

# *Accuracy and the Family Historian/Genealogist*

By Howard Maynard Faulkner

As family historians and amateur genealogists we constantly add *new* information to our database. Some of us are *sticklers* for every detail entering only facts that are *proven* and which may be replicated. Others *take what they get from whatever source* and use it without much attention to accuracy. Most likely and especially as a novice, the majority of us use some combination of the two. How many of us truly *cite our sources* and when doing so attempt to place a value on that source by identifying it as *primary, secondary, or tertiary*? Yes, some will do *some of the time*. More likely the *low hanging fruit* will be so noted. That which is not easily substantiated is more often added to our collection without evidence of a source or as an incomplete reference. We may incorrectly *accept as fact*, what an aunt *told* us, what we have *read* in some published genealogy of the same surname, or from a *transcript* incorrectly transcribed. If in doubt, question and seek further clarification.

To be deserving of the name *genealogist* we must be constantly vigilant to do good research as a professional scientist would. That means that when we add information to our family history, we have a responsibility to be as certain as reasonably possible that such information is correct. Period! **Citations of evidence should provide a clear path for others to locate that same information in the future.** Failure to provide a clear roadmap to each piece of information in your database, which others may easily replicate, *does not* represent quality work. Many tell of the *thousands of ancestors* they have in their database. Sheer numbers of *likely ancestors*, based upon shoddy research does not qualify as a well prepared genealogy. It's better to have a few hundred documented and proven ancestors than thousands without. Quality outweighs quantity in genealogy.

Most would agree that obtaining and citing our sources into our family history is not much fun, the methods may seem inconsistent, and frankly many think it takes too much time. True, but this is the difference between a reliable well researched family history and one that is simply interesting to read but may have *little basis in fact*. Ask yourself, "*If I am going through all of this, don't I want my work to be accepted as being as correct as I can possibly make it?*" My answer is yes! And I think those taking the time to read this would agree with me.

Citing your resources or evidence is a must to assist others in investigating and corroborating your information. Your citations should in most all cases answer the following question any reader may ask: **WHO** (Publisher, Author.), **WHAT** (Book, CD, email etc), **WHEN** (Dates of the source), **WHERE** (Location where it may be found. i.e. library, museum, clerks office, website etc., **WHY** (additional brief comments that may be helpful to the researcher).

To further assist the reader I recommend the following helpful and highly respected resources.

Books: *Evidence, Citation and Analysis for the Family Historian*, Pub. 1997

*Evidence Explained: Citing History Sources from Artifacts to Cyberspace*, Pub 2007

Both books by Elizabeth Shown Mills, Genealogical Publishing Company, Baltimore, MD

Websites: *Board for Certification of Genealogists at:*

<http://www.bcgcertification.org/skillbuilders/skbl971.html>

*About.Com at:* (Commercial site w/ some suspect advertising. However the content good).

<http://genealogy.about.com/od/citing/a/sources.htm>

*National Genealogical Society ay:* <http://www.ngsgenealogy.org/comstandtech.cfm>

*Pro Genealogists:* <http://www.progenealogists.com/citationguide.htm>