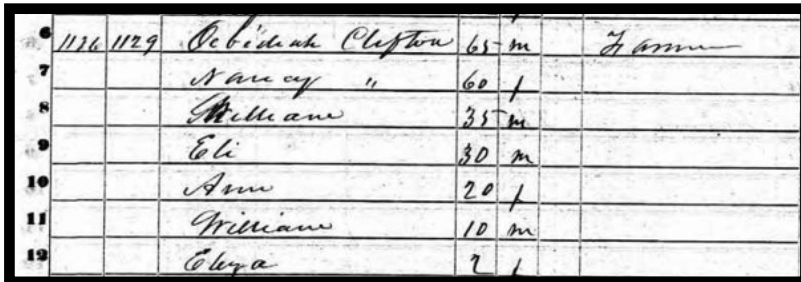


An Ann by Any Other Name

I am easily distracted in my family history research. I might find the name of a minister on a marriage record and go searching for the churches he was affiliated with. That, in turn, might lead to researching the church where the marriage occurred, leading to an investigation of an interesting place name for the church location. You get the picture.

The Name Mystery



6	1126	1129	Obediah Clifton	65 m	Ann
7			Nancy "	60 f	
8			William	35 m	
9			Eli	30 m	
10			Ann	20 f	
11			William	10 m	
12			Elyza	7 f	

Anyway, I was troubled by the name of the wife of my 4th great grandfather, Obediah Clifton (abt 1783 - aft 1850). In the 1850 Census, the wife of Obediah is identified as 'Nancy'.

However, the death certificate for Obediah's youngest daughter (Sarah Clifton) identifies the mother as 'Ann' and the death certificate for Obediah's older daughter (Nancy Hall Clifton) identifies the mother as 'Annie'. I also have a military pension record that identifies Obediah Clifton's wife as Ann Callaway. To keep things neat, I really wanted Nancy and Ann to be the same person.

Know your Nicknames

A shot-in-the-dark Google search for "Ann Nancy Clifton" turned up an unexpected result that eventually led to an answer - Nancy was a common nickname for Ann! A lot of readers probably know this already, but this is new to me. Based on an article from [Name Nerds](#) entitled "[Where do Our Nicknames Come From?](#)", I learned that it was once common to affectionately refer to a child or family member by putting the word 'mine' in front of the name. Referring to my daughter you might say "mine Ann". Referring to your neighbor's daughter you might say "thine Ann". Eventually, the 'n' sound was contracted with the beginning of the name to form Nan, Nannie or Nancy. Similarly, Edward becomes "mine Ed" and eventually 'Ned'.

Philology

Not being one to rely on a single source for any piece of evidence, I eventually found a wonderful book on Google Books with the ponderous title [Transactions of the American Philological Association, Volume 23](#), which includes an article titled "[Attraction in English](#)" by Charles P.G. Scott. Published in 1892, this 126 page article discusses "English Words which have Gained or Lost and Initial Consonant by Attraction", attraction being the transfer of the final consonant of one word to the following word. On page 295 of the book he describes how Ann became Nan.

15. **Ann** or *Anne*, formerly also *An*, ME. *Anne*, from OF. *Anne*, Latin *Anna*. *Ann*, cald by her father or mother *mine Ann*, and by their gossips *thine Ann*, came to be *my Nan*, *thy Nan*, and so *our Nan*, *her Nan*, and *Nan* without a possessiv.

A little further reading reveals that while Nan derives from Ann, Nancy actually derives from Annis, which is an older form of Agnes (mine Annis - Nannis - Nance - Nancy). In any case, Nancy was a common nickname for Ann and I can conclude that Nancy Clifton and Ann Clifton are one in the same person.

The moral of the story is that a knowledge of traditional nicknames is useful in genealogical research. I found the Charles Scott article to be a fascinating read and highly recommend it. For those looking for a quicker means to an end, Family Search has a [wiki list of traditional nicknames](#) that is a great resource.

I have never encountered Philology before this. [Wikipedia defines Philology](#) as 'the study of language in written historical sources'. Investigating this a little further, I really think that Philology is a useful minor for anyone majoring in family history. But I digress...