

OFF THE BEATEN TRACK: SOLVING PROBLEMS USING ORIGINAL SOURCES

Gene F. Williams, CGSM

WHAT IS THE BEATEN TRACK?

The BEATEN TRACK is the one **we use most** in our genealogical research
In the past few years it has become the **INTERNET**

- From the INTERNET we **accept** information submitted by fellow genealogists without checking first for ACCURACY and SOURCE information
- The INTERNET is a wonderful tool, it has revolutionized the way we do research, **BUT**
- Where are the records and indexes coming from that are so searchable and accessible to us???

INTERNET

Most sites on the INTERNET are publishers

- Some have and are digitizing records to make them readily available to us, but
- In most cases, the publisher is not the **CREATOR** of the records

OUR RESPONSIBILITY AS RESEARCHERS

Use the **INTERNET** to gather research done by others (*indexes and family linked databases*)

- We use it as a tool to do a “preliminary” search and as a “guide” from which to begin research
- Become aware of the difference between **ORIGINAL** and **PUBLISHED** records
 - **ORIGINAL** records – Those that were created at or near the time of the event
 - **PUBLISHED** records – Those that are copied in some form from the original (abstracts, extracts, indexes, etc.)

YES!! There are **ORIGINAL** records being digitized and appearing on the INTERNET

- It becomes our responsibility to
 - Recognize them as **ORIGINAL RECORDS**, use them in our research, and to
 - Search the Website or Entry for the **SOURCE CITATION** of the **ORIGINAL** record, then
 - Record the **CITATION** in our records

PUBLISHER VS. ORIGINATOR

Source Information:

Ancestry.com. **(Publisher)** *Social Security Death Index* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: The Generations Network, Inc., 2007. **Original data:**

(Originator) *Social Security Death Index, Master File*. Social Security Administration.

PUBLISHER VS. ORIGINATOR

Source Information: Social Security Death Index

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. **(Publisher)** © 1999-2005 by Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

➔ This data is only accurate as of 1 Mar 2008. The information on this printout is from the *United States Government (Originator)* records and is in the public domain. No claim to copyright is expressed or implied.

REQUIREMENTS FOR SOLVING A GENEALOGICAL PROBLEM

1. "Genealogical Proof Standard" (GPS) –
 - The standard for judging whether information or statements about a relationship, identity, situation, or event is substantially credible

GENEALOGICAL PROOF STANDARD

Requires a Thorough and Extensive Search

- *Identify all relevant records - Not just the*
 - *Microfilm* - *Online databases*
 - *What is conveniently available* - *Census*
 - *Nicely indexed* - *Newspapers*
 - *In paper form* - *Compiled service records, etc.,*
- Requires Complete and Accurate Source Citations
 - Two Purposes for citations
 - a. *To record the specific location of each piece of data and*
 - b. *To record details that affect the evaluation of that data*
- Requires Skilled Analysis
 - Each research problem produces a chain of records with some obvious patterns
 - They identify the people and circumstances in which they lived
 - They provide answers to specific research questions
 - We MUST determine the credibility of each detail in each document, and
 - Determine if it fits within our family
 - If questionable, we must continue until we prove or disprove the information to our satisfaction

REQUIREMENTS FOR SOLVING A GENEALOGICAL PROBLEM

2. Problem-solving "proof" solutions must rely on:
 - Multiple sources showing evidence that is in agreement
 - A comprehensive search for evidence
 - Sources created as close as possible to the time of the event reported in them (ORIGINAL RECORDS)
3. Dangers of relying exclusively on Family History Library (FHL) materials for solutions:
 - Many FHL sources are derivative sources or are based on secondary information
 - Most all the book collection
 - The Ancestral File Database
 - The International Genealogical Index
 - Many microfilmed materials
 - FHL microfilm holdings are not comprehensive for many time periods, localities, and record types

FHL CATALOG EXAMPLE

- Bird, Annie Laurie. *Boise, The Peace Valley*. (Caldwell, Idaho : Canyon County Hist. Soc., 1975, c1934) **DERIVATIVE**
- Leonard, William Dean and Korinne Kay Leonard. *Mendenhalls In The United States : A Listing Of The United States Census Data For The Mendenhall Family*. (San Jose, California : W.D. & K.K. Leonard, c1999)

