

# FIRST FAMILIES OF PENNSYLVANIA, RESEARCH GUIDE

## DOCUMENTING YOUR APPLICATION;

### INCLUDING ANSWERS TO FAQs

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Why do genealogists worry about finding and documenting the correct information when researching their family tree? Certified Genealogist Christine Rose tells the story of the tombstone in Tennessee that showed a birth date which was inconsistent with all of the other records. Finally, a family member explained: “When the family had the stone erected years later, they saw that all the other tombstones had birth dates and they thought it didn’t look good to not have one.’ So they made it up!” (Rose, Christine. *Genealogical Proof Standard*. 4<sup>th</sup> Rev, Ed. San Jose CA, 2014, p. 25)

To help you find and document the correct information for your submission to First Families of Pennsylvania, the following research guide provides a brief summary of what genealogists mean by sources, information, and evidence used to document their research. After that are answers to some frequently asked questions about specific types of resources that can be used for proving a lineage for First Families of Pennsylvania.

**Genealogy Research:** In genealogy, we talk about sources, information and evidence. Ideally we begin with a research question such as: Who was the father of Christiana Wertman (1836-1890), the wife of Daniel Laidacker in Montour Co., PA? We then locate a source that we think will answer the question, interpret the information found in the source, and develop an evidence-supported answer to the question. For a more in-depth look at this topic, refer to Elizabeth Shown Mills, *Evidence Explained: Citing History Sources from Artifacts to Cyberspace*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. Rev. Genealogical Pub. Co., Baltimore, MD, 2017.

As you read through the next sections, it’s important not to get bogged down by definitions. You need to think: What exactly am I looking at as a source and how likely is it that the information in it is correct? How close was this source created to the actual event and how do I know that?

**Sources:** Sources are the documents; publications; artifacts such as letters, photographs, awards, etc.; tombstones, websites, databases, etc. that genealogists consult. There are three types of sources:

| Type of Source     | Definition   | Examples  |
|--------------------|--|---|
| Original           | First time recorded or a digital copy                                  | State vital record, will, deed, church records, court records, newspaper obituaries, etc. |
| Derivative         | Taken from the original  | Translations, transcriptions, abstracts, indexes, databases, etc.                         |
| Authored narrative | Combination of several other sources. May contain original conclusions | Lineage books, family histories, county histories, newspaper histories, etc.              |

Even though most genealogists consider wills and deeds recorded in the official county records as original sources, these documents are actually copies made by the clerk. For example, the heirs of the deceased took the original will to the county to have it probated and the clerk copied it into the will book. The original may have been placed in the county probate file, returned to the heirs, or just gone missing. Every time a copy is made, there is a chance of an error.

It's important to evaluate a source. Some questions you may ask are:

- What exactly is the source?
- Who provided the information?
- Why was it created?
- When was it created in relationship to the event?
- Where was it kept?

**Information:** There are three types of information that we find in a source:

| Type of Information | Definition   | Examples  |
|---------------------|--|---|
| Primary             | Firsthand knowledge of event. Recorded at or about the time of the event | Government issued vital records (birth, death, marriage), church record, court record, cemetery records, deeds, wills, etc. |
| Secondary           | Repeats what others said<br>No firsthand knowledge                       | Many family histories, undocumented county histories  |
| Undetermined        | Unknown involvement<br>Unknown who provided the information              | Census information prior to 1940, some family histories, undocumented county histories.                                     |

A single source may contain several types of information. For example, a state issued death certificate (vital record) may contain primary information about the death and secondary information about the birth of the deceased because the informant may not have been present (or even alive) at the time of the deceased's birth.

Evaluate the information. Some questions you may ask:

What type of information is it?

Who provided the information?

Was the informant a witness?

Does the information agree with other sources?

What information is missing?

Why is that information missing?

Did the provider have a reason to lie?

