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# BEYOND THE FIRST CLUE: UNRAVELING A GENEALOGICAL MYSTERY WITH THE GPS

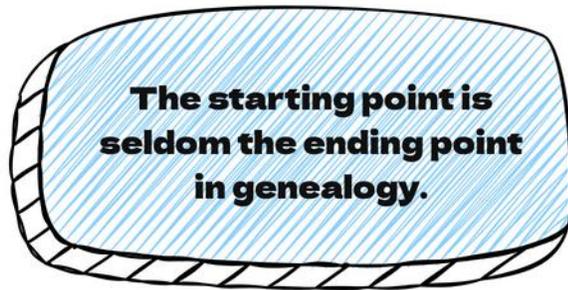
Board for Certification of Genealogists®

20 January 2026



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An age-browned newspaper clipping found among the loose papers in a black notebook announced the death and described the life of Delany DeVine, including an 1855 birth in Minnesota. With this direct evidence, can we report Delany's birthplace as "Minnesota"?

First appearances can deceive. Because information from any single source can be wrong, genealogists know they should not stop with the first, or the second, or the third source when seeking to answer a research question.

## Devine Rites Set Wednesday At Goodwin

Funeral services for Mrs. Delany DeVine, 91, a resident of Goodwin, who died Saturday at the home of her daughter, Mrs. J. R. Johnson of Goodwin will be held Wednesday, February 20, at 2 o'clock in the Baptist church at Goodwin. Burial will be, made in Goodwin cemetery. The body will remain at the Shaw-Messer chapel until the time of the service.

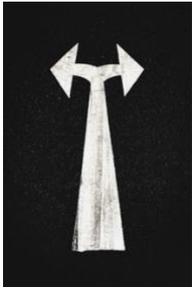
Mrs. DeVine was born on February 14, 1856, in Minnesota. She married Edmund DeVine at Rock Rapids, Ia. on September 3, 1881. Mr. DeVine died in 1921.

Mrs. DeVine had lived 38 years in the Goodwin community and for seven years made her home in Goodwin. She was a member of the Baptist church in Goodwin.

She was preceded in death by her husband, four sisters, and two brothers.

Her survivors include three daughters, Mrs. Vena Kirby of Watertown; Mrs. J. R. Johnson of Goodwin; and Mrs. George Ploof of Watertown; three sons, Edmund DeVine of Slayton, Minn.; John DeVine of Grover; and Charles DeVine of Goodwin; two sisters, Mrs. Tressa Stiner of Oakland, Calif.; and Mrs. Lydia Scott of Des Moines, Ia.; 27 grandchildren and 11 great-grandchildren.

"Devine Rites Set Wednesday at Goodwin," ca. February 1946, from unidentified newspaper, probably Deuel Co. or Codington Co., South Dakota; Sadie (Mitchell) DeVine Hill papers, privately held by Sadie's granddaughter (Delany's great-granddaughter).



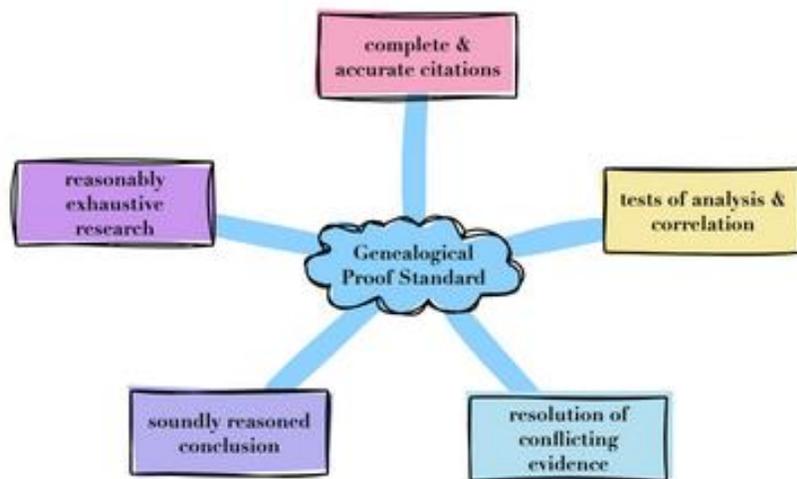
## Which Way?

