



## GENEALOGY TIP OF THE MONTH PROVE YOUR (Data) POINT!

Proving an ancestor relationship usually involves certain key data points:

- Birth (date / place)
- Marriage (date / place)
- Death (date / place)
- Family relationships (spouse, parent, child)

To prove your ancestry, you need to offer reliable and defensible proof (other researchers should be able to follow the same path and agree with your findings). This documentation can also be used to support a circumstantial case if you have “missing links” that can be supported with a logical argument.

The Genealogical Proof Standard has 5 elements -- #3 is “Weigh the Evidence” (Source & Evidence). *NOTE: GPS #2 is “Cite Your Sources” – this includes the repository (where you found the document – online, databases, library, archives, family letters, etc.) as well as the type of document.*

## SOURCE



When / Where Did the Information **ORIGINATE?**

- **Primary**
- **Derivative**
- **Authored**
- **Mixed**

## **PRIMARY SOURCE:**

- Information was recorded at time of event or soon after by living parties involved.
- Original or photocopy of original
- Not based on prior records
- Examples of Primary Sources:
  - Certified Birth / Baptismal record
  - Certified Marriage certificate
  - Handwritten will presented at probate court

## **DERIVATIVE SOURCE:**

- Created from prior records by transcription, abstraction or translation
- Information was collected later or from other parties
- Examples of Derivative Sources:
  - Transcriptions (original to county lists, county to state, state to national or to online databases) or written/typed versions of original record for easier reading
  - Census record copies (original in National Archives, transcription copies provided to state) or brief summaries (seen in genealogy databases – specific to family unit but does not include entire page)
  - Index of Wills or Abstracts of Court Records
  - Some church / burial records
  - Family bible records with data entered by surviving generations (not recorded at time of event)
  - Translations from one language to another

## **AUTHORED SOURCE:**

- User submitted information – may include feelings or opinions
- Must be confirmed with official documentation (Cite Your Sources)
- Examples of Authored sources:
  - Family history books

- Family trees
- Family stories shared or recorded
- Journals / diaries (may be mixed – see below)

### **MIXED SOURCE:**

- Mixture of Primary and Derivative Information
- Example of mixed source: Certified death certificate
  - Date/place/cause of death provided by physician who attended the death (primary)
  - Date/place of birth and name of parents provided by an informant who may or may not give accurate information - often not even a family member (secondary/derivative)



## **EVIDENCE**

Does the Source Contain All the **INFORMATION I NEED?**

- Direct
- Indirect
- Negative

**DIRECT EVIDENCE:** All the facts you need to prove a data point are in the document

Example: Birth certificate

- Child's full name, date and place of birth, names of father and mother (including mother's maiden name) for relationship

**INDIRECT EVIDENCE:** Partial proof but need more data

Example: Census record

- Child's name but not full name (may be only first or middle name, initial or nickname)

- Child's year of birth and state/country of birth but not specific month/day or town/county of birth
- Relationship to head of household – but are they a parent, stepparent or adoptive parent? Does not give maiden name of mother

**NEGATIVE EVIDENCE:** Proof cannot be determined from information given

Example 1: Birth or death certificate lists parent as **“Unknown”**

Example 2: **“Henry had no sons who survived childhood”** – *you may have the wrong “Henry” as parent of your male ancestor*

Example 3: **“Henry had 5 (unnamed) sons.”** – You need to keep searching for names of each of those sons.



## WHEN IN DOUBT: Weigh the Evidence

- Evaluate your various sources and choose the one(s) most defensible.
- What is the **QUALITY** of the **SOURCE**?
- Evaluate the evidence provided within those sources and decide if it is sufficient or whether further research is required for definitive proof.
- What is the **VALUE** of the **EVIDENCE**?
- **WRITE UP YOUR CONCLUSIONS** & support those conclusions with the sources and evidence you have chosen.