**Evidence:** The information that you find in a source provides evidence to answer your research questions. There are three types of evidence:

| Type of Evidence  | Definition  | Example   |
|-------------------|---|---|
| Direct            | Answers your research questions.  | Will of Gideon Wertman in Montour Co., PA states: "To my daughter Christianna intermarried with Daniel Laidacker..."  |
| Indirect          | No direct answer but may provide clues. Often combined with other evidence. | There is no record of the name of the mother of Elizabeth Wertman (1836-1907), but the PA death certificates and church baptism records of her younger and older siblings show that their mother was Anna Maria Croom.  |
| Negative evidence | What should be there isn't there.   | If Mathias Deibler (a minor at the time of his supposed father's death) was the son of Albright Deibler, he should have been named in the court record where a guardian was appointed for all the minor children. There is no mention of a Mathias in the list of children of Albright. |

**Sources to use for FFP:** Your goal in applying to First Families of Pennsylvania should be to use reliable, acceptable sources. To do that:

1. Look for original sources with primary information whenever possible. These are just a few examples:
  - a. Government issued vital records (should be available for 3 most recent generations. Exceptions for FFP are made on a case-by-case basis.)
    - i. Birth
    - ii. Marriage
    - iii. Death
    - iv. Divorce
  - b. Church records (depending on the denomination)
    - i. Baptism
    - ii. Death
    - iii. Marriage
  - c. Government documents
    - i. Wills and probate documents
    - ii. Deeds and other land records
    - iii. Court records
    - iv. Census records – both Federal and state when available
    - v. Tax records
  - d. Other
    - i. Cemetery records or tombstones (with transcription and location)
    - ii. Newspaper clippings current with the events.
    - iii. City directories
    - iv. Social Security Death Index
    - v. Military records
      1. Draft registrations
      2. Pension applications
    - vi. Bible records
    - vii. Diaries and letters
    - viii. Geburts und Taufschein (PA German birth and baptismal certificates)
2. Evaluate all the sources that you find.
3. Read the entire document.
4. Use all three types of evidence.
5. Resolve any conflicts about names.

- a. Do not assume relationships. In earlier records, terms such as junior and senior did not imply any relationship and only referred to younger and older people with the same name.
  - b. Do not assume any relationship between two people with the same surname who appear on the same document unless that relationship is stated.
  - c. Be careful when families use the same names for multiple generations or when the same name appears in several families in a single location at the same time.
6. Connect the wife to the child. The widow named in the will is not necessarily the mother of any of the children. This connection is especially important if the lineage goes back through the female line in that generation.

**Cite your sources.** First Families of Pennsylvania does not require a specific bibliographic format for identifying the source of the information that you provide. The important thing to ask yourself is: Could another researcher easily find this source with this citation? For example, you should provide the author, title, publisher, place of publication and date of publication for published works as well as including a copy of the title page and the reverse of the title page if it includes the date of publication or copyright that is not on the front of the title page.

For government documents such as wills, deeds, and court records, include the county, state, type of record, volume, and page. If the information comes from an online source, include the online repository, the name of the database, film number if applicable and image number in addition to the specific source information such as: Montour Co., PA. Wills. Vol 1, p. 887. In PA, U.S., Wills and Probate Records, 1683-1993, Ancestry.com, Image 513 of 519.

There are several online sites that provide information on citing sources. One is the “Cite Your Sources” Research Wiki by FamilySearch.org ([www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Cite\\_YourSources\\_\(Source\\_Footnotes\)](http://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Cite_YourSources_(Source_Footnotes))). Another excellent source for models of citations is the Evidence Explained website of Elizabeth Shown Mills ([www.evidenceexplained.com](http://www.evidenceexplained.com)) where she provides “sample Quick Check Models” for a variety of sources.

A final word of advice about citations. Try not to worry about the format. Remember, you want another researcher to be able to find the original item that you used. Whether you use a comma or a semicolon is not as important as whether you include all the information you need.

