

How to Document Your Civil War Ancestor

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Getting Started

You may want to start a file folder to gather photocopies of all your documentation. Do not send original documents or your only copy - send only things that you can part with. Your application, complete with all of its documentation, becomes the property of IGS for preservation purposes.

Plain, uncertified photocopies are perfectly fine to submit with your application. The only copies that must be "certified copies" are those from documents that cannot be photocopied. For example, if a probate court will not make a photocopy of a marriage record because the book is too fragile to handle, the "copy" that the court gives you must be certified.

An additional word about copies - please have all copies on 8.5" x 11" or 8.5" x 14" paper. Larger paper is very hard to work with and smaller paper is easy to lose.

As you are filling out your application form, work from your documents rather than from family group sheets or ancestor charts. This will help eliminate carrying through any typographical errors entered into the genealogy software, and it forces you to take one more look at each document. If the fact isn't on the document, don't include it on the application. If all of the documentation states the ancestor was born in Indiana, put "Indiana" on the application, rather than "Pike Township, Jay County, Indiana."

What You Need to Prove

The heart of any lineage society is proving descent from a qualifying ancestor. This means that each step from one generation to another needs to be proven - including proving yourself to your parents.

It is not possible to list all of the things which can and cannot be used to prove relationships. The rule to keep in mind is that the document must actually state the fact you are trying to prove.

Original records created at or near the time of the event, such as civil or church birth records, are best. Be certain to review the Rules of Evidence for what is and is not considered acceptable proof.

An example of something that is not acceptable is an undocumented family history written long after anyone would have had firsthand knowledge of the people and events involved. This includes pages printed from a genealogy web site and family group sheets. It is important to realize that pre-1880 censuses do not prove relationships. Minors living in a household are not necessarily the children of the adults living there. If the relationship is not expressly stated on the census, that census cannot be used to prove relationship.

Both people in each generation need to be documented. This includes the females.

Although Indiana did not require civil birth or death records until 1882, it is possible to document pre-1882 birth and death dates. Tombstones, church records, estate records, guardianship files, school records, and pension papers are just a few of the sources that could be used. At the least, an estimate can be based on the census, such as "Born circa 1845 per the 1850 through 1880 census" or "Died after 1870 per the 1870 census."

All documentation must contain source citations, such as "Allen County, Indiana, marriage book 5, page 174."

Making It Easier on Yourself

Compiling a lineage society application can be time consuming. There are several ways you can make the process easier on yourself.

Consolidate proofs so that you send only one copy of a needed item. If you are proving two lines - for example, one from your great-grandfather and the other from your great-grandmother - you need send only one set of proofs for the generations those lines have in common. (Including an ancestor chart in your application is helpful in such cases.)

With the exception of using a run of the census to establish a date of birth, it is very rare that it is necessary to include every census that an ancestor appeared in. Also, there is no need to send a copy of a published census abstract and a copy of the actual census. The copy of the actual census is sufficient.

If one document proves several different facts, there is no need to copy it multiple times. For example, a page from a book of cemetery readings may show dates for more than one person on the application. It is not necessary to include a separate copy for each ancestor.

It is not necessary to use notebooks or highlighters. Applications cannot be stored safely or easily while bound in notebooks. Although notebooks can make a visually pleasing presentation, the SCWFI committee must remove all papers from binders, notebooks, and individual plastic sleeves, which slows down the

review process. The important part of the application is the documentation, not the notebook.

Highlighters are insidious for preservation purposes. Some highlighters do not photocopy or microfilm well. Be safe - don't use them. What you highlight may end up as a black bar on microfilm, obscuring the very information you wanted to show.

If you have a long document and want to draw attention to a particular part, use a red pen or pencil and draw an arrow, dot, or bracket in the margin. This is just as effective, and does not hinder microfilming or photocopying.

Another way to make the application process easier on yourself is by starting early and turning in your application long before the 31 December deadline. This will allow you more time to obtain additional documentation if it is needed.

Help is Here for the Asking

The SCWFI committee wants to help as many people as possible honor their Civil War Hoosier ancestors and is happy to answer questions from applicants and potential applicants. You can direct questions via e-mail to SCWFI@indgensoc.org