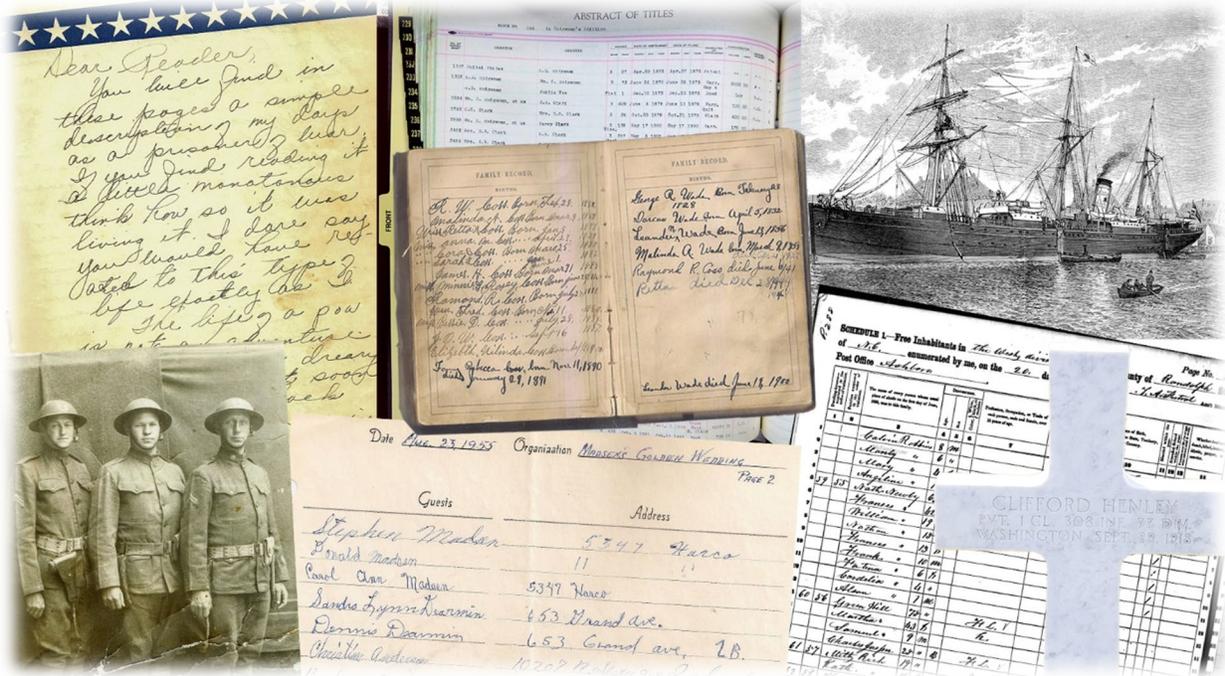




# Evidence Analysis



## 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.”<sup>1</sup>

## 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.**



<sup>1</sup> 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

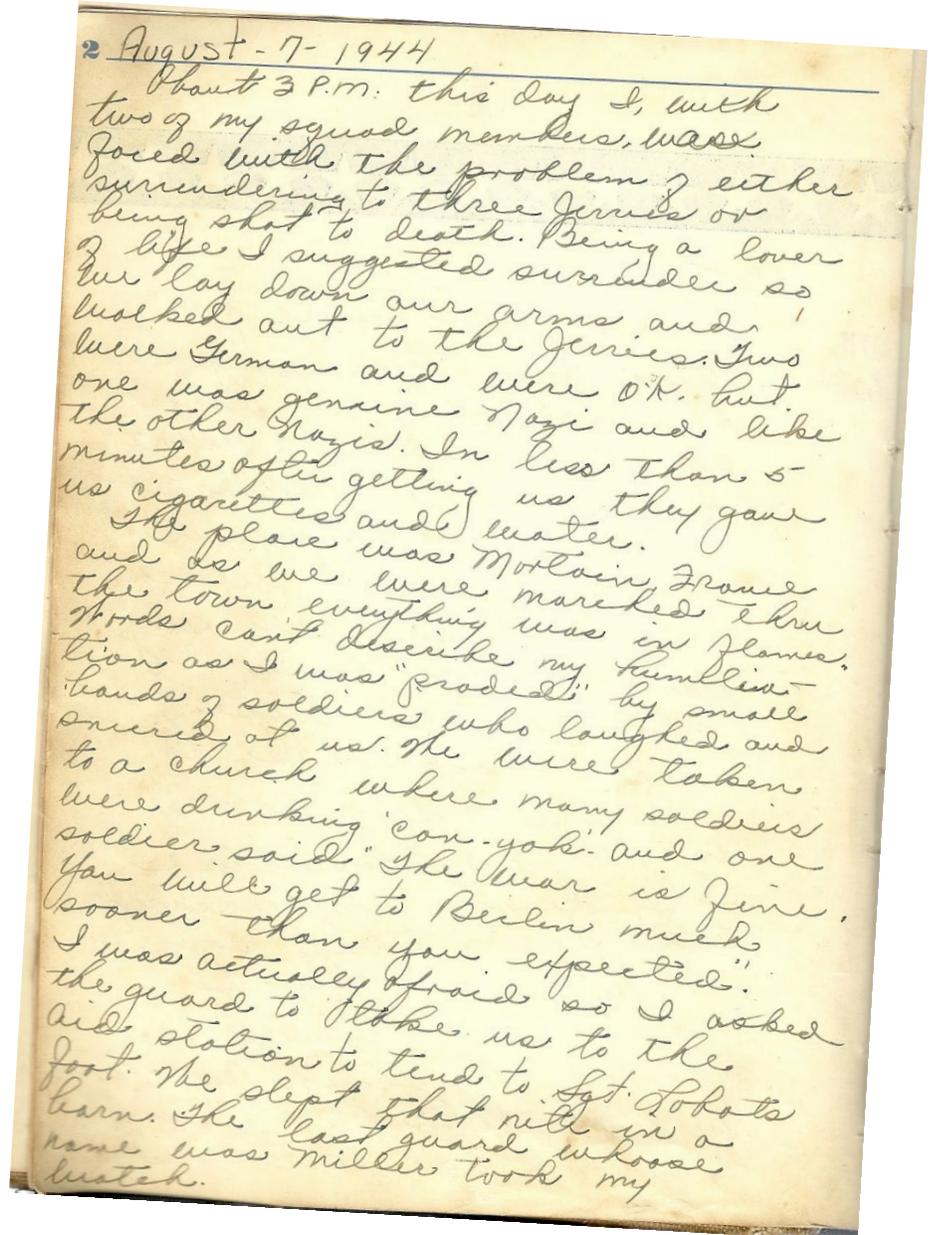
Original records are the most sought-after records for genealogists. Why? Because **original records are likely to have the most information and the facts within are typically more accurate** than a copy derived from the original.

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 7<sup>th</sup> 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."**<sup>2</sup>



<sup>2</sup> 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 Holzman's Addition

