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Genealogy Strategies to Connect Ancestors

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Have you ever come across two people in your tree that you just knew were related - but you just couldn't prove it?

That's what happened to me the other day. When I came across this predicament, I was determined to find the answer. And like a little beaver, I kept at it until I found the relationship link and could prove it.

The Research Question

Going into the research project I had identified two women with the same maiden names who had both lived Fulda, Spencer County, Indiana.

- Juliana Schwartz b. 1834, Germany, married Joseph Simon in 1855 in Fulda, Spencer County, Indiana
- Mary Catherine Schwartz, b. 1867, Fulda, Spencer County, Indiana.

Fast forward to 1880, and here's what we find.

- Joseph and Juliana Schwartz Simon are living in Sedgwick County, Kansas.
- And so is Mary Catherine Schwartz - unmarried.

Can you see why I thought they might be related? Two women with the same maiden name both were living in Spencer County, Indiana and again in Sedgwick County, KS. They were born a generation apart, which makes it unlikely that they are sisters. So, what's happening? Are these women related? If so, how?
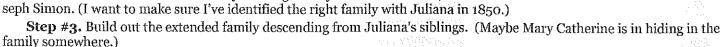
What I didn't know going into this project was anything about Juliana's birth family - parents or siblings. Likewise I didn't know anything about Mary Catherine's origins. So I had my work cut out for me, relating two women with only maiden names to go by.

The Research Plan

My goal was to construct Juliana's family and see if Mary Catherine hung off of her tree somewhere. The research steps rolled out as follows.

Step #1. Find Juliana as an unmarried woman in the 1850 US Census with her birth family. (With luck this would give me her siblings among whom to look for Mary Catherine.)

Step #2. Find Juliana's family in the 1860 Census to see if it matches up - albeit with her out of the house and maybe living nearby with her husband, Joseph Simon. (I want to make sure I've identified the right family with Juliana in 1850.)

Picture of Joseph and Juliana Schwartz Simon courtesy of Mary Catherine Eck Faass

Step #3. Build out the extended family descending from Juliana's siblings. (Maybe Mary Catherine is in hiding in the family somewhere.)

The Research Work

I fairly quickly found a Juliana Schwartz at about the right age among the family of John and Barbara Schwartz in Pennsylvania in the 1850 US Census for Pennsylvania[1]. Okay, this looks promising; however, Juliana is in Indiana in 1855 when she got married, so it's not obvious that this is the same family.

I open up a handy Excel spreadsheet and list the family members with their birth dates, birth locations, and age in a column headed "PA, 1850." What I didn't do - and lesson learned - is include the sexes of each family member. You'll see why in a minute.

The next step was to find the family again - without Juliana - in the 1860 Census[2]. Remember, she married John Simon in 1855. If this is Juliana's birth family, they would probably be in Indiana if they followed or led Juliana there. The migration from Pennsylvania to Indiana doesn't bother me because as new lands opened up, property would be cheaper, and settlers would move west. A migration to Indiana from Pennsylvania would make sense.

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[1] Seventh Census of the United States, 1850; (National Archives Microfilm Publication M432, 1009 rolls); Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29; National Archives, Washington, D.C.

[2] 1860 U.S. census, population schedule. NARA microfilm publication M653, Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.

birth pl	birth dt	Family Member	Age	
			PA, 1850	IN, 1860
Germany	1806	John	44	
Germany	1804	Barbara	46	55
Germany	1831	Frances	19	26
Germany	1835	Julia	15	
Germany	1837	Catherine	13	
Germany	1837	William	13	22
Germany	1843	Fredrica	7	17
PA	1849	John	1	

When I found a Schwartz family in Spencer County, Indiana, I took out the spreadsheet I started earlier. I added a column titled "IN, 1860", and I plugged in the same information about the Schwartz family as before. Doing this made it very clear what information matched up between the two censuses and what information left questions.

This family didn't quite look like the family I found in Pennsylvania. John, the father, was missing in 1860. Does this mean something happened to John, or do I have the wrong family? Moving on, the second child, Frances, was a girl in 1860. This didn't jive with the 1850 PA Census where the second child was Frank, a boy and seven years younger. Finally, the youngest son wasn't in the 1860 Indiana census. Either I have the wrong family, or something happened to the baby. Juliana was, as expected, out of the house since she married in 1855 and therefore was not with this suspected birth family in 1860.

Rats. So close.

The Solution to Reconciling the Families

There were several pieces that fell into place that ultimately made the connection. I went to the Midwest Genealogy Center, and pulled out all of the books on Spencer County, Indiana. Here's what I found.

- The newspaper abstracts found in Spencer County (Ind.) Newspaper Abstracts[3] from the period listed the death of John in 1855 as a suicide. (Sadly it was just a month before Juliana moved to Kansas. Maybe it was the reason for the move?) Now we know why John wasn't in the 1860 US Census for Indiana.
- I went **back** to the 1850 US Census for Pennsylvania to look at the sex of each family member. Frances, it turns out, though spelled with an "e" is a boy! Clear as day, the child is listed as "male." Even though there was a 7-year discrepancy in the birth dates Frances (1850) & Frank (1860) looked like they could be the same person.
- The cemetery transcripts for St. Boniface Cemetery in Fulda, Spencer, Indiana (Spencer County (Ind.) Cemetery Inscriptions[4] listed the graves of Franz and Mary Philomena (Klum) Schwartz. Ah ha! Juliana had a brother named Frank/Frances/Franz, who lived & died in Fulda, Spencer County, Indiana.
- The final step was to look for Frank & Mary Klum Schwartz in the 1860 Indiana Census. If they had a daughter of the right age named Mary Catherine, the mystery would be solved. And, yes, she was there.
- As it turned out Mary Catherine was Juliana's niece. Juliana followed Mary Catherine to Kansas, where she married Nicholas P. Lies, and as they say "lived happily ever after."

Research Lessons Learned

I love genealogy simply and richly because it is an ongoing learning experience. What I learned with this project includes -

- Check the sex of each person listed in the Census. It makes a difference.
- Just because I knew Frances with an "e" is usually a girl, doesn't make it true every time. Often there are translation or trans iteration variances when a family immigrates and changes languages, in this case from German to English. We're familiar with the common difference between Frank and Franz. The different spellings of "Frances" would be a similar distinction.
- I love spreadsheets. It came in very handy when comparing a family across two Censuses - among other things.
- There were materials such as the newspapers abstracts and the cemetery transcripts which made all the difference in putting the puzzle together. Don't stop with the census records.
- Follow the research all the way through. If I'd have stopped and assumed the 1850 family & the 1860 family were the same - or not the same - and not pulled other records, I could have either made the wrong conclusion or missed hitting a land mine that would have derailed everything.

To me, genealogy is more than collecting records -- although you have to start there. The magic is when the records speak to you and tell you about the lives of the people who came before you. The magic is in what we can learn about them, and in turn enrich our own lives.

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[3] Spencer County (Ind.) Newspaper Abstracts, Patmore, Sharon, 1988 – 1999
[4] Spencer County (Ind.) Cemetery Inscriptions, Spencer County Historical Society, 1987