

The Heritage Room
Athens-Clarke County Library

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BASIC STEPS

GETTING STARTED

1. Start with you – gather your documents
2. Talk with family members
3. Fill out Pedigree or Ancestral charts, Family Groups sheets and you will know what you are missing
4. Then work through the federal population census schedules
5. Based on the above 4 activities :
 - a. Develop a plan for each person based on what you already know so you are systematic in looking for your ancestors
 - b. Evaluate your sources carefully
6. Join a genealogical society near where you live for networking and for methodology classes

EVALUATING INFORMATION

Source is any means (person, document, book, artifact, or repository) through which we acquire information.

Evidence is the information provided by a source. It can work for or against our hypothesis.

Proof is “the thought process by which we reach a convincing conclusion (assertion of fact) based on the evidence (information statements) we gleaned from the sources (people, documents, books, artifacts, or repositories) we examined.”

(From Devine, Donn. “Evidence Analysis.” Mills, Elizabeth Shown, ed. *Professional Genealogy: a Manual; for Researchers, Writers, Editors, Lecturers, and Librarians*. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 2001. p. 332)

The same evaluation standards apply to online information as to traditional resources. As with all sources of information, some are more reliable than others.

Modern genealogy has developed 3 sets of criteria for evaluating information:

The terms **original and derivative** are applied to **Sources**

The terms **primary or secondary** are used to determine **where the Information came from**

And the terms **direct or indirect or circumstantial** are applied to evidence.

Information can be evaluated using the following standards:

- I. **Original vs. Derivative Sources.** *Original* indicates the information was created at the time of the event with first-hand knowledge, such as a death certificate. *Derivative* is everything else, including some of the information found on an original source, such as the date of birth on a death certificate.
- II. **Primary vs. Secondary Information.** *Primary* information comes from a participant or witness, such as the date of death given by the attending physician on a death certificate. *Secondary* information is a retelling of what was heard from a participant or witness, such as the age of death given in a newspaper obituary, or the names of parents of the deceased on a death certificate if the informant did not personally know them.
- III. **Direct vs. Indirect vs. Circumstantial Evidence.** *Direct* indicates that a definitive answer is obtained, such as the date of death on a death certificate. *Indirect* indicates a possible definitive answer, but does not fully resolve the question, such as the date of birth on a death certificate that was provided by a close family member. *Circumstantial* indicates you have reasons to believe beyond the specific piece of information that you have the answer, such as when the date of birth on a death certificate is close to a date also found in a Census document.

(From Devine, Donn. "Evidence Analysis." Mills, Elizabeth Shown, ed. *Professional Genealogy: a Manual; for Researchers, Writers, Editors, Lecturers, and Librarians*. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 2001.)

RECORD YOUR INFORMATION

Pedigree charts

Family groups sheets

Family data sheets

Genealogy database programs

– **Cyndis List Software and Computers** then scroll to **Articles, Comparisons & Reviews** at <http://www.cyndislist.com/software.htm#Articles>.

There are number of sites listed that can help you make your decision. Also look at **GenSoftReviews** <http://www.gensoftreviews.com/>

See Resource Guide ...p. 6 for more information

THREE LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT RECORDS

Federal

State

Local

You have to figure out at which level your ancestor had interaction with the government

MILITARY RECORDS

Militia records

Wars

Pensions

Service records

CHURCH RECORDS

Church histories, minute books

Membership records

Compilations

“White” church records for African-Americans during slavery and after

MIGRATION TRAILS AND “JUMP IN THE RIVER”

Where was water?

What direction did river flow?

ORGANIZE YOUR INFORMATION

Figure out a filing system

Store your materials to keep them safe and preserve them

Backup computer files

CITE YOUR SOURCES

Use Mills’ books so you can verify and check and so other will know whether to trust your work

You must cite so you can evaluate

PREPARE IN ADVANCE FOR RESEARCH TRIPS

Consult with folks who know the local area and its records

Check online and print resources

Check online library catalogs

KNOW what you are looking for

REMEMBER:

Must put yourself in ancestor's place and time

Object is to find parents of each generation

Research siblings

Use Geographic tools –atlases, maps, gazetteers, etc.

Assumptions are dangerous

Words do not always mean what we think they mean- learn the vocabulary and look things up.