

***A Family Legacy: Documented Records* that stand the “Test of Time”**

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web site: <http://www.tmason1.com/lds.htm>

Genealogy - This word comes from two Greek words, one meaning “race” or “Family,” the other “theory” or “science.” Therefore, *genealogy is the science of tracing our ancestry*. Family history stories can help you research your genealogy, and your genealogy proves your family’s history. The word **pedigree** comes from two Latin words: **pes** meaning “foot,” and **grus** meaning “crane.” The standard pedigree chart that has been used for years when tracing one’s genealogy resembles a crane’s foot. This form has become a well-known symbol and is synonymous with genealogy. A pedigree chart is like a family tree tipped on its side starting with you in the far left position.

This paper is divided into the following five sections:

- I. **Principles of Documenting**
 - II. **Documenting Styles**
 - III. **Principles of Family History Research**
 - IV. **How to Do Family History Research**
 - V. **For Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints**
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Principles of Documenting

How does one create a **LEGACY to stand the test of time**? Each item in our family history records should be supported by **documentation**. Even hunches and conflicts are based on information from some source.

Please read my explanation of the differences between information documented by Original records as compared to that from Secondary records. It is found in the section on “How to Do Family History Research”. We should seek to prove our claims from the best possible records.

Genealogy record keeping can be about as exciting as reading the listings in a telephone directory. It contains simple facts of names, dates and sometimes places. Some people today mistakenly think that using the Internet to obtain their family data is so easy. They find poorly documented information in user friendly World Wide Web sites and as they contribute to these sites they “publish” their unsubstantiated work to the world. Before computer technology made publishing so easy, researchers produced books and journals that were based on valid reasons. Such Web sites repositories like the LDS Ancestral File, Pedigree Resource Files or the Ordinance Index maintained by the Family History Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints should be treated only as a beginning. You can read more about this in “The Use and Abuses of Online Genealogy” by Gary B. Hoffman at http://www.genealogy.com/genealogy/65_gary.html. I personally enjoy using the World Connect project offered by Rootsweb at <http://worldconnect.rootsweb.com> and my web site at <http://www.geocities.com/tmason1> because they offer easy updating from my database.

Family History Research is more than genealogy data keeping. To make ancestors more real, you could describe the setting of the ancestor’s culture by placing them in history using a time line and explanations of their community. Explain any significant events that shaped their destiny such as a war, the consequences of religious values, illness, or tragedy. See if you can tell of the character of the ancestor that would reflect their tastes and feelings about events and the setting of the story of their life. Most localities have written local histories and public documents. Some family members as well got the “good stuff” in photographs, journals and other “old papers”. Trust no data without checking it out.

One of the biggest challenges of family history research is to conduct it in such a way that collection, analysis, and interpretation of information is carried out with maximum objectivity. This means that any conditions which might introduce bias or prejudice must be avoided if at all possible. Any conclusions should be written in such a way that a skeptical or interested investigator has enough information to be able to repeat the research and either confirm or invalidate the reported results. For the 23 years I taught about research in a college setting, students were encouraged to use professional research journals and many different textbooks and had to substantiate any conclusions. This is how the *science of tracing our ancestry* should occur.

Documentation refers to that part of a report which arranges and acknowledges the sources used.

Documentation allows:

- evaluation of the **reliability** of the information. Knowing a source can help you identify information that you may want to verify through use of other types of records and to check for errors. It may prevent others from having to redo completed searches.
- **replication** - provision of enough information so that another person could easily obtain a copy of the record.
- **tracking** of your research as you work so you do not forget. Record research efforts that reveal no information. It saves later repeated effort.
- **citation** of all researchers' contributions, including your own. Use your name, not the word "I" or "me", when referring to yourself.

Ask yourself, "Where did I get that piece of information?" Every item in your database has a source. You will not always be able to return to or remember where you got information. When misinformation is entered into our databases we can create many problems.

For example:

- ▶ Many hours of time can be wasted searching in the wrong places.
- ▶ Locating the correct ancestral information will take much longer.
- ▶ Family history will become unsubstantiated family lore.
- ▶ Records submitted to other databases promulgate bad information worldwide.
- ▶ Anyone trying to validate your work will be unable to find your sources.
- ▶ You become guilty of JUNK GENEALOGY.

When is my documentation enough?

In the scientific world, the documentation process depends on the purpose for which the material is being prepared. A research claim involving a medical treatment certainly should be well enough documented to allow others to repeat experiments and confirm conclusions. "What claim is being made?" "Is it possible that some person has biased the data?" Good research should be objective, orderly and repeatable. If a person is gathering genealogical data for personal amusement, we would assume their research methods might not be as exacting as the methods used by one who intends to publish. If you are doing genealogical research to pass on to your children or others or you intend to publish, or you intend to do proxy LDS ordinance work then you should be as accurate as possible. It would be irresponsible to claim information that has no source documentation.

Since we are limited by our resources however, we often must rely upon the work done by others and make judgments that a source is accurate enough to be relied upon without our having to search out the original record. We may have to accept a census record as a substitute for a will when we can't find one. When you find some data, it doesn't mean that you should stop research, it means that you have a lead and depending on whether or not you are able and have the time and the records available, you will still work at confirming the accuracy of data. If no more authoritative information turns up, your effort will have to suffice. Sometimes it takes much effort and the locating of new sources before more accurate conclusions are possible. Therefore, I conclude that there is no rule which says how much documentation you need. Just do not fail to cite your sources. A reader will someday recognize that further substantiation is necessary.

Share the Information You Compile

I encourage you to share your time and efforts with the rest of the family history community.

Your submissions will enable you to:

- Coordinate your family history research with others.
- Reduce time-consuming and expensive duplication of effort.
- Make a permanent copy of your family information.
- Help build the resources that have been made available to you.

This is the generation to "get it right". The personal computer technology is now advanced enough for quick, accurate and massive record keeping. Work to leave such good family history records that anyone can understand your data and no one will question where you obtained the information.

Terry Mason BSc, MA, retired from being a psychology professor at Niagara College of Applied Arts & Technology in Welland, Ontario, Canada in 1997. Later, he was employed for more than a year by Heritage Quest in Bountiful, UT in indexing quality control developing U.S. Census databanks. He co-founded Niagara Learning Systems which designs and markets Computer Aided Instruction programs and software for teachers. He has served in the community as a consultant and workshop trainer in family history (genealogy) record keeping and has been a missionary, teacher, Ward & Stake Genealogy Consultant, Elders Quorum President, High Councillor and Bishop in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He is currently the Family History Center Director in the Clermont, FL Ward. 2003