Every Fact Cited: Marking the Trail for Future Genealogists

Genealogy Guidepost Series, Part II
Prepared by Hannah Kubacak & Bill Buckner

Creating Citations

Why do you create citations?

- For your benefit:
  - In a few weeks/months/years will you remember where a fact was found?
  - If you find conflicting information, how will you determine which is more reliable if you can't return to the source?
  - If another researcher questions the reliability of your work, can you back it up?
- For the benefit of others:
  - When future family researchers look at your work, will they be able to verify the information?
  - Avoid leaving family with unanswered questions about how you found the information.
    - Providing information without providing a source, is not helpful to future family members.
    - If something is family legend, state that it is undocumented.
    - You've spent your time researching, do not miss the chance to share your hard work.
- Give credit to others who have done research before.
  - If information, photos, or other documentation was provided by others, give them credit for their contributions.
  - Research is collaborative.

When do you create citations?

- Every fact needs AT LEAST one source.
- Every source used should be cited.
- Cite sources as you find them! Do NOT "wait until later."

Evaluate Sources

- Not all sources provide reliable information.
  - Family Trees
    - Providing information without providing a source, is not helpful to future family members.
    - If something is family legend, state that it is undocumented.
    - You've spent your time researching, do not miss the chance to share your hard work.
  - FindaGrave
    - Evaluate the source to ensure that you are not misrepresenting what information is being provided.
    - Compare the information on the headstone to the information that has been entered.
    - Look for additional sources if necessary.

Quick and Easy Citations

Online Sources

- Many popular genealogy websites make it easy for you to copy & paste a source citation.
- Look for source information or citation notes on the page.
- This information is often near the bottom of the page or in the item description.

Books & Other Print Material

What information is important to record?

- Title
- Author
- Volume Number (when applicable)
- Publisher
- Year of Publication
- Page Numbers (especially if information is not fully indexed)
- Where was the book? (This is not part of a traditional citation, but because genealogy books can be difficult to find, it may be helpful for you or other researchers down the line.)

Oral History

- Describe the details of the conversation (name, date, place, person's authority on the subject).
- In your footnotes/endnotes you can describe your source so that the reliability of the information can be evaluated.

Citing & Writing

- There are many accepted formats for citing your sources for publication.
- Some journals or quarterlies may request that you follow a certain style.
  - Example: The National Genealogical Society Quarterly requires submissions to follow Mills' *Evidence Explained: Citing History Sources from Artifacts to Cyberspace*
- If you are writing your own family history, choose the format and style that works well for you.
- The main goal of a citation is to enable future readers to be able to "retrace your steps."

Resources

Evidence Explained

- *Evidence Explained: Citing Sources from Artifacts to Cyberspace* by Elizabeth Shown Mills
- Easy to follow examples and templates for citations and reference notes.
- Online help: www.evidenceexplained.com

Purdue University Online Writing Lab

- Online tools and guides for many of the most widely used citation styles
- https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/resources.html

Research Log

- Keep track of sources used and what information was searched for/found.
- Free forms available online or create your own.
- https://media.americanancestors.org/uploadedfiles/content/education/learning_resources/downloads/research-log.pdf