

Borders: What To Do When They Didn't Exist!

According to Diane L. Richard, some ancestors were hard to pin down, and for good reason!

IF YOUR FAMILY LIVED in the very center of a county in the center of the state and appears to have never moved, then, you might be in the enviable position of not needing to look any further than the records of that one county for your ancestors.

More often than not, whether you had a family living near a county border or at a state border, there is a good chance that they conducted their business or were involved in various matters (e.g., attending church, marrying, etc.) in adjacent counties or even the next state. Many recent projects have reminded me that families seemed to behave as if the "borders" didn't exist and it's important to recognize and appreciate that mentality and to make sure that you expand "where" you research, when you can't find them in the census, can't find marriages, burials, can't locate a deed or land grant, etc. It might be that all of these events took place within a 10 mile radius, which just happens to encompass a different county and maybe state.

Let's look at some examples of families who lived along various county and/or state borders and the importance of not limiting our research to where we "know" they lived.

Walden Family

This is a family where the patriarch, Nelson, was born in NC and we are trying to identify his parents and trace the family back to its roots. Between being born in NC and settling in MS, Nelson lived in Tuscaloosa, AL. At the same time, we find other contemporary individuals sharing the

Walden surname —Jesse, Richard and John. It is clear that Richard is a generation older and perhaps, maybe, a father to Nelson and/or

Walden all purchased land in the 1830s in Tuscaloosa. John and Richard purchased land adjacent to one another, while Nelson's and Jessie's land was nearby.

Other research had told us that Richard Walden died in adjacent Fayette County in 1860. On a whim, the land search was expanded on Richard, John, Jessie and Nelson and what do we find — both Nelson and Jessie also had land patents, on the same day, in neighboring Fayette County! In both cases, both Nelson and Jessie declared themselves to be living in the county where the land was purchased. Though we haven't yet dug further into the nitty gritty of the land, we do know enough to learn that their land was not adjacent along this border; suggesting that Nelson truly wasn't living in both counties on the same day and it may be that he declared his allegiances for convenience.

The bubbles on the map on page 22 show you the location of the land patents issued to someone with the surname of Walden in 1830s Tuscaloosa and Fayette Counties AL. Orange = Jessie, Yellow = Nelson, Red = John and Green = Richard. From this, you can see that their land purchases were all near the Tuscaloosa/Fayette border and that both Jessie and Nelson literally purchased land in both counties. So, where previously we were going to focus on the records of Tuscaloosa, we now know that the records of Fayette may have more relevance than previously thought.

Squire Gunter & Family

Whereas the previous example

| DESCRIPTION OF TRACT PART OF SECTION | No. ACRES | UNITED STATES TITLE TO WHOM SOLD/GRANTED | DATE OF SALE | No. OF CERTIF. / WARRANT |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|--|---------------|--------------------------|
| NE 1/4 of NE 1/4 | 40.1834 | John M. Davis | Aug. 18, 1834 | 28842 |
| SW 1/4 of NE 1/4 | 40.1834 | Joseph F. Doughty | Oct. 17, 1834 | 29338 |
| SE 1/4 of NE 1/4 | 40.1834 | Allen Wallin | Jan. 4, 1837 | 23866 |
| SW 1/4 of NE 1/4 | 40.1834 | Joseph F. Doughty | Oct. 17, 1834 | 29338 |
| NE 1/4 of NW 1/4 | 40.1834 | Richard Olive | Oct. 2, 1834 | 29151 |
| SE 1/4 of NW 1/4 | 40.1834 | Joseph F. Doughty | Oct. 17, 1834 | 29338 |
| SW 1/4 of NW 1/4 | 40.1834 | Richard Olive | Oct. 2, 1834 | 29151 |
| NE 1/4 of SE 1/4 | 40.1834 | Joshua Walbert | Feb. 10, 1834 | 18329 |
| SE 1/4 of SE 1/4 | 40.1834 | John Gilliam | Oct. 16, 1834 | 29334 |
| SW 1/4 of SE 1/4 | 40.1834 | Joshua Walbert | Feb. 10, 1834 | 18329 |
| NE 1/4 of SW 1/4 | 40.1834 | Joshua Walbert | Jan. 20, 1837 | 23334 |
| SE 1/4 of SW 1/4 | 40.1834 | John Wallin | Jan. 21, 1837 | 23337 |
| SW 1/4 of SW 1/4 | 40.1834 | Joshua Walbert | Jan. 20, 1837 | 23336 |
| NE 1/4 of NW 1/4 | 40.1834 | Richard Olive | Oct. 2, 1834 | 29151 |

Example page of information from the Tuscaloosa Tract book, as published in a series of books compiled by Maggie Hubbard Sudduth, showing the location of Richard and John Walden's land grants.

Jesse and/or John.

