



Mining Collateral Lines for Fun and Genealogical Profit

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"What is a collateral line, and what use is that to me?"

What Is A Collateral?

In genealogical terms, a collateral line is any line of descent from one or more of your ancestors through any other than your own direct line. This can be at any point in the line of descent: close to you (researching your aunts and uncles, for example), or "way back" (for example, researching your Mayflower ancestor through research done by someone in an entirely different line).

What Good Is Researching A Collateral?

We recommend you always do SOME research on siblings (full or half) of your direct ancestors. Get the vital records for all siblings – birth, marriage, death. Remember that at least one of the parents of these siblings is also your direct ancestor, so the information you obtain is documentation of that ancestor.

How To Research A Collateral?

The techniques for researching collaterals are the same as for direct ancestors. Use the "usual" sources:

- Vital Records – Birth, Marriage, Death
- Legal Records – Wills, Probate, Property
- Government Records – Social Security, Census, Pension, Immigration
- Published Records – County Histories, Family Histories, Newspapers, Directories
- Other Organization Records – School, Church, Cemetery
- Personal Records – Interviews, Diaries, Letters, Bibles, Photographs

Also research the "step-parents" of your ancestors ... sometimes for several generations up and down the line. Why do that? Think about the factors that influence us as we grow up ... the families who raised us have a great impact on our lives - and those may not be just the biological parents. Therefore, research the step-parents and their families to see what factors influenced an ancestor's life. "Step-relatives" may also lead to direct ancestors through the back door – remember those ancestors who married had to meet somewhere. The most likely places were homes of friends, neighbors, or other relatives. Be alert for these connections in all your research.

In short, to research collaterals, do the same things you do to track your direct ancestors. Look at vital records and other primary sources, work your way back from the known to the unknown, and watch for clues. Once you find clues in the collateral records, use those to look for proof that they apply to your direct line as well ... it's easier to prove or disprove a hypothesis than to find facts with no starting place.

Collateral Research Tips:

- Log every life event you have found for that person, as well as everyone else in the household. Indicate the event, date, and place. Then look for gaps to begin your research.
- Record what you already know about the collateral relatives, especially those who were (or may have been) in the same place at the same time.

- Consider what records might be available for the relatives that you haven't yet researched. Make a work plan of records that might be helpful in obtaining the information you need.
- As you gather records, document the source of every record you find. Don't forget to look for information on all family members while you're in a particular record group or database.
- Periodically review all the family group sheets and research checklist for new gaps or clues. Follow up on these new hints and keep logging the results.
- If you use a numbering system for your direct ancestors, determine early in your research how you want to track collaterals. It may not be necessary to worry about numbers for collaterals, particularly if you use a computer database and don't assign numbers for your direct ancestors.
- Be as careful in maintaining and documenting these sources as with your direct ancestors - this proof may be all you ever find!
- And don't forget to post queries for some of those who are most likely to be sought by others - these are usually the ones who had lots of descendants, so there's more chance that one of those descendants is doing family research.



Resources:

Books:

- o Croom, Emily Anne. **The Genealogist's Companion & Sourcebook**. Cincinnati, OH: Betterway Books, 2003. See especially Chapter 1 on "Cluster Genealogy".
- o Croom, Emily Anne. **Unpuzzling Your Past: A Basic Guide to Genealogy (Fourth Edition)**. Cincinnati: Betterway Books, 2010.
- o Horowitz, Lois. **Dozens of Cousins: Blue Genes, Horse Thieves, and Other Relative Surprises in Your Family Tree**. Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press, 2004.
- o Szucs, Loretto Dennis and Sandra Hargreaves Luebking. **The Source: A Guidebook of American Genealogy (Third Edition)**. Salt Lake City, UT: Ancestry, Inc., 2006. In 2010, Ancestry.com digitized the content of **The Source** and made it available in wiki format as one of the foundational sources for the Ancestry.com Wiki. http://www.ancestry.com/wiki/index.php?title=The_Source:_A_Guidebook_to_American_Genealogy

Magazines:

- o Dollarhide, William. "Descendancy and Collateral Numbering Systems", Genealogy Bulletin, Volume 15, Number 5, Issue 53, September/October 1999. http://www.familyrootspublishing.com/store/product_view.php?id=209

Web Sites:

- o Ingle, Cyndi. Cyndi's List "Hit a Brick Wall? » Cluster & Collateral Genealogy" <http://www.cyndislist.com/brickwall/cluster/>
- o Przecha, Donna. "The Bigger Picture" http://www.genealogy.com/38_donna.html
- o Lindsay Elisabeth. "Collateral Line." http://wiki.genealogytoday.com/collateral_line.html
- o Genealogy.com "What Is a First Cousin, Twice Removed?" http://www.genealogy.com/16_cousn.html
- o Vorpahl, Beverly (Smith) "Collateral Records." This article originally appeared in the November/December 1998 issue of **Family Chronicle**. <http://www.familychronicle.com/CollateralRecords.html>