Overview of Acceptable Sources for *Pennsylvania Ancestors Lineage Society* Applications

Additional information with more detailed explanations is found in the *PALS Research Guide to Documenting Your Application*.

Source	Acceptability[1]	Qualifier	Tips
Probate Records including wills and estate files	High	Relationships need to be directly stated in the documents. Two people with the same surname on a document does not prove a relationship by itself.	The woman named as wife in the will may not be the mother of any of the children.
Vital Records – Birth	High	Should be government issued document.	Beware of unofficial "vital record" collections.
Vital Records- Marriage	High	Should show that the marriage took place.	Look for marriage returns/records rather than licenses.
Vital Records - Death	High	Is considered reliable for death information. Can be used for birth information with caution.	Evaluate birth/family information on the death certificate carefully.
Court Documents	High	Wide variety of documents. Helpful to know the laws in effect at the time of the recording of the document.	Look for guardianships for minor children when husband died.
Deeds	High	Two people with the same surname on a document does not prove a relationship by itself.	Look for deeds to settle an estate.
Government Pension Records	High	Determine who provided the information.	Look for records of others in the family/community.
Other Government Records	High	Evaluate why the record was created and by whom.	Look for records concurrent with the event.
Church Records	High	Information should be contemporary[2] with the event. Translations should follow the PALS checklist.	Look for original records whenever possible rather than indexes, abstracts, or transcriptions.
Bible Records	High	Must be contemporary[2] with the events recorded.	Check the date when the Bible was printed/published.
Marriage Announcements in Newspapers	High	Should be contemporary[2] with the event and show the marriage took place.	Use engagement announcements to find the actual marriage announcement.
Fraktur	High	Should be contemporary[2] with the event(s). Translations are usually required.	Useful for PA German births and marriages.
Census Records	Medium	Best used with other records because, before 1940, informant is unknown.	Pre 1880 U.S. Census records cannot be used alone to establish relationships.
Cemetery compilations	Medium	Often there is no way to determine if the stone was original or provided later.	These may be the only record of older tombstones.
Obituaries in Newspapers	Medium	Should be contemporary[2] with the event. Can be used to identify parents.	Beware of the omission of relatives of the deceased such as a divorced spouse, estranged children, etc.
Diaries/Letters/Emails	Varies	Must be contemporary[2] with the events discussed. History of ownership should be provided for older documents.	Application must include verification of the author's firsthand knowledge.
Newspaper Articles	Varies	Must contain first-hand knowledge or be contemporary[2] with the events discussed.	Local papers often contain "events" such as family visits, vacations, etc.

Source	Acceptability[1]	Qualifier	Tips
County Histories	Varies	Information must be contemporary[2] with the events discussed or well documented.	Individual providing the information should have had first-hand knowledge if no documentation is provided.
Published Genealogies	Varies	Can be accepted if the information is well documented with acceptable sources.	It is best to locate the original documents.
Tombstone Photos Including Find A Grave	Varies	Tombstone must be contemporary[2] with the death of the individual and not erected years later. Cemetery must be identified by name and location.	The word "mother" on a tombstone does not mean she is the mother of all of a man's children.
Indexes and Abstracts	Varies	Locate the original records whenever possible.	There may be more information in the original document.
Journal Articles	Varies	Information must be supported by references to acceptable documents.	Check JSTOR.org for digitized back issues of scholarly journals.
Information from websites	Varies	Information must be supported by acceptable documents.	Locate the original documents .
Online databases	Varies	Depends on the source of the information in the database.	Read the description to determine the source of the information .
Family stories and oral histories	Not accepted		Use as clues to locate the original documents.
Find A Grave memorials	Not accepted	May be accepted if the source of the information is documented and if the source is acceptable.	Use as clues to locate the original documents.
Family group sheets, charts, etc.	Not accepted		Use as clues to locate the original documents.
Website Family Trees	Not accepted		Use as clues to locate the original documents.
Lineage Society Applications	Not accepted		Use as clues to locate the original documents.

[1]Acceptability as a source of information to provide evidence for Pennsylvania Ancestors Lineage Society

[2]Contemporary means that the information was recorded at or close to the time the event took place. For example, a wedding announcement appearing a few days after the wedding is contemporary with the event. A tombstone erected by a family group in 2015 to mark the death of an ancestor in the 1700s is not contemporary with the event.

A few questions to ask as you evaluate a source:

What is the purpose of this source? Why was it created? When was it created? Who created it? Is it an original record or a copy?

Who was the informant? Were they a witness to the event or did they have first-hand knowledge? Did they have a reason to lie?

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