

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 053 732

LI 002 966

AUTHOR McClure, Patricia Harlan  
TITLE [Genealogical Research.]  
PUB DATE 69  
NOTE 23p.; (22 References); Papers prepared for the  
Institute in Archival Librarianship, University of  
Oregon, September 22, 1969 - August 14, 1970

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF-\$0.65 HC-\$3.29  
DESCRIPTORS \*Archives, Institutes (Training Programs), \*Library  
Education, \*Microfilm, \*Records (Forms), Research,  
Seminars  
IDENTIFIERS Genealogy, \*Librarianship, University of Oregon

ABSTRACT

Two Institute papers were concerned with genealogical research. "Manuscripts, Private Papers and Genealogical Research," deals with the handling and evaluation of unpublished and private papers in genealogical research. "The Genealogical Society of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints," discusses the Mormon Church's microfilming of original records of genealogical interest from all parts of the world and compiling them in one central depository in Salt Lake City to facilitate research. (Other papers from this Institute are available as LI 002962-LI 002965 and LI 002967 through LI 002976). (NH)

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[ GENEALOGICAL RESEARCH ]

By

Patricia Harlan McClure

Papers Prepared for the Institute in Archival Librarianship,  
University of Oregon, September 22, 1969 - August 14, 1970

LI 002 966

MANUSCRIPTS, PRIVATE PAPERS  
and  
GENEALOGICAL RESEARCH

Patricia Harlan McClure  
Archives-Fall 1969  
Library 507  
Mr. Duniway

Along with public records, private papers and manuscripts play a vital part in the piecing together of a family history. Public records provide the genealogist with direct information but private papers give the insight and clues that highlight public records and may lead him to other possible sources. Some of these public or official records are church and parish registers, probate records, land records and deeds, military and naval records, and cemetery and marriage records.

The genealogist, therefore, is concerned with searching unpublished and private papers for clues to lead him to other sources or for verification of evidence already available.

Accuracy, above all else, is stressed in genealogical work: Quality rather than Quantity. "Far too many 'so-called' genealogists judge success in research by the number of names they have collected in their searches."<sup>1</sup> A genealogist must train himself to be accurate and accuracy results from painstaking and exhaustive weighing of evidence, organizing of that evidence from a host of detail into logical order, and the constructing and testing of hypotheses. These steps are indispensable in proper genealogical procedure. Only after each piece of information has passed these tests can it be entered as fact or recorded as inference. Good intentions are not enough!

Each piece of information concerning an ancestor is valuable if it is realized that it is not necessarily correct and if it is not accepted without first proving it to be factual. Not all record sources contain correct information, obviously. It is essential, therefore, that the genealogist evaluate each record

so that only the items of correct information will be accepted and used in the identity of ancestors. There are, in general, two classes of genealogical sources:

- 1) personal, direct knowledge, tradition, and private family records, and
- 2) public or official records.

These sources can be correct, although it will be seen that some may have more claim to exactness than others. Personal, direct knowledge comes from the immediate contacts of the person with the event or information. A child knows his parents or siblings and other near relatives. He generally knows his exact age and birthplace but as to the question of the birthplace or birthdate of his grandparents, he is not always certain. This involves family tradition and can only be relied upon to provide clues as to where the exact documentation may be found. Family knowledge is subject to the fallibility of memory, especially where dates are concerned.

Sometimes private family records contain information that is personal, direct knowledge, recorded at the time of the event, or shortly thereafter, when the event is still clear in mind. Sometimes, however, the records were written long after the event. For example, a family Bible may not have been started until several years into the marriage and records of the birth dates of the older children and of the grandparents, etc., were entered from memory. Sometimes earlier records were copied from an older Bible. In this case, the dates entered in the Bible would be before the date of publication of the Bible, which is a good clue to look for. Sometimes these entries were made in

several different handwritings and by people who spelled poorly, another factor for error.

