researching a person whose name and location may change frequently, it can be challenging to establish their identity. A successful research strategy requires us to consider multiple aspects of their life, including their name(s), location(s), and the people in their networks.



## Name Searches

Keep track of the name variations you find for a person and search for all of them, even if it requires multiple searches in the same source.

### Search for all previous married surnames

When researching a woman who was previously married, search for her birth surname and all prior known married names. Malinda reverted to the Fuller surname despite several intervening marriages and divorces. Divorce records may note what surname a woman plans to use after a divorce, so check for a “restored” name in divorce case files or published legal notices.

### Unique surnames are great search terms!

Limiting a search to a unique surname in a known place of residence can be a quick way to find relevant records.

### Consider nicknames

Searching for middle names and related nicknames can help you break down research brick walls. If you find a middle name, consider the possibility that the person may have been commonly known by that name or even by a related nickname. For example, “Sarah Elizabeth” may appear in a record as “Lizzie S.,” “Sallie E.,” or even “Sarabeth.”

### Try advanced search characters to find variant spellings

Wildcards and phrase searches are powerful tools to help you find different versions of names. An asterisk usually substitutes for multiple or no characters while a question mark replaces exactly one character (e.g., M?lind? would find Malinda, Melinda, Malindy, etc.). Check the advanced search help on the websites you use to see which characters are supported. To find initials, try a phrase search by surrounding the name with quotation marks (e.g., “M C Fuller”).

To manage alternate spellings, nicknames, and even aliases, try a name table to track names throughout a project (example below).

Name	Initials	Nicknames	Alternates	Surname Variations
Joseph Furminger	J.	Joe	James	Ferminger, Firminger
William Heigel	W. L.		Wilhelm	Heigle
Malinda	M. C.	Malindy, May	Melinda	

## Location Research

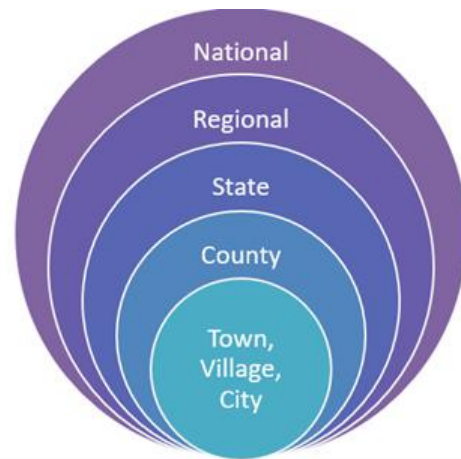
Establishing places of residence is an important part of locating records, especially when searching for a possible marriage. Did the bride and groom live in the same place? Do those place(s) still exist? Have the place names or county lines changed? Understanding a location's history can help you determine likely migration routes, locate interim places of residence, and identify places where records may exist even if the couple never lived there.

### Research in all relevant places

Mine records for references to locations and conduct research in every place mentioned. Isaac and Malinda's short marriage announcement mentioned his hometown, their place of marriage, and her former residence. Newspaper research in the latter place revealed Malinda's scheme and led to her census entry there under a previously unknown married name.

### Location, location, location!

Relevant information may exist at many jurisdictional levels, including towns, counties, region or district, states, and countries, so search in all places that might hold records. To identify available research resources for locations, use the place-based tools available on most genealogy websites. Examples include the *FamilySearch* Research Wiki, Catalog, and Images links, and the "Explore by Location" section of the *Ancestry* Search page.



### Look beyond major genealogy sites

Genealogy and historical societies, local archives and libraries, museums, and universities may hold records and indexes that aren't available elsewhere. The *FamilySearch* Research Wiki is a useful source for contact information on local resources such as genealogical and historical societies, libraries, and archives: [https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Main\\_Page](https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Main_Page).

### Cast a wide net

Check newspapers in all the cities, counties, and states where your ancestors and their family members lived, including their past places of residence. News that affected a faraway family member might be published where other family members lived. If an ancestor lived or worked near a major city or close to a county or state line, check newspapers for the larger area, since nearby newspapers sometimes contain overlapping coverage.

