

## **Finding Unknown Parents of a 19<sup>th</sup> Century Ancestor**

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Finding unknown parents of an ancestor can be challenging. It is even more difficult to find pre-1850 ancestors due to the fact that fewer records are available for this time period, fewer records about children and women exist, fewer records that name parents of a person exist, and the lack of direct, explicit evidence linking the generations.

Direct evidence is a piece of information that directly and explicitly answers a question. Some examples include:

- a birth certificate directly describes the name of child, date of birth, and parent's names
- a marriage record directly describes names of bride and groom, place and date of marriage
- a last will and testament directly names the heirs of the decedent (but may not specify exact relationships).

Indirect evidence is a source of relevant information, but does not directly, explicitly answer the question, and cannot answer the question without being combined with other evidence.

- An 1850 census record showing a man, woman and some children in a household is indirect evidence, because it infers that this household may be comprised of 2 named parents and their biological children. But it does not prove these relationships (since the 1850 census does not specify relationships between persons in a household).
- Combining this census record with a death record listing the child's parents as this same couple from the census provides stronger evidence (while still indirect) that these were the parents of that child.

Negative evidence is when a source does not include the information sought.

If you are using Indirect Evidence to prove a relationship, you will use 2 or more indirect sources/records to prove your hypothesis. They should "build" on each other, meaning that one piece of evidence will lead you to another and each should support the same

conclusion. Go through the evaluating evidence section below. If there are discrepancies between the different sources, they should be resolved

This presentation will focus on using several pieces of indirect evidence to make the case for family relationships, especially in situations lacking direct evidence.

Specifically, we will touch on:

- Accumulating evidence
  - Evaluating evidence
  - Making the case for or against a hypothesis
  - If against, suggestions for further research to strengthen the evidence and come to a positive conclusion
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What constitutes proof?

“Proof is a fundamental concept in genealogy. In order to merit confidence, each conclusion about an ancestor must have sufficient credibility to be accepted as ‘proved.’ Acceptable conclusions, therefore, meet the Genealogical Proof Standard (GPS).” -- Board of Certification of Genealogist’s website at <http://bcgcertification.org/>.

Genealogical Proof Standard:

Five elements:

- Reasonably exhaustive research
  - Complete, accurate citations to the source or sources of each information item
  - Tests- through processes of analysis and correlations – of all sources, information items and evidence
  - Resolution of conflicts among evidence items
  - Soundly reasoned, coherently written conclusion
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Evaluating Evidence:

- Does the evidence make sense?
- Is it consistent?
- Is it reasonable?
- Could this information actually refer to two different persons of the same name?

- Is the source a primary source or secondary? Secondary sources are removed from the event and involve persons who were not present at the original event and may not be as reliable.
  - Is the source original or derivative? Derivative is a copy, transcription, abstract or index. When you find a derivative copy, always seek out the original for accuracy's sake.
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## [Incomplete List of] Types of Records useful for Finding Brick Wall Ancestors

1. Federal Censuses
  - a. Use proximity to neighbors as a clue – always examine at least the 20 names before and after your ancestor for connections
  - b. Use the tick marks in the pre-1850 censuses to determine whether the family can include your ancestor based on known birth date/range
2. Census Substitutes
  - a. State or local censuses
  - b. Tax records
  - c. Petitions
  - d. Jury Lists
  - e. City directories
3. Cluster Research or FAN Club
  - a. FAN (**F**riends, **A**ssociates, and **N**eighbors) Club or Cluster research involves investigating the friends, extended family (and in-laws), associates and neighbors of your ancestor to figure out the connections between this “cluster” of people and how it can help you find more information about your ancestor through the records of others.
4. Internet Search Engines
  - a. Always remember to do regular internet searches for your ancestors. Try different search terms, combinations and abbreviations.
5. Probate Records
  - a. Testate means that a person died with a last will and testament documenting their wishes for dispersal of their property
  - b. Intestate means that a person died without a will, so the court decides how the property is dispersed (based on law of the time).

- c. Types of probate records include: Letters of Administration, Letters of Testamentary, Inventories, Settlements, Guardianships and more!
6. Tax Records
- a. Tax records were kept yearly in many areas
  - b. Track an ancestor from the first year he is listed – could indicate a recent move, land purchase or the year he attained legal majority
  - c. When an ancestor no longer appears on the tax list, he may have died, reached an age to no longer be taxed, or he may have moved
  - d. The person next taxed for the same piece of land may be the new owner (unrelated), the spouse, or children/other heirs.
7. Military
- a. Affidavits in military records often refer to family relationships or indirectly infer family relationships
8. DNA
- a. Autosomal – If the unknown parents are 4-5th Great Grandparents or more recent, you might have autosomal DNA matches descended from this unknown couple. Extensive analysis of autosomal matches may bring this evidence to light.
  - b. Y-chromosome – traces direct paternal line of a male test taker. Matches of the same surname are descended from a common male paternal ancestor during a genealogical time frame. If you have unexpected results, you may need to consult a DNA expert for help interpreting.
  - c. Adoptions – it is possible to determine biological family of an adoptee through autosomal DNA testing. Seek advice of an expert if unclear about how to do this.

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