

NATIONAL GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY SPECIAL TOPICS SERIES
MASTERING GENEALOGICAL PROOF

NGS Special Publication No. 107
ISBN No. 978-1-935815-07-5

Printed in the United States on chlorine-free, acid-free, 30 percent post-consumer recycled paper.

Cover photos contributed by B. Darrell Jackson and Thomas W. Jones.
Author's photo courtesy of Marilyn Markham.

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PUBLISHED BY
National Genealogical Society
3108 Columbia Pike, Suite 300
Arlington, VA 22204-4304

Chapter 8

Using the GPS

Not only do we strive to produce work that meets the GPS, we use it to evaluate other genealogists' conclusions.

Yes answers to eleven questions about a genealogical conclusion—whether our own or another genealogists'—and its context will indicate the conclusion meets the GPS:

- a. Does the writer state a clear research question—what is it?
- b. Do the writer's citations address sources likely to help answer that question?
- c. Do the citations reflect a search that was reasonably (not necessarily perfectly) thorough?
- d. Do the citations in conjunction with the text indicate that all or most sources are likely reliable?
- e. If the conclusion rests on any error-prone sources or information, does the writer justify their use?
- f. Do the footnotes, or footnotes and text, show that the writer analyzed all the supporting sources?
- g. Does the writer base the conclusion on the correlation of evidence from all relevant sources?
- h. If the conclusion is not self-evident, does the writer present correlations in narrative, list, table, map, or other form?
- i. Does the writer convincingly resolve all conflicts with evidence supporting the conclusion?
- j. Does the writer state the conclusion clearly?
- k. Does the author convincingly show or explain why the conclusion is correct?

When assessing our own work, a *no* answer to even one of the above questions means our conclusion is not proved. More work remains. Addressing a *no* answer may be simple (restating the conclusion, for example), difficult (extending the research, for example), or somewhere between these extremes.

A *no* answer in an assessment of another genealogist's work suggests caution. Trusting the work, building on it, or incorporating it into our work could needlessly introduce error. We might opt to address the deficiency, use the work as a finding aid for our own research, or bypass it completely.

Chapter 8 exercises

1. Select a book of interest to you that purports to accurately present family relationships from the past. Select a conclusion that the work's author seems to believe is proved, and answer the following eleven questions about that conclusion, its context, and its presentation. *Yes* answers to all eleven questions will indicate the conclusion meets the GPS:
 - a. Does the writer state a clear research question?
If *yes*, what is the research question?
 - b. Do the writer's citations address sources likely to help answer that question?
 - c. Do the citations reflect a search that was reasonably (not necessarily perfectly) thorough?
 - d. Do the citations in conjunction with the text indicate that all or most sources are likely reliable?
 - e. If the conclusion rests on any error-prone sources or information, does the writer justify their use?
 - f. Do the footnotes, or footnotes and text, show that the writer analyzed all the supporting sources?
 - g. Does the writer base the conclusion on the correlation of evidence from all relevant sources?
 - h. If the conclusion is not self-evident, does the writer present correlations in narrative, list, table, map, or other form?
 - i. Does the writer convincingly resolve all conflicts with evidence supporting the conclusion?
 - j. Does the writer state the conclusion clearly?