

Valid and Unsound Assumptions: What Was She Thinking?

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It is not uncommon for us to neglect to question our assumptions. Failure to search for evidence to support our assumptions and to critically test evidence can lead to inaccurate conclusions. This case study demonstrates how challenging valid assumptions and unsound assumptions reveals previously undiscovered evidence and upends faulty conclusions.

ASSUMPTIONS¹

- ▶ **Fundamental**: generally accepted as true
- ▶ **Valid**: generally accepted as true unless convincing contradiction
- ▶ **Unsound**: may be valid, cannot be accepted without supporting evidence

DANGERS!

It is not uncommon for us to fail to question our unsound assumptions. When we fail to search for the supporting evidence we can

- ▶ Trace the wrong individual,
- ▶ Trace the wrong family, or
- ▶ Reach the wrong conclusion.

TEST!

Attempt to prove or disprove each unsound assumption.

Examples of Unsound Assumptions

Abbreviations

- ◆ Jr. May not indicate a father-son relationship.
- ◆ Ia. Sometimes used for the state of Indiana.

Censuses

- ◆ Marital status: widow / widower
- ◆ Wife of the husband is the mother of his children.
- ◆ Wife with the same first name in different censuses is the same person

¹ Board for Certification of Genealogists, *Genealogy Standards*, second edition (Nashville, TN: Ancestry, 2019), pp. 26–27. Standard 45. Assumptions.

- ♦ Individual living in 2 consecutive censuses lived in the same geographic location during the intervening 10 years.
- ♦ Everyone enumerated in a household was alive on the date of the census.
- ♦ Kinship relationship of same-surname males and females living in the same household
 - ♦ Kinship relationship of boarders and lodgers
 - ♦ Ages / places of birth

Names

- ♦ Right name: wrong person
- ♦ Right person: different name, different spelling
- ♦ Spelling variations
- ♦ Nicknames

CASE STUDY

TWO FAULTY ASSUMPTIONS, TWO FAMILIES

UNEXPECTED RESULTS AND MORE QUESTIONS

Research Question

Who was the husband of **Elizabeth Larzelere**, born 1795—1804, living in 1820 in Bedford County, Pennsylvania, with 4 children under the age of 10?

Unsound Assumption

Elizabeth Larzelere was a widow.

Research Plan: Bedford County

Search for the proof of death of Elizabeth's husband

Probates / Wills

Guardianship

Cemeteries

Church records

Land Records

Search for other Larzelere families living in the area

Research Question

Who were the wife and the child of **Thomas Britton Larzelere** mentioned in the *History of Bucks County Pennsylvania from the Discovery of the Delaware to the Present Time* by Davis?

Unsound Assumptions

Thomas Britton Larzelere was married once and had one daughter.

Research Plan: Bucks County and Philadelphia

Search for marriage record

Search censuses

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