- The first two volumes are the actual census data which gives name, alias, relationship, age, birthplace, census date, location, reference, family number and notes. The data is sorted by census year, location and then by family number. The third volume is an index to the census data. **DERIVATIVE**

FHL CATALOG EXAMPLE

- Jones, Sarah E. *Register of births at Union and Sandy, Salt Lake County, Utah, 1898-1900.* (Salt Lake City, Utah : Filmed by the Genealogical Society of Utah, 1990)

DERIVATIVE

- Utah. Probate Court. (Salt Lake County). *Divorce records, 1852-1856, 1877-1887.* (Microfilm of original records filmed in the city and county building Salt Lake City) Salt Lake City, Utah : Filmed by the Genealogical Society of Utah, 1966 **ORIGINAL**

STEPS TO SOLVING PROBLEMS WITH ORIGINAL SOURCES

- Learn enough about the locality to understand what the original record possibilities are
 - FamilySearch.org ► *Search Tab* ► **Research Guidance** ► Find Area of Interest ► What ORIGINAL records are available
 - FamilySearch.org ► **Research Helps** ► Find Area of Interest ► Research Outline ► What ORIGINAL records are available
- Locate the records
 - FHL Catalog – Make sure they are the ORIGINALS (*Author is the County, State or Country*)
- Search Online for Archives, Historical Societies, etc.
 - *Cyndislist.com*
 - *USGenWeb.org*

General U.S. Sites - Cyndislist.com

Category Index - Libraries, Archives & Museums

- [DAR Library](#)
- [Directory of Genealogy Libraries in the U.S.](#)
- [Family History Library Catalog](#)
- [Genealogy Libraries in the U.S.](#)
- [Japanese American National Museum](#)
- [LibDex - The Library Index - USA](#)
- [Library of Congress](#) - See this category on *Cyndi's List* for related links.
- [National Archives](#) - See this category on *Cyndi's List* for related links.
- [National Women's History Museum](#)
- [NUCMC Listing of Archives and Manuscript Repositories in the United States](#)
- [State Libraries of the USA](#)

USGenWeb.com

- Select the State Page
 - Search the menu for
 - Libraries
 - Historical Societies
 - State Archives
 - County Records Offices
- All these repositories have ORIGINAL records holdings, some are now being digitized
 - **EXAMPLE:** *Jackson County, Missouri Marriages digitized by the Missouri Historical Society*

- Go to the records to read, copy, transcribe or abstract them
 - *Make sure all pages are viewed and copied*
 - *If there is more than one entry for a person in the index, view and copy all records*
 - *Place the source citation on each sheet*
- Evaluate the original records and correlate them with microfilmed and published records
 - Quantity vs. Quality

- *Multiple sources may copy the same information from an earlier source that is unreliable*
 - *Multiple sources for a particular statement confirm each other only when each is a reliable source of independent origin offering firsthand knowledge*
- 5. Resolve contradictions and base your problem- solving proof conclusion on the sum of the evidence from all the records you found
 - Test it against these Levels of Confidence
 - *Certainly – No reasonable doubt based on sound research and good evidence*
 - *Probably – More likely than not based on sound research and good evidence*
 - *Possibly – Evidence supports the assertion, but assertion is far from proved*
 - *Likely – Odds weight slightly in favor of the assertion*
 - *Apparently – Formed an impression based on common information*
 - *Perhaps – Suggests an idea that is plausible, but remains to be tested*

STRATEGIES FOR LOCATING ORIGINAL RECORDS

- Read “how-to” books and articles on states, regions and localities
- Read case studies in scholarly journals
- Listen to lectures on research at national, state and regional genealogical conferences
- Read articles in state, regional and local level periodicals
- Read non-genealogical works about the locality or time period of interest
- Use manuscript finding aids

RECORDS CATEGORIES OFTEN REQUIRING ON-SITE RESEARCH

- Archival and Historical Society Manuscript holdings
- Church Records (especially minutes)
- Court Records not at the county level (district courts, federal courts)
- Family Records
- Gravestones and Cemetery Records
- Local Government Records
- “Loose” County Court Papers
- Many genealogically useful National Archives Records
- Newspapers
- Non-American Records
- Recent Records

NOTES: