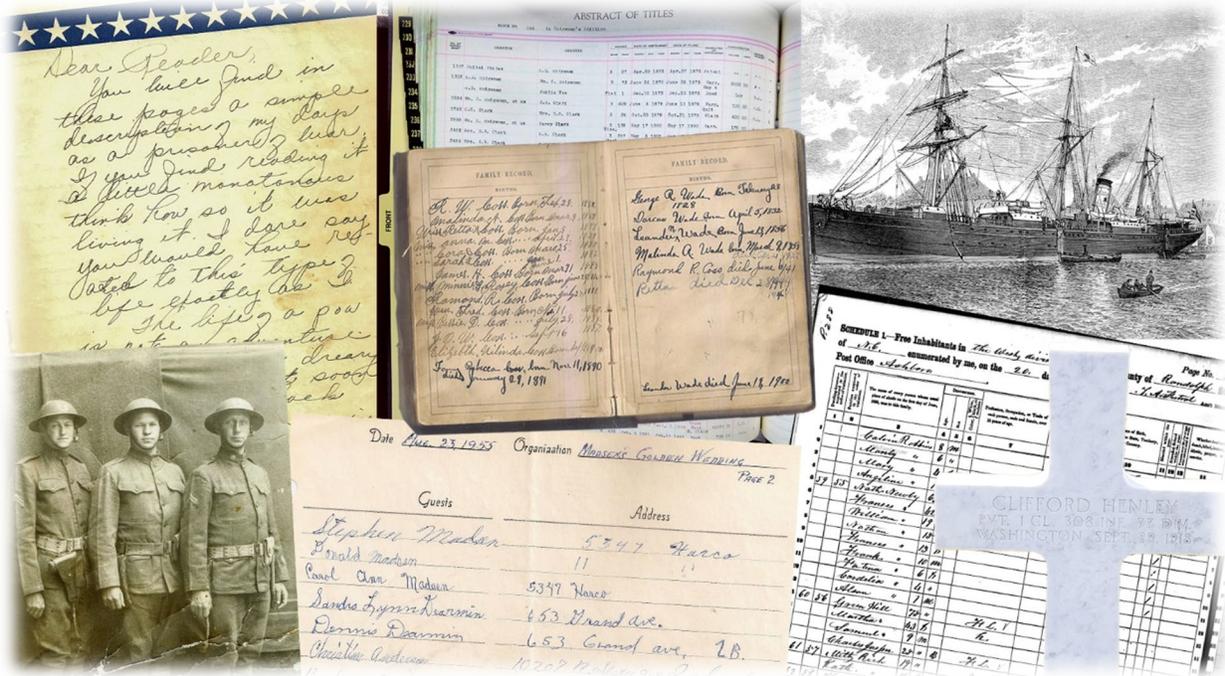




Evidence Analysis



Evidence Defined

As a Noun “the available body of facts or information indicating whether a belief or proposition is true or valid.”

As a Verb “be or show evidence of.”¹

Items & Data

This is important to understand. There are two things we need to think about when analyzing evidence... the **item** itself and the **facts** within the item. **We treat these two things separately** when evaluating the evidence. They can carry different weight when deciding what is fact and what may be an error.

Every document, image, and artifact can tell a story. **The real clues are in the details.**



¹ Oxford Languages via Google Search.

ITEMS - Documents, Images, and Artifacts

When reviewing documents, images, and artifacts we need to first decide if they are an **original item** or a **derivative (copy)** of the item. One can be fooled into thinking they are looking at an original old document when they may be looking at a clerk's handwritten copy.

