

# **“Reading between the Lines: Using Indirect Evidence to Help Solve Difficult Research Problems”**

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## **What Are Direct and Indirect Evidence?**

- Direct evidence is information that provides an answer without the need for additional facts or further explanation. The answer it provides may be true or false.
- Indirect evidence is information that does not explicitly answer the question at hand, although it relates to it in some other way.

## **Why Is Indirect Evidence Important?**

- Not all direct evidence is correct.
- Sometimes direct evidence to solve a case is not available.
- Several pieces of indirect evidence can be used together to build a powerful case.

“In the quest for proof, where direct evidence is lacking or appears to be incorrect, indirect evidence from various sources is often assembled to arrive at a reasonable conclusion or ‘proof.’”

~ Donn Devine, JD, CG, CGI, Chapter 17, “Evidence Analysis,” *Professional Genealogy* (Baltimore, Maryland: Genealogical Publishing Company, 2001-2004), 334.

## **The Genealogical Proof Standard<sup>1</sup>**

- ✓ Reasonably exhaustive research
- ✓ Complete and accurate source citations
- ✓ Thorough analysis and correlation
- ✓ Resolution of conflicting evidence
- ✓ Soundly written conclusion based on the strongest evidence

## **Case Study #1: The Father of Richard E. Bishop**

Takeaways: Review every bit of direct evidence you can find for clues, but recognize that some direct evidence may be incorrect. Negative evidence can be important to building your case. Indirect evidence can be found in less-common sources, such as college yearbooks and correspondence of unrelated people.

## **Case Study #2: The Parents of Isaac R. “Dock” Lewis**

Takeaways: Inconsistent information in census records may actually be important clues. DNA can provide powerful indirect evidence when understood and used correctly. Correlate the evidence you have. What patterns do you notice?

## **Case Study #3: The Ancestry of John Oakley**

Takeaways: Sometimes direct evidence is misleading on purpose—our ancestors may have had something to hide. If the evidence you have doesn’t make sense, ask questions, consider the historical context in which the events occurred, and remember the human element of the research.

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<sup>1</sup> “Genealogical Proof Standard (GPS),” <http://bcgcertification.org/ethics-standards>; accessed 22 August 2021).