



# Cluster Research Using the FAN Principle (Friends, Associates, and Neighbors)

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*“When those we study left no document to handily supply the information we seek, we often find it in the records created by members of their FAN Club—their Friends, Associates, and Neighbors.”*

~Elizabeth Shown Mills, “QuickLesson 11: Identity Problems & the FAN Principle.” *Evidence Explained: Historical Analysis, Citation & Source Usage*

## What is Cluster Research?

*“...looking at a particular family from a broader view than as a single family whose pedigree moves back in a straight line to one progenitor.”*

~Marsha Hoffman Rising, *Family Tree Problem Solver*, p. 91.

## What is a FAN Club?

FAN stands for Friends (and Family), Associates, and Neighbors. It’s a term coined by Elizabeth Shown Mills to help her students remember the key elements of the cluster research methodology. We research families and the communities they live in. Communities can be thought of in many ways: neighborhoods, cemeteries, towns, etc.

## Why Cluster Research?

Researching whole families and the people associated with them can help researchers in many ways:

- Identify an individual’s immediate family, or extended family.
- Perform biographical research.
- Merge individuals with different names into one identity.
- Separate multiple family groups within a geographical area.
- Separate one individual with the same name from others of the same name.
- Determine where someone came from.
- Identify an individual’s associates in a historical event.

## Methodology

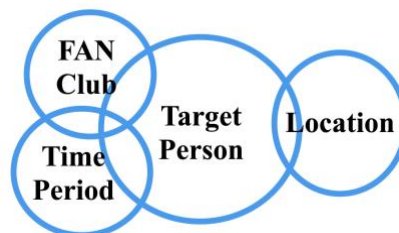
Think of the ripples that a drop of water falling on a pond creates. The center is the target person. The ripples expand outward. Those ripples represent the FAN Club, with those closest to our subject appearing closest to the center where the water drop fell. As you research, expand from the target person and the known relatives outward.

- Target person
- Known relatives
- Same surname individuals
- Associates and neighbors
- Associates of associates



We can apply this to different geographic locations and time periods. The ripples will overlap.

- Target person and their geographic location
- Target and FAN Club
- Target and time period



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## Where to Begin?

- Decide on a goal or a question to answer. Be specific about names, dates, and places.
- Write down what you know.
- Write down how you know it (think in terms of citations or citation-like information).
- Start the research with what is known, then work towards the unknown.

## Tools:

- Family Group Sheet
- Lists
- Maps
- Mindmapping
- Sketch it out
- Spreadsheets, AirTable
- Timelines
- Write it out



## Sources to Use

Use sources that not only name your person of interest but also those that involve your subject's extended family, friends, associates, and neighbors. Records that provide context for the communities and time period where these people lived are also informative. Here are a few suggestions.

- Business
- Cemetery
- Census
- Church
- City directories
- County histories
- Court
- Diaries and journals
- Employment
- Family Bibles
- Family trees (online and paper)
- Immigration
- Land and property
- Land ownership maps
- Military (muster, pension)
- Naturalization records
- Newspaper and obituaries
- Passenger lists
- Petitions
- Probate
- Records involving the lives of enslaved and formerly enslaved people
- School
- Tax records
- Vital records – birth, marriage, death
- Wills



Remember to evaluate your sources and the information and evidence they contain. Any source can have errors.

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### Sample Forms

#### Timeline Template:

<u>Timeline for [Name]</u>			
<u>Date</u>	<u>Event</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Source/Notes</u>

#### Fan Club Template:

<u>[Name] FAN Club</u>				
<u>Name</u>	<u>Connection</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Comments/Source</u>

#### Known Relatives Template:

<u>Known Relatives of [Name]</u>				
<u>First Name</u>	<u>Maiden Name</u>	<u>Surname</u>	<u>Relationship</u>	<u>Comments/Source</u>

#### Family Group Record:

A Family Group Record documents a couple, their children, and lists their parents. The forms have spaces for everyone's vital information (birth, marriage, death, burial). They are a good way to document and visualize a nuclear family. There are many templates available online. Search using the term "Family Group Record" or "Family Group Sheet."

FamilySearch's *Research Wiki* has links to many Family Group Records (and lots of other forms) at [https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Genealogy\\_Research\\_Forms](https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Genealogy_Research_Forms)

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