Original vs. Derivative Copies

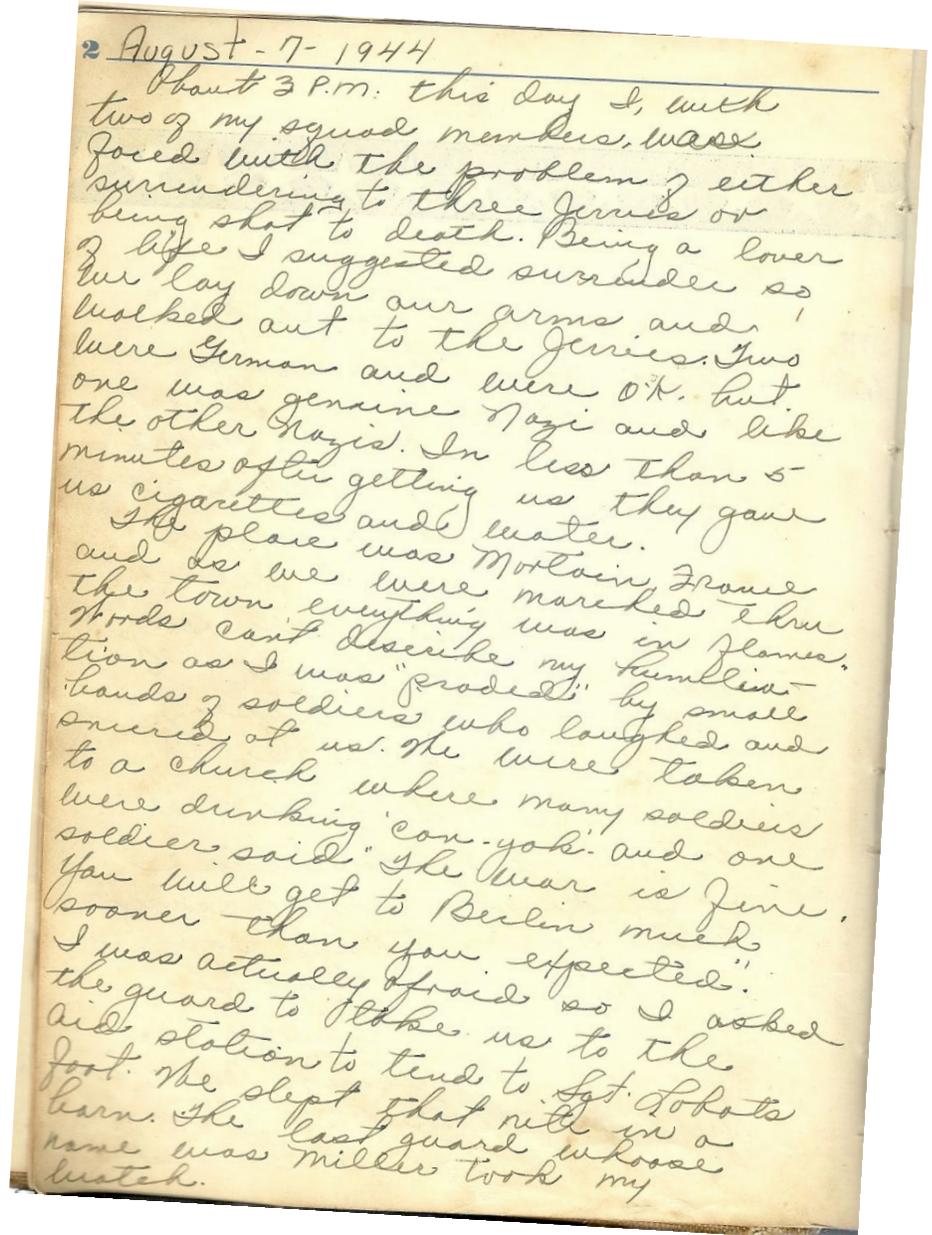
Original records are the most sought-after records for genealogists. Why? Because **original records are likely to have the most information and the facts within are typically more accurate** than a copy derived from the original.

They often were created at the time of the event, but not always.

Original Records

Original records can include **items of first recording** of any event, original recordings (including audio and video), artifacts (including grave markers, family heirlooms, etc.), vital records (birth, marriage, or death), church produced certificates, or any other document, image, or artifact that was the first record of the event.

This image is from the first entry on the 7th of August 1944 in the diary of American William Miller, P.O.W. captured by the Germans during WWII. It reads in part, **"About 3 P.M. this day I, with two of my squad members, was faced with the problem of either surrendering to three Jerries or being shot to death. Being the lover of life, I suggested surrender, so we lay down our arms and walked out to the Jerries."**²



² William A. Miller, "A Wartime Log." (Germany 1944-1945), p. 11, entry for 7 August 1944; privately held by Joyce Miller, [ADDRESS FOR PRIVATE USE], Wilmington, North Carolina, 2022.

