

# Getting Started in Family History Research

## *Class 1: Identify What You Know*

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### Steps for Researching Your Family History

- Identify What You Know
- Decide What You Want to Learn (Research goal)
- Identify and locate your sources
- Research!
- Analyze

**Genealogical Principle: Work from the known to the unknown**

### Identify What You Know

- Interview yourself
- Talk to relatives—What do they know? What family stories were they told?
- Record data using a family group sheet, chart, or genealogical software

### The Essential Toolkit

- Notebook – paper or Evernote or One Note
- Five generation chart (aka pedigree chart)
- Family Group Sheet
- Research Plan
- Research Log
- Genealogical software program (optional)

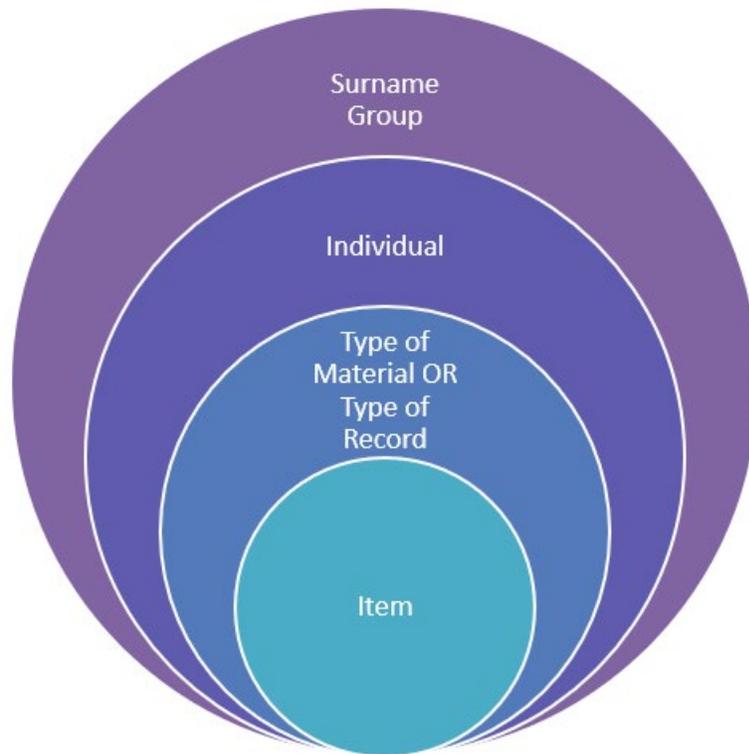
### Genealogical Recording Standards

- Names
  - Write surnames in all CAPITAL LETTERS
  - Record a woman using her maiden name
  - When a maiden name is unknown use MNU/--?--/just the given name \_\_\_\_\_
- Dates
  - Record dates as DAY-MONTH-YEAR (ex: 16 Jan 2016)
  - DO NOT use slash marks or two-digit years (ex: 1/16/2016 or 1/16/2016)

- Places
  - Note smallest to largest geographic division (ex: Boston, Suffolk County, Massachusetts)
  - For outside the U.S.: townland/parish, county, country
  - Be sure to identify counties because many records exist at the county level

## Classifying and Organizing

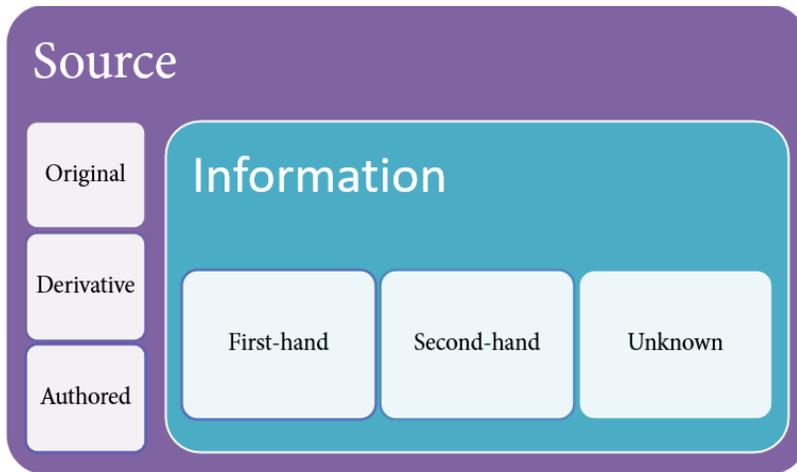
- Review your current organization system and save what is unique and significant
- Refine your classification scheme
  - First level: By surname or family line
  - Second level: by individual, by couple or family, or by event
  - Additional refinements: by material type, by location, or by record type
  - Sample collection hierarchy:



## Evaluating Your Research

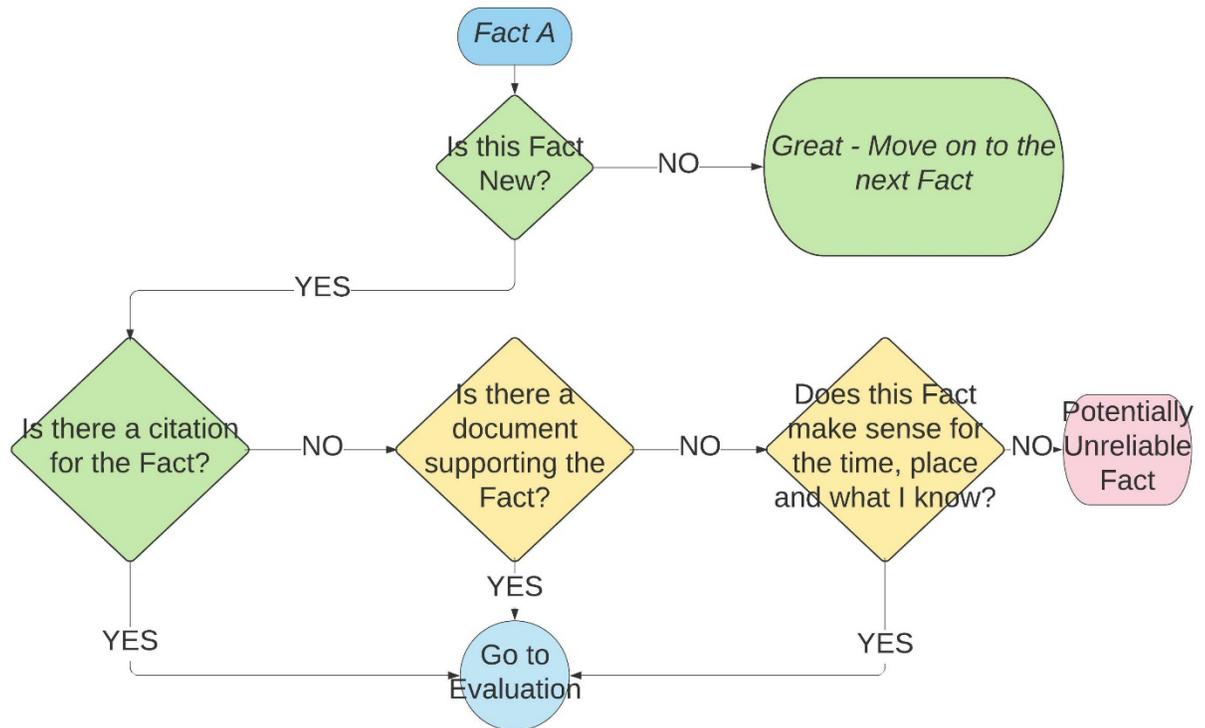
- Using the Genealogical Proof Standard as a Guide
  - Step 1: Check the inherited collection for original documents
  - Step 2: Check the genealogy forms for citations
  - Step 3: Compare the new material to your existing research
    - Is there new information?
    - Are there areas of disagreement?