With so few records available for this period of time, land records became the main focus. A search in various abstracted books (including records from the Tuscaloosa County Alabama Tract Book) and also in the online Land Patent Search (Bureau of Land Management — General Land Office Records, www.glorerecords.blm.gov/search/default.aspx, tells us that Richard, John, Jessie and Nelson

focused on county borders and land ownership, this example focuses on a mix of county and state borders with regards to census and other records for a non-landed ex-slave African-American family.

In 1910, we find Squire (aka Esquire aka Boss) Gunter living in Stewart Creek Township, Surry, NC with his wife (Betsy) and 2 children, living next to a son. This was the last time that Squire was found in the census. The details provided were that he was 55, had been married for 31 years, was mulatto, born in Virginia (as were his parents). His wife was born in North Carolina (as were her parents). The couple had had six children, all of which were still living.

As soon as we start researching, we find that for the 1880 census, Esquire, wife (Elizabeth) and two children were living in Dan River, Patrick, VA. For this record, purportedly, Esquire and wife were born in NC, with the children born in VA. So, they had previously lived in the neighboring state of VA!

Now, the found record for the 1900 census is interesting, as we find Squire's wife, Betsy A, still living in Dan River, Patrick, VA with all six children, though no Squire.

So, the census tells us that the family lived in Patrick, VA and Surry, County, NC, between 1880 and 1910.

The next records pursued were marriage records. We know that for post-1868 NC, these are excellent records, regardless of



Two land patents were issued on the same day, 20 September 1839 to Nelson Walden, in two different counties, Fayette and Tuscaloosa, AL. In both cases, he claimed to be from the county where the land was situated. These are adjacent counties.

race. Additionally, Virginia also has good extant marriage records for the period.

1. S[quire] Gunter married B[etsy] A[nn] Stanley, 20 Dec 1877 in Patrick, VA. The groom and bride were both said to have been born in Stokes, NC.
2. Daughter Polly Gunter married 1 August 1902 in Patrick, VA and both she and her husband were born in Patrick, VA.
3. Son James Gunter married 6 November 1902 in Surry, NC. NC marriage records of the time do

not list birth place, though both bride and groom were living in Surry, NC at the time.

4. Daughter Mollie Gunter married 21 March 1907 in Patrick, VA and it was stated that she was born in Patrick, VA, though her husband was born in Surry, NC.

5. Son Thomas Gunter married 28 July 1907 in Patrick, VA and it was stated that he was born in Patrick, VA, though his bride was born in Surry, NC.

Notice that in the same year, 1902, siblings married in both Patrick, VA and Surry, NC.

We can see from census and marriage records, that this family had connections to Patrick, VA, as well as Surry and Stokes counties in NC.

The map snippet illustrates that these were all adjacent counties and it was important to look at the records of all three counties to learn about this family. Since the project is only partially completed, our search may extend to still more nearby counties in the future!

Welch/Welsh Family

In the adjacent counties of Henry County VA and Stokes, Rockingham and Forsyth Counties NC, we find another mulatto/black family doing the same dance in the records of several counties across a state line. This brief synopsis gives you a sense of the lack of loyalty the family seemed to have to any one county!

- 1865 Birth — son — Spencer, Henry, VA
- 1870 Census — Snow Creek, Stokes, NC
- 1880 Census — Snow Creek,

Records

Stokes, NC & other part in Horse Pasture, Henry, VA

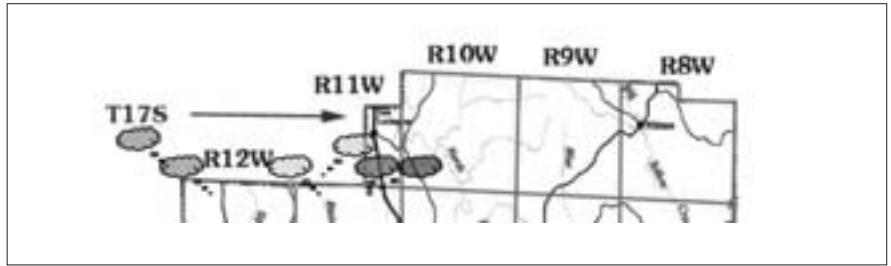
- 1880 Marriage — son — Lewisville, Forsyth, NC
- 1889 Marriage — son — Winston, Forsyth, NC
- 1892 Marriage — son — Reidsville, Rockingham, NC
- 1900 Census — Madison, Rockingham, NC & Forsyth, NC
- 1910 Census — Madison, Rockingham, NC
- 1917 Marriage — son — Belews Creek, Forsyth, NC
- 1920 Census — Madison, Rockingham, NC

Mainor/Maynor Family

Though many families made big leaps from, say, NC to the Southeast and/or the Midwest, or even further west, some families seemed to migrate as new, more westerly, counties were formed (e.g., from Indian lands in Georgia) or as territories/republics became states (e.g., Texas in 1845) or took a more leisurely route to what may have been their ultimate destination all along.

