

Genealogy Boot Camp

Session 3: Analyzing Information and Evidence

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Evaluating a Record

Analysis involves engaging the brain when you look at a source and a record. *Examine the record, don't just read it.* First, evaluate the **Source** (from Session 2):

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

Next, evaluate the **Record** itself (*remember, there are multiple records in a single source*):

- What is the purpose of the record? Who created it?
- Is the record legible?
- Is any information missing?
 - Is the document ripped, torn, wrinkled, etc.?
 - Do I have all the pages?
 - Is the digital image complete?

Finally, evaluate the **Information** in the record:

- What genealogical information is present?
- How much time passed between the event and its recording?
- 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.

How long after the event was the record created? You are attempting to determine whether any recall mistakes could have affected the documentation. Records created soon after an event are to be preferred over records written down long after the event.

Who provided the information for the record? A participant in the event? Someone else? Here you are attempting to figure out how likely is it that the information in the record is accurate. A participant in an

event is more likely to have accurate information, although keep in mind that each participant may have a different view of the event.

Which information in the record is primary (first-hand)? And which information is secondary (second-hand). A single record potentially has many pieces of genealogical information. A death certificate is the classic example of a document with multiple pieces of genealogical information, some of which are first-hand or primary knowledge (e.g. date of death, place of birth) while some pieces of information are secondary (e.g. date of birth).

Evaluating the Evidence

Information is the content within a record—the raw data or factual statements presented. **Evidence** refers to the interpretation of information within a record. It may support, directly or indirectly, a conclusion or answer a question. Genealogists often use multiple pieces of information from multiple records to provide evidence for any given conclusion.

Direct evidence directly answers a research question. **Indirect evidence** requires additional pieces of information. The nature of the evidence is always tied to the question being asked. Evidence is not intrinsically direct or indirect; it depends on the question. Evidence can be direct but incorrect (e.g. an incorrectly recorded mother's maiden name on a death certificate). **Negative evidence** is the lack of information or “silence” in a record about our research question.

Examples of Record and Evidence Analysis

Example 1 – Death Certificate

File No. **19393**
Registered No. **897**

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
BUREAU OF VITAL STATISTICS
CERTIFICATE OF DEATH

Primary Dist. No. 2

1. PLACE OF DEATH:
(a) County Allegheny
(b) Township _____
(c) Borough Pittsburgh
(d) City _____
(e) Name of hospital or institution SCHENLEY APARTMENTS
(f) Length of stay: In hospital or inst. _____ (g) In this community _____

2. USUAL RESIDENCE OF DECEASED:
(a) State Penna. (b) County Allegheny
(c) City or town Pittsburgh
(d) Street No. 4000 Fifth Avenue
(e) If citizen of foreign country, name country _____

3. (a) FULL NAME MAUDE BELL PLOWMAN

3. (b) If U. S. Veteran, complete reverse side of certificate _____ 3. (c) Social Security No. None

4. Sex F race W 5. Color or _____ 6. (a) Single, widowed, married, divorced Widowed

6. (b) Name of husband or wife George Taylor Plowman 6. (c) Age of husband or wife if alive _____ years

7. Birth date of deceased May 30 1874

8. AGE: Years 72 Months 8 Days 5 If less than one day _____ hr. _____ min.

9. Birthplace Turkey
(City, town, or county) (State or foreign country)

10. Usual occupation Retired

11. Industry or business _____

12. Name Rev. Newton Hervey Bell
13. Birthplace Iowa
14. Maiden name Emma Hall Curtis
15. Birthplace New York

16. (a) Informant's own signature Jennifer Plowman (R)
(b) Address Schenley Apts., Pittsburgh, Penna.
(c) Place Homewood County Allegheny State Penna.

17. (a) Cremation (b) Date thereof 2-10-47
(c) Place Homewood County Allegheny State Penna.

18. (a) Signature of funeral director R. J. Hoffenduffe
(b) Address H. SAMSON, Inc., 557 Neville St.

19. (a) FEB 7 1947 (b) _____

MEDICAL CERTIFICATION
20. Date of death: Month Feb. day 5 year 1947 hour 11 PM minute 58
21. I hereby certify that I attended the deceased from Jan 24, 1947, to Feb. 5, 1947 that I last saw her alive on Feb. 4, 1947 and that death occurred on the date and hour stated above.

