

MYSTERIOUS RELATIVES

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Have you come across a mysterious relative – but don't know how this person fits into your research?

- An old labeled photo
- An old letter addressed to a relative
- A strange person or boarder living in the household in a particular census
- A mysterious person buried in the family cemetery

THEY ARE THERE FOR A REASON!

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As a researcher, it is important to understand the relationship between these strangers and your person of interest.

Cluster genealogy is a method used to research extended family groups, neighbors, and associates linked to your person of interest. Using this research technique could potentially explain relationships, reveal maiden names, or knock down a brick wall. Researching a mysterious relative may be the missing puzzle piece to answer your questions!

TIPS

1. Pay attention to all people surrounding your person of interest.

Step 1 of the Genealogical Proof Standard: **Reasonably Exhaustive Research**

“We conduct a reasonably exhaustive search for all information that is or may be pertinent to the identity, relationship, event, or situation in question.”
~ *BCG Genealogical Standards Manual*

2. Ask questions!
 - WHO could this person be?
 - Are they really a lodger? A distant relative? A fostered child?
 - WHO was the informant on the death certificate?
 - WHO was the sponsor for the baptism?
 - WHAT do they have in common with your person of interest?
 - WHY is this person linked to your person of interest?
 - WHAT was happening during this time period? (i.e. Irish Potato Famine, Great Depression)

3. Develop hypotheses.

“I believe Jane Seabron may have been the biological sister of Julia Smith, because both women were born within five years of each other in Georgia and stated that their father was a native of North Carolina.”

4. Research

a. Look for context clues and patterns.

1. Consider chain migration.

Chain migration: the process where people tended to migrate to the same area as others from the same city or region.

b. Use supplemental records to further study these mysterious relatives.

1. Census records
2. Vital records
3. Newspapers
4. Maps
5. City directories

5. Document your research.

a. Cite ALL sources.

6. Analyze the data.

- a. Make spreadsheets and compare data side-by-side.
- b. Don't be afraid to dispute a document. Documents may include purposely false information or contain errors about relationships.

7. Develop and document conclusions.

a. Accept that there may be unresolved conclusions.

8. Review and renew – review the research from time to time and look for new helpful sources.

SOURCES

As of September 2024

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