

# Correlating Evidence

By Constance Henley Knox

Typically, when we talk about correlating evidence, we're comparing facts found in records and or family lore. This can be done by each individual ancestor or in family groups. Each has its own strategy.

Smart researchers also include correlating people from the "F.A.N. Club." F.A.N. is a term coined by Elizabeth Shown Mills to be **Friends, Associates, and Neighbors**. This can help us tie records together. Not all situations will require using the F.A.N. club in our correlation.

This is also known as **Cluster Research**. When referring to **Cluster Research** we are grouping the family along with the F.A.N. Club.

The idea here is to examine the records of everyone that interacted with our Target Ancestors. The Target Ancestor is (my term) the subject(s) of our Research Question.

## Research Question

As with any genealogical research project, it starts with a research question. By crafting a research question, this allows us to focus our research and helps us to avoid time wasted going down other rabbit holes. Sometimes the research question is simple yet specific and often is resolving a genealogical problem.

Your research question should be about an ancestor or clan in a specific place and time to the best of our knowledge. For example, "Who were the parents of Christiane F. Beck who was born on the 30<sup>th</sup> of October 1843 in Kolding, Vejle, Denmark?"

## Research Plan

After you have the research question in mind, next it to plan how you are going to solve the research question. Where are you going to look?

## FamilySearch Wiki

A quick way to figure this out is to go to [FamilySearch.org/wiki](https://www.familysearch.org/wiki) and filter to the location you are researching. Then decide what records are best to solve your research question based on the timespan of your ancestor. On the FamilySearch wiki, you'll find many hyperlinks showing you where those records are located.

## Cindi's List

[Cindi's List](#) is another free resource to help find locations of records if you are not finding what you are looking for on the FamilySearch Wiki.



## Online vs. On Location

While researching online is convenient, there are so many records that are not digitized that may hold the answer to your research question at local libraries, archives, historical and genealogical societies, that one should make offline research part of your plan. Seek out what is not online.

## Research

As they say in scuba diving, “plan your dive and dive your plan.” Same goes for genealogical research, **plan your research and research your plan.**

Once you have a solid idea of where to look for records, dive in and start looking for those records that are specific to your research question. Stay focused.

As you research, you’ll want to document what you find in your Research Notes, add the records to your files, and attach them to the ancestor’s profile in whatever software or online platform you are using. You’ll also want to add the data to a spreadsheet if correlating evidence as needed to resolve conflicts.

## Conflicting Data

During every research project you’ll run into conflicting data. Names may be spelled differently, birthdates may differ, family and household members may change over time. Correlating the evidence can help us to understand our ancestor’s life and resolve the conflicting evidence.

## Correlation of Evidence

Correlating Evidence can be done as you do your research or after you have collected all the documents you can find.

Many times, we’ll use Correlating Evidence to resolve conflicting facts by weighing the evidence for its strength deciding whether the facts are primary or secondary evidence, as it pertains to our research question. Deciding if it is an original or a derivative source can help us weigh the facts.

Correlating these facts from the records can help visualize how ages, names, places and all facts line up throughout the lifetime of our ancestors.

## One Ancestor vs. the Family Group

Outlining the facts and evidence can be done either per individual ancestors or in family groups (such as a husband, wife, and children). You can decide how you want to do this based on your research question. Does the research question span an entire lifetime or just one event? Knowing this might help you decide your strategy.

## Correlating Sources with Names, Places, and Dates

When correlating sources, we want to correlate names, places, and dates from each source (at minimum). Other details may be just as important to correlate such as occupations, parents, place of birth of parents, other family mentioned, and perhaps witnesses, etc.

## Types of Correlation Formats

In short, you can correlate evidence in any way you wish. Professionals typically use a grid such as what you find in a spreadsheet.

Often, I will correlate census records separately from other records only because of the additional information found in various census records. Here are some various ways to correlate evidence.

- Census Records - Ancestors Lifespan
- Other Records Compiled - Ancestors Lifespan
- All in One Spreadsheet – Family Group Collective Lifespan

You can do this on paper, but I highly recommend using spreadsheet software as you will add columns over the course of your research.

## Complex Reporting

Often, we use record type and names down the left side and the details (such as birthdates, places, age, etc.) in columns across the top of the spreadsheets.

In the image below you can see the various spellings of Christiane Beck's name and various birthdates. The one highlighted in red is what I'm using as her official birthday because it comes from her baptismal record that was recorded shortly after her birth and it is from a church record in Denmark where she was born. This weighs heavier in my evaluation than records recorded at much later date (not all shown here).

