

Finding the Truth in Family Stories
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Repeated over time family stories became pseudo-facts that everyone knows and believes and can seriously lead our research astray.

Common types of errors in family stories:

- Ethnic Origins of Family Names and Birthplaces of Ancestors
- Immigration
- Maiden Names of Female Ancestors
- Associations or Encounters with Famous People and Historic Events
- Military Service of Ancestors
- Native American Ancestors

Assessing the accuracy of family stories:

- ✓ Did the informant – the person telling the story - personally know the people involved?
- ✓ If so, how old was the informant when the people involved died?
- ✓ Did the informant grow up in the same vicinity as people in the story?
- ✓ How did the informant feel about the people involved (disapproval or admiration)?
- ✓ Is there any evidence to support the story?

Stories can lead to useful information even if not completely accurate

Evaluating Evidence:

Original: First recorded form (will, letter)

Derivative: Copied, transcribed, reproduced, abstracted, or summarized from previously written material

Primary: Created at the time of the event by a knowledgeable adult participant or by official charged with accuracy and written without bias

Secondary: Recorded after hearing the details from someone else (obituary, tombstone)

Birthplaces: Typically, we discover birth places through:

- Census Records
 - Death Certificates
 - County Histories
 - Obituaries
- None of which are error-free.

Immigration Ports of entry:

<https://www.ancestrycdn.com/support/us/2016/11/majorusports.pdf>

Association with Famous People:

- ✓ Is it chronologically possible?
- ✓ Did my ancestor live in close proximity to the family of the famous person?
- ✓ If not, do typical migration patterns suggest a possible connection?
- ✓ Was my family of a similar socio-economic status?
- ✓ Is there any record of interaction between my family and that of the famous person?

Historic Events:

- ✓ What is the date/time period & where did the event occur?
- ✓ Who is the ancestor?
- ✓ What did the ancestor do and what records contain the information?
- ✓ Where is the repository that holds the records? Who had jurisdiction over the records?

Property

- Land Grants & Bounty Land for military service
- Land Patents: <https://glorerecords.blm.gov/search/default.aspx>
- Deeds

Common sources of Native American stories:

- Female ancestor with an unusual first name
- Any history of interaction with Native Americans
- Physical appearance of ancestor – existing photos or memories of older relatives
- Female ancestor whose maiden names is elusive
- Substitute for African ancestry

DNA testing is often inadequate due to the purity of the reference population.

Dawes Rolls: Native American Ancestry and tribal affiliation

Evaluating published material:

- ✓ Check the original publication date
- ✓ Which people in the story were living at the time of publication?
- ✓ Which people in the story lived in the lifetime of the informant? In the same vicinity?
- ✓ Embellished? The more glamorous, heroic, wealthy, association with famous people the story, the less probable

Sources of information:

Vital Records (birth, marriage, death)	Findagrave.com
Church records	Familysearch.org
Census	glorerecords.blm.gov search
Obituaries	City Directories

Guardianship records

Pension files

County Histories

Land records & Deeds

Dawes Roles (Native American)

Family Histories in print

All of these sources are only as good as the person supplying the information

Things to do:

Correspondence with relatives

Create timelines of verifiable information

Consider Autosomal (cousin finder) DNA testing

Visit courthouses, county archive centers, local History & Genealogy Societies