### Use maps!

Plotting event locations on a date-appropriate map can help you analyze your ancestor's movements and may suggest new avenues of research. In addition to genealogical society and library websites, check the maps at the Library of Congress and the David Rumsey Historical Map Collection: <https://www.davidrumsey.com/>.

## Network Research

Note *every* name mentioned in records for the person you're researching. Thoroughly research all spouses, children, and event witnesses, whose records may provide clues to other relationships or mention relevant research locations. Elizabeth Shown Mill's FAN Principle (Family/Friends, Associates, and Neighbors) provides an excellent template for network research. See the bibliography for related references.

## Use newspapers as finding aids to original records

In the absence of a marriage or divorce index, a brief newspaper mention can provide the information you need to confirm the date and place of an event. Look for vital event mentions, land transactions, court actions (divorces, lawsuits, and probates), religious observances, and social mentions to find an original record. The record may not be available online, but once you know it exists, you can research who currently holds it and how to obtain a copy. Some of the most valuable information for this project came from records held at the National Archives and in local court and clerk's offices. Always look for the original record!

## Use occupations as a search term

A person's occupation can be a useful clue to establishing their identity and identifying others in their network such as business partners, co-workers, or customers. For this case, tracing Malinda's employment as a carpet weaver identified her moves across several states and helped to confirm her identity. Newspapers, city directories, and census records are often useful sources of information on a person's profession.

## Look for records that are likely to name relatives

Take advantage of new offerings like the *FamilySearch* Labs Full-Text Search that indexes a growing number of documents, including deeds and probate records: <https://www.familysearch.org/en/labs/>

## Compare and analyze information across records

Extract all information from the records you use and correlate the data to show patterns and identify discrepancies. Tables and spreadsheets can help you compare similar information across records. For example, the table below shows a five-year difference in Malinda's reported age at two marriages that occurred only five months apart in 1913.

	<b>Silsbee Marriage</b> Santa Clara Co., Cal.	<b>Johnson Marriage</b> Leavenworth Co., Ks.	<b>Heigel Marriage</b> Cleburne Co., Ark.
<b>Date</b>	10 October 1910	9 May 1913	17 October 1913
<b>Name</b>	Mrs. M. C. Fuller	Malinda C. Silsby	Mrs. M. C. Silsbee
<b>Residence</b>	Dodge City, Ks.	Dodge City, Ks.	Morgan Hill, Cal.
<b>Age</b>	55	60	65
<b>Spouse</b>	James W. Silsbee	Isaac R. Johnson	Wm. Heigel Sr.

## Bibliography

For examples of other cases of multiple marriages and changing identities, see:

Hoyt, Sharon. "Her Sixth Matrimonial Venture: A Case Study on Tracing a Woman's Multiple Marriages." *Legacy Family Tree Webinars*.

<https://familytreewebinars.com/webinar/her-sixth-matrimonial-venture-a-case-study-on-tracing-a-womans-multiple-marriages/>.

Jones, Thomas W. "The Three Identities of Charles D. McLain of Muskegon, Michigan." *National Genealogical Society Quarterly* 96 (June 2008): 101-120.

## Name Research

Bockstruck, Lloyd de Witt. *The Name is the Game: Onomatology and the Genealogist*. Baltimore, Maryland: Clearfield, 2013. This short book contains chapters on forenames (given names) and surnames. While the lack of chapter subheads or an index can make it difficult to find specific topics, the book is full of useful examples and is well worth a read.

Marks, Kenneth R. "The Best Way to Find 20% More Pertinent Newspaper Articles Online." *The Ancestor Hunt*. <https://theancestorhunt.com/blog/the-best-way-to-find-20-more-pertinent-newspaper-articles-online/> : 24 February 2024. The quicksheet in the article contains a useful chart of visually similar letters in online newspapers.

Rose, Christine. *Nicknames Past and Present*. Fifth Edition Expanded. San Jose, California: CR Publications, 2007. Includes sections on traditionally female and male nicknames, English equivalents of Dutch/Frisian and Italian nicknames, and names that are often truncated or superscripted in records. Order from author's website: <http://christine4rose.com/html/books.htm>.

## Family/Friends, Associates, and Neighbors (FAN Principle)

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

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