

Module 9 – The Neighbor Effect Toolkit

A Step-by-Step FAN Analysis Guide for Beginning Genealogists

Operation Granny Files | Genealogy 101 Series

Purpose Statement

This toolkit will help you apply the FAN principle — Friends, Associates, and Neighbors — to your own genealogical research. Using simple, structured steps, you will learn to extract neighbor data from census and community records, track recurring connections across time, and use those relationships to break through brick walls and discover new evidence about your ancestors. The FAN principle is one of the most powerful tools available to beginning genealogists — and this worksheet puts it directly in your hands.

Part A — FAN Worksheet

Research Subject (Ancestor Name): _____

Census Year and Location: _____

Instructions: List up to ten neighbors found near your ancestor on the census page. Note names, occupations, and birthplaces, and flag any patterns: Does this person appear again in a later record? Do they share a surname? Are they associated with the same church or organization?

#	Neighbor Name	Age	Birthplace	Occupation	Appears Again?	Same Surname?	Same Church / Org?	Notes
1								
2								
3								
4								
5								
6								
7								
8								
9								
10								

Additional Research Notes:

Part B — The Cole–Snider Neighborhood, 1895

A Cluster Research Case Study

In 1880, a researcher named Anna was searching for the Ohio origins of her ancestor Elias Cole, a farmer in Monroe County, Iowa. No Ohio records had surfaced despite years of effort. On a whim, she widened her focus — and looked next door.

Adjacent to Elias Cole on the 1880 federal census was Heinrich "Henry" Snider, also a farmer, also from Ohio. A decade later, the 1895 Iowa State Census showed both families still living as neighbors. Searching Monroe County probate records, Anna found that Elias Cole had served as bondsman for Heinrich Snider's estate in 1897 — with the phrase: *"my neighbor of thirty years."*

Thirty years placed both men together before the Iowa move. Anna traced Snider to Licking County, Ohio. In the Licking County deed index for 1848, she found both names: Cole and Snider purchasing adjacent plots of land, from the same seller, in the same month.

The neighbor had carried the answer for over a century.

Cluster Found — Monroe County, Iowa (1880 Federal Census)

Entry	Head of Household	Age	Birthplace	Notes
13	Mary Cole Hartley	28	Ohio	Possible relation to Elias
14	Elias Cole	52	Ohio	Research subject
15	Heinrich "Henry" Snider	49	Ohio	Key FAN member — held Ohio origin clue
16	James Whitmore	44	Indiana	Adjacent landowner; appeared in same church register

Lesson: Research your neighbors the same way you research your ancestors. Their records may name your ancestor directly — or place them in a community that leads you home.

Part C — Reflection Questions

Use these questions to guide your own FAN research after completing the worksheet above.

Question 1:

Who are the two or three neighbors who appear most consistently alongside your ancestor across multiple records? What do their birthplaces and occupations suggest about your ancestor's origins, community, and migration path?

Question 2:

In the probate or deed records of your ancestor's neighbors, does your ancestor appear by name — as a witness, bondsman, heir, creditor, or "dear friend"? What does that appearance reveal about the relationship, and what new search leads does it open?

Question 3:

If your ancestor migrated at some point in their life, can you find any of their neighbors making the same move? How does their shared migration path help you identify where your ancestor came from — and what community they left behind?

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