

Virtual Genealogical Skills Bootcamp

Session 2: Analyzing Sources

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Principles of Analysis

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.

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**:

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

Next, evaluate the **Record** and the **Information**. Evaluate the **Evidence** provided by the information and decide whether it directly answers your question (Direct Evidence) or whether it provides clues (Indirect Evidence). See Session 3.

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.

Citations and Source Analysis

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.

The most important aspects of your citation style are that it is **consistent** and that it allows the reader to **locate the record** on their own.

Tip #1- Cite everything that isn't common knowledge.

Tip #2- Cite as you write.

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.

For more on the Genealogical Proof Standard, see <https://bcgcertification.org/ethics-standards/> and <https://www.genealogyexplained.com/basics/genealogical-proof-standard/>.

Principles

Roughly in order of Who, What, Where IS (geographic location), Where IN. The When is linked to whatever it is the date of. For online citations, the Who is usually combined with the publication information Where IS to reduce duplication.

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 (publication information in parentheses), geographic location.
4. Where IN = item of interest, record of interest with volume and page number.
5. When = several dates may be needed - date viewed, if online, and date created or date of event.

A helpful sequencing for online databases from *Evidence Explained* QuickLesson 26,¹ “Name of Database in Quotation Marks,” type of database (e.g., index vs. online images), *Title of Website in Italics* (URL : access date), image number, specific item of interest; source-of the source data.

Citation Examples

Templates for citing various types of sources are shown in the boxes below, with placeholder text shown in [Blue](#). Examples are shown below the boxes.

Books

[Author](#), [Title](#) ([City](#): [Publisher](#), [publication date](#)), [page](#).

Martin E. Hollick, *New Englanders in the 1600s: Expanded Edition* (Boston: NEHGS, 2012), p. 25.

Note: include volume number, reprint, 2nd edition, etc. as needed

Cemetery

Online

Find A Grave ([URL](#) : [date accessed](#)), memorial [Number](#) for [Name](#), digital image (if have photo of tombstone), added by [Name](#), [Date](#); citing [Cemetery Name](#), [County](#), State.

Personal visit

[Cemetery Name](#), [Town](#), [County](#), [State](#), grave marker for [Name](#), [Date of Death](#); photo by author [Date](#).

¹ Elizabeth Shown Mills, “QuickLesson 26: Thinking Through an Ancestry.com Citation,” *Evidence Explained: Historical Analysis, Citation and Source Usage* (www.evidenceexplained.com : accessed 3 April 2021); posted 2 March 2019.

Online

Find A Grave (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.

Personal Visit

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

Census

1790-1840

Year U.S. Federal Census, *County, State, Town or City*, page *Number*, Line *Number*, household of *Name*; digital image at *Website* (URL : *accessed date*, if viewed at Family Search, FHL Film number and image number); citing NARA microfilm publication *Number*, roll *Number*.

1850-1870

Year U.S. Federal Census, *County, State*, Schedule, *Town or City*, page *Number*, Dwelling *Number*, Family *Number*, household of *Name*; digital image at *Website* (URL : *accessed date*, if viewed at Family Search, FHL Film number and image number); citing NARA microfilm publication *Number*, roll *Number*.

1880 onwards

Year U.S. Federal Census, *County, State, Schedule Type* schedule, *Town or City*, ED *enumeration district*, page *Number*, dwelling *Number*, family *Number*, household of *Name*; digital image at *Website* (URL : *accessed date*, if viewed at Family Search, FHL Film number and image number); citing NARA microfilm publication *Number*, roll *Number*.

1790-1870

1830 U.S. Federal Census, Mercer County, Pennsylvania, population schedule, page 183, household of Jacob Homer; digital image at *Ancestry* (www.Ancestry.com : accessed 5 May 2006); citing NARA microfilm publication M33, roll 107.

1880 onwards

1900 U.S. Federal Census, Westchester, New York, population schedule, Eastchester, ED 64, page 2A, dwelling 20, family 26, household of James Bellew; digital image at *Ancestry* (www.Ancestry.com : accessed 27 March 2020); citing NARA microfilm publication T623, no roll number given.

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 : accessed 6 June 2012, FHL film 1820741, image 29 of 42); citing NARA microfilm publication T625, roll 741.

Church Records

Online

“*Database Name*,” *Type* (digital images or index), *Website* (URL : *accessed date*, if viewed at FamilySearch FHL film # and image number), *Type of Record* (baptism, marriage, burial, etc) for *Name*, *Date*; citing records of *Church Name*, *Town*, *County*, *State*.

Onsite

Church Name (*Town*, *County*, *State*), “*Register Title*,” page *Number*, *Record Type* for *Name*, *Date*; if viewed at an historical society, add *Repository Name*, *Town*, *County*, *State*.

Online

“Church records, 1668-1881,” digital images, *FamilySearch* (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.

