

Perilous Assumptions: Revisiting Those First Finds

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Despite the best of intentions, many family history researchers - particularly as beginners - make incorrect assumptions about records that don't quite fit. This program will explore false assumptions, revisiting those mistakes, and the family history discoveries that may await.

Family history research is the adventure of a lifetime! Many researchers, particularly as beginners, are often so focused on discovering the next name on the pedigree chart that they overlook key pieces of information, or in many cases, don't know what to look for.

The first records we typically discover as family historians, including the U.S. Census and vital records, are in many ways the most important records we ever find. Those documents of parents, grandparents, or other close family members have an abundance of information, and yet are also filled with hidden clues we don't necessarily know to look for as beginners.

As we gain experience in evaluating sources and information, we should go back and review those first records of discovery, you might be surprised with what jumps out at you! Suddenly, an always-expected ancestral connection no longer has merit or a random neighbor is now an in-law.

Here are a few "first find" sources and some hidden information that can come to light upon further review:

- U.S. Census

A lot of information to review with this foundation source, including relationships to neighbors (1790-1940), Revolutionary War & widow pensioners (1840), notes that lead to non-population schedules (1850-1880), naturalization status (1900-1940), and age at first marriage (1930).

- Vital records

Who is the informant? With the emotional stress and/or joy surrounding these life events, how accurate is the information?

- City directories
Have you looked at every directory for each ancestor? What names and addresses consistently appear that suggest a family connection?
- Civil War pension index
This popular index includes more than just Civil War soldiers, including veterans of the Spanish-American War and Indian Wars.
- FAN club
Dubbed by Elizabeth Shown Mills, have you researched your ancestors' Friends, Associates, and Neighbors? Those names that appear on the census pages, vital records, naturalization witness statements, and on the backs of photographs!
- Maps
Map out all the addresses identified on the various records you've accumulated. Do they make sense?
- Timeline
Listing each life event, date, and source can bring out holes (or chasms!) and inconsistencies with your research. Does everything line up?

Read, reread, and re-reread all those first finds, and remember that every little detail counts!

Greenwood, Val D. *The Researcher's Guide to American Genealogy*. 4th ed. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 2017.

Jones, Thomas W. *Mastering Genealogical Proof*. Arlington, VA: National Genealogical Society, 2013.

MacEntee, Thomas. *The Genealogy Do-over Workbook: Get Your Genealogy and Family History Research Back on Track and Still Have Fun!* St. Agnes, AUS: Unlock the Past, 2016.

Szucs, Loretto D., and Sandra H. Luebking, eds. *The Source: A Guidebook to American Genealogy*. 3rd ed. Provo, UT: The Generations Network, 2006.

Evaluate the Evidence: https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Evaluate_the_Evidence

Evaluating Your Evidence (National Institute for Genealogical Studies):
[https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Evaluating_Your_Evidence_\(National_Institute\)](https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Evaluating_Your_Evidence_(National_Institute))