RECORD BOOK	DATE OF INSTRUMENT	DATE OF FILE	ADVERSE INTEREST	AMOUNT PAID	REMARKS
1037	United States	H. J. Holzman	B 27 Apr. 20 1975	Apr. 27 1975	Patent
1303	H. J. Holzman	Wm. C. Holzman	B 73 June 26 1976	June 26 1976	Warr. Map & Plat
	H. J. Holzman	Public Use	Plat 1 Dec. 10 1976	Dec. 20 1976	Deed
2534	Wm. C. Holzman, et ux	G. S. Clark	B 609 June 6 1979	June 10 1979	Warr. Quit Claim
2748	G. S. Clark	Mrs. W. S. Clark	C 24 Oct. 28 1979	Oct. 31 1979	Warr. 400.00
2999	Wm. H. Holzman, et ux	Harry Clark	Misc. 3 129 May 17 1980	May 17 1980	Warr. 176.00
3498	Mrs. S. B. Clark	G. S. Clark	B 507 May 6 1981	May 7 1981	Warrantee's Deed
3496	Mrs. S. B. Clark	G. S. Clark	C 384 Apr. 1 1981	May 7 1981	Deed
3591	G. S. Clark	Harry Clark	C 555 Dec. 16 1981	Dec. 19 1981	Warr. 100.00
3692	Heater Harry Clark (& Hina, Effie L. Jackson	Miss, Effie L. Jackson	C 557 Dec. 19 1981	Dec. 19 1981	Warr. 478.00
3693	Hina, Effie L. Jackson	G. S. Clark	C 558 Dec. 20 1981	Dec. 20 1981	Warr. 1.00
4111	H. J. Holzman	Patrick Carroll	P 40 June 18 1981	Apr. 23 1982	Warr. 35.00
4304	Wm. H. Holzman	Harsh Halbul	P 119 July 3 1982	July 22 1982	Warr. 100.00
4478	Wm. H. Holzman	Charles H. Clark	P 189 Nov. 11 1982	Nov. 11 1982	Warr. 26.00
4610	Mrs. Emma Oberpr.	Chas. H. Clark	B 40 Jan. 16 1983	Jan. 16 1983	Warr. 180.00
4707	Dorick & Bridget Carroll	Robert Taylor, for S. L. & S. J. J. J.	A 50 Mar. 1 1983	Mar. 1 1983	Deed
5260	Wm. H. Holzman	James Larson	P 662 July 23 1983	Mar. 17 1984	Warr. 60.00
6439	Wm. H. Holzman	James Larson	G 246 Mar. 20 1985	Mar. 2 1985	Warr. 80.00
6490	G. S. Clark	G. S. Clark	C 58 Dec. 2 1985	Dec. 8 1985	Warr. 450.00
6884	Made Halbul	Lorraine Johnson	H 77 Mar. 19 1986	Apr. 27 1986	Warr. 500.00
6888	Lorraine Johnson	Made Halbul	H 47 Mar. 22 1986	Apr. 27 1986	Warr. 480.00
8123	G. S. Clark	Edward Irwin	C 217 Apr. 11 1989	Apr. 11 1989	Warr. 500.00
8203	Wm. H. Holzman	Wm. Taylor	H 203 Apr. 27 1987	Apr. 27 1987	Warr. 1800.00
8484	A. Lorraine Johnson, et ux	Missal Various L. S. S. Co.	A 263 June 18 1987	June 18 1987	Deed
8565	Andor T. Johnson, et ux	Matthew Dawson, for Trust Co.	A 269 June 23 1987	July 23 1987	Deed
8621	Jas. Larson, et ux	Wm. Loan & Trust Co.	B 48 Feb. 1 1987	Apr. 1 1987	Warr. 400.00
8791	Chas. H. Clark	Jane Irwin	G 48 Mar. 10 1987	Apr. 20 1987	Warr. 1000.00
8792	Harry Clark	Chas. H. Clark	E 20 Mar. 17 1987	Apr. 20 1987	Deed
8998	Albany Co. S. L. & S. Ann.	Patrick Carroll, et ux	E 176 Sept. 20 1987	Oct. 3 1987	Warr. 1.00
10042	Jas. Larson, et ux	Barclay & Young, for Trust Co.	B 47 Dec. 29 1988	Dec. 31 1988	Deed
11842	Andor T. Johnson, et ux	Barclay & Young, for Trust Co.	B 113 Feb. 29 1989	Apr. 20 1989	Deed
11728	John H. Davis, et ux	Andor T. Johnson, et ux	B 178 Oct. 19 1989	Oct. 19 1989	Warr. 48.48
12026	H. Holzman, Trustee	Barclay & Young	H 190 Mar. 1 1990	Mar. 2 1990	Warr. 776.00
12889	Barclay & Young, Trustees	Wm. Investment Co.	H 274 Sept. 1 1990	Sept. 2 1990	Warr. 8668.88
13099	Wm. Investment Co.	Barclay & Young, Trustees	I 104 Sept. 1 1990	Sept. 2 1990	Warr. 41070.00
13226	G. S. Clark	Jane Irwin	H 428 Feb. 4 1991	Feb. 11 1991	Deed

### Derivative Defined

As a noun "something that is based on another source."<sup>3</sup>

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

<sup>3</sup> 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.”*<sup>4</sup>

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	Son	6
—	Velma → ⊕	Wife	6
—	Vestal Pauline	Sister-in-law	6
—	Luffman John H.	Head	0
—	Sallie → ⊕	Wife	1
—	Gracie	Daughter	2
—	Elsie	Daughter	2
—	Hubert C	Son	2

<sup>4</sup> 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**.

