INDIRECT EVIDENCE TO ESTABLISH GENEALOGICAL PROOF

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GENEALOGICAL EVIDENCE

Genealogical evidence is not tangible—it exists in our minds. To better understand the concept of genealogical evidence, it is important to understand several other key genealogical terms.

RESEARCH QUESTION

Genealogical evidence must be applied to a **research question**. Genealogical research questions typically focus on identity, relationship, or circumstance.

- **Identity** (for example, differentiating between three men of the same name)
- **Relationship** (for example, identifying the parents of a great-great-grandmother)
- **Circumstance** (for example, identifying reasons for immigration or whether a man served in the Civil War)

SOURCE

Every genealogist consults **sources**. Sources are the census enumerations, wills, DNA match lists, deeds, vital records, and tombstones that we examine at archives, view on our computers, and see in cemeteries. Sources are not the repositories, courthouses, websites, or libraries where we find those sources. Sources are divided into several categories: original sources, derivative sources, and authored works. An **original source** is the initial recording of an action or event, such as a birth certificate created immediately after the birth. A **derivative source** is a source that was created at a later date, such as a delayed birth certificate created 30 years after the birth. An **authored work** is a written body of work, such as a book or article, that includes information from a variety of sources.

INFORMATION

Sources (such as deeds, vital records, and DNA match lists) provide us with **information** about people, places, and events. Genealogists seek information such as the purchase price of an ancestor's homestead, the birth date of a great-aunt, or the number of centimorgans shared with a second cousin. Information comes in three forms—primary, secondary and unknown—based on the informant. **Primary information** has a higher probability of being accurate because it is provided by someone with firsthand knowledge of the event. For example, on a birth certificate for which the midwife is the informant, the child's birth date would be primary information, since the midwife personally witnessed the birth. **Secondary information**, on the other hand, generally has a lower probability of being accurate, since it is hearsay. For example, on that same birth certificate, the father's birth place would be secondary information, since the midwife would have likely been provided that information by someone else, such as the father or another party. Sometimes, the identity of the informant and/or their knowledge about the event is not known; in those instances, it is not possible to determine whether information is primary or secondary and it is considered to be **unknown**.

SO, WHAT IS EVIDENCE?

Evidence is what we interpret information to mean, through analysis and correlation, in the context of our research question. Evidence is classified into three categories: direct, indirect, and negative evidence. **Direct evidence** is a single piece of information that directly answers the research question. **Indirect evidence** is a body of information that does not directly answer the research question, but that we analyze, interpret as being relevant, and combine with other clues to answer the research question. **Negative evidence** is a lack of information that, in itself, suggests an answer to the research question.

EXAMPLE: JIMCOSKY CASE STUDY

RESEARCH QUESTION

Who was the biological father of Andrew Jimcosky, born 19 March 1923 in Scranton, Pennsylvania, son of Helena (Modzelewska) Jimcosky?

DIRECT EVIDENCE

Two sources provide direct evidence in response to this research question.

- Andrew Jimcosky's delayed birth certificate identifies his father as Frank Jimcosky.[1]
- A civil marriage certificate for Andrew Jimcosky and Sophie Golembiewski identifies Andrew's father as Frank Jimcosky.[2]

INDIRECT EVIDENCE

Several other sources include information that provides indirect evidence that contradicts with the direct evidence.

- A baptismal record for Andrew Jimcosky identifies "Franciscus Grzymkowski" as his father. However, the father's name is crossed out, and the notation "ex toro illegitimo" [from an illegitimate bed] is included in the margin.[3]
- A 1930 petition for the sale of real estate, filed by Helen Jimcosky, includes Helen's testimony that her husband Frank abandoned her on 10 March 1922[4] (one full year before Andrew's birth).
- The 1930 divorce case for Frank and Helen Jimcosky includes Helen's testimony that Frank abandoned her in March of 1922 and was living in Poland.[5]

In this instance, there are two sources that provide direct evidence to answer the research question. Several other sources, together, provide indirect evidence that conflicts with the direct evidence, even though the indirect evidence does not point to a specific or conclusive answer.