## **FAQs: QUESTIONS ABOUT DOCUMENTING YOUR LINEAGE.**

1. **I listed Ancestry as the name of my source. Why isn't that acceptable?**

Using Ancestry.com to locate information is fine in many cases. But Ancestry like many of the online websites such as FamilySearch, MyHeritage, Newspapers.com, etc. is a collection of databases as well as user created family trees and databases made up of information from those user created trees. Those family trees are covered in FAQ #3.

Looking only at the databases and excluding the user created trees and databases created from them, it is important to identify the specific source that the information came from. Evaluate that database the same way you would evaluate any source. Be sure to read the description of the database (see FAQ2).

Sometimes one database like the PA and NJ Church Records database contains information from a number of different sources. You need to cite the specific source and/or the database that you are using as well as the online website such as:

Montour Co., PA. Wills. Vol 1, p. 887. In PA, U.S., Wills and Probate Records, 1683-1993, Ancestry.com, Image 513 of 519.

Burials by A. P. Pfleuger, Zion Lutheran Church, Turbotville, Northumberland Co., PA, page 359. In PA and NJ, U.S. Church and Town Records, 1669-2013. Ancestry.com. Image 120 of 147.

## **2. I've seen things like the Pennsylvania Births and Christenings, 1709-1950 database on FamilySearch.org. Is that a reliable source?**

Whenever you are using a collection type of database, try to determine the source of the information contained in that database. If you look at the description of this database on FamilySearch, you will find the following: "As this is an index of records compiled from various sources, **it is strongly recommended that you verify any information you find with original records**" (bold in the original description). Some databases such as this one were compiled from user submitted information and pedigree charts without any checking of the accuracy of that information.

A similar database on Ancestry.com is the Lancaster, Pennsylvania, U.S. Mennonite Vital Records, 1750-2014. Many of the records in that database are taken from undocumented family histories and pedigree charts. If you check the individual cards in that database (see the images on Ancestry), you should be able to determine the source of the specific information and locate that source to evaluate it.

### **3. Why aren't the family trees on websites such as Ancestry, FamilySearch, MyHeritage, etc. acceptable sources?**

Many of the family trees found online are not documented. In other words, no one has checked the information contained in them for accuracy. That's not to say that they are incorrect and you should ignore them. Rather you should use the information that they contain as clues to do your own research and locate the sources that have information to construct your family tree.

### **4. What are the best types of sources to use?**

Ideally, the information contained in government issued vital records for birth, death, and marriage; government records for wills, probate files, deeds, etc.; court records; and church records is considered reliable. Remember, you are looking for original sources and primary information whenever possible. See the list earlier in this guide.

### **5. I looked everywhere online and couldn't find the information that I need. I guess I'm just at a dead end, right?**

While a lot of wonderful records are online, there are other resources that are only available by going to a repository in person, making a phone call, sending an email, or contacting a group such as Random Acts of Genealogical Kindness. Don't give up just because what you need is not online.

### **6. What about using things like Bibles, or family letters and diaries?**

The record pages in a family Bible can be an excellent source as long as the information provided on them was current with the event or provided by someone who had firsthand knowledge of the event. For example, the information in a family record in a Bible that was published in 1875 would not be considered as proof for events that happened in the 1700s unless it can be shown that the person providing the information had direct knowledge of the events. Bible records are considered on a case-by-case basis.

The same applies to family letters and diaries. The writer should have had firsthand knowledge of the events. For example, if Anna Hershey noted in her diary for 14 Apr 1835: "Brother Joseph and his wife Barbara had a baby yesterday and named her Mary," this could be used as documentation for the birth of Mary Hershey, daughter of Joseph Hershey and wife Barbara, on 13 Apr 1835.

## 7. May I use newspapers, county histories, and family history books?

Let's look at each of these:

**Newspapers:** Look for articles, obituaries, and notices that were published at or very close to the time of the event. Newspaper articles on historical events are usually not acceptable unless the source of the information in them is documented or if they are a reprint of an article that appeared at the time of the event.