This document was the original diary and in his own handwriting, making it a firsthand account of what happened. It is an original and primary source of this event.

Derivative Records

ABSTRACT OF TITLES

BLOCK NO. 246 In Hodgeman's Addition

| RECORD | DATE OF INSTRUMENT | DATE OF FILE | ADVERSE | ADVERSE | ADVERSE | ADVERSE | ADVERSE | ADVERSE | |
|--------|--|---------------------------------------|---------|---------|---------------|--------------|------------------|---------|--|
| 1037 | United States | H.J. Hodgeman | B | 27 | Apr. 20 1875 | Apr. 27 1875 | Patent | | |
| 1303 | H.J. Hodgeman | Wm. C. Hodgeman | B | 73 | June 26 1876 | June 26 1876 | Warr. Map & Plat | 5000 00 | |
| | H.J. Hodgeman | Public Use | Plat | 1 | Dec. 10 1876 | Dec. 20 1876 | Deed | 100 00 | |
| 1534 | Wm. C. Hodgeman, et ux | G.S. Clark | B | 609 | June 6 1879 | June 10 1879 | Warr. Quit Claim | 100 00 | |
| 1748 | G.S. Clark | Mrs. W.B. Clark | C | 24 | Oct. 28 1879 | Oct. 31 1879 | Warr. Deed | 400 00 | |
| 1899 | Wm. H. Hodgeman, et ux | Harry Clark | Misc. | 139 | May 17 1880 | May 17 1880 | Warr. Deed | 176 00 | |
| 2498 | Mrs. S.B. Clark | G.S. Clark | B | 597 | May 6 1881 | May 7 1881 | Warrantee Deed | 100 00 | |
| 2496 | Mrs. S.B. Clark | G.S. Clark | C | 384 | Apr. 1 1881 | May 7 1881 | Deed | 100 00 | |
| 2591 | G.S. Clark | Harry Clark | C | 555 | Dec. 16 1881 | Dec. 19 1881 | Warr. Deed | 100 00 | |
| 2692 | Heater Harry Clark (& Hina, Effie L. Jackson | Miss, Effie L. Jackson | C | 557 | Dec. 19 1881 | Dec. 19 1881 | Warr. Deed | 478 00 | |
| 2693 | Hina, Effie L. Jackson | G.S. Clark | C | 558 | Dec. 20 1881 | Dec. 20 1881 | Warr. Deed | 1 00 | |
| 4111 | H.J. Hodgeman | Patrick Carroll | P | 40 | June 18 1881 | Apr. 23 1882 | Warr. Deed | 35 00 | |
| 4304 | Wm. H. Hodgeman | Harsh Walbal | P | 119 | July 3 1882 | July 22 1882 | Warr. Deed | 100 00 | |
| 4478 | Wm. H. Hodgeman | Charles H. Clark | P | 189 | Nov. 11 1882 | Nov. 11 1882 | Warr. Deed | 25 00 | |
| 4610 | Mrs. Emma Oberpr. | Chas. H. Clark | Sales | 40 | Jan. 16 1883 | Jan. 16 1883 | Warr. Deed | 100 00 | |
| 4707 | Derrick & Bridget Carroll | Robert Taylor, for S.L. & S. J. J. J. | A | 50 | Mar. 1 1883 | Mar. 1 1883 | Warr. Deed | 2000 00 | |