Legends and traditional matter also occur in family records and these must be taken for what they are. Sometimes, too, records may be made or changed for doubtful purposes to cover up some unpleasant<sup>a</sup> and the possibility of an alternative motive for its existence shouldn't be excluded. No matter how many times a tradition appears, orally or written, it isn't a fact until it is thoroughly documented.

Generally speaking, therefore, family written records in Bibles, account books, etc., are reasonably accurate when the records were made contemporaneously with the events but when made long after, such records are subject to the fallibility of memory.

Private papers and manuscripts used as reference in genealogical research can be evaluated in two classifications: Primary sources and Secondary sources. A Primary source is a record or statement of an event or circumstance made by an eye-witness or someone closely connected with that event or circumstance, recorded or stated verbally at or near the time of the event or circumstance. Secondary source is a record or statement made by a non-eye-witness, recorded or stated verbally either at or some time after the event or by an eye-witness some time after the event when the fallibility of memory is an important factor.<sup>2</sup>

The difference between these two depends on the time element and the actual connection with the event.

To classify a record source as Secondary does not necessarily stamp it as inferior and unacceptable, but to classify

it in that way does make the researcher aware that the possibility of such an item containing errors is greater than in a Primary source.

In many records, a number of genealogical facts may be recorded and in such cases, it is necessary to evaluate each single fact. One record source may contain both Primary and Secondary information. For example, a letter from a new father could refer to an event that occurred recently, the birth of a son, perhaps, and could also refer to the respective ages of the mother and other children in the family. The whole letter is a primary source, as it is a statement of a circumstance and condition that existed at the time of recording and given by a member of the family as an eye-witness to those conditions. The details of names and relationships is also primary. The detail of the age of the mother is secondary, however, as her birth took place some considerable time before the event recorded and his memory may not be reliable as to the exact date.

Another distinction that should be made in evaluating private papers is whether it is an Original record or one that has been Transcribed, Copied, or Compiled. The Original record is the first recording of an event in that particular type of record. The letter of the new father would be an original, unofficial record. The other three types are quite obvious. If, for example, a handwritten copy of the letter was made by the addressee it would be a Transcribed letter. The more times a record is copied, the more chance there is for error.

Evidence gathered from genealogical sources can be divided into two classes: Direct and Circumstantial. The latter requires inference or calculation to arrive at the conclusion, the former is self-evident and directly pertinent to the problem under investigation. All these must be taken into consideration when examining private papers and unpublished manuscripts to determine the value and authenticity of record evidence and to form the basis for the solution of apparent and real discrepancies in various records. Primary sources are less likely to contain errors than Secondary sources. Original records are less likely to contain errors than Transcribed records. Direct evidence is more reliable than Circumstantial evidence.

Private papers, when received in an archive, can be a valuable source of Primary, Original and even Direct evidence or at least make possible the re-interpretation or recognition of existing sources. They should not be sold short as a possible source of genealogical information in favor of the more official public records which are also found in archives. These collections, since they are characteristically unique, "observe few rules and stick to no subject. If they relate to one person, they are as likely apropos to two. Their form is often irregular and fragile, their content difficult to classify and decipher, their 'date' and 'place' incomplete or missing and their use hedged about with many restrictions."<sup>3</sup> Included among the documents of genealogical importance that might appear among personal collections received in an archive are the following:<sup>4</sup>

Family Histories. Generally in the form of printed Genealogies, these are often very valuable. It must be remembered, however, that they are, at best, Secondary sources, and copied at that.

Family Bibles. The amount of information in these may vary but they generally contain information about family relationships and birth and christening dates. Even in those cases where a family Bible is not known to exist, it should always be considered a genealogical possibility and the researcher should make inquiries concerning it.

Certificates of Birth, Marriage, and Death. These are usually copies prepared at the time of the recorded event but not part of the official record and they can be generally considered as providing authentic and accurate Primary evidence.

Church Baptism or Christening Certificates. These give the date of baptizing or christening, the date of birth, the place of birth and the names of the parents.

