



Recognizing Errors in Source Documents

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Evaluation of Sources – Continuums of Measurement

- Documents are either original or derivative.
- Information, on a statement-by-statement basis, is either primary or secondary.
- Evidence is either direct or indirect.

Helpful Resources

- *BCG Standards Manual*, “Evidence-Evaluation Standards,” pp. 8-13.
- Samples of written proof summaries online at <http://bcgcertification.org/skillbuilders/worksamples.html>

Great Books on Analyzing Evidence

Christine Rose, *Genealogical Proof Standard: Building a Solid Case* (San Jose, California: self-pub., 2001).

Elizabeth Shown Mills, editor, *Professional Genealogy: A Manual for Researchers, Writers, Editors, Lecturers, and Librarians* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 2001).

Elizabeth Shown Mills, *Evidence! Citation & Analysis for the Family Historian* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1997).

Richard S. Lackey, *Cite Your Sources: A Manual for Documenting Family Histories and Genealogical Records* (University Press of Mississippi, Jackson, 1980).

Noel C. Stevenson, J.D., *Genealogical Evidence: A Guide to the Standard of Proof Relating to Pedigrees, Ancestry, Heirship and Family History* (Aegean Park Press, Laguna Hills, CA, 1989).

Eugene Aubrey Stratton, *Applied Genealogy* (Ancestry Inc., Utah, 1988).

Interesting Examples of Analysis

Carmen J. Finley, "Original Naturalization Records: A Reliable Source for Birth Dates?" *National Genealogical Society Quarterly*, vol. 91 (March 2003), pp. 60-63.

Helen Schatvet Ullmann, "Richard Mills, Seventeenth Century Schoolmaster in Connecticut and New York," *New England Historical and Genealogical Register*, vol. 154 (April 2000), pp. 189-210.

Evidence, A Special Issue of the National Genealogical Society Quarterly, vol. 87 (Sept. 1999).

Thomas W. Jones, "The Children of Calvin Snell: Primary versus Secondary Evidence," *National Genealogical Society Quarterly*, vol. 83, No. 1 (March 1995), pp.17-31.

Joy Reisinger, "When Original Evidence Disagrees: Is Mother Genevieve a Greslon or a Fontaine?" *National Genealogical Society Quarterly*, vol. 83, No. 1 (March 1995), pp. 32-38.

What to Do With Data Disagreement

Don't discard the document or source; don't ignore it.

Include the document with the error in your analysis and writing. Some ways to do this are:

- In a database, add an alternate event (such as a second birth or perhaps just a note) with the conflicting data. Include a full citation and explain that it is in conflict with other information.
- In a compilation, include a footnote discussing the different information this document contains and what weight you assign for its reliability.
- Include a paragraph in text describing what the document states that is in conflict with other documents. Explain why you think this document is in error.
- Write a "proof summary" describing the different conflicting sources along each of the three continuums and then stating why you feel that one source has greater weight of evidence.