| 5260 | Wm. H. Hodgeman | James Larson | P | 662 | July 23 1883 | Mar. 17 1884 | Warr. Deed | 60 00 | |
| 6439 | Wm. H. Hodgeman | James Larson | G | 846 | Mar. 20 1885 | Mar. 2 1885 | Warr. Deed | 50 00 | |
| 6490 | G.S. Clark | G.S. Mackay | C | 58 | Dec. 2 1885 | Dec. 8 1885 | Warr. Deed | 450 00 | |
| 6884 | Made Walbal | Lorenzo Johnson | H | 77 | Mar. 19 1886 | Apr. 27 1886 | Warr. Deed | 500 00 | |
| 6888 | Lorenzo Johnson | Made Walbal | P | 47 | Mar. 22 1886 | Apr. 27 1886 | Warr. Deed | 400 00 | |
| 8123 | G.S. Clark | Edward Irwin | C | 217 | Apr. 11 1889 | Apr. 11 1889 | Warr. Deed | 500 00 | |
| 8203 | Wm. H. Hodgeman | Wm. Taylor | H | 203 | Apr. 27 1887 | Apr. 27 1887 | Warr. Deed | 1800 00 | |
| 8484 | A. Lorenzo Johnson, et ux | Missal Various L.S. S. Co. | A | 243 | June 16 1887 | June 16 1887 | Warr. Deed | 800 00 | |
| 8565 | Andor T. Johnson, et ux | Matthew Dawson, for Trust Co. | A | 269 | June 23 1887 | July 23 1887 | Warr. Deed | 500 00 | |
| 8621 | Jas. Larson, et ux | Wm. Loan & Trust Co. | B | 48 | Mar. 1 1887 | Apr. 1 1887 | Warr. Deed | 400 00 | |
| 8791 | Chas. H. Clark | John Irwin | G | 48 | Mar. 10 1887 | Apr. 20 1887 | Warr. Deed | 1000 00 | |
| 8792 | Harry Clark | Chas. H. Clark | E | 50 | Mar. 17 1887 | Apr. 20 1887 | Warr. Deed | 1 00 | |
| 8998 | Albany Co. S.L. & S. Ann. | Patrick Carroll, et ux | E | 176 | Sept. 20 1887 | Oct. 3 1887 | Warr. Deed | 1 00 | |
| 10042 | Jas. Larson, et ux | Barclay & Young, for Trust Co. | B | 47 | Dec. 29 1888 | Dec. 31 1888 | Warr. Deed | 500 00 | |
| 11842 | Andor T. Johnson, et ux | Barclay & Young, for Trust Co. | B | 113 | Mar. 29 1889 | Apr. 30 1889 | Warr. Deed | 176 00 | |
| 11728 | John H. Davis, et ux | Andor T. Johnson, et ux | B | 178 | Oct. 19 1889 | Oct. 19 1889 | Warr. Deed | 48 48 | |
| 12026 | H. Hanson, Trustee | Barclay & Young | H | 190 | Mar. 1 1890 | Mar. 2 1890 | Warr. Deed | 776 00 | |
| 12889 | Barclay & Young, Trustees | Wm. Investment Co. | H | 274 | Sept. 1 1890 | Sept. 2 1890 | Warr. Deed | 8668 88 | |
| 13099 | Wm. Investment Co. | Barclay & Young, Trustees | I | 104 | Sept. 1 1890 | Sept. 2 1890 | Warr. Deed | 4107 00 | |
| 13226 | G.S. Clark | John Irwin | H | 428 | Feb. 4 1891 | Feb. 11 1891 | Warr. Deed | 730 00 | |

