



Evidence Guidelines for Evaluating Genealogical Sources

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Analyzing, Reasoning, & Proving

Terminology¹

Sources

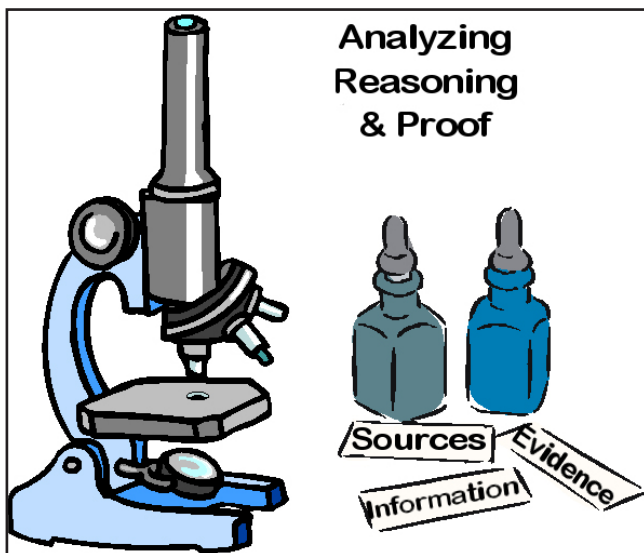
Original source—written, oral, or other material object as distinguished from a copy (or duplicate) of it or from an extraneous source of its content.

Derivative source—coming from another, a reproduction (duplication), transcript, abstract, or other copy (or repeated communication) of an original.

Information

Primary information—original or first-hand information which is recorded or related at the time of a particular event (or very soon thereafter) by (1) a knowledgeable eyewitness or participant in the particular event that is the subject of the record or (2) an official whose duties included making a full, accurate record of the event.

Secondary information—information subsequently supplied by a person who recorded it after hearing about the event or the details of the event from someone else.



Evidence

Direct evidence—factual information or data which is clearly stated

Indirect evidence—evidence relating to specific circumstances in which the existence of certain facts are inferred

Evaluation—the process of analyzing a particular source, and information therein.

¹ The base of the terms herein defined are from Henry Campbell Black's *Black's Law Dictionary*, 6th edition (St. Paul, Minn.: West Publishing Co., 1990).



10 Steps to Analytical Success

[Adapted from “Evidence-Evaluation Standards” in *The BCG Genealogical Standards Manual*.]

Researchers must

1. Conduct reasonably extensive research
2. Analyzed and correlated data
 - a) distinguish between original and derivative sources
 - b) distinguish between primary and secondary information
3. Explain significant inconsistencies
4. Consider the background context of all data including changes in geographic boundaries, types of records created, characteristics of records, laws, customs, and regional history
5. Collate all data with previous presumptions or conclusions
6. Collate direct and indirect evidence with the problem being investigated
7. Consider previous assumptions or conclusions within the context of the newly found data
8. Assemble all evidence with care and caution, examining the record for indirect evidence
9. Weight each piece of evidence carefully according to its credibility
10. Seek resolution for all contradictory evidence

Suggested Resources

1. Board for Certification of Genealogists. *The BCG Genealogical Standards Manual*. Provo, UT: Ancestry, 2000. [Particularly standards 19–34]
2. *Black's Law Dictionary*. Bryan A. Garner, editor. 6th edition. St. Paul, Minn.: West Publishing Co., 1990.
3. Bouvier, John. *A Law Dictionary: Adapted to the Constitution and Laws of the United States of America and of the Several States of the American Union*. Revised 6th edition, 1856. [Available online at <http://www.constitution.org/bouv/bouvier.htm>.]
4. *The Chicago Manual of Style*. 15th edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.
5. Devine, Donn. “Evidence Analysis.” In *Professional Genealogy: A Manual for Researchers, Writers, Editors, Lecturers, and Librarians*. Elizabeth Shown Mills, editor. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 2001.
6. ———. “Evidence and Sources—And How They Differ.” *Ancestry Magazine* 15 (May/June 1997).
7. ———. “Reliable Information—Whatever the Source.” *Ancestry Magazine* 19 (May/June 2001).
8. Evidence: A Special Issue of the National Genealogical Society Quarterly. *National Genealogical Society Quarterly* 87 (September 1999).

9. Greenwood, Val D. *The Researchers Guide to American Genealogy*. 3d edition. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 2000.
10. James, T. Mark. "Abraham Ott of Orangeburg, South Carolina: Direct vs. Indirect Evidence." *National Genealogical Society Quarterly* 93 (June 2005).
11. Jones, Thomas W., Ph.D., CG. "A Conceptual Model of Genealogical Evidence: Linkage between Present-Day Sources and Past Facts." *National Genealogical Society Quarterly* 86 (March 1998).
12. ———. "The Children of Calvin Snell: Primary versus Secondary Evidence." *National Genealogical Society Quarterly* 83 (March 1995).
13. ———. "Genealogical Proof Standards." *National Genealogical Society Quarterly* 89 (September 2001).
14. Leary, Helen F.M. "Evaluating Research Data." In *North Carolina Genealogy and Local History*. 2d edition. Raleigh: North Carolina Genealogical Society, 1996.
15. Merriman, Brenda Dougall. *Genealogical Standards of Evidence*. Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2010.
16. Mills, Elizabeth Shown. *Evidence! Citation & Analysis for the Family Historian*. Baltimore, Maryland: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1997.
17. ———. *Evidence Explained: Citing History Sources from Artifacts to Cyberspace*. 2d edition. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 2009.
18. ———. *Evidence Analysis: A Research Process Map*. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 2007.
19. ———. *Quick Sheet: Citing Online Historical Resources, Evidence! Style*. Revised edition. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 2006.
20. ———. *Quick Sheet: The Historical Biographer's Guide to Cluster Research (the FAN Principle)*. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 2009.
21. ———. *Quick Sheet: The Historical Biographer's Guide to Finding People in Databases & Indexes*. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 2009.
22. ———. *Quick Sheet: The Historical Biographer's Guide to the Research Process*. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 2009.
23. Rose, Christine. *Genealogical Proof Standard: Building a Solid Case*. San Jose, California: privately published, 2001
24. Russell, Judy. *Building a Family from Circumstantial Evidence*. Surprise, Arizona: Legacy Family Tree, 2012. [Webinar recording available at http://www.legacyfamilytreestore.com/ProductDetails.asp?ProductCode=W_EVIDENCE]
25. Stevenson, Noel C. *Genealogical Evidence: A Guide to the Standard of Proof Relating to Pedigrees, Ancestry, Heirship and Family History*. Revised edition. Laguna Hills, California: Aegean Park Press, 1989.

Online Resources

- Board for Certification of Genealogists (BCG) "Skillbuilding" Articles from *OnBoard!* newsletter of the BCG: <http://www.bcgcertification.org/skillbuilders/index.html>
- Evidence Explained: <https://www.evidenceexplained.com/>
<https://www.facebook.com/evidenceexplained>

