

A LESSON FROM THE “DEAR OLD LADY OF PISA:” How good is the Foundation of Your Family Tree?

In the year 1178 Bonanno Pisano began construction of a Campanile, or bell tower, for the town of Pisa, Italy. He failed however to design a foundation that could support the bell tower which he had designed. Pisano supervised construction of the first three stories himself. The bell tower had already begun its now famous listing to one side while completing the third level.

Those who followed Pisano over the next 200 years constructed four additional floors while attempting to make corrections for the angle of inclination at each floor level. Over the ensuing millennia literally thousands and thousands of man-hours have been spent developing methods to stabilize the structure and millions of dollars spent implementing those methods. All of it the result of an inadequate foundation design.

Just as a sound foundation is critical to the structural integrity of a building, the information you collect while researching becomes the foundation of everything else you do afterward to build your family tree.

Experienced genealogists know that “to successfully research an ancestor is to determine the events in which he may have been involved, to determine whether those events would have been recorded and, if so, to determine where the records are located.” [Greenwood, Val D. *Researcher’s Guide to American Genealogy*. 3rd ed. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 2000, p.11]

They also “...use compilations, communications and published works, whether paper or electronic, primarily for their value as guides to locating the original records...” [National Genealogical Society. *Standards for Sound Genealogical Research*.

http://www.ngsgenealogy.org/cs/ngs_standards_and_guidelines]

Learn to expand the record categories you examine in your research and improve your skills to better evaluate the reliability of each. It is not that experienced genealogists use different record categories than less experienced genealogists, but rather how they use the record groups. Accredited Genealogist Karen Clifford has written an excellent article that allows the reader to job shadow an experienced accredited genealogist and see how searching one record provided clues for where to seek for additional information necessary to solving a relationship problem. The article is available on the internet at the link provided below.

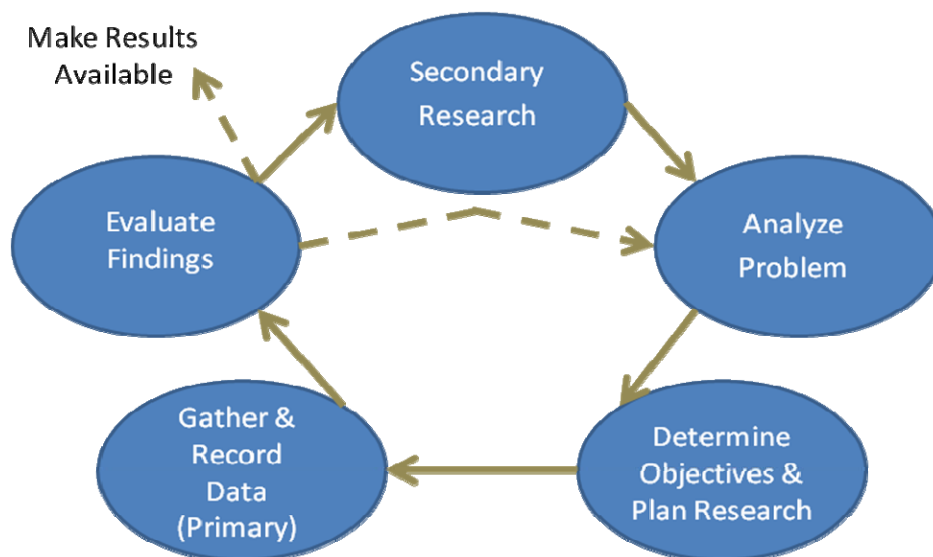
On the Trail of a Credentialed Genealogist, Finding the Ancestry of Etna Briggs. Genealogy.com.

[http://www.genealogy.com/genealogy/20_trail.html]

As you compile your family tree, strive to adhere to the *Genealogical Proof Standard* developed by the Board for Certification of Genealogists, that to be reliable, conclusions must meet the following five elements:

- A reasonably exhaustive search;
- Complete and accurate source citations;
- Analysis and correlation of the collected information;
- Resolution of any conflicting evidence; and
- A soundly reasoned, coherently written conclusion.

There is more to research than simply collecting information. It is a continual process which includes comparison of new information against the old. A model of the Research Process is provided below:



[Greenwood, Val D. *Researcher's Guide to American Genealogy*, p. 7]

Elizabeth Shown Mills, CG, CGL, FNGS, FASG, FUGA cautions genealogists to never rely on any one record. Sound research only happens when records from a variety of sources are examined and evaluated. This is the genealogist's method of applying checks and balances to their research.

Helpful Websites for skill building:

NGS Standards and Guidelines. National Genealogical Society.
http://www.ngsgenealogy.org/cs/ngs_standards_and_guidelines

Skillbuilding: Your Learning Center. The Board for Certification of Genealogists.
<http://www.bcgcertification.org>

Mentoring & Educational Resources. The International Commission for the Accreditation of Professional Genealogists (ICAPGen). <http://www.icapgen.org/icapgen/>

Free Courses. FamilySearch. <http://familysearch.org/learn/researchcourses>

Related Books:

Carmack, Sharon DeBartolo, CG, FUGA. *Organizing Your Family History Research: Efficient and Effective Ways to Gather and Protect Your Genealogical Research*. Cincinnati, OH: Betterway Books, 1999.

Everton, George B, *The Handy Book for Genealogists*, 10th ed., Draper, UT: Everton Publishers, 2002.

Greenwood, Val D. *Researcher's Guide to American Genealogy*, 3rd ed. Baltimore, MD: Genealogical Publishing Co., 2000.

RESEARCH AID - ANALYSIS CHART

Information I Know About My Ancestor	Analysis and Conclusions