Journals, Diaries, and Biographies. Their completeness depends on their compiler. They record, generally speaking, movements from place to place, details of births, marriages, and deaths. They also contain valuable background material for life stories. It has been said that diaries, "when they are writ 'clearly and full upon any gallant subject,' when the entries are consistantly made by an eager and competant reporter, and when they flash vivid light on circumstances, then they hold a distinguished place as 'contemporary evidence.' But when they are the dreary recountings of dreary lives, when they are confined to recording the weather or the physical condition of a hypochondriac, when the significance of the world about him is lost to the diarist, then their value is nuisance value only. Good diaries get published; bad diaries encumber shelves."<sup>5</sup> Don't forget, however, that all diaries hold potential genealogical significance.

Old Letters. These items, which might date back some considerable time, may contain items of family interest, giving valuable genealogical data, such as dates and events in the lives of other members of that family. These often contain Primary, Original information. In examining old letters, the following points should be borne in mind to assist in evaluating their worth as Primary or Secondary source material:

- i. the name and relationship of the writer
- ii. the address on the letter, which would presumably be the address from which it was written and the home of the writer
- iii. the date and place from which the letter was sent

- iv. the date the letter was written
- v. the genealogical contents of the letter.

Memorial Cards. The custom of announcing the death of an individual through the medium of a printed memorial card was common to most countries until a few years ago. Such cards were sent to the relatives of the deceased and usually showed the name of the deceased, the date of death, and the place of burial. Often other items of genealogical value were included, such as the date of birth, parentage, and age at death.

Apprenticeship Records. In most European countries, the system of apprenticeship was the only way in which a young boy could learn a skilled trade. The earlier apprenticeship papers (or indentures, as they are often called) usually name the father, while the later ones may name both parents and may contain other valuable genealogical data. Copies of the original, signed agreements can sometimes be found among private papers.

Military Records. Any connection that can be made with the military is extremely helpful in genealogical research as this leads to other, public records that are complete and generally accurate. Military service medals, ribbons, and photographs may be guides to the name of the regiment in which the ancestor served. Also, pension records, disablement records, applications for pensions and military bounties, and pay books are helpful in tracing.

Pension Records. Until recent years, there were few pensions other than those provided for military service.

Scrapbooks. These include newspaper clippings, photographs, pictures of places with which the family has had residential connections, and collections of other miscellaneous items.

Baby Books. These are of a more recent origin and provide accurate sources of birthplace and date and parentage.

Wedding Announcements. These normally give the date and place of the marriage as well as the names of the bride and groom. These are not, however, evidence that the marriage actually took place. They do provide a basis for further searches to find the actual proof of marriage.

Newspaper Clippings. These generally refer to incidents in the lives of members of that family such as notices of births, marriages, deaths, and appointments to important positions, etc.

Obituaries. These contain generally a great wealth of information, including date and place of death and a list of the survivors of the deceased and often birth dates and parentage.

Photographs. These can provide clues from which other record searches will result. The name and address of the photographer may provide clues to the locality in which the family lived. Sometimes names and details are recorded on the back, which may necessitate the careful stripping off of the backing.

Copies of Wills, Land Grants, and Deeds. These show the names of relatives, the relationship to them, and disclose items of value that will lead to the searches in other records. Land grants and deeds are particularly valuable, as they establish a specific place of residence at a given time.

Citizenship Papers, Naturalization Papers, and Passports. These often give the precise place of birth and birthdate.

It will be noted that all of the above, if not providing Primary sources, do provide clues to an unbiased source which can verify circumstantial evidence and confirm the truthfulness of the private record.

