

Researching in a Major Repository: Preparation, Collection & Evaluation

By Raylene Morrow Junkins October 2014

Raylene's Theory: The further from home you are the more expensive the research. Therefore: Do everything you can from home or close to home before you leave for your research trip.

What is the purpose of the trip? Is it a vacation with a little genealogy thrown in, maybe at several different locations? Is it a dedication research only trip? Or just doing a search of the internet? The principles are the same.

Do your homework. Do an internet search. Is the information you are looking for already digitized online? Is it indexed only online? Is it on microfilm available from the FHC? What do I really need from this location? Can I get it by snail mail or email? Pay a small fee to a local researcher.

Check for a website. Determine what kind of a site it is. Information only, does it have a contact email and/or phone. Is there a catalog or listing of holdings? Are there any online databases and/or indexes? Check cyndislist.com.

Research the location. Does it have the information I am looking for? Has the information been moved to a different location (i.e. transferred to a historical society, or state/national level organization). Did it exist at the time of the record I need? Were they keeping that kind of record for the correct time period? What about "There was a fire"? Check for resource guides.

Check out the location. Where is it located? What hours it is open. Do they close for lunch? Is everything in one location? What about parking? Photocopies allowed or not, cost of copies, need money, denominations, or copy card. Cameras allowed or not.

Research Plan. Make a research plan. Who are you looking for? What records do you want to search? Office locations for record types. Call numbers if catalog is available. I use Word Documents, and type results as I go. Search indexes, if available before you go.

What do you take? Research plan, computer with genealogy program , notebook, pencil (no pens), money as needed, camera, extra batteries, and thumb/flash drive.

A word about online indexes. Test the index. Does it really include all the years for all the locations in the title? Were all records legible? What is the source of the index? What records were indexed?

What is a Source?

Artifacts, Books, Digital files, Documents, Film, People, Photographs, Recordings, Websites

Classified by *Physical Form*

- **Original Sources** –
Materials in their first oral or recorded form
- **Derivative Sources** –
Materials produced by copying an original or manipulating its content

What are derivative sources?

- Abstracts – brief summary
- Compilations – pieces of information put together in a form or report
- Databases - extractions put together in a format
- Extracts – copy of only certain parts
- Transcriptions – verbatim copy of an original
- Authored works – family histories

Information content of Sources

- **Primary information** - details from someone with firsthand knowledge – participant – eyewitness
- **Secondary information** – details from someone with secondhand or more-distant knowledge, hearsay, tradition, local lore
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Evidence *interpretation* of Information

- **Direct evidence** - information that seems to answer the research question by itself
- **Indirect evidence** – information that cannot, alone, answer the question; must be combined with other information
- **Negative evidence** – absence of information that should exist

Proof

Conclusion supported by three things:

- Through research and documentation
- Reliable evidence correctly interpreted and carefully correlated
- Well-reasoned analysis

Basic Principle *

SOURCES provide **INFORMATION**
From which we select **EVIDENCE** for
ANALYSIS.
A sound **CONCLUSION** may then be
considered “**PROOF.**”

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