

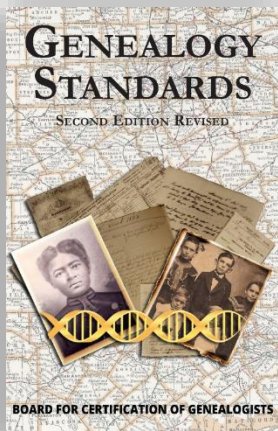
Beyond the Document:

Extracting Evidence from Context

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At the core of genealogical research lies documents: records of birth and death, legal proceedings, transfers of land, marriages in faith and in law; as such, it is very easy for we as genealogists to become too bogged down in the seeking of documents, and not thinking in terms of their historical **context**. But it is through our understanding of documents that we can better utilize them and extract evidence from them.

BCG Genealogy Standards



The Board for Certification of Genealogists publishes a list of 90 standards for professional genealogists (R 929.1 G326) which are applicable to everyone from beginners to the most seasoned professionals. Among these standards are several which specifically address the important of context.

Standard 12. Broad Context. *When planning research, genealogists consider historical boundaries, and their changes, migration patterns and routes, and sources available for potentially relevant times and places. They also consider economic, ethnic, genetic, governmental, historical, legal, linguistic, military, paleographic, religious, social and other factors that could affect the research plan and scope.*

In other words, genealogy is not just an assembly of names, dates, places, and events. To truly conduct genealogical research successfully, researchers need to look at broader historical context to inform the research they conduct, provide evidence for where documentation might or might not occur, and identify what type of evidence might appear at a particular time or in a particular location. In many cases, this means learning more about the scope of time and place, than the people being researched.

Standard 41. Evidence Scope. *Genealogists obtain much of their evidence from information naming people of interest or their possible relatives, neighbors, and associates. Genealogists also obtain useful evidence from sources that do not name these people. These include histories of the area, its population, and relevant time periods, and works describing customs, governance, laws, and regulations.*

In the broadest scope, historical context is vital to informing our research; learning about historical customs, local history, migration routes, ethnic groups, denominations; these are all aspects which can inform our research with evidence. But historical context does not only apply to the world in which we are researching, it also applies to the documents themselves. When

we locate documents, it's always important to scrutinize and analyze the documents, to determine if these documents are truly what they present themselves as, and to gain a better understanding of what they are.

Standard 35: Source Analysis. As they examine potentially relevant sources, genealogists appraise each source's likely accuracy, integrity, and completeness. This appraisal considers the source's characteristics:

... The source's history, including its governance, provenance, purpose, recorder, storage, and time lapse between events and their recordation

All documents are created for a purpose. What that purpose is, and what that purpose served over-time, are not always clear. As genealogists, we look at a birth certificate, and immediately we see this as a record of someone being born in the US. But if we think in terms of the historical context, we would realize that the purpose of the record is not to document someone's birth, but to provide proof of natural born citizenship. The 14th amendment, ratified in 1868, established birthright citizenship in the US. But from 1868-1907, there was no established means of proving this. The Naturalization Act of 1906 standardized the naturalization process, resulting in a federal birth certificate form in 1907. But birth and death records are managed by each individual state. In response, from 1909-1919, every US state introduced and passed a civil registration law, requiring the issuance of birth and death certificates.

Standard 37. Sources, information, and evidence. Genealogists view sources as containers of information items potentially relevant to research questions.

It is important to remind ourselves that the documents themselves are not the thing of value, but the containers of valuable information. It can be very easy to get caught up in locating a specific source.

Case Example: State of Kansas Death Certificate of Clementine Crumrine, issued Dec 1914, Osawatomie, KS at the state hospital. No Data reported for name of father, birthplace, name of mother, birthplace. Why? The informant on the death certificate is a nurse in the hospital.

PLACE OF DEATH.		STATE OF KANSAS.	
County <u>Miami</u>		STATE BOARD OF HEALTH—DIVISION OF VITAL STATISTICS.	
Township <u>Osawatomie</u>		STANDARD CERTIFICATE OF DEATH.	
City <u>Osawatomie</u> No. <u>State Hospital</u> Street		Registered Ward No. <u>155</u>	
Full Name <u>Mrs. Clementine Crumrine</u>		(If death occurred in a hospital or institution, give its NAME and number.)	
PERSONAL AND STATISTICAL PARTICULARS.			
1. Sex <u>Female</u>	2. Color or Race <u>White</u>	3. Single, Married, Widowed, or Divorced. <u>Widowed</u>	4. Date of Birth <u>Nov 15 1846</u>
5. Age <u>68</u> yrs. — mos. — da. or yrs. — mos. — da.			
6. Occupation (a) Trade, profession, or particular kind of work. (b) General nature of industry, business, or establishment in which employed (or employer).			
7. Birthplace (State or country) <u>Indiana</u>			
8. Name of Father <u>No Data</u>			
9. Birthplace of Father (State or country) <u>No Data</u>			
10. Maiden name of Mother <u>No Data</u>			
11. Birthplace of Mother (State or country) <u>No Data</u>			
12. The above is true to the best of my knowledge. (Informant) <u>Mary Whelan</u> (Address) <u>Osawatomie State Hospital</u>			
13. Date of Death <u>Dec 12 1914</u>			
14. I HEREBY CERTIFY, That I attended deceased from <u>Aug 15 1913</u> , to <u>Dec 11 1914</u> , that I last saw <u>her</u> alive on <u>Dec 11 1914</u> , and that death occurred on the date stated above, at <u>the</u> place.			
The CAUSE OF DEATH* was as follows: <u>Cerebral Hemorrhage</u>			
15. Length of Residence (for hospitals, institutions, transients, or recent residents). At place of death <u>37</u> yrs. — mos. — da. In the State <u>37</u> yrs. — mos. — da.			
16. Place of Burial or Removal. <u>Osawatomie</u>			
17. Date of Burial <u>Dec 13 1914</u>			
18. Undertaker <u>John Johnson</u>			
19. Address <u>Osawatomie</u>			

If we were purely seeking this death certificate to further a genealogy tree, this document provides little more than a date and location of death.