Immediate cause of death Cerebral hemorrhage
Left Hemiplegia
Due to Hypertension
From history

Other conditions _____
Major findings: Of operations X Of autopsy X

22. If death was due to external causes, fill in the following:
(a) (Probably) Accident, suicide, or homicide (specify) _____
(b) Date of occurrence _____
(c) Where did injury occur? _____
(d) Did injury occur in or about home, on farm, in industrial place, in public place? _____

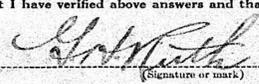
23. Signature S. Schill Address Schenley Apts Date signed 2/4/47

MARGIN RESERVED FOR BINDING
WRITE PLAINLY WITH UNFADING INK—THIS IS A PERMANENT RECORD
N. B.—Every item of information should be carefully supplied. AGE should be stated if properly ascertained. Each statement of OCCUPATION is very important. See instructions on back of certificate.

Question	Answer
1. Is the Source original, derivative or authored?	Original
2. How long after the event was the Record created?	Several dates appear on the record. The specific date is not important. What is important is that the record was created shortly after death.
3. Who was the informant? Did the informant have first-hand knowledge?	The informant was the deceased's daughter-in-law. The deceased had lived with her son and daughter-in-law for 15 years prior to her death. The informant had first-hand knowledge for much about the deceased

Question	Answer
4. Which pieces of genealogical information on the record are primary and which are secondary?	Place of death and name of spouse are examples of primary information. Birth Date and places and parents are examples of secondary information.
5. Which pieces of evidence directly answer <u>which</u> questions?	Birth date: Direct (although keep in mind the informant wasn't present at the deceased's birth) Parents: Direct Birthplace and birthplace of parents: Indirect – the information is incomplete

Example 2: Draft Registration Card

Form 1 30-261 REGISTRATION CARD No. 28		20-4-8. A REGISTRAR'S REPORT 10 78 35	
1 Name in full	George Herman Ruth	1 Tell, medium, or short (specify which)?	6' 2" Slender, medium, or stout (which)? Medium
2 Home address	680 Commonwealth Boston Mass.	2 Color of eyes?	Brown Color of hair? dark Bald?
3 Date of birth	Feb 7 1894	3 Has person lost arm, leg, hand, foot, or both eyes, or is he otherwise disabled (specify)?	
4 Are you (1) a natural-born citizen, (2) a naturalized citizen, (3) an alien, (4) or have you declared your intention (specify which)?	Natural born	I certify that my answers are true, that the person registered has read his own answers, that I have witnessed his signature, and that all of his answers of which I have knowledge are true, except as follows:	
5 Where were you born?	Baltimore Maryland U.S.	WARD 8	Lewis A. Amistad (Signature of Registrar)
6 If not a citizen, of what country are you a citizen or subject?		Product 9	
7 What is your present trade, occupation, or office?	Base Ball - Boston American 28	City or County	Boston Mass
8 By when employed?		State	June 5 1917 (Date of registration)
9 Have you a father, mother, wife, child under 12, or a sister or brother under 12, solely dependent on you for support (specify which)?	None	1078-5	
10 Married or single (which)?	Married Race (specify which)? Russian		
11 What military service have you had? Rank; branch; years; Nation or State	None		
12 Do you claim exemption from draft (specify grounds)?	No		
I affirm that I have verified above answers and that they are true.			
 (Signature or mark)			

Question	Answer
1. Is the Source original, derivative or authored?	Original
2. How long after the event was the Record created?	June 1900. It was simultaneous for the purpose it was being created – a count of citizens of the United States. However, it was up to 70 years after some of the informant’s birth and 50 years after arrival in this county. Memory could be an issue.
3. Who was the informant? Did the informant have first-hand knowledge?	Don’t know. Have to hope it was a member of the household.
4. Which pieces of genealogical information on the record are primary and which are secondary?	Can’t assume its primary because you don’t know the informant was. Could have been a neighbor as allowed by census data collection protocols. This is a case of neither primary nor secondary, but unknown information.
5. Which pieces of evidence directly answer <u>which</u> questions?	Direct: birth year, year of arrival Indirect: year of naturalization – between 1859 and 1900.

