FAN Out!
Using Cluster Research to Break Through Brick Walls

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What is FAN research?

- Term coined by genealogist Elizabeth Shown Mills to describe research into the Friends, Associates, and Neighbors of one's target ancestor or research subject.

Examples of FANs:

- Extended family
- Marriage witnesses
- Godparents
- Cemetery "neighbors"
- Residential neighbors (e.g. in census records)
- Character witnesses on petitions for naturalization
- Sponsors named on passenger manifests
- Business partners
- Grantors/grantees in land transactions

Research into FANs can help break walls when evidence from sources pertaining to directly to one's ancestors is lacking. How does it work?

Case Study #1: What was the maiden name of Margaretha Elisabetha Schulmerich?

Background: Johann Georg Schulmerich was baptized 21 December 1766 in Hillesheim (presently in Mainz-Bingen, Rheinhessen, Germany). Baptismal record states that he was the son

of Philipp Schulmerich and Margaretha, no maiden name given. Searches for a marriage or death record for Margaretha Schulmerich were unsuccessful.

FAN focus: Godparents

Child's name	Mother's name	Baptismal Date	Godparent
Johann Georg	Margaretha	21 December 1766	Johann Georg Lindhoff
Anna Elisabetha	Margaretha Elisabetha	October 1768	Anna Elisabetha Haussmannin
Maria Magdalena	Margaretha Elisabetha	14 October 1770	Maria Magdalena Schulmerichin
Maria Charlotta	Margaretha Elisabetha	6 April 1773	Maria Charlotta Haussmannin

Strategy: Obtain baptismal records for the four children of Philipp and Margaretha Schulmerich; look for patterns. Hypothesize that Margaretha Elisabetha Schulmerich's maiden name was Hausmann. Test hypothesis by searching for baptismal records for Margaretha Elisabetha Hausmann.

Result: Margaretha Elisabetha Haussmann, daughter of Nicolaus and Christina, was baptized on 2 January 1743 in Hillesheim. Her sisters included Anna Elisabetha Haussmann, baptized 30 October 1744, and Maria Charlotta Haussmann, born 6 August 1756.

Case Study #2: Where in Germany was Henry Wagner born? (Case discussed here: https://fromshepherdsandshoemakers.com/2017/11/05/the-final-clue-tracing-the-wagners-back-to-germany/)

Case Study #3: Who were the parents of Robert Walsh? (Case discussed here: https://fromshepherdsandshoemakers.com/2019/04/23/the-walshes-of-st-catharines-digging-deeper-with-cluster-research/)

See also: https://fromshepherdsandshoemakers.com/2019/07/05/mapping-birthplaces-of-irish-immigrants-to-st-catharines/

Case Study #4: Where was Antonina Naciążek born, and who were her parents? (Case discussed here: https://fromshepherdsandshoemakers.com/2016/12/31/in-search-of-antonina-naciazek-mining-geneteka-for-clues-in-absence-of-direct-evidence/)

Special tip for those researching Jewish immigrants to New York City:

- *Landsmanschaftn* were immigrant aid societies formed by immigrants from the same towns and villages in Central Europe (see: https://www.cjh.org/pdfs/Landsmanshaftn07.pdf)
- Societies would frequently purchase large sections of cemeteries to be subdivided into burial plots for their members, which means that all the cemetery "neighbors" were originally from the same town or village in Europe.
- The Jewish Genealogical Society of New York has a Burial Society Database project (https://www.jgsny.org/searchable-databases/burial-society-databases) which allows you to determine the European town or village associated with each cemetery section. A phone call or email to the cemetery is generally all it takes to determine whether a research subject was buried in a plot associated with one of these burial societies.