

# CONFRONTING CONFLICTING EVIDENCE



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In genealogical research it is almost a given that conflicting evidence will be encountered. This lecture examines ways to analyze and resolve such evidence. Conflicts may be apparent and easy to reconcile, may not appear until writing up the research, may be difficult to reconcile and require a proof summary, or may not be possible to reconcile.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

- Definition of conflicting evidence
- Role of conflicting evidence in the Genealogical Proof Standard
- Elizabeth Shown Mills's Classes of Evidence—Direct, Indirect & Negative
- Elizabeth Shown Mills's Evidence Analysis Process Map

## 2. EXAMPLES

- #1: The conflicting evidence – three different names for father of Charlotte Fasse Graue  
: The resolution -- Differences in cultures affect the way names appear in records. Getting to know the research locale helped solve the conflict. In this case it was not until the laws and the records of the time period in Lippe Detmold were considered and examined, could the conflict be resolved.
- #2: The conflicting evidence -- Authored sources give either PA or VA as birthplace of Capt. John Harper (1728- 1804)  
: The resolution -- Despite a reasonably exhaustive search over 10 years, the conflicting evidence has not been resolved and may not be able to unless some original or derivative source with primary information comes to light.

- #3: The conflicting evidence -- Label on a photograph does not appear to go with the photo.
  - : The resolution – By correlating information from Maureen Taylor, expert in genealogy and photography identification, and known census and bible records, this conflict was quickly resolved.
  
- #4: The conflicting evidence— One marriage record and two census records give different names for Wash Visor’s wife. How many wives did Wash Visor have and who mothered which child?
  - : The resolution – After a reasonably exhaustive search, a proof summary was constructed which resolved the conflict.
  
- #5: The conflicting evidence— Every source, except one, including census records, city directories, and an obituary, records Margaret Allen of Adams County IL as a widow. An Adams County divorce file contradicts that.
  - : The resolution – Examining the divorce file and finding former husband residing in Indiana with another family helped prove her divorced status. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century there was a stigma attached to divorce. It became a custom for divorcees to list themselves as widow or widower
  
- #6: The conflicting evidence – All sources except one give the birthdate of Sarah Baxter Bourne of Kennebunkport Maine as 1814.
  - : The resolution – By comparing a typescript with the original manuscript, the conflict is solved.

### 3. CONCLUSION – When evidence conflicts

- Identify the conflict
- Conduct further research
- Compare and analyze the sources used
- Write up a resolution

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