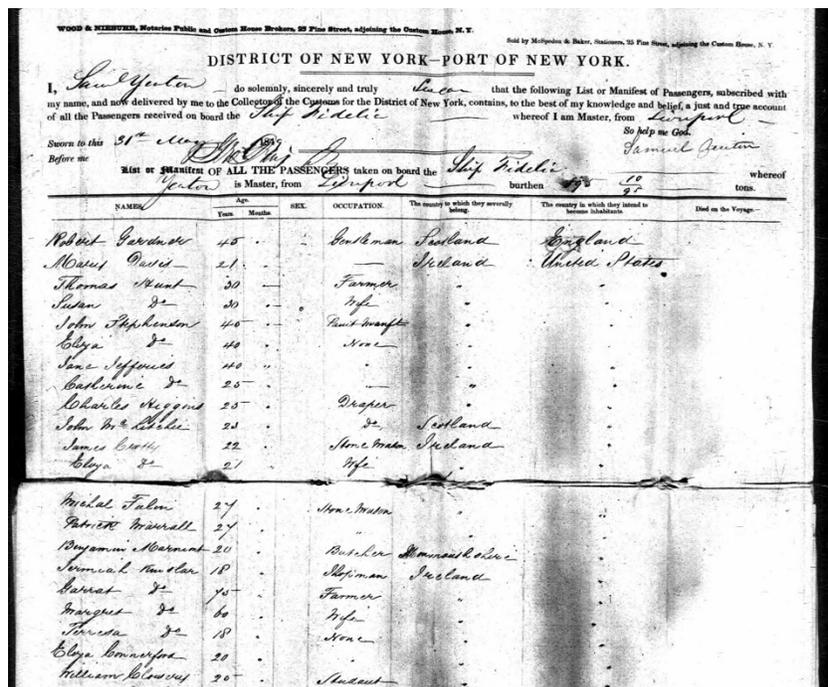
Example 4 – Published Genealogy

<p>GENEALOGY of the Whittlesey-Whittelsey Family</p> <p>By <i>Charles Barney Whittlesey</i> No. 1945</p> <p>SECOND EDITION 1941</p> <p>New York WHITTLESEY HOUSE London MCGRAW-HILL BOOK COMPANY, INC.</p>	<p>128 <i>WHITTLESEY GENEALOGY.</i></p> <p>312^a MARY ANN. 312^b JOHN, b. Mar. 9, 1785. 312^c WILLIAM, b. April 5, 1787.</p> <p>313. DOLLY COGSWELL (Anna^m, Eliphalet^t, Eliphalet^t, Johnⁿ), b. May 22, 1767; m. Stephen Branch; she died July 20, 1802. They resided near Bennington, Vt. Their children were :</p> <p>313^a DOLLY. 313^b CLARISSA. 313^c STEPHEN.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">MEMORANDA.</p> <p>In 1800 Mrs. Anna (Whittlesey) Cogswell, her (Dolly's) mother, and John Cogswell, made a journey of one hundred miles on horseback, to visit Mrs. Branch in her Vermont home. [Cogswell Genealogy.]</p> <p>314. WILLIAM COGSWELL (Anna^m, Eliphalet^t, Eliphalet^t, Johnⁿ), b. July 23, 1769; m. Amaryllis Johnson (a sister of his brother Roger's wife), b. Feb. 20, 1765, in Salisbury, Conn. They resided at New Preston, Conn. Col. Cogswell d. Aug. 28, 1823; Mrs. C. d. Mar. 14, 1826. Their children were :</p> <p>i MARY ANN, b. Jan. 6, 1792; m. Sept. 12, 1816, John Milton Holley. ii AMARYLLIS, b. Sept. 24, 1793; m. Mar. 23, 1818, Chauncey Perry. iii RUTH, b. Aug. 24, 1795; m. Oct. 8, 1828, Dr. Jethro Hatch. iv SARAH JOHNSON, b. Sept. 26, 1797; m. Sept. 15, 1818, Luman Whittlesey, No. 633. v WILLIAM JOHNSON, b. Nov. 4, 1799; m. June 12, 1839, Alma Canfield Sterling. vi THEODORE SEDGWICK, b. April 27, 1801; m. Oct. 19, 1826, Mary Morcia Maria Gregory. vii ELIZA, b. May 1, 1803; m. Jan. 12, 1829, William H. Downes. viii JULIA MARIA, b. Feb. 16, 1805; m. 1824, Romanta Seymour. ix FANNY ABIGAIL, b. Feb. 16, 1809; m. Oct. 8, 1828, Dr. Mark Pratt.</p>
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Question	Answer
1. Is the Source original, derivative or authored?	Authored
2. How long after the event was the Record for William Cogswell created?	Publication dates is not the same as when an individual record was created. In a compiled genealogy, the author typically engaged in months of correspondence with family members. Often the correspondence has not survived so we don't know when a particular letter supplied the information about William Cogswell.
3. Who was the informant for information about William Cogswell? Did the informant have first-hand knowledge?	Author is not the same as the informant. Don't know who the informant was.
4. Which pieces of genealogical information on the record are primary and which are secondary?	All secondary
5. Which pieces of evidence directly answer <i>which</i> questions?	Direct <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Birth – 23 July 1769 • Wife – Amaryllis Johnson • Death date – 28 Aug 1823