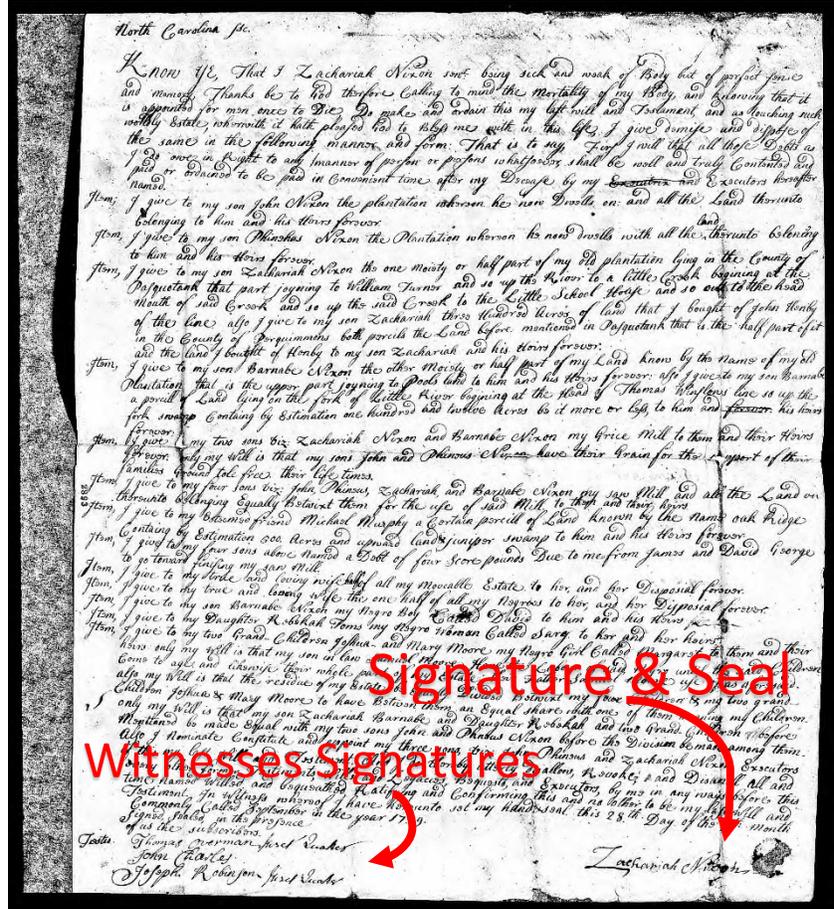
Sources can be documents, newspapers, or other items.

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.	Dødens Datum enten i Kirken eller hjemme.	Førendenes Navn, Stand, Bændering og Bygd.	Fæddernes Navn, Stand og Opholdssted.	Deres anførsel i det afmærkede Register.	Anmærkninger.
17.	17 juli 1850	Anton Christensen	15 Septbr 1850 i Næstved	Jens Christen Næstved i Næstved Kone Marie Kær i Vindeby.	Jens Hans Stedens i Vindeby Mikkel Rasmussen i Næstved Kone Peder Rasmussen og Kone Mette i Næstved Gudsne Jørgen Rasmussen i Næstved	1850 90840	M. indt. f. D. d. 5 Juni 1851 i D. f. D.
18.	21 juli	Jørgen Madsen	22 Septbr 1850 i Næstved	Anders Madsen i Næstved Kone Catharin Rasmussen i Næstved	Anders Rasmussen i Næstved Jens Madsen i Næstved Gudsne Peder Rasmussen i Næstved	1857 22	M. indt. f. D.
19.	9 Aug.	Christopher Madsen	27 Octbr 1850 i Næstved	Jens Madsen i Næstved Kone Marie Rasmussen i Næstved	Anders Rasmussen i Næstved Jens Madsen i Næstved Gudsne Peder Rasmussen i Næstved	1859 44	M. indt. f. D. d. 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.

<sup>5</sup> 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.