But if we are thinking beyond the document, we can identify from context of its creation that we should be looking for informational sources regarding the commitment of Clementine Crumrine, possibly a living will for her care, and other indirect documentation about the history of the Osawatomie State Mental hospital to further our contextual understanding of what all of this means so we can better develop our proof.

When discussing extracting evidence from context, we would be remiss if we did not discuss the importance of citation in document analysis.

Case Study: Ohio Graves

Registration Cards can be found on Ancestry, Fold3, and Familysearch and appear to be legitimate documents, providing the cemetery and date of burial for service members.

In the case of Henry S.

Crumrine, we located a Graves Registration Card showing he was born in 1810 and died in 1849 in Mahoning Co. OH. The

card credits service in Co. F, 1st Regiment, Ohio Volunteers. However, according to the “Official Roster of the Soldiers of the State of Ohio in the War With Mexico 1846-1848”, Henry S. Crumrine was 21 at his enlistment 6 June 1846. The man recorded on the registered grave was born in 1810 – making him 36.

GRAVES REGISTRATION CARD			
Crumrine Henry S			
Name	Canfield Twp Mahoning Co Ohio		
Address	Canfield Ohio		
Date of Death	Aug 16 1849	Place	Canfield Ohio
Cause	1810	Date of Burial	Aug 19 1849
Date of Birth	1810	Place	
Name of Cemetery	Zion Ref Lutheran	Location	Canfield Twp Mahoning Co
Lot No.	Row 15	Section No.	I Old
Block No.		Grave No.	53
Marker: Flat		Upright	X
None			
Next of Kin:	(Name)	(Address)	
SERVICE RECORD			
War Served In:	Mexican		
Date Enlisted	June 6 1846	Date Discharged	June 15 1847
Serial No.			
Branch of Service	Infantry	Rank	Sergt
Company, Outfit or Ship	Co F 1st Regt OVI		

Henry S. Crumrine.....	do	21	June 6, 1846	1 yr.	September 14, 1846; appointed with company June 15, 1847. Appointed Corporal —; Sergeant April 1847.
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Standard 44. Evidence reliability. Genealogists recognize that any seemingly relevant evidence item may be proved reliable or not reliable. They understand that unreliable evidence may be useful, for example, to follow as a clue, explain an error, or resolve conflicting evidence.

In exploring the citation of the Ohio Graves Registration, it was made clear that there were significant errors made in their creation, due to the recorder, purpose, and time lapse. The cards were produced in 1943 by the WPA, 97 years after the documented service, with no access to the records of the National Archives. Confirming our analysis, pension payment cards

for Henry S. Crumrine, Co F. 1st Regiment Ohio volunteers, and his widow, Clementine Crumrine, were found, filed in Kansas in 1907 and 1910.

Identifying the graves registration card, and demonstrating its lack of reliability as a source, was necessary to resolve conflicting proofs regarding the service of Henry Crumrine. Just because the source is not reliable, does not mean the source is not useful or does not contain evidence.

(3-II-11) 6-3271		MEXICAN WAR.					
NAME OF SOLDIER:		Crumrine, Henry S.					
NAME AND CLASS OF DEPENDENT:							
SERVICE:		RANK: Sgt.		ENLISTED:		DISCHARGED:	
		21st Ohio Vols					
ADDITIONAL SERVICE:							
DATE OF FILING:		CLASS:	APPLICATION NO.	CERTIFICATE NO.	FILE NO.	ACT.	STATE.
1907 Feb. 28							
1910 Nov.			Mex. War. 21st 50 20.152			July 29 1867	Kansas
			and 11.5.68 15.5.17				
BOUNTY LAND:							
REMARKS:		Army, Co F 169869 21st O. 12th Kans Vol. Inf 1					

Standard 40. Evidence Mining. Genealogists obtain evidence from information items and sets of information items. They seek evidence items that answer research questions directly, indirectly, or negatively. Evidence mining requires attention to details that might initially seem insignificant. Genealogists ignore no potentially useful evidence-including indirect and negative evidence or evidence that might conflict with or complicate a working hypothesis – and they give equal attention to direct, indirect, and negative evidence.

In reviewing documents, it's always important to keep your mind open to the notion that the document could contain direct, indirect, or negative forms of evidence. In our example of the death certificate for Clementine Crumrine, the certificate is direct evidence of her death. The death certificate is indirect evidence of her commitment to a State Hospital, requiring further documents to establish that proof. The death certificate also contains negative evidence - that none of her family was present at the time of her decease, which explains why the informant provided "no data" regarding her parentage.

Beyond the Document

As you continue forward with your own personal genealogical research, or engage with others in assisting them with their own, be mindful of the documents you are using and think contextually about the documents themselves – consider the provenance, purpose, recorder, storage, and time lapse, think about the broader context and the scope of their creation, and consider seeking ancillary sources to further contextualize what you are looking at. And always, always, document your sources and review those citations to ensure you are confirming the reliability of your document sources and extracting ALL of the available evidence, be it direct, indirect, or negative.