

The One Place Study as a Research Tool

Board for Certification of Genealogists® Presentation

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What is a One Place Study?

A One Place Study is an in-depth investigation of a specific geographic location over time. Unlike traditional genealogical research that follows individual family lines, a One Place Study examines all aspects of a particular community—its inhabitants, landscape, buildings, economic activities, social structures, and cultural practices. This approach combines genealogy, local history, demography, and social history to compile and analyze information about a place and its people. This method can lead to understanding the broader historical, social, and economic contexts of your ancestors' lives. It can potentially break through genealogical "brick walls." They examine how communities formed, evolved, and sometimes dissolved through historical events, economic changes, and demographic shifts. A One Place Study has no fixed guidelines. It is flexible to include whatever you feel is important, whatever records are extant, or whatever information will meet your research goals.

These studies reveal relationships that extend beyond kinship networks, illuminating the importance of neighbors, business associates, religious affiliations, and community leaders. Understanding these connections can explain marriage patterns, occupational choices, migration decisions, and other life events that shaped family histories.

Genealogy Standards in Practice

A one place study can support the Genealogical Proof Standard (GPS) by emphasizing thorough research and careful documentation leading to well-reasoned written conclusions.

- Reasonably exhaustive research
- Complete and accurate source citations
- Analysis and correlation of the evidence
- Resolution of conflicting evidence
- Soundly reasoned, coherently written conclusion

Applying the Genealogical Standards to all aspects of conducting a one place study will produce a study of value. Almost every Standard can apply to work on a one place study. Many are highlighted in this guide. The noted Standards are from: Board for Certification of Genealogists, *Genealogy Standards*, second edition, revised (Washington, D.C.: Turner Publishing Co., 2021).

Benefits of Conducting a One Place Study

- Understanding historical context
- Getting to know all the people
- Seeing patterns

- Providing evidence when documents do not make specific statements
- Exposing strong and weak connections among the people
- Observing how the built and natural environments influenced the people and their activities

Challenges of Conducting a One Place Study

- Lacking a defined structure
- Defining the scope
- Analyzing large amounts of data
- Encountering gaps in records
- Accessing records
- Structuring all the collected data

Selecting a Place

Choose a location that intrigues you or is relevant to your genealogical research. This could be a place where ancestors lived or a community with historical significance. Keep in mind that the larger the physical place or the longer the time frame you want to study, the larger the amount of data you will need to gather. Start smaller, if possible, to keep it manageable.

Places to consider

- | | |
|----------------|----------------------|
| • City | • Business |
| • Town | • Church |
| • Village | • School |
| • Hamlet | • House |
| • Neighborhood | • Civic Organization |
| • Street | • Military Company |
| • Building | • Ship |
| • Cemetery | • Signature Quilt |

Creating a Locality Guide

Start your one place study by creating a comprehensive locality guide. This guide serves as an inventory of all known and potential repositories of information relevant to your chosen place and time period. It should detail record types available, the time periods they cover, and where they are held including both physical and online repositories. Developing this guide helps you systematically uncover sources that might exist outside the immediate geographical area of your study, such as records in a parent county or regional archive. A locality guide can serve as a checklist to ensure relevant records are not missed. This thorough approach to source identification is instrumental in planning your study.

A locality guide can contribute to meeting standards, including Standard 9: Planned Research and Standard 10: Effective Research Questions. Once sources are identified you can develop a plan to gather the information from those sources. Genealogists typically have a focused research question that leads them to consult the sources most likely to answer the question. In the case of a one place study, those focused questions are often created after a body of information from

identified sources is gathered. In essence, gathering information for a one place study is creating a database which you can consult to answer research questions which helps fulfill Standard 13: Source-based Context. If your locality guide is comprehensive, you will be consulting all types of sources that can provide information and evidence to meet your research goals. And finally, the locality guide can help you meet Standard 35: Source Analysis. Understanding the quality of a source will help you use it effectively.

Learning about the history of a place will help fulfill Standard 12: Broad Context. Understanding historical boundaries, migration patterns, and other historical factors will provide context for your research and interpreting the records. Standard 64: Background Information which would be included in your assembled, written results helps those reading what you have written about your place to understand the economic, ethnic, historical, legal, religious, and social contexts. Standard 73: Biographical Information helps you apply that context to individuals who are unique in time and place.

Sources for a One Place Study

Any sources typically used in genealogical research are valuable for a one place study. A wide variety of source types will help reconstruct a community's past. Standard 14: Topical Breadth tells you to consult sources naming or affecting your research subjects. Consult a wide variety of sources that name the people inhabiting a place and attempt to collect all potentially relevant information. Standard 17: Extent tells you to go beyond your person or family of interest and Standard 19: Data-collection Scope to collect all relevant information. Gathering information from all available sources certainly fulfills these standards and helps you attain reasonably exhaustive research.

Source types to consider

- Censuses
- Vital records
- Religious Records
- Cemeteries
- Wills and Probate
- Land Records
- Tax Rolls
- Town and City Directories
- Court Records
- Newspapers
- Manuscript Collections
 - Diaries and Memoirs
 - Business Records
 - Fraternal and Civic Organizations
- Visuals
 - Maps
 - Postcards
 - Photos

Data Management Tools

- Spreadsheets (Excel, Google Sheets):
 - Ideal for consistently structured information found in census, land, tax, and vital records
 - Create unique keys for each entry (e.g., census year + page + dwelling number)
 - Useful for sorting and filtering to identify patterns and outliers
- Genealogy Trees (Legacy, Roots Magic, Family Tree Maker, FamilySearch, Ancestry, MyHeritage, WikiTree):
 - Build interconnected family trees for the entire community
 - Track both kinship and non-kinship relationships
- Database Applications (Airtable, Notion):
 - Organize research notes and sources in relational databases
 - Link records across tables
- Word processors
 - Create research reports and narratives for unstructured information and stories
- Mapping Tools:
 - Deed platting software (DeedMapper, Meets & Bounds)
 - Geographic Information Systems (Google Maps, Google Earth, ArcGIS)
- One Place Study tools (Name & Place, WikiTree Spaces)

A one place study will use more than one tool to manage the information collected.