The temptation exists. You come across a source with information that helps you fill out information on your online or software family tree. Should you go ahead and plug into your tree that Delany was born in Minnesota? Her obituary says so. What's the problem with accepting that and moving on to the next bit of information you need?

The problem is that if you just collect names and those bits of information, you are not doing genealogy well nor are you likely compiling accurate information. In the case of Delany DeVine's birthplace, going deeply beyond her obituary brings you to a lengthy set of conflicting evidence. Different sources claim two different states and locations hundreds of miles apart for her birth site. Things become complicated. How do you wend your way through the confusing maze of evidence you have uncovered?

## Enter the Genealogical Proof Standard (GPS) and Genealogy Standards

The Board for Certification of Genealogists has developed and published *Genealogy Standards* "as a guide to sound genealogical research and a way to assess the research outcomes that genealogists produce. They are standards for anyone who seeks to research and portray accurately people's lives, relationships, and histories."<sup>1</sup>



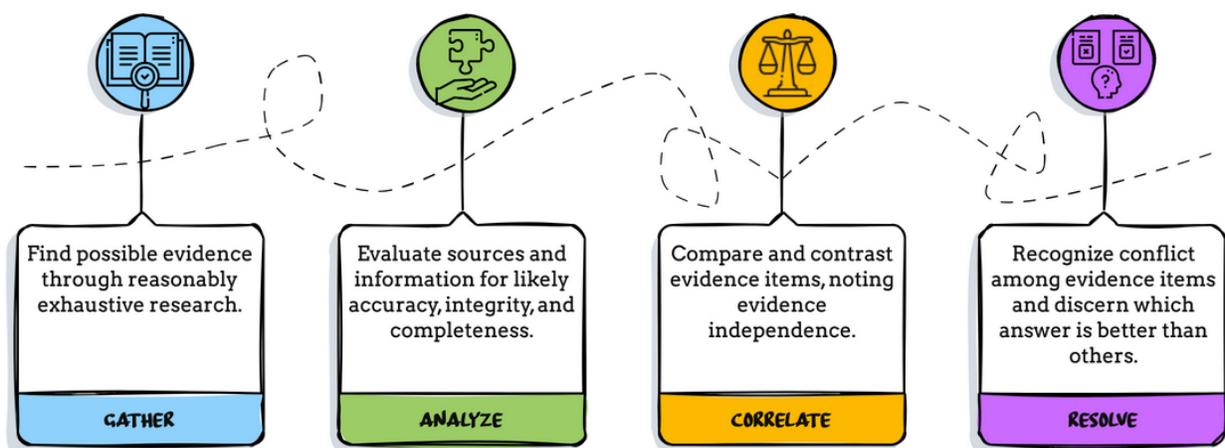
The GPS provides a measure for completed research. The individual standards guide research and provide measures for evaluating processes and outcomes.

<sup>1</sup> Thomas W. Jones, "Introduction to the First Edition," *Genealogy Standards*, second edition revised (Ancestry.com, 2021), xxiv.

## Guiding the Research Process with the GPS

After you develop your research question (see Genealogy Standard 10), a research process guided by the genealogy standards may be visualized in this way:

### \* RESEARCH PROCESS



### Gather

Standard 17 (Extent) says that “thorough research attempts to gather all reliable information potentially relevant to the research question, including evidence items conflicting or consistent with other evidence items.”<sup>2</sup> Standard 44 (Evidence reliability) reminds us that “any seemingly relevant evidence item may be proved to be reliable or not reliable.”<sup>3</sup> Together, these two standards warn us that the search for Delany DeVine’s birthplace cannot stop with the direct evidence from her obituary that she was born in “Minnesota.”

