

# Genealogy Do-Over - Week 6: 6-12 February 2015

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**Topics:** 1) Evaluating Evidence and 2) Reviewing Online Education Options

For the sixth week of the [Genealogy Do-Over](#) we turn to one the most important, and often neglected areas of genealogical research: Evidence Evaluation. As I've stated in the past, not determining whether a source was credible, would often come back to haunt me in later research. I've admitted this shortcoming and now I'm resolved to do something about it!

In addition, with Week 6, we begin to look at different types of educational opportunities available for genealogists. This week, the focus is on those offerings online, both free and fee-based. Ongoing education is a crucial part of not only becoming a good genealogist, but keeping your current skills finely honed and acquiring new skills!

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## **Evaluating Evidence**

Once I've gathered various bits of evidence for a proof point, such as my own birth date, and I've entered them in my research log, the next task: evaluating the evidence to determine whether by birth date can be proven or not.

In the past my evaluation of evidence consisted of saying to myself, "Well, if it is in a book it must be true!" or "If it is on someone's try, why would they lie?" Then I would enter the data in my genealogy database program and go on my merry way.

Now, I'm using a process to really look at the evidence I've found and to "rank" it based on certain elements. These evaluation elements that I use are from an article entitled [Guidelines for Evaluating Genealogical Resources](#) by Linda Woodward Geiger. You can find this article, and many more, in the Skillbuilding section of the Board for Certification of Genealogists' website [here](#).

I've included the basic evaluation information in a separate tab of the genealogy research log so I can refer to it when evaluating a line entry in the research log. I also make notes in the Analysis column to support my theory as to proving or disproving my birth date.

Here's an example using a certified copy of my birth certificate that I have in my possession:

- **Source Type:** Derivative. It is a copy of the original record at the repository, in this case the New York State Department of Health, Vital Records. Some would argue that an official copy could still be called an Original instead of a Derivative, but for the standards I am using, I feel comfortable using Derivative.
- **Clarity:** Clear. I can read the text, it is typewritten or printed, and I don't need to guess at words.
- **Information:** Primary. Although this is a copy, the original birth certificate was filed soon after my birth and is very close in time to the birth event. It was also filed with an official government agency required to keep an accurate record of such events.
- **Evidence Type:** Direct. My birth date, location and other information is explicitly stated on the record; the information does not need to be inferred.

So, my birth certificate is "Derivative, Clear, Primary and Direct" as I call it. It would rank higher as a reliable record than say a birth announcement in the newspaper (not knowing who the informant was) or a Delayed Birth Certificate which is filed years later and based on one or more sworn affidavits by myself and/or others.

And finally, another valuable resource for learning more about evidence evaluation is [QuickLesson 17: The Evidence Analysis Process Map](#) at the Evidence Explained website.

- **What I Plan to Do:** With my current research, after I've done my "reasonably exhaustive search," I will then begin to evaluate each source. Using the Genealogy Research Log and the basic evaluation points of Source Type, Clarity, Information, and Evidence Type, I will work to either prove or disprove dates, locations and other information before it gets added to my genealogy database software!
- **"All-In" Participant Options:** Consider following my example of implementing evidence evaluation into your genealogy research process. Yes, it can be time consuming, but just like citing sources, once you've gotten into the habit, it becomes easier and you feel more confident in completing the task.

- **Modified Participant Options:** If you are reviewing your existing research, it may be difficult to evaluate evidence if you haven't cited sources. In addition, some genealogy database software programs don't make it easy to evaluate evidence. Determine the best method for your current data; it may actually help to use a program such as Evidentia, Clooz or one of the other evidence evaluation software packages.

### **Reviewing Online Education Options**

Starting this week, the Genealogy Do-Over asks participants to start reviewing options for genealogy education and the focus is online resources (we look for "offline" resources next week!).

As you can imagine, I'm a big proponent of not just genealogy education, but online genealogy education as well. Webinars are a big part of my own genealogy business and over the past five years the genealogy industry has seen explosive growth in "distance education."

So why do we pursue genealogy education? Not only to become better genealogists, but also because new record sets come online or are available at repositories and we want to use them as efficiently as possible. In addition, we may discover an ancestor from a new location and we're not familiar with research in that area.

Here is a resource listing for free online genealogy education resources: [RESOURCES Free Online Genealogy Educational Resources](#) (opens in PDF). As you can see, there are some gaps especially in the area of Canadian, UK and Australian resources. If you know of any resources in these areas, please send me the links and information at [geneabloggers@gmail.com](mailto:geneabloggers@gmail.com).

Later this week I'll be posting a listing of fee-based online genealogy education resources that are worthy of closer inspection.

- **What I Plan to Do:** I will be creating an Educational Plan for 2015 and maintaining it as a separate document. First I will list my educational goals, and then I will use my list of online genealogy resources to see what future offerings line up with those goals. Finally, I'll add a reminder to my calendar (or Evernote) to check in on my Educational Plan at the end of each month so I can try to stay on track.
- **"All-In" Participant Options:** Review the [RESOURCES Free Online Genealogy Educational Resources](#) (opens in PDF) and consider creating some type of Education Plan. Start with small goals for 2015 and then look for webinars, classes, videos and other online resources that can help you achieve those goals.
- **Modified Participant Options:** There isn't much different for the "go-over" or "review" participants – we all need genealogy education whether we are doing a complete "do-over" or not. See the plans above and determine what is a good fit for your learning style and the gaps in your genealogy skills.

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And that's all I have for this week's topic of the [Genealogy Do-Over](#). Get ready for next week when we discuss

**Next Week: Week 7 – 13-19 February 2015**

- Reviewing Genealogy Database Software
- Digitizing Photos and Documents

Thanks for being a part of the Genealogy Do-Over and your feedback is always appreciated. You can leave a comment on the blog post at [GeneaBloggers](#), email me at [geneabloggers@gmail.com](mailto:geneabloggers@gmail.com) or post at the [Genealogy Do-Over Facebook Group](#).

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