

# Building Your Genealogical Skills

## Session 3: Analyzing

Ann G. Lawthers, Genealogist, [Ann.lawthers@nehgs.org](mailto:Ann.lawthers@nehgs.org)

### 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)
- 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](http://www.findagrave.com) : accessed 3 January 2018), memorial # 154008051 for Louisa Thaxter Danielson, digital image added by “Elizabeth,” 20 Sep 2015; citing Limington Village Cemetery, York County, Maine.

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, Massachusetts, population schedule, Boston Ward 25, ED 588, p. 15A, dwelling 73, family 676, household of James Lauthers; digital image at *FamilySearch* ([www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org) : accessed 6 June 2012, FHL film 1820741, image 29 of 42); 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](http://www.ancestry.com) : accessed 5 May 2006 image 2 of 5); citing NARA microfilm publication M33, roll 107.

#### *Church Records*

First Congregational Church (Milton, Norfolk, Massachusetts), “Records of the Church“, baptism of Mary Vose, 4 June 1749; citing records of Milton Historical Society in the custody of the Milton Public Library, Milton, Norfolk, Massachusetts.

“Church records, 1668-1881,” digital images, *FamilySearch* ([www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org) : accessed 21 April 2022, FHL Film 7833583, image 84), baptism for David Rogers, 20 June 1773; citing records of Greenfield Hill Church, Fairfield, Fairfield, Connecticut.

### *Land and Probate*

“Maryland Land records 1748-1851,” online image at *FamilySearch* ([www.familysearch.org](http://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](http://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; image viewed at *GenealogyBank* ([genealogybank.com](http://genealogybank.com) : accessed 15 July 2019).

### *Passenger Lists*

“New York Passenger Lists, 1820-1957,” digital image, *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) : accessed 17 August 2019) record for Watzlaw Masher, arrival 13 Nov 1912; citing NARA microfilm publication M237, roll number not given.

### *Vital Records*

“Ohio Deaths 1908-1953,” online image viewed at *Family Search* ([www.familysearch.org](http://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,” marriage of Charles Coombs and Ethel Marshall, 10 December 1906, Lawrence, MA; digital images viewed at *American Ancestors* ([www.AmericanAncestors.org](http://www.AmericanAncestors.org) : viewed 19 Feb 2020); citing Lawrence Town Records, Volume 562, page 515.

## Step 5 – Analyze

Don't just read, examine

### Principles for Analysis

Analysis involves engaging the brain when you look at a record. First, you will evaluate the **Source**. Is it:

- Original: first recorded form
- Derivative: from something already written or spoken
- Authored: compiled

Next you will evaluate the **Information** in the record (multiple records in a single source)

- How long after the event was the record made?
- Who was the informant? A participant? Someone else?
- Which pieces of information represent:
  - Primary information: the informant had first-hand knowledge.
  - Secondary information: the informant had secondhand knowledge.

Finally, you will evaluate the **Evidence** provided by the information and decide whether it directly answers your question (Direct Evidence) or whether it provides clues (Indirect Evidence).

Robert Charles Anderson, author of the *Great Migration* series of books wrote a compact guide to genealogical analysis (*Elements of Genealogical Analysis* (Boston: NEHGS, 2014)). In the guide he makes a distinction between sources and records (see page 1 of book).

- A **source** is a coherent collection of **records** created by a single jurisdiction or a single author for a defined purpose.
- A **record** is that portion of a **source** which pertains to a single event.