How extensive does our research have to be before it can be considered “reasonably exhaustive?” *Genealogy Standards’s* definition of *reasonably exhaustive research* provides a five-criteria checklist:

<sup>2</sup> Board for Certification of Genealogists (BCG), *Genealogy Standards*, second edition revised (Ancestry.com, 2021), 14.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

- ❑ “Yield at least two sources of independent information items agreeing directly or indirectly on a research question’s answer.”
- ❑ “Cover sources competent genealogists would examine to answer the same research question.”
- ❑ “Provide at least some primary information and direct, indirect, or negative evidence from at least one original record.”
- ❑ “Replace, where possible, relevant authored narratives, derivative records, and information that is secondary or undetermined.”
- ❑ “Yield, where possible, data from sources that indexes and databases identify as potentially relevant.”<sup>4</sup>



Looking for Delany’s birthplace, reasonably exhaustive research led to nineteen separate sources providing direct or indirect evidence.



### Analyze

Standards 35 (Source analysis) and 36 (Information analysis) require the evaluation of each source’s and each information item’s “likely accuracy, integrity, and completeness.”<sup>5</sup> While other factors are also relevant, this analysis should include identifying the informant, source-type, and information-type.

For example, the starting-point obituary can be identified as an authored source with information provided by an unnamed person who was almost certainly a family member. Because Delany was living at the home of her daughter, Mrs. J. R. Johnson, at the time of her death, that daughter, Lillian (DeVine) Johnson was a likely informant. Because Lillian (or another family member/informant) could not have been present at the time of Delany’s birth, the information is considered secondary.



### Correlate

Standard 47 (Evidence correlation) says that “Genealogists test their evidence by comparing and contrasting evidence items. They use such correlation to

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 85–86.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 21–22.

discover parallels, patterns, and inconsistencies, including points at which evidence items agree, conflict, or both.”<sup>6</sup>

Correlation of the seventeen sources providing direct evidence for Delany’s birthplace showed disparate answers: Minnesota (4 sources), “Southwestern Pt. of Minnesota” (1), “Lavern Minn” (1), Iowa (10), “Clayton Co Ia” (1).



## Resolve

Standard 48 (Resolving evidence inconsistencies) requires that “Genealogists attempt to resolve conflicts or incompatibilities among two or more evidence items.”<sup>7</sup> In resolving evidence conflicts, Standard 38 (Source preference) and Standard 39 (Information preference) suggest that “original records that reliable scribes carefully created soon after the reported events” and that “information provided by consistently reliable participants, eyewitnesses, and reporters with no bias, potential for gain, or other motivation to distort, invent, omit, or otherwise report incorrect information” are more likely to be accurate and reliable.<sup>8</sup>

All evidence claiming someplace in Minnesota as Delany’s birthplace appeared within secondary or undetermined information found in authored or original sources created in 1920 or later. In most of those instances, the identified or likely informant was a child or son-in-law of Delany. When Delany was enumerated during a census within either her husband’s or father’s household between 1856 and 1915, her birthplace was consistently reported as Iowa. The 1895 Iowa state census reported her birthplace specifically as Clayton County, Iowa. The earliest appearance of Delany is as a one-year-old enumerated in the 1856 Iowa state census within her parents’ household in Boardman Township, Clayton County, Iowa. Inasmuch as one of Delany’s parents was the likely informant in this census, this evidence is considered likely primary information. Other records document her family’s presence in Clayton County immediately before and after Delany’s birth and provide indirect evidence. This early primary information found in original documents permits resolution of the evidence conflict in favor of a birthplace in Clayton County, Iowa.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 23–24.

## Using the GPS to Unravel a Genealogical Mystery

Reasonably exhaustive research, careful analysis of sources and information, correlation of all evidence items, and resolution of any conflicts that appear together makes possible a soundly reasoned argument answering the research question. Citing sources supporting each claim of fact not common knowledge and writing how evidence led to the discovered answer complete meeting the Genealogical Proof Standard.

### For Further Exploration

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