Derivative Defined

As a noun “something that is based on another source.”³

Derivative copies are often things like transcriptions, abstracts, indexes, clerk copies, copies of vital records, images of the original, family histories or books, online family trees, databases, translations, and manuscripts. Derivatives are pretty much anything except the original item.

Right or Wrong Information within Original or Derivatives

Just because a document is an original does not necessarily mean the information within it is correct. Likewise, just

because an item is a derivative copy does not mean it is the information is incorrect. It very well could be that the derivative copy is correcting an error made in the first original record.

DATA - Facts and Information

Analyzing the Data

I like to refer to the information contained within the item as “data” instead of facts. I have a hard time calling something a fact when we’re not sure if it is factual or not. Good genealogists will question everything before crafting a conclusion.

Consider the Source

We’ve all heard the saying, *consider the source*. Well, this is for good reason when it comes to evaluating the evidence and weighing the data (or possible facts) contained within the item we are

³ Oxford Languages via Google Search

examining. We want to consider the source. Who gave this information? Who recorded this information? Could there be an error in the information? If so, how could that happen?

What is a Source Anyway?

Source Defined

As a noun *“a place, person, or thing from which something comes or can be obtained.”*⁴

For the sake of this discussion, we are referring to the source as a person or creator. Either some person gave the information, or some person was acting on behalf of an entity (like a government body) “creating” a document, manuscript, ledger, index, etc. These are our sources... *“a place, person, or thing from which something comes or can be obtained.”*

In every document, we want to consider who the informant was (if known) before evaluating the evidence. This will help us understand how reliable the information may be.

Informants and Witnesses

A good researcher is always looking for the informants and witnesses on any document. Who are they and how do they relate to the people the document is about?

Luckily, in the 1940 U.S. census, it tells us who the informant was by marking it with an X with a circle around the X. Shown in the image (blue arrows) shows who the informant was. Velma Vanhoy (wife) was the informant in this household.

| | | | |
|---|-------------------|---------------|---|
| — | Wesley | Wife | 1 |
| — | Luther M. → ⊕ | Son | 2 |
| — | Ester May | Daughter | 2 |
| — | James Ralph | Son | 2 |
| — | Vanhoy Joseph M. | Head | 0 |
| — | Oliver Fred James | Friend | 6 |
| — | Velma → ⊕ | Wife | 6 |
| — | Vestal Pauline | Sister-in-law | 6 |
| — | Luffman John H. | Head | 0 |
| — | Sellie → ⊕ | Wife | 1 |
| — | Gracie | Daughter | 2 |
| — | Elsie | Daughter | 2 |
| — | Hubert C | Son | 2 |

⁴ Oxford Languages via Google Search.

Primary vs. Secondary Sources

We divide our sources into two groups, **primary and secondary sources**. These are the **people (or creator) who informed, reported about, or witnessed the event**.

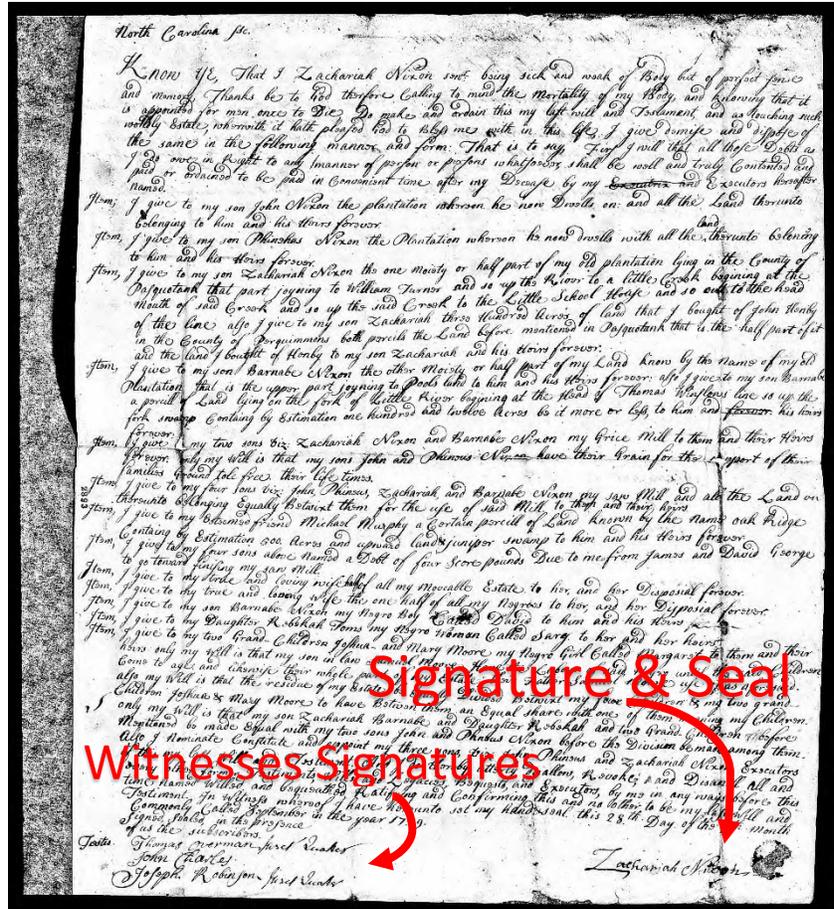
Sources can be documents, newspapers, or other items.

