

Building Your Genealogical Skills

Class #3- Analyzing

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Objectives

- Understand the basics of genealogical citation
- Be able to list key questions to ask about a genealogical source and the records it contains.
- Practice analyzing individual records and sources by applying sound genealogical analysis principles.

Citations

[Why Bother With Citations](#)

There are multiple reasons you should use citations to document where you found a fact. First, knowing where you found a fact helps you evaluate the accuracy of the information. Second, knowing the source of a fact allows you, or someone else, to go back and find it again. Also, in the internet age, URL's come and go. Finally, citations are part of the Genealogical Proof Standard

[Genealogical Proof Standard](#)

1. Reasonably exhaustive research
2. Complete, accurate citations to the source or sources of each information item
3. Tests—through processes of analysis and correlation—of all sources, information items, and evidence
4. Resolution of conflicts among evidence items
5. A soundly reasoned, coherently written conclusion.

[Principles](#)

Capture the following elements

1. Who = creator or author -- sometimes omitted if redundant with title (What) or publisher (Where IS)
2. What = title, database name
3. Where IS = publisher, geographic location

4. Where IN = volume and page number, specific record of interest
5. When = two dates may be needed - date viewed, if online, and date created

Sequence the citation roughly in order of Who, What, Where IS, Where IN. The When is linked (velcroed) to whatever it is the date of.

Special considerations

- US census (own, unique sequencing)
- Find A Grave (creator/author is last)
- Two-level online citations – (1) Online source, including location of the record of interest: (2) Original source

Citation Examples

Books

Martin E. Hollick, *New Englanders in the 1600s: expanded Edition* (Boston: NEHGS, 2012), 125.

Cemetery

Find A Grave, (www.findagrave.com : accessed 3 January 2018), memorial # 54008051 for Louisa Thaxter Danielson, digital image; citing Limington Village Cemetery, York County, Maine, added by "Elizabeth," 20 Sep 2015.

Brookdale Cemetery, Dedham, Norfolk, MA, tombstone of Virginia E. Chamberlain 4 January 1999, photo by author, 2005.

Census

"1920 U.S. Federal Census," Suffolk County, Mass., population schedule, Boston Ward 25, ED 588, p. 15A, dwelling 73, family 676, household of James Lauthers; online images viewed at *Family Search* (www.familysearch.org : accessed 6 June 2012 image 32 of 32); citing NARA microfilm publication T625, roll 741.

"1830 U.S. Federal Census," Mercer, Pennsylvania, population schedule, page 183; online images viewed at *Ancestry.com* (www.ancestry.com : accessed 5 May 2006 image 2 of 5); citing NARA microfilm publication M33, roll 107.

Church Records

Trinity Church, Fairfield, Conn., Marriages 1785-1829, p. 2; viewed at Fairfield Historical Society, Fairfield, Conn.

Vital Records

“Ohio Deaths 1908-1953,” online image viewed at *Family Search* (www.familysearch.org : accessed 8 August 2014, image 1328), certificate #49104 for Jenny Homer, 6 January 1917; citing records of Cleveland, Cuyahoga, Ohio.

“Massachusetts Vital Records, 1841-1910,” online images viewed at *American Ancestors* (www.AmericanAncestors.org : viewed 19 Feb 2020), marriage of Charles Coombs and Ethel Marshall, 10 December 1906, Lawrence, MA; citing Lawrence Town Records, Volume 562, page 515.

Land and Probate

“Maryland Land records 1748-1851,” online image at *FamilySearch* (www.familysearch.org : accessed 23 July 2019, film 007737894, image 658 of 768), deed, Leonard and Elizabeth Smith to John Sigafoss, 15 April 1789, Lot #30, Berlin; citing Frederick County, Maryland Land Records, WR 8, folio 541.

“Maryland, Wills 1737-1918, indexes 1747-1930,” online image viewed at *Family Search* (www.FamilySearch.org : accessed 30 June 2019, FHL film 5081361, image 699), will of Malchor Staley, made 19 March 1791, proved, 23 March 1791; citing Maryland Orphans Court, Frederick County, Liber GM-2-372.

Newspapers

“Road Notice,” *Examiner* (Frederick, Maryland), Wednesday, August 30, 1865, page 3, online image viewed at *GenealogyBank.com*.

Step 5 – Analyze

Don't just read, examine

Analysis Principles

Question 1: Is the record you are looking at an original or derivative source? Digital images of an original are considered equivalent to the actual original.

- Original – From the time period being researched. Sometimes referred to as “primary – e.g., by FamilySearch” Sources treated as primary/original:
 - Duplicate original
 - Record (Clerk's) copy

- Image copy
- Derivative – Written by someone who did not experience the events or time period. Sometimes referred to as “secondary – e.g., by FamilySearch.” Includes:
 - Transcript
 - Extract
 - Abstract
- https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/Primary_sources

Question 2: When was the record created, i.e., how soon after the event it is capturing?

Question 3: Who provided the information? A participant? Someone else?

Question 4: Which information in the record is primary (first-hand)? And which information is secondary (second-hand)

- An eyewitness to the event provides firsthand knowledge
- Someone who did not participate in the event provides secondary or second-hand knowledge.

Common errors in reading old records

- Misreading words and dates
- Failing to understand why the source was created
- Failing to understand the origin and history of a record
- Interpreting past events with a 21st century lens
- Misunderstanding legal terms - see Barbara Jean Evans – A to Zax: A Comprehensive Dictionary for Genealogists & Historians, Alexandria, VA: Hearthside Press: 1995
- Overlooking relevant information

Reading Old Documents

- What is boilerplate and what is substance?
- Spelling and paleography
- https://www.ancestry.com/wiki/index.php?title=Tips_for_Reading_Old_Handwriting

Beware of Transcriptions

- Check the original
- Look for other examples of the letter or number you are having trouble reading
- Each person has a unique writing style

Summary

Citations

- Capture the Who, What, When, Where IS, Where IN
- The order of items in the citation is flexible
- That said – don't get tied in knots

Analysis

- Are you looking at an original, derivative or authored source?
- When was the record created?
- Who provided the information?
- Does the record contain primary (eyewitness) or secondary (non-participant) information?