PROVING CONCLUSIONS

Successful genealogical research relies on exploring different classes of evidence. A lack of direct evidence does not mean that a research question cannot be resolved. When faced with challenging research problems, the ability to work with indirect evidence can be a valuable skill for problem solving and breaking through brick walls.

Indirect evidence can be used to resolve many types of research questions, including questions of relationship (such as connecting an individual to his or her parent/parents); questions of identity (such as differentiating between individuals of the same name); and questions of circumstance (such as identifying war service). Indirect evidence is especially useful in cases involving significant record loss, unrecorded events, and undocumented events—and the resulting body of evidence can often be more compelling than direct evidence.

Using indirect evidence requires skillful analysis and correlation to develop a compelling argument, and the totality can be used to prove a conclusion. A conclusion based on any type of evidence—including indirect evidence—can be considered proven when it satisfies the five elements of the **Genealogical Proof Standard**:

- reasonably exhaustive research into a variety of sources;
- complete and accurate source citations;
- careful analysis and correlation;
- resolution of conflicting evidence; and
- a sound, written conclusion.[6]

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[1] Pennsylvania Department of Health, delayed birth certificate no. D228402-1923, Andrew Jimcosky; Pennsylvania Department of Health, New Castle. Andrew's birth was registered in 1941 based on evidence from a school record and an affidavit submitted by his mother.

[2] Lackawanna County, Pennsylvania, marriage license no. 1242 (1948), Jimcosky-Golembeski; Lackawanna County Orphan's Court, Scranton, Pennsylvania.

[3] St. Stanislaus Bishop & Martyr Roman Catholic Church (Scranton, Pennsylvania), "Metryki Chrztu Sw. Od Roku, 1923, 1924, 1925 [Holy Baptismal Certificates from 1923, 1924, 1925]," chronologically arranged, p. 8, baptism of Andreus Grzymkowski; Mary Mother of God Parish Office, Scranton, Pennsylvania.

[4] Lackawanna County, Pennsylvania, Court of Common Pleas, case no. 207 (March Term, 1927), Petition of Helen Jincosky [Jimcosky] for Sale of Real Estate; Lackawanna County Clerk of Courts, Scranton, Pennsylvania.

[5] Lackawanna County, Pennsylvania, Court of Common Pleas, case no. 272 (March Term, 1930), Helena Grzymkowska v. Frank Grzymkowska; Lackawanna County Clerk of Courts, Scranton, Pennsylvania.

[6] Board for Certification of Genealogists, *Genealogy Standards* (Washington D.C., Board for Certification of Genealogists, 2017), Chapter 1.

REASONABLY EXHAUSTIVE RESEARCH
Thorough research involves analyzing the research question, developing a research plan that includes relevant sources, and consulting those sources regardless of whether they are easily accessible or more difficult to access. After the findings are analyzed in the context of the research question, this process is refined and repeated until a logical and convincing conclusion is in sight.

COMPLETE & ACCURATE CITATIONS
Documentation strengthens the credibility of an argument written to prove a conclusion. Complete and accurate source citations give readers an understanding of whether reasonably exhaustive research was conducted, whether original records and primary information items were used, and whether the sources consulted were appropriate for the research question and scope.

CAREFUL ANALYSIS & CORRELATION
Indirect evidence arguments rely heavily on skillful analysis and correlation—examining the sources and information piece by piece to understand their context and nature, and determining how those pieces fit or don't fit together in the context of our research question. This thought process is what transforms information into evidence that applies to the research question.

RESOLUTION OF CONFLICTING EVIDENCE
In order to reliably establish proof, any information or evidence that conflicts with the conclusion being presented must be resolved. This eliminates the possibility of other answers to the research question.