**County histories:** In these, you may find a variety of types of information and no indication of the source of any of it. Usually, information (birth, marriage, parents) on people who are living at the time the book was published is accepted on a case-by-case basis when original records do not exist. For earlier generations, you can use the other information as clues for additional research in original documents.

**Family Histories and Lineage Books and Papers:** The big question to ask here is: "Is the information contained in these books well documented?" If so, you should be able to locate the original documents to use in your application. A few lineage books are so well documented and researched that the information is accepted without further research. An example is what are known as the Silver Books of the Mayflower Society.

However, when no documentation is included, family histories and lineage books are not accepted. Even the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution will no longer accept some of the lineages found in their earlier applications and published in their lineage books such as the 1918 volume titled *Lineage Book NSDAR* because they do not meet the current standards for proof of a lineage. In general, lineage papers from other societies are not considered documentation, but they should refer you to the original proofs.

Don't ignore these books and papers. Use the information in them as clues for your own research. For example, knowing the possible name of a father may make it easier to locate a will, deed, or probate record showing a connection between a father and a child.

## 8. I found a complete biography on Find a Grave. May I use that?

Find a Grave is excellent for locating pictures of tombstones. Sometimes there is even a scan or photo of an actual newspaper obituary attached to person's record. If you are lucky, the source for that newspaper clipping will be given so you can find the original.



Unfortunately, most of the biographies on Find a Grave and similar websites are not documented and thus are not acceptable sources for FFP. We do not know who provided the information and where they got that information. However, there may be clues on Find a Grave that will lead you to the original information. Transcriptions of newspaper obituaries on Find a Grave are not acceptable without a copy of the appropriate part of the original newspaper as well as the paper's name, location, and date.

### **9. May I use a photograph of a tombstone to show birth and death dates?**

Absolutely! In the absence of other records such as government issued vital records, church records, obituaries, and probate records, tombstones can be very helpful. But remember that the stone should be an original marker placed at or near the time of death and not a modern replacement or one added by a family association. You should provide a clear picture of the stone as well as a transcription of the inscription on the marker. Be sure to include the name and location of the cemetery.

Find a Grave is an excellent source for pictures of tombstones. If you use a picture from Find a Grave, indicate that in your citation with the transcription, cemetery information, and memorial number if any.

### **10. May I use early U.S. Federal census records to prove family connections in families when vital records do not exist?**

Before 1880, there is no relationship stated in the U.S. Federal Census. Before 1850, only the head of the household was listed. Therefore, census records before 1880 can only be used in conjunction with other records to establish relationships. See the example in FAQ #13.

### **11. May I use an index or an abstract or should I find the original record?**

Whenever possible, find the original record. You may find that there is more information in an original record than in the abstract or in the index. Because some indexes rely on OCR (optical character recognition) or artificial intelligence, you may find that the computer confuses dates and "reads" the newsprint incorrectly. Ancestry even notes in the U.S. Obituary Collection, 1930-Current: "The facts in this collection were found using artificial intelligence technology and may contain errors." There's a great example

of OCR picking up a military enlistment date for the birth date. If you have questions about a specific index, you can always contact First Families of Pennsylvania.

## **12. What happens when I can't find a marriage record for some of my ancestors?**

While you should be able to locate a marriage record for more recent generations, there are other documents that you can use to replace a marriage record in the earlier generations. Remember, you are proving a biological lineage so an actual marriage document is not required. In some cases, you may need to provide several documents to establish when a couple married and the maiden name of the wife (See FAQ #13). Death certificates of children often provide the maiden name of the mother. Searching online for "marriage record alternatives" should provide useful links. But remember, just because a woman is named in the will does not mean that she is the mother of any of the children.

The important thing is to ask yourself: "Does the lineage go back through the male or female?" If it goes back through the male line, it is not necessary to provide the maiden name of the female. If it goes through the female line, you must prove the maiden name and that this female is the mother of the specific child in your lineage.