"Small wonder that some librarians throw up their hands and either leave them uncatalogued in cartons (secretly hoping they will disappear or not be called for) or treat them oversolicitously, like a sub-normal child."<sup>6</sup> "Manuscripts and private papers are here to stay."<sup>7</sup> But their existence is no guarantee of their productive use. "Organizing manuscripts, providing guides and assistance in use, and making them known and freely available are indispensable preliminaries to an active research program."<sup>8</sup>

When personal papers are received in an archive, it is the responsibility of the archivist, as soon as possible, to study the existing arrangement (fonds) of the papers. "The first handling of a mass of manuscripts is often most important and needs the ripe judgment and trained hands of the experienced archivist."<sup>9</sup> If they haven't been rearranged since the growth of the papers was terminated, they may be "replete with hints of

value to the final archival arrangement and the dating and identifying of the miscellany of the collection.<sup>10</sup>

When they have been shifted, the chronological arrangement is a possibility for genealogical purposes, with a surname file and location cross-reference but the arrangement must depend first on the material. In a sense, "the archivist must submit to being ruled by his material."<sup>11</sup>

"In every collection there are misplaced, wrongly dated and undated documents, unsigned memoranda, inclusions, and apparently disconnected papers that require careful consideration, as it is a prime archival duty to reduce the unidentified manuscripts in every collection to the least possible number. This consideration is valuable in direct proportion to the knowledge, experience, and 'manuscript sense' of the one who arranges the collection."<sup>12</sup> "Manuscript collecting is not for manuals. It is not a technique, not a science; it is an art-- perhaps one of the creative arts."<sup>13</sup>

There have, however, been standards recently proposed for the handling and serving of manuscript materials,<sup>14</sup> and these, combined with the "manuscript sense", would prepare the archivist to assist the genealogist at work.

FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Derek Harland. Genealogical Research Standards. Salt Lake City. 1963. p. 19.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 39

<sup>3</sup>Neal Harlow. "Managing Manuscript Collections," Library Trends. IV, 2 (Oct. 1955). p. 203.

<sup>4</sup>This list is from David E. Gardner, et al., A Basic Course in Genealogy, Vol. I. Salt Lake City. 1958. p. 259-265 with annotations from both Gardner and myself.

<sup>5</sup>David C. Mearns. "Historical Manuscripts, including Private Papers." Library Trends. V, 3 (Jan. 1957) p. 320-321.

<sup>6</sup>Howard H. Peckham. "Policies regarding the use of manuscripts." Library Trends. V, 2 (Jan. 1957) p. 361.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Harlow, p. 203.

<sup>9</sup>John C. Fitzpatrick Notes on the care, cataloguing, calendaring, and arranging of manuscripts. 3rd ed., Washington, 1928.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Mearns, p. 321.

<sup>14</sup>Howard L. Applegate. "Proposed standards for manuscript materials." AB, August 25, 1969, p. 552.

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THE GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY  
of the  
CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST  
of the  
LATTER-DAY SAINTS

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Accessioning and Preservation

Patricia Harlan McClure  
Archives - 507  
Mr. Duniway

13 November 1969

Microphotography, according to T. R. Schellenberg, is "a modern technique suited to the management of modern records."<sup>1</sup> For the Mormon Church, it is a modern technique suited to the modern management of old records. For many years now, they have been using microfilming to record original records of genealogical interest from all parts of the world where they are available and compiling them in one central depository in Salt Lake City to facilitate their genealogical research. They have found that microfilming is the best solution for them for obtaining and handling the vast amount of genealogical records that they do.

According to Schellenberg,<sup>2</sup> the objectives in microfilming records are usually two-fold: (1) to reduce their bulk, and (2) to insure their preservation. Other reasons in relation to the Mormon Church, however, are also involved. These are:

- (3) microfilming may be the only way to obtain the records
- (4) microfilm is easier to handle than the original document, and
- (5) microfilm is easier and cheaper to reproduce many copies from.

These reasons outweigh the high cost of the original process mentioned by Schellenberg.<sup>3</sup>

Since 1938, the Mormon Church has spent \$25,000,000 on microfilming throughout the United States and the rest of the world,<sup>4</sup> producing a great bulk of records to be stored. Microfilm has reduced the potential bulk considerably. For example, one hundred years of the London Times takes up less than two drawers of storage space when microfilmed. The many

record books, often quite bulky in size, would be difficult to store and handle. Microfilm eliminates this problem, making possible the compact storage of thousands of boxes of microfilm which fit neatly into drawers. More than 600,000 rolls of microfilm have been accumulated thus far and several thousand new rolls are processed each month.