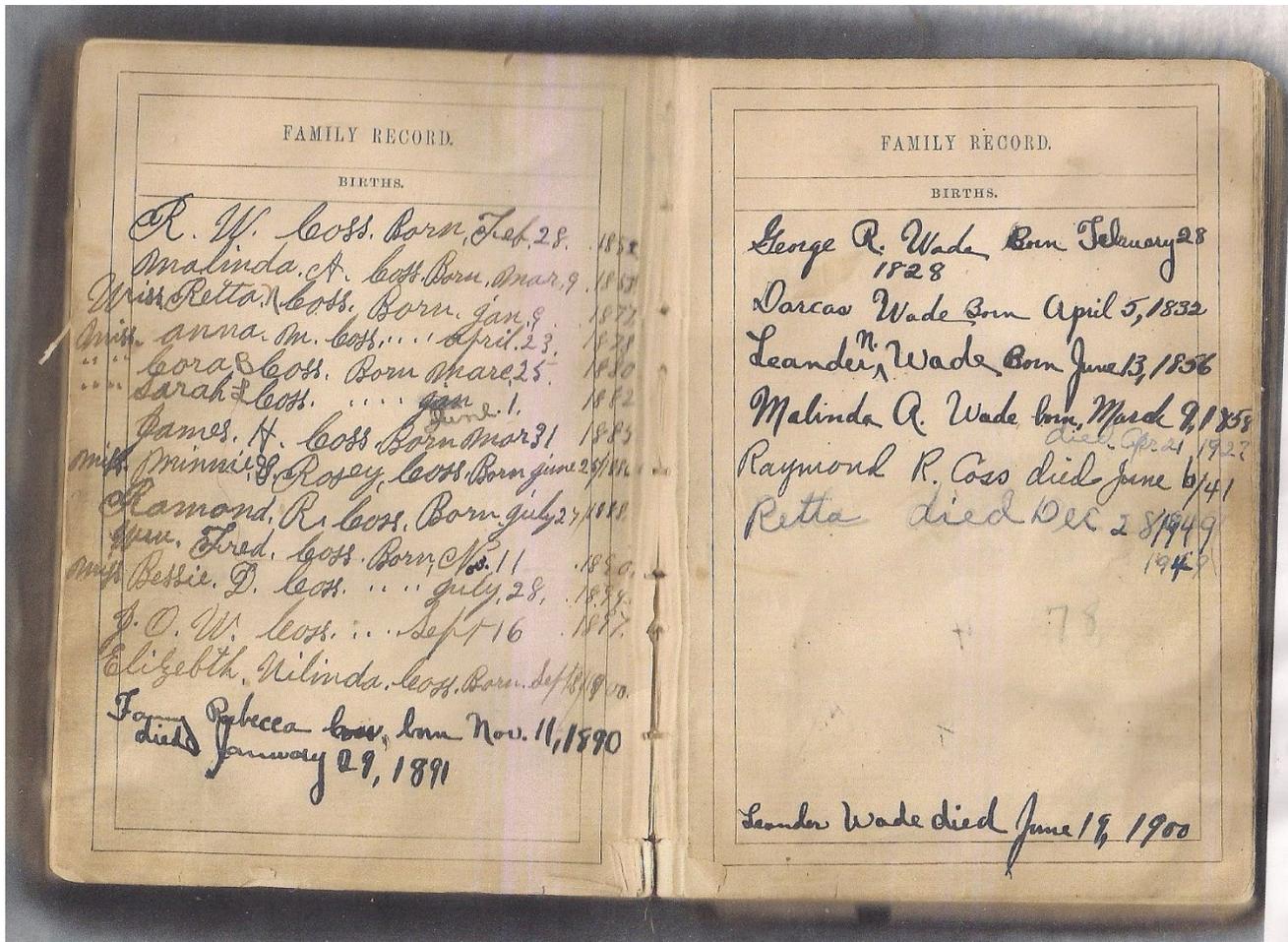
If images are hard to read, seek to see the original in person whenever possible.

The image shows a historical census form titled "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 such as "Gale, Matt.", "Gale, Mary", "Gale, John", etc. The form is handwritten and shows signs of age.

## 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*