



Rules of Evidence

1. Official civil issued records of birth, marriage and death are required for each event/person when such document exists.
 - a. Short form birth certificates are not acceptable.
 - b. Marriage license applications with the return are required.
 2. A church record or marriage certificate is acceptable if no license application exists.
 3. In addition to the documentation required for those listed on the application, documentation must be included for any event that changes a person's name or states a relationship other than what is listed on the application. Ex., if a death certificate lists a second spouse or different name after remarriage, proof of the second marriage must be submitted.
 4. All evidence submitted shall be sufficient to prove that the applicant is directly descended from the claimed ancestor(s). Adopted children do not qualify as a step in the lineage.
 5. DNA evidence may be considered on an individual basis. Please contact firstfamilies@wpgs.org to discuss prior to completing the application.
 6. The evidence must prove residence of the ancestor(s) in one of the 26 counties of western Pennsylvania by 31 December 1810 and be sufficient to differentiate between any two persons of the same name residing in the same area at the same time.
 - a. Tax records are frequently used to establish residency. Real property (real estate) taxes prove that one owned land, but not necessarily that one lived on the land. Chattel (personal property) tax records do establish residency.
 7. A female applicant ancestor living in western Pennsylvania before 31 December 1810 must be identified by her maiden name, if she was born with a surname. In the event a woman was a Native American or born enslaved, or otherwise not born with a surname, an application may still be submitted, pursuant to all other standards.
 8. Quality of evidence is more important than quantity. However, even quality evidence from a credible source can be wrong. If a major conflict among sources is found, include a statement to address and resolve the conflict.
 9. Primary ("first-hand") information that directly states a fact or relationship is preferred. Examples of acceptable documents containing primary knowledge and direct evidence include:
 - a. Government-issued certificates.
 - b. Death certificates are rarely a primary source for the date of birth or names of parents. A death certificate must be supplemented with additional documentation when used as proof of birth or parentage.
 - c. Legal records, such as wills and deeds. Such records must state the relationship (a document that names an heir is not proof of relationship).
 - d. Church records, such as baptism, marriage and death.
 - e. Bible records, if event dates are contemporary with the publication date of the Bible. A copy of the title page must be submitted. The current owner and location of the Bible should be given.
 - f. Letters, diaries, and family records, if they state facts that the writer could have known "first-hand." The identity of the writer and the date of the document are necessary. The current owner and location of the document should be given.
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10. In the absence of sources containing primary knowledge and direct evidence, other types of evidence and information may be submitted. Multiple sources will be necessary to corroborate evidence, as one document in these categories rarely provides sufficient evidence on its own. Examples include:
 - a. census records (pre-1880 census records that do not state relationship are not sufficient on their own as proof of a generational link)
 - b. newspaper accounts (including obituaries)
 - c. authored works
 11. A short paragraph should be written in the event it is necessary to use four or more sources to prove an event or relationship (“proof summary”), or to resolve conflicting evidence (“proof argument”). The proof summary or argument should be considered your source document and be included numerically with the rest of your numbered documents. All underlying source documents should be included as subsequent pages of this source (or cross-referenced if already included). See [*Tips*](#) for an example.
 12. Many types of records are useful but should be treated as finding aids to original records and not submitted as proof. Examples include:
 - a. Published County Histories
 - i. Biographies published in county histories will not be considered proof of a generational link (as they were rarely verified).
 - ii. The authors often used tax records, land records and other primary documents to write their narrative. Every attempt should be made to submit those original documents. In the event the original documents are no longer available, the county history may be submitted.
 - iii. Biographies may be used as proof of marriage for the subject of the biography if other marriage documentation is not available.
 - b. Lineage papers from other societies will not be considered as documentation.
 - c. A database or index will not be considered as documentation.
 13. Submit only the most credible documentation necessary.
 14. If a conflict of evidence cannot be resolved or documentation is not sufficient to prove an event or relationship, the application cannot be approved.
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