However, whenever possible, we want to get to the original source. Some sources might only be inanimate objects, like a tombstone.

Primary Sources

A primary source is typically someone who witnessed an event. For example, a mother is the informant on her child's birth certificate. She was there, gave birth to her child, and she likely provided the information for her child's birth certificate, thus, is most likely getting the information correct.

The witness on a marriage certificate would also be a primary source as well as the data about the bride and groom, since the bride and groom likely provided the information on the marriage certificate.



Will of Zachariah Nixon 1739

Secondary Sources

A secondary source is going to be someone who did not witness an event or have firsthand knowledge about the data contained within a document. Examples of secondary sources are newspapers articles, obituaries (either online or in print), census records, narratives, family histories, registries, indexes, manuscripts, etc.

| Født e. | | | | | Drenge. | | |
|---------|-----------------|---------------------|--|--|--|---|--|
| Nr. | År og Datum. | Barnets fulde Navn. | Daarens Datum enten i Kirken eller hjemme. | Førendrenes Navn, Stand, Bændering og Bopæl. | Faddernes Navn, Stand og Opholdssted. | Deres anførsel i det afmærkede Registerbøger. | Anmærkninger. |
| 17. | 1850 17 juli | Anton Christensen | 15 Septbr 1850 i Lindelse | Anders Nilsen i Højte hans hustru Marie Kants i Lindelse. | Jens Hans Andersen i Lindelse Mikkel Rasmussen i Lindelse Hans Peter Rasmussen og Kennetild. Gudne Jørgen Rasmussen i Lindelse. | 1850, 90840 | M. indt. f. D. den 5 Juni 1851 i D. f. D. |
| 18. | 21 juli | Jørgen Madsen | 22 Septbr 1850 i Lindelse | Anders Eriksen hans hustru Catharin Rasmussen i Lindelse. | Anders Hans Andersen i Lindelse Jørgen Madsen i Lindelse Gudne Bertram Jørgen Eriksen i Lindelse. | 1857, 22 | M. indt. f. D. |
| 19. | 9 Aug. | Christopher Madsen | 27 Octbr 1850 i Lindelse | Jens Madsen hans hustru Marie i Lindelse. | Anders Christen Madsen i Lindelse Hans Jørgen Madsen i Lindelse Johannes Christen Jørgen i Lindelse Gudne Jørgen Madsen i Lindelse. | 1859, 99 | M. indt. f. D. den 5 Juni 1851 i D. f. D. |

5

Danish Church Birth Registry for Christopher Madsen b. 1850

Mixed Primary and Secondary Information Within One Item

Now that you understand **Items** (documents, images, and artifacts), and whether they are **Original vs. Derivative** copies (of items), and...

You understand that the **Source** may be a **Primary vs. Secondary** source...

We need to talk about the fact that you can have **mixed primary and secondary information within one document**, regardless of if it is an original or derivative item.

Each item you examine could have a mix of primary and secondary data contained within it based on the relationship between the informant and the subject (the person within the document).

For example, a death certificate. If a wife was by her husband's side when he died, she witnessed his death. The death date and place contained on his death certificate would be primary information (data/facts) because she witnessed his death. However, she likely did not witness his birth and thus the birth date and place she informs about on the death certificate, is considered secondary information.

⁵ Rigsarkivet [Danish National Archives,] "Arkivalieonline [Online Archive]," online database, (<https://www.sa.dk> : accessed 18 June 2017), Kirkebøger [Church Books] > Kirkebøger fra hele landet [Church Books from Around the Country] > Svenborg County, Lindelse Sogn [Parish] > Kontraminsterialbog (1813 - 2003) [Ministers Log] > 1843 F - 1859 F > image 42, line 19.

Weighing the Evidence

The reason we go to this length of deciding primary vs. secondary sources and original vs. derivative items is it helps us evaluate the evidence we resolving conflicts found in multiple documents. All of us will find various birth, marriage, death, dates, places, ages, name spellings, and the list goes on. To help us decide which of the conflicting evidence is correct, it may come down to primary and original sources.

