Pennsylvania Ancestors Lineage Society,
The Genealogical Society of Pennsylvania*:*

RESEARCH GUIDE TO DOCUMENTING YOUR APPLICATION

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*. 4th Rev, Ed. San Jose CA, 2014, p. 25)

To help you find and document the correct information for your submission to Pennsylvania Ancestors, the following research guide provides a brief summary of what genealogists mean by sources, information, and evidence used to document their research.

PALS and the Genealogical Society of Pennsylvania subscribe to and follow the *Genealogy Standards* of the Board for Certification of Genealogists and the *Guidelines* of the National Genealogical Society.

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.* 3rd 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 No firsthand knowledge	Many family histories, undocumented county histories

Type of Information	Definition	Examples
Undetermined	Unknown involvement 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, 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 PALS: Your goal in applying to Pennsylvania Ancestors 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 PALS 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. Pennsylvania Ancestors 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). Another excellent source for models of citations is the Evidence Explained website of Elizabeth Shown Mills (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 that is needed.

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