

# Building Your Genealogical Skills

## Part 3: Analysis

### Module 7 – Analysis

#### 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.

#### Evaluating a Source

Ask yourself: 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
- Authored – Ask yourself whether the author cites the provenance of his or her information.