Knowing Originals from Copied (Derivative) Documents

In some cases, it is obvious that you are looking at an original or a copy of an original, sometimes they are stamped as copies.

Indexes and registries are examples of information extracted from an original record. Vital records can often have many copies, even certified copies.

County or court clerks will often create multiple copies of records. For example, notices to the area sheriffs of someone's arrest warrant, various court documents, and multiple copies of real estate contracts, just to name a few.

You can have multiple copies of original documents if they were created at the same time. Often in real estate transactions, we'll sign multiple copies of the same document, one for each party in the transaction.

Images

Images of family or a standard photo (such as of a tombstone) are usually treated as originals. They are typically held by the family or the photographer.

Scans of these images would be treated the same as originals in our evaluation, unless they have been modified by computer paint programs such as Paint, Photoshop, etc.

Census Images Online

Census images, while technically are a derivative copy of the original, because it is a photographic copy of the original, it treated as an original in our evaluation.

However, because the information was written by a census enumerator, the information in it is considered a secondary source since the enumerator does not have firsthand knowledge of the people he is recording.

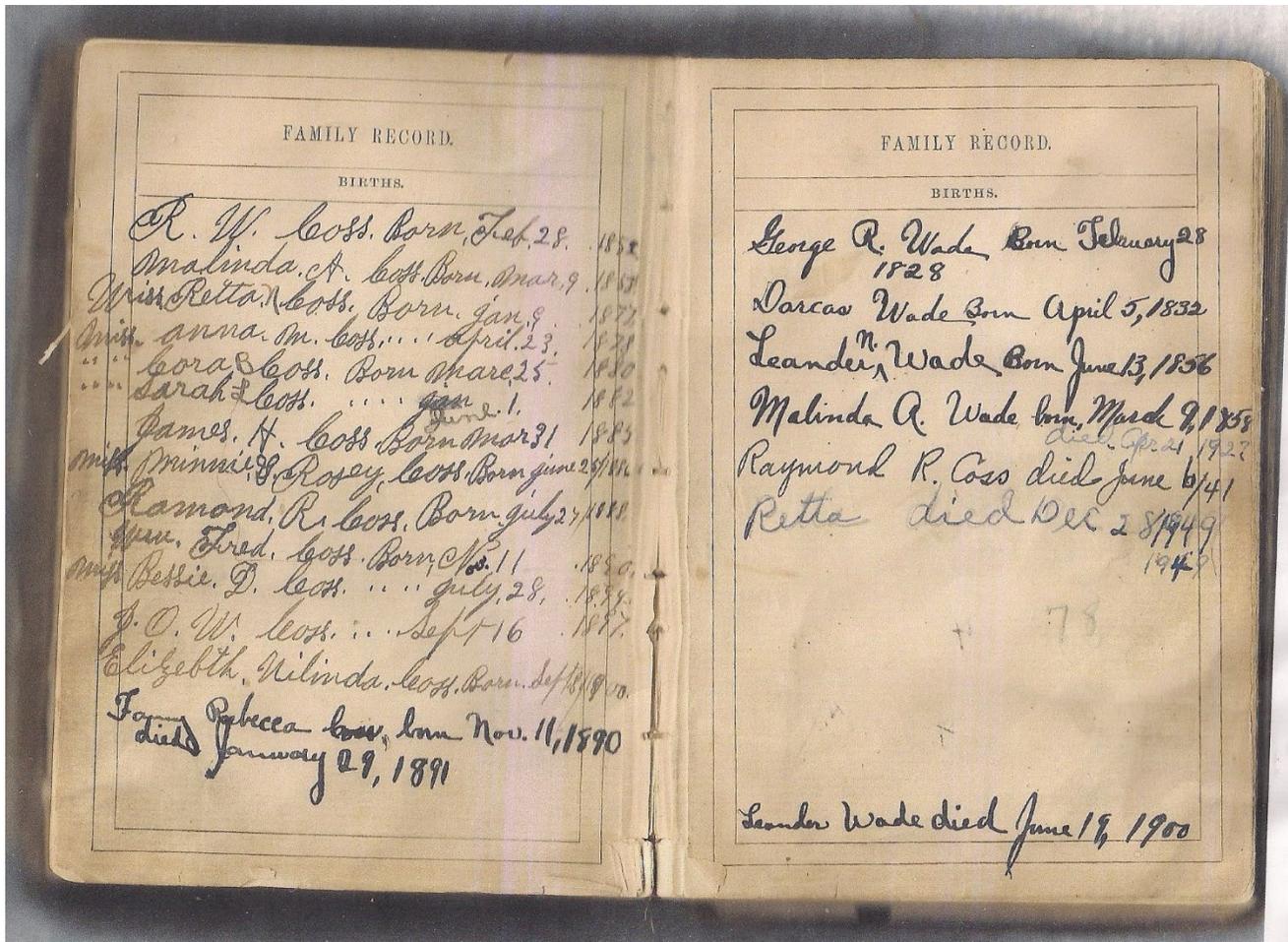
If images are hard to read, seek to see the original in person whenever possible.