Onsite

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.

Land and Probate

Online

“Database Name,” Type (digital images or index), Website (URL : accessed date, if viewed at FamilySearch FHL film # and image number), Type of Record (deed, will, guardianship, etc.) for Name, Date, Book; citing records of Church Name, Town, County, State.

From Courthouse

County, State, Book, page Number, Name1 to/from Name2 (for land) Name (for probate), Date.

“Maryland Land records 1748-1851, images 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, Book WR 8, folio 541.

“Wills 1737-1918; indexes 1747-1930,” images 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, Maryland, Liber GM-2-372.

Military

Draft Card

“Database Name,” Type (digital images or index), Website (URL : accessed date, if viewed at FamilySearch FHL film # and image number), Name, Serial no., order no., Draft Board number or name, city, county, state; citing NARA microfilm publication number, Roll number.

“U.S., World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918,” digital images at Ancestry (www.ancestry.com : accessed 20 April 2022), draft card for Warren Roth Keck, serial no. 423, order no. 4721, Draft Board Division 2, Greenville, Mercer County, PA; citing NARA microfilm M1509, no roll number.

Newspapers

Online

“Article Title,” *Newspaper* (Town, County, State), Date Published, Page, Column; image (or transcript) viewed at *Website* (URL : accessed date).

“Road Notice,” *Examiner* (Frederick, Maryland), Wednesday, August 30, 1865, page 3; image viewed at *GenealogyBank* (www.genealogybank.com : accessed 15 July 2019).

“Death Roll,” *Record-Argus* (Greenville, Mercer, Pennsylvania), 2 February 1903, page 5, column 4; digital image viewed at *Newspapers.com* (www.newspapers.com : accessed 25 Feb 2005).

Passenger Lists

Online

“Database Name,” *Type* (digital images or index), *Website* (URL : accessed date, if viewed at FamilySearch FHL film # and image number), *Name*, *Date*; citing records of *Repository*, *Town*, *County*, *State* (or NARA microfilm publication *number*, Roll *number*).

“New York Passenger Lists, 1820-1957,” digital image, *Ancestry* (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

Online

“Database Name,” *Type* (digital images or index), *Website* (URL : accessed date, if viewed at FamilySearch FHL film # and image number), *Type of Record* (birth, marriage, death) for *Name*, *Date*; citing records of *Repository*, *Town*, *County*, *State*.

Onsite - Register

Author (name of state or local agency), *Name of Book*, *Book Volume Number*, *Type of Record* (birth, marriage or death) for *Name*, *Date*, page *Number*; citing records of *Repository*, *Town*, *County*, *State*.

Onsite – Certificate

Author (name of state or local agency), **Type of Record** (birth, marriage or death) for **Name**, **Date**, certificate **Number**; citing records of **Repository**, **Town**, **County**, **State**.

Online

“Ohio Deaths 1908-1953,” digital images at *Family Search* (www.familysearch.org : accessed 8 August 2014, film 1983843, image 1328) death 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 : viewed 19 Feb 2020); citing Lawrence Town Records, Volume 562, page 515.

Resources

Elizabeth Shown Mills, *Evidence explained: citing history sources from artifacts to cyberspace* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 2017).

Elizabeth Shown Mills, “QuickLesson 10: Original Records, Image Copies and Derivatives,” *Evidence Explained: Historical Analysis, Citation and Source Usage* (www.evidenceexplained.com : accessed 3 April 2021); posted 28 July 2012.

Elizabeth Shown Mills, “QuickLesson 17: The Evidence Analysis Process Model,” *Evidence Explained: Historical Analysis, Citation and Source Usage* (www.evidenceexplained.com : accessed 3 April 2021); no posting date.

Elizabeth Shown Mills, “QuickLesson 19: Layered Citations Work Like Layered Clothing,” *Evidence Explained: Historical Analysis, Citation and Source Usage* (www.evidenceexplained.com : accessed 20 July 2023); posted 4 September 2014, updated 24 October 2018.

Elizabeth Shown Mills, “QuickLesson 26: Thinking Through an Ancestry.com Citation,” *Evidence Explained: Historical Analysis, Citation and Source Usage* (www.evidenceexplained.com : accessed 3 April 2021); posted 2 March 2019.

Kyle Hurst, *Portable Genealogist: Reference Notes* (Boston: New England Historic Genealogical Society, nd). Available for purchase at <https://shop.americanancestors.org/collections/how-to-guides/products/portable-genealogist-reference-notes>.

Robert Charles Anderson *Elements of Genealogical Analysis* (Boston, Massachusetts: New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2014). Available for purchase at <https://shop.americanancestors.org/collections/how-to-guides/products/elements-of-genealogical-analysis>.

Thomas W. Jones, *Mastering Genealogical Documentation* (Arlington, VA: National Genealogical Society, 2017).