In 1850, we find Eli Mainor and family in Caddo Parish, LA. It just so happens that Caddo Parish was a LA/TX border county. Panola County, TX was formed in 1846, one year after TX statehood and we find Eli and family in the 1860 census for Panola. A move of just a few miles has the family in a new state and county! The family eventually moved a couple of more counties west (Wood County, TX), where they remained.

The forementioned 1850 census is very important with regards to this family. It gives you a road map of where the family lived and for about how long as they slowly moved from North Carolina to Caddo Parish, LA — NC, SC, GA, AL, TX and LA. Note that they did a dance between TX and LA suggesting that they dallied in TX for a few years while it was the Republic of Texas and then



This partial township/range map for Tuscaloosa County AL has bubbles showing the land grants purchased by those with the Walden surname in the 1830s. Those bubbles just north of the border represent Fayette County, AL locations.

returned to that state just a few years later. So, even in this case, where the family migrated westward, looking at border areas became important when researching the Caddo Parish, LA and Panola County, TX areas — keeping the time frame fairly open

county and often in a different state. Due to varying marriage laws, it was sometimes easier to get married in one place over another — think Gretna Green (Scotland) as a classic example. Often, certain locales were “easier” as the marriage age was



1852 Theodor Fischer Cassel map of Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, (part of the David Rumsey Historical Map Collection) shows the proximity of Surry and Stokes Counties in North Carolina with Patrick County, Virginia.

when researching the records for these two locales.

Marriages

This is one type of event where you have an increased chance of finding a document in a different

younger and parental permission would not be required, or you could do it all in one day with no waiting period, no blood test was required, etc. Additionally, it was sometimes possible to get a license in one county or state and then

| | | | | | | |
|------|-------------|----|----|---------|------|---------|
| 2939 | Eli Manir | 40 | 3m | Blanner | 750. | Blanner |
| | Lucas | 37 | 2 | | | Blanner |
| | George W | 15 | 2m | | | Blanner |
| | Mary C. | 11 | 2 | | | Blanner |
| | Sam C. | 18 | | | | Blanner |
| | Magdalen A. | 8 | | | | Blanner |
| | John B. | 6 | 3m | | | Blanner |
| | Catharine | 2 | 2 | | | Blanner |
| | Miriam | 2 | 3m | | | Blanner |

This 1850 Census snippet of the Eli Manir [Maynor] family in Caddo Parish, LA gives a roadmap to their travels and suggests that they dallied along the TX/LA border area before finally settling in TX.

marry in another county or state.

This West Virginia Archives & History News write-up published in November 2007, www.wvculture.org/history/ahnews/1107news.pdf, captures the essence of this topic for West Virginia research:

"If you don't find a marriage record in the expected county, check adjacent counties, including adjacent counties across state borders. During different time periods, elopement has been popular, especially from the 1920s through the 1940s. Elopement across state borders was not uncommon, particularly if one's home state required blood tests and/or fees and a border state did not, or if a clerk in a particular location was known to turn a blind eye to an underage bride or groom. West Virginians in the northeastern counties often eloped to Maryland, and those in the western counties eloped to Kentucky, usually to Catlettsburg in Boyd County. Those along the northern Ohio River border of West Virginia may have eloped across the nearest bridge. Those in the southeast may have gone to Pearisburg in Giles County, Virginia."

Other similar articles published by West Virginia Archives & History discuss marriage laws and how they impact where to look for marriage records. And, this article about Pennsylvania's marriage laws and why and where couples went to marry is fun to read: "When You Can't Find Grampa's Marriage Record," <http://pastprologue.wordpress.com/2009/02/23/when-you-cant-find-grampas-marriage-record>.

[wordpress.com/2009/02/23/when-you-cant-find-grampas-marriage-record](http://pastprologue.wordpress.com/2009/02/23/when-you-cant-find-grampas-marriage-record).

So, marriage laws and personal circumstances drove a lot of couples to marry outside the county or state where they lived, requiring us to look further afield for documents of these unions. Though, most couples didn't travel too far to get married.

Conclusion

Hopefully, through these simple examples, you have gotten a taste for why it can be important to broaden ones' search geographically. Though the examples covered the 19th and 20th centuries, the same factors are also important in earlier (and later) research.

So, some reasons to look in other counties/states for records on your ancestors:

- Living along a particular waterway or geographic element, regardless of political boundaries
- Distance to courthouse and other services (e.g., land in one county, deed registered in another)
- Less stringent marriage laws
- Family had a long-time connection to a particular church or preacher
- Predilection to remain in a particular area and yet move around as desired land became available or changed needs necessitated relocating
- Living in one state, working in another (not just a modern phenomenon)

All of the above and other reasons suggest that for many families, their records are not

necessarily all going to be found in repositories of the county where they lived. And, the closer they lived to a county border or state border, the more likely you are to find records scattered across two states and three or more counties.

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Diane L. Richard has been doing genealogy research for over 24 years. She currently does professional research in NC and DC and can be found online at www.mosaicrpm.com/Genealogy.