## **13. Could you explain a little more about using indirect evidence?**

There are times when you do not find the exact information you need. When this happens, you should try to piece together the answer from a variety of sources. Here's a more detailed look at the example of Elizabeth Wertman who was listed in the evidence chart earlier in this guide.

Let's say you are trying to place Elizabeth with her mother. The official PA Death Certificate for Elizabeth Wertman shows she was born in 1836 and died in 1907. In the space for maiden name of mother, the informant listed "don't know" and gave the father's name as Philip Wertman. There is no known marriage record for Philip Wertman. However, you can examine the rest of the names shown on the 1850 census with Philip Wertman. The 1850 census does not show relationships, but, using those names, you locate a PA Death Certificate for two of the people shown in the household. Born 1838 and died 1906, Esther Wertman's death certificate shows her mother as Maria Kroom and father as Philip Wertman. The PA Death Certificate for Jacob Wertman, born 1840 and died 1910, shows his mother as Anna Maria Croom and his father as Philip Wertman. Turning to a local church book, you find a baptism record that contains the 1831 baptism of Catharina Wertman, daughter of Philip and "Anna Maria born Croom." This shows Philip was married to Anna Maria Croom/Kroom by at least 1831 and still married to her in 1840 when Jacob was born. Thus Elizabeth, born in 1836, was Anna Maria's daughter.

#### **14. What should I do if I can't find exact dates?**

Sometimes you will not be able to locate an exact date for event but you may be able to locate records to give you an approximate date. For example, Joseph Schlough appears in the 1850 census but not in the 1860 or 1870 census, and you've checked to see that he hasn't just moved to another location or been missed in the census. It is reasonable to assume that Joseph died before 1860 or between 1850 and 1860. In another example, letters of administration for the estate of Jacob Resch were granted on 21 Sep 1764. Thus, you know that Jacob died before 21 Sep 1764 because a will is only probated after a person dies.

Some simple abbreviations to use with dates are:

- Abt. = About a given date
- Bef. = Before a given date
- Aft. = After a given date
- Bet. = Between two dates

#### **15. Are translations of the early Pennsylvania German church records acceptable?**

Yes! Rev. Frederick Weiser and other experts have published translations of many of the early Pennsylvania German church records. John Humphrey used these translations to publish a series of volumes on Pennsylvania births by county which are available online at the GSP website for members. The information in these translations and compilations can be used to prove a lineage. One caveat: Be sure that the translator has not added additional information or comments that do not appear in the original. To determine this, you should read the introduction and/or preface to the volume. Beware of information added in brackets in the translation.

While you are looking for the early church records, don't forget to look for the early Pennsylvania German birth and baptismal certificates known as Geburts und Taufschein. Like the current vital records, these are a wonderful resource. There are many published collections with translations as well as online collections available from several libraries and museums.

#### **16. I paid to have an early German newspaper article on the marriage of my ancestors translated. Can I use that?**

Yes, you can use the translation of foreign language documents including things like newspapers articles as long as the original item meets the requirements of FFP. Other

examples are the early PA German frakturs, and Bible records. For each translation, you should include a copy of the original document, the translation signed by the translator, and a brief description of the qualifications of the translator. For specific questions about translations, contact FFP.

**17. I'm of African American descent, so I can't document my family back far enough to join FFP, right?**

Of course, you may be able to join! Remember that there are 3 time periods for membership in FFP. While African Americans have a rich heritage in all three time periods, it may be easiest to locate your ancestors in the more recent Pennsylvania Proud period which runs from 1866 until 1900. However, there are a number of excellent records available for both enslaved and free people of color in Pennsylvania going back into the 1700s. One early example is the 1772-1790 papers of manumissions from the Quaker Philadelphia Quarterly Meeting. Explore the Family History Resources – African American (under Public Resources and Collections) on the GSP website for links to these manumissions and a wide variety of resources to help you in your research.