A SOUND, WRITTEN CONCLUSION
The last component necessary to establish genealogical proof, based on indirect evidence, is a written discussion of the relevant information, analyzed and discussed in the context of the research question. The three types of proof discussions include proof statements, proof summaries, and proof arguments. A **proof statement** is a presentation of proof based on direct evidence—it typically does not require much explanation, and can be just one or two sentences. A **proof summary** is more complex, and is typically used to present evidence that requires some level of explanation but that does not have any major conflicts. A **proof argument** is used to present complex evidence, including indirect evidence, when a research question cannot be easily answered.

Solving difficult research problems and breaking through brick walls—especially when events are unrecorded or undocumented, when records fall short of providing direct evidence, and/or when there is significant record loss in geographic areas of interest—is possible using indirect evidence.

EXAMPLE: JOHNSON CASE STUDY

RESEARCH QUESTION
Who were the parents of John H. Johnson, who was born perhaps 5 February 1808 in Newark, New Jersey; lived in Springfield, Illinois as early as 1839; was a partner with printer and bookbinder Johnson & Bradford; and died in 1886 in Springfield?

KNOWN INFORMATION
Census enumerations identify John's birth place as New Jersey. John's 1886 death certificate and a 1904 published history of Springfield identify his birth place as Newark, New Jersey. John had six known children: Walter, Abby, Maria, Mary Emma, Mary Belle, and Carrie.

BODY OF INDIRECT EVIDENCE
Property records in Sangamon County, Illinois, and Essex County, New Jersey, link John H. Johnson of Springfield to a Johnson family in Newark, New Jersey. In 1846, John H. Johnson and his wife Mary provided a mortgage to Isaac F. Johnson of Newark, for property in the area of Springfield known as "the Edwards addition."[7] When an inventory of Isaac's estate was made in 1851, John H. Johnson was listed as a debtor.[8] In 1853, John C. Johnson of Newark, acting as guardian of his grandson Jacob C. Johnson, authorized John H. Johnson to act as his

[7] Sangamon County, Illinois, Mortgage Book Y:380-81, John H. and Mary Johnson to Isaac F. Johnson, 14 October 1846; Sangamon County Recorder, Springfield, Illinois.

[8] Essex County, New Jersey, estate files, no. 14088G, Isaac F. Johnson (1851), inventory, 6 January 1851; New Jersey State Archives, Trenton.

representative to procure the cancellation of the 1846 mortgage, which had been paid in full.[9]

An unpublished history of the Johnson family of Newark, New Jersey, compiled by Jacob C. Johnson son of Isaac, identifies "Horace of Springfield" as the son of John Cummings and Sarah (Freeman) Johnson, and names Horace's children as Walter, Abby, Rida, Carrie, and Mary.[10] On a visit to Newark when he in his 80s, Jacob Johnson recalled, for the local newspaper, the time he spent in Springfield in the mid-1850s working in the bookstore of his uncle, "Horace Johnson," where Abraham Lincoln used to shop. He also recalled visiting his great-grandmother at the old Johnson mill." The recollections provided on that visit were memories from long ago; however, it is reasonable to conclude that Jacob had reliable knowledge of the identities of their grandparents, and great-grandmother, who he saw often because he was raised in his parents' household. Additionally, John Cummings Johnson died in 1857, and his obituary states that he had five children, but does not name them. Four children aside from John Henry Johnson can be accounted for.

Indirect evidence proves that "John H. Johnson" of Springfield, Illinois, was the uncle that Jacob Cummings Johnson referred to as "Horace of Springfield" in the Johnson family history. *John Horace Johnson was the son of John Cummings Johnson and Sarah Freeman.*

FOR FURTHER STUDY

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[9] Sangamon County, Illinois, Mortgage Book SS:192, John C. Johnson, guardian, to John H. Johnson, 28 June 1853; Sangamon County Recorder, Springfield, Illinois.

[10] Gardner, Genealogical Dictionary of New Jersey [unpublished], vol. JOH-JUS, fifth page of unpaginated volume, Jay Cummings Johnson family tree, 1936.