Question	Answer
	<p>Indirect</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Place of death. The author states they resided at New Preston, Connecticut but doesn't tell us where he died. Probably, New Preston, but the books doesn't say that directly.

Example 5 – Immigration



Question	Answer
1. Is the Source original, derivative or authored?	Original
2. How long after the event was the Record created?	Manifests were typically filled out at the port of departure and the information transferred to the arrival ports forms. So, the time lapse is the time it took to cross the ocean.
3. Who was the informant? Did the informant have first-hand knowledge?	The passenger provides the information on the passenger lists.

Question	Answer
4. Which pieces of genealogical information on the record are primary and which are secondary?	All primary.
5. Which pieces of evidence directly answer <u>which</u> questions?	Direct: names, ages, occupation, date of arrival Indirect: Since age is given, one can estimate the year of birth as 1827.

Summing Up

Writing a proof or research summary is necessary in some situations (e.g. some lineage society applications) and in some instances merely puts the researcher’s mind at rest that an exhaustive search has been performed and conclusions accurately drawn. Putting your research, analysis, and evidence into narrative form can make it clear whether or not a research question has truly been answered.

First, clearly state the question you are trying to answer. Next, assemble the evidence you have collected that is related to question.

Plan for writing. Some popular strategies are:

- Building blocks – lead with strongest piece of evidence; support with additional pieces
- Syllogism (If A=B and B=C then A=C)
- Multiple hypotheses (useful for same name situations)

Begin by presenting an overview of the situation and state research question. Then begin to present the evidence, a piece at a time.

While writing make sure you resolve any conflicts between the items of evidence. For example:

- State the conflict.
- Give possible explanations why the conflict exists.
- Solve the conflict through source and information analysis and correlation of different pieces of evidence.

The final paragraph is a conclusion.

Resources

Elizabeth Shown Mills, “QuickLesson 2: Sources vs. Information vs. Evidence vs. Proof,” *Evidence Explained: Historical Analysis, Citation and Source Usage* (www.evidenceexplained.com : accessed 20 July 2023); posted 22 January 2012, updated 18 October 2019.

Elizabeth Shown Mills, “QuickLesson 13: Classes of Evidence—Direct, Indirect & Negative,” *Evidence Explained: Historical Analysis, Citation and Source Usage* (www.evidenceexplained.com : accessed 20 July 2023); no post date.

Marc McDermott, “Genealogical Proof Standard,” *Genealogy Explained* (<https://www.genealogyexplained.com/basics/genealogical-proof-standard/> : accessed 20 July 2023); posted 22 March 2022.

“Research Report Examples,” *Board for Certification of Genealogists* (<https://bcgcertification.org/learning/skills/genealogical-work-samples/#RR> : accessed 20 July 2023).

Shelley K. Bishop, “How to Write a Genealogy Research Report,” *Family Tree Magazine* (<https://familytreemagazine.com/research/genealogy-research-report/> : accessed 20 July 2023); originally published July 2016.