The Church is attempting to microfilm copies of documents and records wherever they can be reached. At present,<sup>5</sup> current filming is being done in:

Utah	Ireland	Italy
California	Wales	Hungary
Canada	Belgium	Poland
Nova Scotia	Netherlands	England (all nearly completed)
Mexico	France	

The projects completed are:

Scotland	Norway	Finland
Isle of Man	Sweden	Luxemborg
Denmark	Iceland	Most of the U.S.

Filming has been interrupted but is to be resumed in:

Parts of Australia	Italy (Piedmont)
British West Indies	Parts of Switzerland
Parts of East and West Germany	

Proposed and in preparation projects include:

Australia	Tonga	Guatemala
New Zealand	Korea	

Contracts are constantly being made to try to open new areas.

All records of genealogical interest are microfilmed. These include parish registers, superior and circuit court minutes, deed books, will books, chancery court minutes, marriage records, estate settlement books, surveyors' books, inventories of estates, land grant records, tax lists, minutes of early courts of pleas and quarters sessions, cemetery records, etc.

It is obvious that all these records would be impossible to obtain in the original. Microfilming provides an exact facsimile of the record that is easy to handle and can be reproduced cheaply. Since the main purpose of the microfilming program is to make records available to as many people as require them, this seems to be the best method.

There are from 65 to 70 operators in the field micro-filming records in court houses and churches all over the world. Their exposed film is sent to Salt Lake City for processing. When it reaches the microfilm lab at the Granite Mountain Records Vault, just outside of Salt Lake City, special care and exactness are used in the processing of the original film. negative. The term processing covers all that is done from the camera to bringing out the completed negative image, ready for making positive copies. Each step of developing, fixing, and washing entails a very high degree of exactness in timing, darkness, temperature, agitation, and constancy of chemical solutions. Each of these factors is carefully and strictly controlled by time meters and flow meters plus a continuing program of checking for constancy and accuracy.

Since the factor of long-time storage is involved and the image must remain clear indefinitely, these special precautions are more important. This condition is not as important in regular commercial developing procedures. The negative must be clear and long-lasting and produce many clear positives over a period of time.

When the negative is finally processed, and a positive print made, they are both inspected for completeness and quality. The final step is winding the long strip of film

onto reels, taking care against fogging and any nicking or splitting. To achieve this, the winding is done in almost complete darkness where the winder checks largely by the feel for any nicks that may result in a damaging break. In March, 1969, 2,373,900 feet of microfilm were processed in the GMRV and 19,780 rolls were printed.<sup>6</sup>

The positive copy and the negative are then sent to the splicing room where the long reels are broken down into "parts" and rewound on smaller reels. For example, the single reel containing The Champaign News Gazette from Champaign, Illinois, from 1920-1952 is broken down into 193 parts. The splicing department in Salt Lake City is presently<sup>7</sup> meeting a splicing quota of 550 rolls of film per day to eliminate a backlog of film.

The spliced rolls of film are then sent to the catalog room where they are assigned an accession number, and call number and cards are typed up for each "part", or roll, of film with one accession number given to the whole series.<sup>8</sup> They are cataloged by source location, title, years and a short description. An "F" in front of the call number denotes film. The cataloger also checks thoroughly for splicing errors, inspecting each foot of film to insure quality. A short description is marked on the leader of the film to help distinguish it.<sup>9</sup>

The call number, part number, and accession number are then typed on a box and the film roll inserted. The negatives are placed in the storage vault where they are filed by accession number.. The positive is sent to the Genealogical Society library in downtown Salt Lake City to be used by the public.

Whenever copies of microfilm are required they are made from the negative stored in the vault. The duplication process is performed within the vault itself for added safety and protection.

The requests for copies come generally from one of the 80 branch libraries of the Genealogical Society. These borrow and sometimes retain copies of microfilmed records for the use in their region by both LDS and non-church members.

