



Genealogy
Clan Strachan Society

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Criticality of Source Citations in Genealogy

by Jim Strachan, FSA Scot (May 2018)

Citing your sources in your genealogical research is a vitally important part of any serious type of genealogical pursuit.

According to [FamilySearch Wiki](#), "Source citations tells the reader where you obtained a particular piece of genealogical data. Source footnote citations help us document, organize, and analyze the evidence gathered. They are the hallmark of quality family history. Ideally, every event or claim on a family group record would have one or more source footnotes."

[Family Tree Magazine](#) writes, "A citation lends credibility to your work – whether you're publishing it, or sharing it with close family members, and it supports your theories, assertions and proof statements."

In an article by [Ancestral Findings](#), "By citing your sources as you go, you can see where you found the original information, look at it again, compare it to the new source or sources, and decide if one is more likely to be correct or more believable than the other."

Also, "Citing your sources also provides future genealogists with a roadmap to your work. They can use this map to re-trace your steps,

possibly discovering new information along the way that will help verify your conclusions or disprove them."

Perhaps most importantly, "A published family history with no sources cannot be proven and is therefore only good for passing along through the family, not for any serious genealogical scrutiny or discussion."

Research of any kind (academic, historical, or scholarly) must include source citations. Research without source citations is virtually worthless.

Genealogy is no different, and the need to properly document source citations is mentioned by the **National Genealogical Society** (USA), **Association of Genealogists and Researchers in Archives** (AGRA – UK), as well as every other expert resource on this subject matter.

The lack of source citations results in an incomplete research product that cannot be relied upon and would need to be vetted if ever to be taken seriously.

We know for certain that secondary sources (cyber sources, family tradition, etc.) are prone to error and exaggeration. Without citations we must presume that every claim made in a genealogy report is from a potentially unreliable secondary source.

Although failure to properly document your source citations does not completely invalidate your research, it does (and should) certainly bring into question its validity.

Additionally, failure to properly document source citations creates an unnecessary burden on future researchers, who in genealogy circles tend to be your own relatives or future generations.

Proper format of genealogical sources can be easily found through any internet search site.

Where birth certificates, marriage license, or other primary documents are used in your research, a copy should be placed in an Appendix.