Collecting and Citing Information

Thoughtful information collection and citation practices are fundamental to the usefulness of a one place study. When extracting information from any source, always record all the elements needed for the citation when you first encounter the source.

Standard 5: Citation Elements guides you to answer key questions about your sources:

- Who?
- What?
- When?
- Where?
- Where in?

Standard 6: Format tells you to use Evidence Explained which is based on the Chicago Manual of Style. Having full citation information at the beginning of gathering the information from a source will help you evaluate the sources' quality and allow for easy sharing of the information later whether it is adding it to a family tree or writing a narrative.

Demographic and Social Analysis

One Place Studies enable demographic and social analysis, including:

- Population growth and decline over time

- In- and out-migration patterns (places of origin and destination)
- Birth rates
- Age at death
- Marriage patterns
- Occupational clustering and specialization
- Economic status and wealth distribution
- Formation of ethnic or religious enclaves
- Evidence of epidemics

These analyses often reveal important historical conditions that shaped the place and its people. Some of the larger trends can suggest the actions and experiences of individuals. Gathering information beyond individuals helps fulfill Standard 41: Evidence Scope.

As information is collected, you can ask focused research questions of the data. Several standards for researching address how to approach the evidence formed from these focused questions. You are seeking evidence, whether it is direct, indirect, or negative, in answer to your research questions. Standard 40: Evidence Mining informs you that the information you have gathered only becomes evidence when it answers a specific research question. Standard 47 Evidence Correlation guides you in testing that evidence against hypotheses to correlate it and resolve inconsistencies. Resolving inconsistencies is addressed in Standard 48: Resolving Evidence Inconsistencies. Compiling a large body of data gives you the opportunity to correlate it in many ways. Mining the evidence is where all the work in gathering information on a place pays off.

Writing and Sharing Your Results

The last part of the Genealogical Proof Standard is a well-reasoned, written conclusion. Writing does not need to wait until the end of the study. There will be many opportunities to write about portions of your study as it is conducted. Keep detailed research logs, write short biographical sketches or profiles, and capture thoughts in narrative form while researching and recording information. These notes will help when you are ready to share your findings. Standard 50: Assembling Conclusions from the Evidence guides you on how to determine you have conducted enough research to write up your conclusions. Writing often exposes research gaps and suggests additional questions to research. Clear and accurate source citations supporting a written narrative will help meet Standard 58: Research Scope. Clearly connect a citation to the information you are writing about.

Share your written conclusions on your one place study webspace or in a report about your place. Standard 58: Research Scope reminds you that your conclusions-our genealogical proofs-are composed of source citations and written narrative. Consider various platforms: a personal blog or website, articles submitted to genealogical or local history journals, or contributions to collaborative platforms such as the WikiTree One Place Studies project.

Enhance your writing with the graphs and charts you created as you analyzed the information or include visuals you have collected for your study. Be sure you have permission to share these. Assembling tables, genealogy charts, and maps to illustrate and explain your research fulfills

Standard 65: Content, specifically bullet points 2, 3, and 4. Illustrations enhance your writing and make information and analysis easier to share.

Communities and Selected Resources

One Place Studies online:

All About That Place (<https://www.youtube.com/@SocietyofGenealogists>)

Recordings of sessions from the 2023 and 2024 conferences are on the Society of Genealogists' YouTube channel.

Homestead Hebrews (<https://homesteadhebrews.com/>)

A website by Tammy Hepps devoted to the historical Jewish community of Homestead, Pennsylvania.

Society for One-Place Studies (<https://www.one-place-studies.org/studies/>)

Find registered one place studies on a map listed by country.

Visualizing Historic Networks: Angoulême in 1764

(<https://histecon.fas.harvard.edu/visualizing/angouleme/index.html>)

The project explores the lives and social networks of individuals in the town of Angoulême in the eighteenth century.

WikiTree One Place Studies (https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Category:One_Place_Studies)

WikiTree maintains over 1,301 One Place Studies. WikiTree supports one place studies by hosting free webpages where study leaders can collect and publish their findings and seek collaborators. Studies are categorized by country and alphabetically by place name.

WikiTree One Place Study Map (<https://apps.wikitree.com/apps/harris5439/opsmap/>)

Explore the studies located on a map of the world.

Books and Articles:

Few, Janet. *Ten Steps to a One-Place Study*. Blue Poppy Publishing, 2020.

Few, Janet. *Putting Your Ancestors in their Place: A Guide to One Place Studies*. Blue Poppy Publishing, 2024. Kindle Edition.

Philibert-Ortega, Gena, "Genealogy 101: One-Place Studies," *GenealogyBank* blog (<https://blog.genealogybank.com/genealogy-101-one-place-studies.html>)

Courses:

Pharos Tutors: First Steps to a One-Place Study

(<https://www.pharostutors.com/first-steps-to-a-one-place-study>)

International Institute of Genealogical Studies: Organising a One-Place Study

(<https://genealogicalstudies.com/enrol/index.php?id=213>)