- Step 4: Evaluate and make a to-do list
- Step 5: Research and add new information to your tree
- Principals of Analysis:



- Is the information original, derivative, or authored?
  - Original: From the time period being researched. Includes duplicate original, record (clerk's copy), image copy. Digital copies, microfilm, and microfiche are considered original for analysis purposes.
  - Derivative: Written by someone who did not experience the events or time period. Includes transcripts, extracts, abstracts. May have transcription errors. The writer's memory may affect contents.
  - Authored: Compiled genealogies
- Is the information first-hand?
  - From a participant 
  - Reported soon after the event 
  - Reported long after the event? 
- Is the information second hand?
  - From a non-participant 
  - Reported soon after the event 
  - Reported long after the event 
- Can you not tell who provided the information? 

- Reviewing facts from inherited research:



## Tips for Interviewing Relatives

- Conduct research before your interview. Research helps the interviewer identify questions to ask the narrator by highlighting what it is you don't know.
- Use primary and secondary source materials to conduct research.
  - Primary sources: contemporary newspaper articles, diaries, correspondence.
  - Secondary sources: published books, articles, newspaper articles that were written later but use primary sources as research material.
- Consider using a biographical form and research to develop thoughtful questions.
- Developing questions
  - Outline questions in advance. Questions can be grouped thematically, but they should also be chronological. An outline can be shared with the narrator in advance but avoid sharing actual questions; you don't want rehearsed or canned answers.
  - Avoid questions that will only provide a yes or no answer.
  - Follow-up on answers that require more detail.
  - Clarify jargon or acronyms during the interview.
  - Ask one question at a time.
  - Summarize what the narrator has said to lead into another question or get more detail.
  - Avoid asking leading questions, questions that relate to your own biases, and phrases like "I assume."

- Sample interview questionnaire found on AmericanAncestors.org at <https://www.americanancestors.org/tools/research-templates>

## Genealogy Forms

American Ancestors / New England Historical Genealogy Society - Pedigree chart, Family Group sheet, Research Log, Family Interview Question, Census Comparison charts:

<https://www.americanancestors.org/tools/research-templates>

National Archives - Census and other useful forms: <https://www.archives.gov/research/genealogy/charts-forms>

Midwest Genealogy Center - The usual forms, plus two unique research check lists; print multiples and file with each individual: <http://www.mymcpl.org/genealogy/family-history-forms>

## Publications

### Skills

Stephanie Call, Webinar Syllabus: *Tips for Interviewing Relatives*, December 2020. Available for purchase at <https://shop.americanancestors.org/products/webinar-syllabus-tips-for-interviewing-relatives>

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

Thomas W. Jones, *Mastering Genealogical Proof* (Arlington, Va.: National Genealogical Society, 2013)

Penelope L. Stratton and Henry B. Hoff, *Guide to Genealogical Writing* (Boston, New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2014). Available for purchase at <https://shop.americanancestors.org/collections/top-sellers/products/elements-of-genealogical-analysis>

Drew Smith, *Organize Your Genealogy*, (Cincinnati: Family Tree Books, 2016).

## Localities

Eichholz, Alice, editor. *Ancestry's Red Book: American State, County and Town Sources*. Revised Edition. Salt Lake City: Ancestry, 1992

Loretto Dennis Szucs & Sandra Hargreaves Luebking. *The source: a guidebook to American genealogy* (Provo, UT: Ancestry, 2006)

Rhonda R. McClure, *Genealogist's handbook for New England Research*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (Boston: New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2021). Available for purchase at <https://shop.americanancestors.org/products/genealogist-s-handbook-for-new-england-research-6th-edition-pre-sale>

Marie E. Daly and Judith Lucey, *Genealogist's Handbook for Irish Research*, (Boston: New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2016). Available for purchase at <https://shop.americanancestors.org/products/genealogists-handbook-for-irish-research>.

James M. Beidler, *Trace your German Roots Online* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Family Tree Books, 2016)