

Are You Ready?

Preparation of lineage papers for any hereditary society requires not only that you descend from a qualifying ancestor, but that you support the application with thorough, high quality research that meets modern genealogical standards.

You need to provide evidence to support each fact and each relationship in the lineage to the qualifying ancestor.

While there is a wealth of information available in print and on the internet, your objective is to provide the best possible evidence documenting the lineage. This, in turn, means that you must obtain copies of original documents. A published genealogy, internet family tree, or published abstract does not provide adequate evidence. For example, you may find a will abstract or an internet family tree showing that Anthony Smith had a son John. An acceptable application will include a copy of the original will, not the published abstract. Further, the submitted copy will have a proper citation.

The following sections overview some basic concepts that you need to be familiar with. You need to understand the basics of evidence, proof, and citation to prepare an acceptable application.

Remember, you need to provide evidence for

- every fact you present in the lineage to the qualifying ancestor. Typically, for each individual in the direct line, you'll need evidence for the birth date, death date, marriage date, and spouse of that ancestor.
- every relationship in the lineage to the qualifying ancestor. You'll need to provide evidence for each parent-child relationship from yourself to the qualifying ancestor. While genealogy software programs typically provide reasonable features for including sources for facts, many programs fall short in documenting relationships. If you are preparing lineage papers for the first time, evidence for parent-child relationships requires careful consideration.

Evidence Basics

To prove your lineage, you'll be providing evidence, usually documents, that prove your lineage to the qualifying ancestor. Modern genealogical practice uses the following definitions:

- Sources – are either original or derivative. An original source is a document in its original form (for example a birth certificate, court docket book, or recorded will). A derivative source takes information from the original and presents it in some altered form (transcribed, abstracted, extracted, paraphrased, etc.). You treat digital images of originals as original, but also include the source of the digital image in your citation. Original sources carry more weight than derivatives; you are expected to include original sources with your application. There may be circumstances when a derivative is all that is available (for example, a tombstone has been destroyed or is unreadable, but a prior transcription exists). In such a case, you may submit the derivative, but must include an accompanying statement

explaining the circumstances. Every effort must be made to obtain original sources.

- Information – The information found in a source is either primary or secondary. The primary information was provided by someone with personal, firsthand, eyewitness knowledge of the event; secondary information was provided by someone that was not an eyewitness to the event. A document may contain both types of information. For example, the informant that gave the information in a death certificate likely provided primary information about the date, time, place, and cause of death. That informant was likely not an eyewitness to the birth of the decedent, so the birth information on the death certificate is likely secondary. You should always seek out documents that support a fact or relationship with primary information.
- Evidence – is information that supports an assertion. Evidence may be either direct or indirect. Direct evidence provides a direct statement supporting the assertion, such as a marriage certificate recording the marriage of two people. Indirect evidence supports an assertion, but requires further evidence to draw a conclusion or fully support the assertion. You should seek out documents and sources that provide direct evidence.

Ideally, you would provide an original source with primary information offering direct evidence to support each fact and relationship in your lineage. In the real world, this is often not possible, particularly for the earliest generations in the lineage.

You should strive to provide the best possible documentation for the lineage. Where it is not possible to provide ideal sources, provide the best possible source, and, if necessary, provide multiple sources. Remember, however, that quality is more important than quantity.

Genealogical Proof Standard

In some lineages there may be some facts, relationships that are difficult to prove. In such cases, genealogists use the Genealogical Proof Standard (see Christine Rose's *Genealogical Proof Standard: Building a Solid Case*, included in

Suggested Reading & Resources).

The Genealogical Proof Standard uses a five step process (exhaustive search, citations, analysis, conflict resolution and a written conclusion) to deal with difficult cases. The suggested reference includes examples.

Rules of Evidence (Not Exhaustive) & Considerations for Certain Types of Sources

Certain types of sources require special treatment.

- Census records before 1880 do not provide relationships and should not be used to infer relationships without other supporting evidence. Since the census records you are likely to access are the copies filed with the federal government (not the original) and since you cannot know who provided the information on a census

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record, treat census records as secondary information in a derivative source. While census records are often support other evidence, they are rarely the sole evidence for any fact or relationship in a lineage application.

- When using Bible records for evidence, provide photocopies or digital images of the family data as well as the title page of the Bible. Include, if known, the provenance of the Bible. If the Bible record is a transcription and the original cannot be accessed, then include a statement explaining when the transcription was made, where it was made, by whom it was made, and who had possession of the Bible at that time.
- Journal articles are rarely acceptable, even if they do include citations to sources. In the interest of providing the best possible evidence, you should obtain copies of the sources referenced in the journal.
- Letters and family records may be used if they contain primary evidence and writer is known. Copies need to include all identifying information including the author, date and, in the case of letters, the addressee.
- County histories and family genealogies, whether in print or on the internet, do not provide suitable evidence. These works generally do not include citations to source material (If they do, you should obtain a copy of that source). Such references may be included to support other evidence.
- Lineage papers from other societies are not accepted.

Citations

A source is the item you look at that provides evidence to support your application. Generally you will submit a copy of that source with the application. A citation is what you include with that copy to communicate where you obtained the copy. The citation must be complete; that is, another person should be able to use that citation to access the same record that you used.

All documents included with the application should have a full and proper citation to the original source on the front.

Genealogists use a wide variety of records. There are standard formats for genealogical citations. One inexpensive reference is Elizabeth Shown Mills' *Evidence! Citation and Analysis for the Family Historian*. Her *Quicksheet: Citing Online Historical Resources* provides guidelines for internet sources (see

Suggested Reading & Resources). More comprehensive (and more expensive) is Elizabeth Mills' *Evidence Explained*.

If you are not familiar with these genealogical references, consult the *Chicago Manual of Style* for traditional citation templates.

The MCGS registrar will work with you if your source citations need fine tuning. Regardless of whether your citations are in the perfect format, it is important is that your citations provide a full reference to source, and perhaps the repository (if availability is limited or the source is part of a manuscript collection available in only one place).

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When you use a microfilm of original records, include a full reference to the microfilm, and, if the microfilm is not widely available, include the repository.

In the case of internet images, also include the web site URL (the long string of letters usually beginning with “http://”, the web site name, the type of record found (transcription, digital image, etc.), and date the site was accessed.

Acceptable Derivative Sources

There are a small number of derivative sources that are acceptable. These are:

- the Calendar of Wills, land patents, early deeds, and marriages found in the published *New Jersey Archives*.
- unrecorded Monmouth County wills found in Stillwell’s *Genealogical Miscellany*.
- town record transcriptions found in Monette’s *First Settlers of Piscataway and Woodbridge* (information from family genealogies in the work is not acceptable).

Suggested Reading & Resources

Mills, Elizabeth Shown. *QuickSheet: Citing Online Historical Resources* Genealogical Publishing Company: Baltimore Maryland, 2005.

Mills, Elizabeth Shown. *Evidence Analysis*. Genealogical Publishing Company: Baltimore Maryland, 2006.

Mills, Elizabeth Shown. *Evidence! Citation and Analysis for the Family Historian*. Genealogical Publishing Company: Baltimore, Maryland, 1997.

Mills, Elizabeth Shown. *Evidence Explained*. Genealogical Publishing Company: Baltimore, Maryland, 2007.

Rose, Christine. *Genealogical Proof Standard; Building a Solid Case*. CR Publications: San Jose, California, 2005.

Is that Lineage Right? National Society Daughters of the American Revolution: Washington, D.C., 2005.