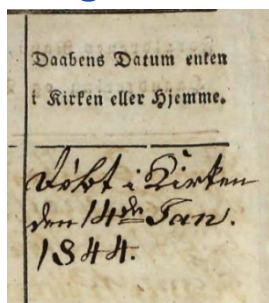
What is this document?	Name (Maiden if known)	Document Date	Event Date	Birth Date	Est. Birth Year	Age in Doc	Relationship	Marital Status	Place of Birth	Father	Father Birth Loc	Mother	Mother Birth Location	Mother's Maiden Name
Baptism	Christian Beck	1844	14 Jan 1844	30 Oct 1843						Johan Frederik Beck		Kirstine Marie Köhlert		
1845 Danish Census	Christiane Bech	1 Feb 1845		1843		2	Child		Kolding	Johann Fried. Bech	Kjøbenhavn	Kirstine Kohler	Kolding	Kirstine Kohler
1850 Danish Census	Christiane Bech	1850								Johan Frederich Bech		Kirstine Marie Bech		
1855 Danish Census	Christiane Beck	1 Feb 1855		1844		11	Child	Single		Johan Fredrik Beck		Kjerstine Marie Köhlers		
Denmark Church Confirmation	Christiane Beck	1858		30 Oct 1843						Johan Frederik Bech		Kirstine Marie Köhlert		
Marriage to Carl Schrøder	Christiane Becks	1871	5 Sep 1871	30 Oct 1843		27								

Figure 1 Example of One Person with Various Records

1855 Danish Census	<a href="#">Link</a>								
Name	Gender	Marital Status	Age	Birth Date	Residence	Residence Place	Relationship	Occupation	Religion
Johan Fredrik Beck	Male	Married	65	1790	I Stuen (In the living room)	Denmark	HOH	Undertøjmester Dagarleide	Lutheran
Kjerstine Marie Køhlers	Female	Married	54	1801	I Stuen	Denmark	Wife		Lutheran
Juliette		Single	13	1842	I Stuen	Denmark			Lutheran
Christiane		Single	11	1844	I Stuen	Denmark			Lutheran
Johannes		Single	8	1847	I Stuen	Denmark			Lutheran
Peter		Single	6	1849	I Stuen	Denmark			Lutheran
Mette Marie Heinsen Nissen	Female	Widow	50	1805	I Stuen	Denmark		Dreiner Garbaoring	Lutheran
Marine Pauline Amalie		Single	16	1839	I Stuen	Denmark			
Carl Christian Baanøer		Single	8	1847	I Stuen	Denmark			

Figure 2 Example of One Record and Family Group

## Google Translate Can Help



Danish

Daabens Datum  
Enten i kirken  
eller hjemme

↔

English

Date of baptism  
Either in the church  
or at home

This helped me to understand that this was the date of baptism in Danish records.

## Note Every Field

In my case, I had to translate some of the field headers to understand the documents in Danish. This is where Google Translate can be your friend. I am also fortunate to have connected with a distant Danish cousin (via Facebook) who translates the harder items for me.

## Simplified for Reporting

Sometimes we compile a lot of information when doing our research. When writing stories and reports it is best to truncate our findings to the important data that supports our case within the discussion of our reports.

Here we're trying to settle on the birthdate for Christiane Beck born in Denmark. As you can see, her birth date or estimated birth year appears in a long list of documents.

This helps simplify the data for the reader and helps us come to a logical conclusion.

What is this document?	Document Date	Birth Date or Est. Yr.
Danish Baptism	14 Jan 1844	30 Oct 1843
1845 Danish Census	1 Feb 1845	1843
1850 Danish Census	1850	
1855 Danish Census	1 Feb 1855	1844
Denmark Church Confirmation	1858	30 Oct 1843
Marriage to Carl Schrøder	5 Sep 1871	30 Oct 1843
1873 Passenger List	8 Aug 1873	
Denmark, Church Records, 1812-1918	17 Aug 1880	1846
1880 Denmark Census	1 Feb 1880	1846
Denmark Emigration Index 1868-1908	10 Jun 1882	1844
Passenger List	1882	1844
Find A Grave		1844
1855 Danish Census	1855	1844

## Conclusions

By abstracting all data and outlining it in a grid, you can see where patterns line up or mismatch. You can also see variations of names.

The final step is to evaluate the evidence by weighing the value of each piece of data and its source. How likely is the evidence to be accurate and why? We'll talk more about this in Evidence Analysis.