

# Handout: Keeping Track of Your Sources

Presented by: Michael Longan Ph.D.

## For Discovering Your Roots: A Beginner's Genealogy Workshop

### The Importance of Tracking Sources

1. To remember how you know what you know
2. To help others find the sources you've found
3. To provide evidence that supports claims about your ancestors and allow others to evaluate those claims.

### Every Genealogical Fact Should Have a Source

When you record a fact in genealogy you should do two things

1. Create a source citation
2. Assign the citation to the fact

### Types of Sources<sup>1</sup>

- Original Sources
  - Original documents created by people with firsthand knowledge of events
- Derivative Sources
  - Copies or transcriptions of an original source or other representation of the content of an original source in a new format
- Authored Works
  - Works created using a combination of original and derivative sources

### Citing Sources<sup>2</sup>

As a beginner, recording important information about a source is more important than figuring out the exact format needed to construct a citation. Record information about Who? What? Where? and When?

- Creator (Who?)
  - Who is the author or creator or the source?
- Title (What?)
  - Record the title if it has one or create a description if the source is untitled
- Descriptor (What?)
  - Additional information needed to identify the source like edition, volume number, etc.
- Place of Creation, Publication, or Access (Where?)
  - Record where a source was created, published, or where it can be accessed.
- Publisher (Who?)
  - If published in a book, magazine, or website.
- Date or Year of Publication or Creation (When?)
  - Record the date of publication or creation
- Specific Item (Where or Where Within?)
  - Record where in the source the information can be found: the page number, for example.

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<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Shown Mills, *Evidence Explained: Citing History Sources from Artifacts to Cyberspace*, Fourth Edition. (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 2024), 28-29.

<sup>2</sup> Mills, 103-109

## Layered Citations

In genealogy, we frequently run across sources that are derived from other sources or that are contained by other sources. In such cases it is good practice to record both the source we accessed as well as the source of that source.

## Using Software to Track Sources

Desktop genealogical software (Legacy, Roots Magic, Family Historian, etc.) and websites (like Ancestry.com or My Heritage, etc.) make the process of constructing citations and attaching them to genealogical facts relatively easy. Software programs and websites include templates that guide you in entering information about your sources. Some websites and software programs have tools for automatically collecting source information and attaching it to a fact.

## Cautions When Using Software Assisted Citations

While automatic source citation is convenient, pay attention while using it. Be sure to check that the computer is accurately representing the information it extracts from the sources you use. Check that the software has:

- collected all of the important information that you need.
- collected the right information
- described the source accurately
- attached the information to the right person

## Vocabulary

**Genealogical Fact:** A claim about a person that has been supported by citing evidence of sufficient quality to suggest that it is true. A claim made in the absence of evidence from a source is not considered a fact. The truth of a genealogical fact may be evaluated based upon the quality of evidence used to support it.

**Source:** A book, document, database, object, artifact, containing information about genealogical facts.

**Citation:** A description of a source including where to find it.

**Layered Citation:** A citation for a derivative source or authored work that is abstracted from or contained within another source. Each layer of the citation is typically separated by a semi-colon.

**Repository:** a collection of sources. A repository may be a physical library, a collection of online databases, or even a personal collection of documents.

## Sample Citations from the Presentation

### Book

Elizabeth Shown Mills, *Evidence Explained: Citing History Sources from Artifacts to Cyberspace*, Fourth Edition. (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 2024), 28-29.

### Journal Article

Fish, Kevin R. "Selling Orville Redenbacher." *Indiana Magazine of History* 110, no. 4 (December 1, 2014): 357–66. doi:10.5378/indimagahist.110.4.0357.

### Original Source/Artifact

Mrs. H. A. Longan 1910-1933, *Family Bible "Little Key to Heaven"* (New York, New York, New York, USA: C. Wildermann Co, 1899), Susan and William Longan collection, privately held by Michael Longan, Valparaiso, Indiana, USA, 2021. Bible of Lillie Tinney Longan Goring.

### Authored Work: Privately Held

William and Susan Longan, *The Legacy of John Longan*, The Susan and William Longan Collection, privately held by Michael Longan, Valparaiso, Indiana, USA, circa 2004.

### Derivative Source: Online Database

Utah Death Registration Index, Homer Longan, November 5, 1918, Summit, Utah, USA, State File Number 1918004848, Ancestry.com; citing Bureau of Vital Statistics, "Utah Death Index, 1847-1966," Salt Lake City: Utah Department of Health.

### Derivative Source: Image Copy

"United States World War II Draft Cards Young Men, 1940-1947," database with images, Ancestry.com (<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/2238/> : accessed 10 November 2024), Orville Clarence Redenbacher, image 1071 of 2029: registration card, serial number 1860, Gibson County, Indiana; citing National Archives at St. Louis, Records of the Selective Service System, Record Group 147, Box: 638.

## Resources (Reference List Style)

Board for Certification of Genealogists. *Genealogy Standards*, Second Edition Revised, Nashville: Turner Publishing Company, 2021.

Family Search. Citations, *Family Search Wiki*, <https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Category:Citations> : 4 February 2016)

Koch, Andrew. "How to create a genealogy source citation." *Family Tree Magazine*. <https://familytreemagazine.com/research/beginner-genealogy-source-citation/> :October 2024.

Shown Mills, Elizabeth. *Evidence Explained: Citing History Sources from Artifacts to Cyberspace*, Fourth Edition. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 2024.

Shown Mills, Elizabeth. *Evidence Explained: Historical Analysis, Citation & Source Usage*. Website, <https://www.evidenceexplained.com/> : 2024.