

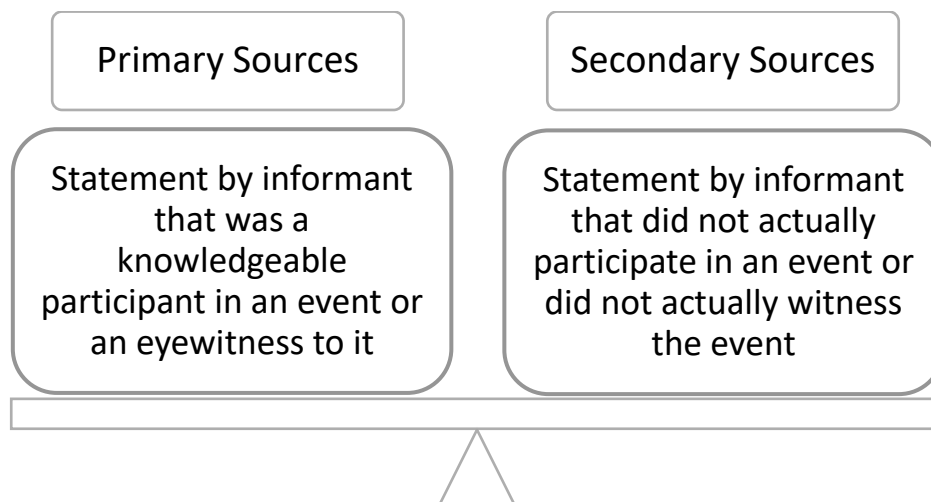
Resolve Evidence Discrepancies: Sorting Facts from Fiction

Genealogy Guidepost Series, Part III

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Evaluate the Source

Who do you trust?



Ask yourself:

- Did everyone in the family have a different version of events?
- Is there a family story that has been “edited” in the re-telling of the event?
- Did your ancestors have a reason to lie?
- Was this record created at the time of the event or years later?

Records for Historical Context

Use additional sources to understand the information you find in historical records. This information will often lead you to additional records about your family. Ideas for where to look:

- Historic Newspapers
- Community Histories
- Maps
- Personal Papers
- Oral History
- Historic Documents

Conflicting Evidence

Things you will encounter:

- Dates that do not match
- Different spellings for a name
- Relationships that do not add up
- Places of birth differ between records
- Sometimes the records are wrong

Strategies to overcome conflicts:

- View the original whenever possible. Do not rely on a transcription. There may be a discrepancy because of a transcription error.
- Read the entire document. Look at the whole document and seek to understand what all of the information means. How do the details impact your ancestor?
- Familiarize yourself with the handwriting of the person creating the record. This will help catch transcription errors.
- Create your own transcriptions of records. Use context clues to help identify challenging words. You may need to look up definitions of words that are no longer commonly used.
- Collect as many records as possible to compare information. You cannot rely on a single record. Look for multiple sources to confirm each fact.
- Keep an open mind. The “truth” in a story may differ from what was expected. Information found on one record may be disproven by information found on another.
- Create a timeline. Look at the information you found in the fuller context of a person’s life and historical events.