

Those “pesky sources” ... again...

Presented by Ernest Wiltshire (7 Dec. 2008)

One of the main reasons why I find TMG to be far superior to any of the other genealogy software programs I had used in the past (BK, PAF, FTM) is the ability to record sources accurately and in as detailed as fashion as one chooses. TMG has also forced me to be systematic in keeping track of my sources and to cite them properly, which none of the other programs seem to do. I have not come across many publications on the proper way to cite source documents; the three most useful works which I have found are:

Cite Your Sources: A Manual for Documenting Family Histories and Genealogical Records, Richard S(tephen) Lackey, 1980, University Press of Mississippi, Jackson, Mississippi. 94 pp. ISBN 0-87805-286-0.

Evidence! Citation & Analysis for the Family Historian, Elizabeth Shown Mills, 1997, Genealogical Publishing Co., Baltimore, Maryland. 124 pp. ISBN 0-9063-1543-1.

Evidence Explained: Citing History Sources from Artifacts to Cyberspace, Elizabeth Shown Mills, 2007, Genealogical Publishing Co., Baltimore, Maryland. 885 pp. ISBN-13: 978-0-8063-1781-6.

A very recent Canadian publication is:

About Genealogical Standards of Evidence: A Guide for Genealogists, Brenda Dougall Merriman, The Ontario Genealogical Society, Toronto, Third Edition, 2008. 96 pp. ISBN 978-07779-3424-1.

This is a brief and very readable work and has a very good little section of illustrated examples of sources. It is of most use to those concerned with Canadian sources

One other related volume that might be of concern to anyone intent on publishing is:

The BCG Genealogical Standards Manual, by the Board for Certification of Genealogists, 2000, Washington D.C., 125 pp. ISBN 0-916489-92.2.
Of most relevance to the family historian would probably be pages 8-13, on Evidence Evaluation Standards.

Don Pounder, a member of the Ottawa TMG Users Group has also pointed us to a useful article and to two web-sites of Library and Archives Canada:

Ontario Genealogical Society:

Cite Your Sources,
The Beginner's Corner - No.3,
Author: Fraser Dunford

FAMILIES, Ontario Genealogical Society,
V46, N4, November 2007, p.5.
Library and Archives Canada:

<http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/le-public/005-6070-e.html> (How to Cite Archival Sources)

“If an archival document belonging to Library and Archives Canada (LAC) is cited in the text of a work, a complete reference to the document should appear in the form of a footnote. A complete reference must contain all the elements necessary to locate the document and to place it in its descriptive context. The individual elements of the reference will vary according to the format of the archival document.”

<http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/electroniccollection/003008-400-e.html> (How to cite online documents):

“An excellent source of information is the supplement to Library and Archives Canada's *Bibliographic Style Manual*.¹ This supplement by Danielle Thibault, entitled "Section 3: Electronic Documents"², is based on the International Standard ISO 690-2 Information and documentation - Bibliographic references - Part 2: Electronic documents or parts thereof.”

Summary:

Lackey's short work was one of the first, and in fact Shown Mills dedicated her first book to him, as he died shortly after his work appeared in 1980; her 1997 work was intended to bring Lackey's work up to date. As its title indicates, it was aimed mainly at the family Historian.

Lackey's book is simple and easy to use, and for many people it may be all that is needed; however it does not cover all the more recent sources now available on the internet, and that is where Shown Mills work becomes particularly useful.

Her second massive volume (885 pages) published ten years after the first, is a monumental work, and seems to be intended more for professional genealogists and family historians who intend to publish their work, particularly in scholarly journals. Most of it is also aimed at Americans, and the detail into which she goes on U.S. sources may not be particularly helpful to those of us whose main countries of interest happen to be Canadian & European.

She does deal very briefly with some International sources in chapter 11, “National Government Records, International Records”, pps 628-642. There is just over a page on Canada, almost 3 pages on England, and 1 on France, almost 5 on Ireland, half a page each on Scotland & Wales. There are some further details on Canadian Census records in the examples, which might be helpful to Canadian researchers.

For the family historian who has no intention to publish, **Evidence Explained** at first appears intimidating, but in my view it is really only the first 2 chapters which are of most interest:

1. Fundamentals of Evidence Analysis pps 15- 38.
2. Fundamentals of Citation pps 41-90.

Also useful may be pages 112 & 113, which are examples of how to deal with personal correspondence and e-mails & pages 780-781, & 783, & 786 which are examples of citing online newspaper articles etc.

Ultimately her Evidence, Citation and Analysis is the more useful of her 2 books; she does not seem to consider though that genealogy programmes such as TMG do a great deal of the formatting of citation and source information which one previously had to do manually, which eliminates the fiddling over which things should be in italics etc.. so one should not be intimidated by the detail she asserts is essential, as most of that is handled by TMG. Of course TMG allows one to refine just how the information will appear in your printed journal or other reports, and once can also do a final edit in Word if the TMG generated reports do not meet one's needs.

I don't need to tell any TMG user how important it is to document the sources of the genealogical data they collect in the course of their family history research, as we all know it is the only sure way to prove that one's work is not mere guess-work, conjecture or family legend, but is solidly based in fact and to as great an extent as possible in official records or reliable family documents.

Of course, even family legend can be included in TMG using the feature which weights its reliability. Although this is not a feature that I make use of a great deal because of the enormous size of my own "One island study" data base, I do include my analysis of sources in note form.. However with most family projects of a moderate size it is probably a most desirable option.

My solution has been a custom approach based on elements of both Lackey and Shown Mills that were originally included in TMG. As with TMG itself, one must decide just how detailed one wishes to be, and then be consistent in applying one's own rules. If you are submitting an article for publication, then the Shown Mills tome is an invaluable reference guide, but for the average family historian it may be more than is needed.

Internet Sources

With the tremendous increase in the number of information sources to be found on the internet, a major problem has been how to record them. Where exactly is the repository of documents found in cyberspace? Does one choose the web-site where the information is found? But what happens when that web-site disappears or changes location?

My choice in many cases is to give the web-site URL though these can be horrendously long. This can be a problem when sources are printed out in footnotes or endnotes, as they can be very unwieldy and unsightly. My preference is to give the address only of the home page, and not the full URL, which in any case is more likely than the home page of the site to disappear or to be irretrievable.

So for very important information I print out the relevant pages and keep them in my paper files, but I also keep on my computer an electronic copy of the web-site.

Our webmaster David Walker has also found a very useful free program that enables one to download a web-site containing vital information and so preserve it for future reference: The HTTrack Website Copier - Offline Browser

“ It allows you to download a World Wide Web site from the Internet to a local directory, building recursively all directories, getting HTML, images, and other files from the server to your computer. HTTrack arranges the original site's relative link-structure. Simply open a page of the "mirrored" website in your browser, and you can browse the site from link to link, as if you were viewing it online. HTTrack can also update an existing mirrored site, and resume interrupted downloads. HTTrack is fully configurable, and has an integrated help system”

It can be found at: <http://www.httrack.com/>

Further details on citing online sources can be found in an online excerpt from Chapter Two of Shown Mills' EVIDENCE EXPLAINED. However I do not believe that the detail she demands is truly necessary except perhaps for academics & scholarly writers. For those TMG users who conscientiously record repositories I think it quite redundant to cite the World Wide Web as repository for inline sources, as she claims is necessary. Perhaps if one has copied the web-site using HTTrack, one might then give as repository one's own personal library. The excerpt can be found at:

http://www.genealogical.com/index.php?main_page=product_info&item_number=3843&NLC-GenPointers1