

Beware

by Mary Lou Bevers

Beware of compiled family data that does not support names, dates, and places contained therein.

Without evidence, one has nothing more than possible clues with which to try and find proof.

Common sense dictates that if the submitter has researched a family, there will not be a lot of blanks for places, and estimated years for events. If evidence had been found about events, then the places and dates would be known.

Unfortunately, there are people who are copying and exchanging such undocumented information who do not even realize that they do not understand what research really is. They are spending time compiling a database of names--many irrelevant. People who don't know any better believe what they see, and it never occurs to them that it could be incorrect. They copy and circulate it, so the errors multiply.

Research necessitates using documents like probate records, deeds, and court case files, along with birth, death, marriage, census, and various other important sources, before one can reach a conclusion (hopefully using multiple pieces of evidence when possible) that anything is a fact upon which to base additional research. Nobody wants to waste their time continuing with something that is likely to be in error.

We must always remember that a **source** is where the information came from, and **evidence** is what proves that it is true.

You can learn more about how to do research by reading good "how to" books, as well as articles in the *NGS Quarterly*, the *FGS Forum*, the *IGS Newsletter*, and other publications. You can also attend seminars and informative programs put on by your local genealogical society. Learn what records will produce the evidence you need.

Errors are everywhere--even in official records. That is why it is vital to do thorough research in multiple sources so that the information can be evaluated. People who have the same name can be easily misidentified. All too often, children are assigned to the wrong family because the compiler saw the name and thought it had to fit into their family.

The first place to start is with yourself--find evidence for every name, date and place that is in your research, and note what evidence you have to support

each one. You may discover that you have made an error, so the sooner you discover it, the better. It's important that you notify all of those researchers with whom you have shared your information.

If you have searched the records and not found evidence for something, but have, after studying it, reached a possible conclusion, then state in your research that it is your theory, and explain why you think so.

It's a lot of work, but it's the only way to produce a family tree that's of any value, both to yourself and to future generations. Quality is what counts--not quantity!

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