In August 1969, the Genealogical Society hosted a World Conference on Records and Genealogical Seminar to which were invited archivists, librarians, historians, genealogists, microfilmmers, demographers, sociologists, medical scientists, government agency representatives, and others who are interested in the protection of the world's vital records. This conference marked the Diamond Jubilee Year (75th Anniversary) of the Genealogical Society which was founded on November 19, 1894.

The Conference topic, "Record Protection on an Uncertain World", was prompted by the Church's active interest in record preservation and the fact that the past decade has caused many thinking people to be concerned about the protection and preservation not only of the world's great art treasures and priceless antiquities, but for its vital records as well in all nations and for all the peoples of the world. These records are at the mercy of floods, fires, hurricanes, earthquakes, insects and natural deterioration as well as the destructions brought about by man. The flood in Florence, Italy is but one example of a natural disaster and the increasing world political tensions is all too evident of one brought on by man. Riots, fire bombs, or nuclear bombs could easily destroy what could never be replaced.

The World Conference on Records brought together people from all over the world who are interested in, and have the responsibility for the world's records, and who recognize the

trust they have placed in them for their safety and protection.

The Conference included seminars on archival, historical, and genealogical subjects during which papers were presented and discussed and ideas and experiences were exchanged. Well over 200 interesting papers were presented on topics such as, different forms for "Miniaturization of Records", "Church Records of the United States", "Guidelines for the Microfilming Decision-- What to Film, What Not to Film, When to Film", "Preservation by Restoration of Documents", "Can a Computer Help the Archivist and Librarian", and "Emerging Technologies for the Preservation of Records". The four day conference was attended by over 10,000 interested people from approximately 40 countries.

While attending one of the General Sessions, participants had a chance to view a new 30 minute color film called "From the Strength of the Hills" which describes the building and scope of the Granite Mountain Records Vault. This enormous and well protected vault with 65,000 square feet of floor space is located in Little Cottonwood Canyon, 20 miles south-east of Salt Lake City. The protection it affords could not be equalled in an outdoor structure because of the 675 feet of solid granite above the six huge vault storage rooms. The storage area has three access tunnels faced with heavy bank vault doors and encasements that are strong enough to withstand the shock of anything less than a direct atomic bomb hit. The vault provides the ideal storage conditions necessary for microfilm storage including circulated, filtered air which is free from dust, smoke, chemicals or fall-out particles, all of which can prove harmful to microfilm. There are spring loaded valves that close automatically to make the storage area tight

if a blast should occur outside.

The vault's water storage is pure and self-contained, coming from a spring inside the mountain. This water is suited for the processing of the film and for drinking. The present flow of 8,700 gallons per day--2,700 gallons in excess of the daily requirements--eliminates the need to bring in water from the outside.

For emergency power, there is a diesel-driven electrical generator that starts automatically if the power from the outside is cut off.

From this it is evident that all possible measures are taken to preserve the world's vital records that the Mormon Church uses in its genealogical research. After more than 25 years of careful thought and planning and nearly two million dollars the vault construction was completed to give the more than 30 years worth of microfilmed records the protection they and the world deserve along with far-reaching, continuing collection programs.

FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>T.R. Schellenberg, Modern Archives (Chicago, 1956) p. 107.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>3</sup>Jerry McDonald also discusses this factor in her article on "The case against microfilming."

<sup>4</sup>Per Paul Royall, Secretary, Genealogical Society (telephone 4 November 1969).

<sup>5</sup>May, 1969. Genealogical Society Observer, Vol. V, No. V, p. 9.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., Vol. V, No. IV, April, 1969.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., April, 1969.

<sup>8</sup>This information on accessioning is mostly from an interview with Mrs. Joanne Keyes, cataloger at the Genealogical Society from 1959-60, 1962-63. (Eugene, Oregon. 8 November 1969).

<sup>9</sup>Richard W. Hale, Jr., "Cataloging of Microfilm", American Archivist, Vol. 22, 1959, p. 13.

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