The image shows a handwritten census form from 1880. The title is "SCHEDULE 1 - Free Inhabitants in the County of Randolph, State of N.C. enumerated by me, on the 20. day of June, 1880." The form is a grid with columns for name, sex, age, color, and marital status. It lists various individuals and their families, such as "Gale, M. H.", "Gale, W.", "Gale, J.", "Gale, M.", "Gale, F.", "Gale, S.", "Gale, D.", "Gale, C.", "Gale, E.", "Gale, G.", "Gale, H.", "Gale, I.", "Gale, J.", "Gale, K.", "Gale, L.", "Gale, M.", "Gale, N.", "Gale, O.", "Gale, P.", "Gale, Q.", "Gale, R.", "Gale, S.", "Gale, T.", "Gale, U.", "Gale, V.", "Gale, W.", "Gale, X.", "Gale, Y.", "Gale, Z."

Handwriting Tells the Tale

Look to the handwriting for clues to determine if the document was an original. Is the handwriting and ink the same appearance throughout the document? If it is, the document was likely written all at the same time.

If the document has different handwriting, different slants, different ink (in pressure and lightness), then the document was likely written or added to, at different times.



A good example is the bible record (shown above). If the information about the family is in different ink and handwriting, then the information was likely recorded as the events in it happened.

One must also consider the age of the document and fading may contribute to your assessment. In this bible record, much of the handwriting and ink is the same on the left page (until you get to the bottom). Additionally, on the left, the dates in the right column are perfectly lined up. This is an indication that this section was likely written all at the same time.

Then the last entry for Fanny Rebecca is different. Notice the death date is recorded at the same time (based on ink and handwriting) as the birth date. This means the birth date was likely recorded after her death.

On the right page, four lines at the top appear to be similar. This indicates that this information was written at the same time. Then Raymond R. Coss and Retta likely were added separately and individually.

Often it is the last entry in same hand and ink that gives an approximate date of when that group of entries was written.

Signatures Are Clues



Will of Zachariah Nixon 1739

Caution

Tombstones

One area of confusion is tombstones. While technically they are an original artifact, the information on them can be wrong more often than we'd like to see. It is not unusual for tombstones to have incorrect information because the data on them may be provided by a secondary source. For example, the birthdate on the tombstone may have been provided by a spouse or child who did not witness the event of the deceased's birth. Therefore, while the tombstone is an original artifact, the birth information contained on it came from a secondary source.

Resolving Conflicting Data and Correlation of Evidence

Resolving conflicting data is where we take our evaluation of multiple items and compare the facts within, a.k.a. Correlating Evidence. This subject is a different set of lessons but comparing and weighing the evidence based on its merits may help resolve conflicting data.

Always Seek Original Items

A smart researcher will want to locate original documents and seek primary source whenever possible.

Look in the source information to find the location of original documents. Look for words like “citing” meaning the source citation is citing the original document’s location.

Your Research Question

As with all targeted genealogical research, it starts with a research question. When evaluating evidence, does the data within the item(s) found directly or collective items perhaps indirectly answer your research question?



Just remember...

The Answers are in the Details.

Connie Knox