

Records for Research – Secondary Sources

Building and Researching Your Family Tree, a Twelve Part Series

Prepared by Bill Buckner & Hannah Kubacak

Records

- Our Ancestors created records just like we do today. The trick is finding out what has survived and what has genealogical value to us in our research.
- Genealogical value – identifies relationships, NDP (Names, Dates, Places)
- Examples:
 - Vital Records
 - Land/Deeds
 - Court (Civil & Criminal)
 - Family Histories
 - Newspaper
 - Military
 - Census
 - Etc.
- There is a finite set of records of genealogical value or interest that have survived and recorded information about your ancestor!
- Where are the records?
 - With the original authority or depository
 - Courthouses (inventory of)
 - Archives (NARA, State, Local – Historical Societies)
 - Libraries (LC, FHL, Regional – Allen County, DPL, Clayton)
- 37% of cultural heritage items are in the possession of individuals, families and communities. [2005 national survey]
- Internet (Everything is on the Internet! Right? Wrong!)

Digital Records

- Digitization and access create problems - junk genealogy, the uncritical presentation of unsourced guesses; the plus is that citing your sources has become more prevalent.
- Unable to study the end record in context, i.e., one-click links index to record. Misinterpretation of record meaning. (e.g., Census family split on 2 separate pages)
- Difficult to remember other sources of records available in original form (e.g., death records not found on Ancestry, available in FamilySearch)
- Experts agree that today's digital records probably will not survive and be readable as they were originally intended.
 - Lifespan of digital content – no one really knows.
 - Technology obsolescence – remember floppy disks?
 - File format - a digital file depends on a specific software program, the operating system and hardware to run it.
- Advancements in technology create new possibilities for records.
 - Enhancing visual aspects of research/presentation.
 - Digital records can be geo-coded to pinpoint locations on a map.
 - DNA and other collaborative tools available.

Access to Records

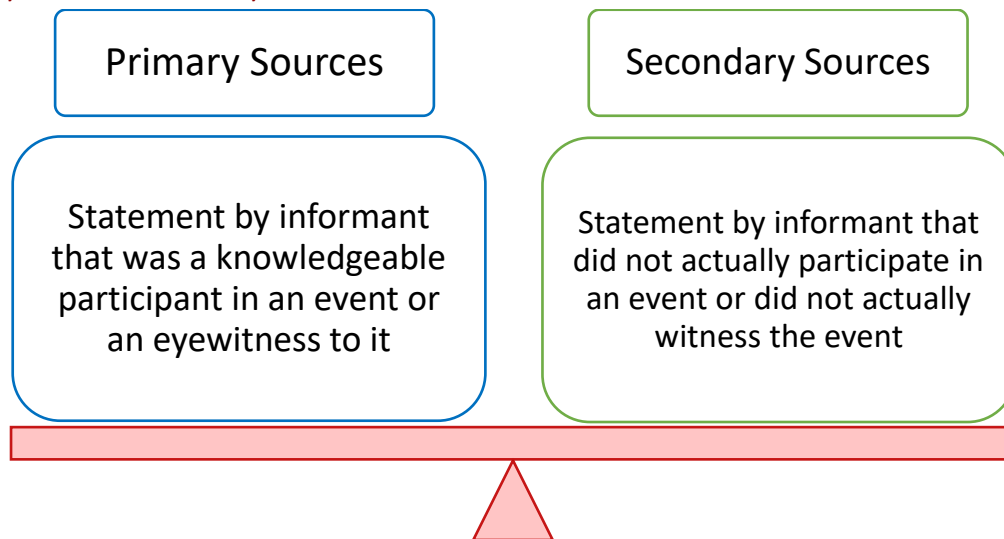
Tip: When you find a record in a database save either a print or digital copy!

- Access to records changes. Records available today may not be accessible in the future.
- Key challenges include:
 - Technology
 - Legal – Laws change, restricting access, access to images tied up in bankruptcy, lawsuits.
 - Financial – Company goes out of business, owner of site dies, contract ends between host and owner of records.
 - Legislation changes about dates of access for public records.
 - Owner or government sees records and source of income.

Record Formats

- Original (Tip: Always view for yourself, if possible)
- Transcribed – the record has been rewritten by someone else. Is it a complete transcription or an abstract/summary?
- Translated – was anything lost in translation?
- Compiled (minutes)
- Reconstructed (burned, lost)
- Indexed

Primary vs. Secondary Records



Secondary Sources

- Document or record NOT created at the time of an event.
- Often provided by someone recollecting the past
- Compilation – index, abstract, transcription
- May not be completely accurate.
- Gives clues that are helpful.

Family Histories

Sometimes you get lucky and someone else has done the work in researching a family line. Caution – validate the information for yourself. Family Histories identified through:

- Notice in Genealogical Magazine
- Local library catalog
- Print catalog of holdings
- Bibliography
- Family knowledge

Periodicals

Genealogy periodicals may be the only place a piece of information is published. Approximately 8K active, 3K defunct. Types of genealogy periodicals include:

- Family periodicals
- Genealogical Society (National, State, regional, county, local) publications
 - Quarterly
 - Newsletters
 - Journal
- Historical Society publications
- Hereditary or Lineage organization (e.g., DAR)
- General or Hobby genealogy magazines

Use an index to find information located within periodicals. Types of periodical indexes include:

- Publisher index
 - Issue
 - Volume
 - Multiple year, Cumulative (5, 10 years)
 - Keyword
 - Online – check website of publisher
- Compiled Indexes – separate book that indexes multiple titles
- PERiodical Source Index – PERSI

Family Trees

Find research compiled by others researching the same family lines. Remember to always fact check.

- Public Family Trees online
- Family Pedigree/Ancestor Charts compiled by Genealogy Societies
- Library catalog
- Genealogy Society websites
- Periodicals

Message Boards and Queries

See what past and present researchers are saying about your ancestors. Where did their research get stuck? What clues have they found?

Genealogy Links

Bibliographic Records

World Cat (search library holdings & find subject headings) www.worldcat.org

FamilySearch (catalog) www.familysearch.org/search/catalog

Digital Books

Internet Archive www.archive.org

HathiTrust Digital Library www.hathitrust.org

FamilySearch (books) www.familysearch.org/library/books/

Digital Records

ArchiveGrid www.archivegrid.com

Genealogy Gophers www.gengophers.com

Family Trees and Message Boards

FamilySearch (genealogies) www.familysearch.org/search/family-trees

RootsWeb www.rootsweb.com

Index for Everton's Genealogical helper (queries) www.myheritage.com/research/collection-10015/evertons-genealogical-helper

Other

FamilySearch Wiki (Family Organizations) www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Family_Organizations

PERSI (Periodical Source Index) search.findmypast.com/search/periodical-source-index