

PRINCIPLES OF NOTES AND SOURCES

NOTES:

Notes may be extracted information, explanations, elaborations, comments, etc., about the data in your file; or research comments, explanations, observations, etc. that are useful to you and other researchers who may see your information. They should be written in a way that will be understandable to someone who knows nothing about your family.

Notes usually transfer as written when included in a gedcom.

SOURCES:

Sources provide information that will allow others to see the same record that you saw to find the data recorded in your family history file.

Sources may or may not transfer well in a gedcom, depending on the genealogy software being used by the sender and the receiver.

RULE of THUMB for SOURCES: Ask yourself, "Will my source information tell someone fifty years from now where to find the document that I found?"

Useful definitions:

An original document was created at the time of an event by reliable witnesses of that event. A primary source cites the original document. (This includes the original document itself, a photo or microfilm of the original document, or a digital image of the original document.) **Primary sources are the most reliable.**

A secondary document was created by someone who witnessed the event, but recorded it at a later time; someone who got the information from a reliable witness then certified the accuracy of the information; or data extracted from the original document. A secondary source is data which comes from a secondary document and clearly acknowledges the original source of the data. **When a primary source is unavailable, a secondary source is acceptable.**

A repository is a place where original or secondary documents are stored; or where photos, microfilms, or digital images of original or secondary documents are stored. **Public repositories are most likely to continue to be accessible over time.**

RELIABILITY:

RULE of THUMB for RELIABILITY: The farther removed from the original document a source is, the less reliable it is.

As of July 2009, new FamilySearch listed eight categories of sources for us to choose from. They are listed here in order of reliability and probable access to future generations:

1. Government record: Documents such as birth, marriage, and death certificates as well as censuses, military and other such records must, by law, be kept in most countries. **These are primary sources and are the most likely to be available to future generations.**

2. Church record: In many countries, these were the only records kept in earlier centuries. Records in Christian churches usually include birth or christening, marriage, and death or burial. Some churches also kept lists similar to census or military records. **These are also primary**

sources and are likely to be available to future generations.

3. Published information: Anything that is published in a newspaper, magazine, professional journal, wedding announcement, funeral program, etc., may be considered a good **secondary source**. Digitized Newspapers and magazines will probably continue to be available in the future, but wedding announcements and funeral programs usually become “**Family possessions**.” (See below)
4. School/University record: This would provide evidence of an individual’s enrollment in the institution and may provide other useful information. **It would be a primary source for the enrollment, but a secondary source for other information.** Such records may or may not be available to future generations.
5. Company record: This could provide **evidence of an individual’s employment**. The company may or may not exist in the future, and the company records may or may not be available
6. Family possession: **Where** will that possession be **fifty years from now?**
7. Memory of someone: Unless the memory can be documented otherwise, it is no better than **hear-say**.

Other commonly used sources:

Family Bible: An excellent primary source **if** the Bible still exists and is accessible to the public. If the family-record pages of the Bible have been scanned and digitized and are available to future generations through a library (for example), it is a good source. Otherwise, it becomes hear-say.

Personal Journal: Same as a family Bible.

Personal History: Same as a family Bible or a personal journal. An autobiography is more reliable than a history written by someone else.

Temple Ordinance Record: Primary source for the ordinance, but questionable for any other information, unless it comes via an extraction from parish (or similar) records or is the record of a living ordinance. If it is an extracted record or a record of a living ordinance, it is a secondary source for genealogical data.

Caution: Using a website as a source is unreliable. Websites come and go, and may or may not always contain the same date. Instead of using a URL, find the original source of the digitized document you are accessing on the internet and use that data to create your source.

If you are considering other types of sources, judge their reliability by deciding into which of the above categories they would best fit.