



Beware the Tangled Branches: Family Trees and Authored Sources

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<https://slig.ugagenealogy.org/cpage.php?pt=611>

What is an authored source?

Authored sources are not:

- Documents created by a person for an entity,
- Often for pay,
- To record an event for legal, religious, organizational, or some similar purpose,
- With no added information or interpretation from the person recording the event.

We all want an original document, created at the time of the event, that clearly states the fact we're seeking. But do authored sources ever qualify?

Authored works take many forms:

- Diary
- Memoir
- Biographies
- Interviews
- Oral histories
- Letters
- Scrapbooks
- Family Bibles
- News stories
- Family histories
- Local (county) histories
- Family trees
- Cemetery sites
- Journal articles
- Transcriptions
- Abstracts
- Extracts
- Indexes
- and more...

Fact is fact, wherever it is found. An honest researcher does not ridicule the source of the facts; rather, the researcher is grateful for the preservation of true and valid information. Neither does the researcher form a premature judgment of the truth and then dismiss, without cause, conflicting information. The difficult task is to sift the truth from the traditions, errors, falsehoods, typographical errors, illogical conclusions, and simple mistakes.

Kory Meyerink, "Evaluating a Genealogy or Family History," *Printed Sources: A Guide to Published Genealogical Records* (Salt Lake City: Ancestry, 1998), 610.

Evaluate the material, wherever you find it

- When was the material created?
- Who is the source of the information? Is it the individual's experience or is someone else reporting it?
- Was there any incentive to exaggerate, minimize, withhold, or alter information?
- Does the work include guesswork or speculation?
- In the case of indexes, abstracts, and extracts, were they copied and recorded accurately, with care?
- Are there sources, and how good are they?
- If there are sources, go to the source. Find the original document.
- Don't trust ... verify!

Where to find authored sources

Online family trees: Ancestry, FamilySearch, WikiTree, Geni, MyHeritage, et al

Cemetery sites: Find A Grave, Billion Graves, Interment.net, et al

Digital Books

- FamilySearch Digital Library <https://www.familysearch.org/library/books/>
- Google Books <https://books.google.com/>
- Internet Archive <https://archive.org/>
- HathiTrust Digital Library <https://www.hathitrust.org/>
- Forgotten Books <https://www.forgottenbooks.com/en>
- Genealogy Gophers <https://www.gengophers.com/#/>

Digital Periodicals

- PERSI <https://search.findmypast.com/search-world-records/periodical-source-index>
- JSTOR <https://www.jstor.org/> > Advanced Search > Select an Access Type > Content I can access

Manuscript Collections – both are searchable via WorldCat <https://www.worldcat.org/>

- ArchiveGrid <https://researchworks.oclc.org/archivegrid/>
- National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections (NUCMC) <https://www.loc.gov/coll/nucmc/>

Reminder: Many valuable resources have not been digitized.

Suggested reading:

Jones, Thomas W., "The Perils of Source Snobbery," *OnBoard*, 18 (May 2012), 9–10, 15
<https://bcgcertification.org/skillbuilding-perils-of-source-snobbery/>.