**18. I don't know much about the county that my ancestors lived in so I don't know where to find the records or even if records exist. What should I do?**

If the location is in Pennsylvania, begin by checking the resources on the Genealogical Society of Pennsylvania website. You will find maps, repository guides for individual counties, and a wide variety of links to sites with information about PA. The members only section of the website has more resources including access to the 16 volume John T. Humphrey collection of Pennsylvania birth records taken from early church records.

For other states, use the Search tab on FamilySearch.org to locate the Research Wiki for the location. Typing the name of the state on the FamilySearch Research Wiki homepage should take you to map of the state. Just click on the county you are interested in searching to find complete information on the types of records that exist and where to find them. The Research Wiki will even tell you if there is any known record loss at the county courthouse.

Don't forget to check the websites of any local libraries or historical/genealogical societies in that location. Groups such as Random Acts of Genealogy Kindness have

volunteers who can often assist you. Check out local history and genealogy groups on Facebook.

## **19. I just can't find the information I need. It's not out there! What should I do?**

Sometimes genealogy researchers hit what's called a "brickwall." Unfortunately, the farther back we go, the more difficult it can be to locate records to support our research. Sometimes, we just have to admit that we've reached the end of the line, at least for the present time. But remember that new information can be found, a family Bible can be located, or a long-lost church book may materialize in an attic. So never give up the search!

In other cases, genealogists write an analysis, proof summary, or proof argument . This is a more advanced research strategy in which you need to use multiple documents and all three types of evidence to reach a conclusion when there is no direct evidence, especially of a parent-child relationship or when there is conflicting information such as several people with the same name in the same location at the same time. You start with a research question or a statement that you are trying to prove; indicate all the sources you've consulted without finding the information; list the sources that you are using to answer your research question; analyze and interpret all of the information that you found in a logical order; and explain your conclusion. But before you begin writing one of these, be sure that you have done a "reasonably exhaustive search" for the information that you need.

For more information on genealogical proof, consult:

Jones, Thomas W. *Mastering Genealogical Proof*. National Genealogical Society, Arlington, VA, 2013.

Jones, Thomas W. "Proof Arguments," Chapter 20, pp. 477-479 in *Professional Genealogy Preparation, Practice & Standards*. Elizabeth Shown Mills, ed. Genealogical Publishing Co., Baltimore, MD, 2018.

Little, Barbara Vines. "It's not that hard to write proof arguments," *OnBoard* 15 (Sept 2009), 20-23. Online at: [gcgcertification.org/skillbulding-its-not-that-hard-to-write-proof-arguments](http://gcgcertification.org/skillbulding-its-not-that-hard-to-write-proof-arguments)

Mills, Elizabeth Shown. "QuickLesson17: The Evidence Analysis Process Map." Online at [www.evidenceexplained.com/content/quicklesson-17-evidence-analysis-process-map](http://www.evidenceexplained.com/content/quicklesson-17-evidence-analysis-process-map)

Norris, Michelle. "Proof Summaries." *Vita Brevis* 17 Jul 2019. Online at [vitabrevis.americanancestore.org/2019/07/proof-summaries](http://vitabrevis.americanancestore.org/2019/07/proof-summaries)

Rose, Christine. *Genealogical Proof Standard; Building a solid case*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Rec. CR Publications, San Jose, CA, 2014.

Also, don't forget to check out the many face-to-face as well as online genealogy courses, webinars, and lectures. GSP has a number of their Third Thursday webinars available on the members' website.

## **20. I know I'll have more questions about sources that I want to use. What should I do?**

Contact the First Families of Pennsylvania (FFP) using the email on the website. While we can not do the research for you (it would be conflict of interest because we will be reviewing your application), we may be able to answer your question or give you some research strategies. Sometimes, we can't answer a question without reviewing the documentation and that can come only after the application for FFP has been submitted.

Also, don't forget that a benefit of membership in the Genealogical Society of PA is free reference consultations.

13 Aug 2023