

# PROOF ARGUMENTS

## HOW AND WHY

F. WARREN BITTNER, CG<sup>SM</sup>  
info@ancestorslostandfound.com  
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### Class outline:

- I. The goal of family history:
  - A. ***Establish identity*** and ***prove relationships***.
  - B. If this goal is not met, all other family history goals and activities are a waste.
  - C. If careful research has proven which of six John Smiths in a county is the ancestor, we owe it to ourselves and future generations to write the reasoning of the conclusion.
  - D. It is in the reasoning that the proof come.
- II. **The *Genealogical Proof Standard*:**
  - A. Relatively exhaustive research.
  - B. Complete citations for each source.
  - C. Analyze and compare the data.
  - D. Resolve conflicting evidence.
  - E. Write a conclusion based on the evidence.
- III. **Written Summaries of Evidence Conclusions: Proof Arguments**
  - A. Examples of why complete source citations are inadequate.
  - B. If we fail to record the logical analysis of our conclusions we doom the next generation to repeating our research.
  - C. Why proof arguments are essential.
  - D. Does format matter?
- IV. **National Genealogical Journals and Their Format**
  - A. Professionals must keep current on their skills. For any professional reading major journals of the profession is essential. The major journals include:
    - 1. *National Genealogical Society Quarterly*  
Every genealogist should read the *NGSQ*. Those who do not are novice researchers doing sub-standard research regardless of years or experience!
    - 2. *The American Genealogist*
    - 3. *The Genealogist*
    - 4. *The New England Historical and Genealogical Register*
    - 5. *The New York Genealogical and Biographical Record*
  - B. Minor journals and their format.
  - C. Learn from the journals and follow their format.

**V. Numbered Genealogies Produced by Software Programs**

- A. Not one of the genealogical software programs number families correctly.
- B. Not one of the genealogical software programs format the families correctly.
- C. This means software can be used for basic structure, but the families must be correctly and edited in word processing software.

**VI. Modified Register Format.**

- A. Putting a family in into Register or Modified Register is an essential part of the research process.
- B. This can only be done in word processing software.
- C. Until a family is analyzed, on paper, in *Register Format*, the research is incomplete.

**VII. How to write a Proof Argument**

- A. Begin with a statement of what is being proven:  
*This is the proof argument tying Minnie Mary Bahre to her birth family.*
- B. State what type evidence the proof is based upon:  
*The evidence tying Minnie to her birth family is indirect, but convincing.*
- C. Briefly summarize the argument:  
*No single document ties Minnie to her birth family. The sum of many pieces of evidence establish this tie.*
- D. Introduce the person with an evidence based statement:  
*Minnie Mary Bahre recorded her own birth date in her Bible as follows, "Minnie Bahre-Wife of Fred J Bittner, Feb 28th 1865, both N.Y. City."*
- E. Analyze the quality of the record:  
*The Bible was a Christmas gift to Minnie in 1898, so for Minnie's 1865 birth record the source is derivative, and the information is secondary.*
- F. Assess the contribution of the record:  
*This information appears to have been recorded by Minnie herself, so can be relied on as far as Minnie was aware of her own birth date and place.*
- G. Give a complete source citation for each piece of evidence.
- H. Present each piece of evidence in logical order:  
*On her 1884 New York City marriage license, Minnie lists her parents as, "Frederick Bahre" and "Dora Luhr."*
- I. Note when one piece of evidence supports another:  
*On her marriage license, Minnie also states she will be twenty years old on her next birthday, which matches the 1865 birth year listed in the Bible.*
- J. Continue to analyze each piece of data:  
*The marriage license is an original source with primary information provided firsthand by the bride and groom.*
- K. Infer information from the sources; develop a theory from the evidence:  
*If Minnie was born in New York City in 1865, her parents must have been living in the city at the time, suggesting information about her parents may survive in contemporary New York City records.*
- L. After one set of family data is presented, introduce the next set of data:

*On 25 May 1861, a marriage is recorded in New York City at the Evangelical Lutheran Church of St. Matthew between "Johann Heinr[ich] Fri[edrich] Behre" of Weetzen in Hannover and "Johanna Dorothea Louise Lühr" of Osterode am Harz, Hannover.*

- M. Compare one set of family data with another:  
*The names of this couple are a close match to the "Frederick Bahre" and "Dora Luhr" listed as the names of Minnie's parents in her 1884 marriage record.*
- N. Draw conclusions from comparing records:  
*The close match of given and surnames suggests this is the marriage of Minnie's parents.*
- O. Analyze the evidence:  
*This 1861 marriage is an original source with information that appears to be primary.*
- P. Present additional evidence to support conclusions:  
*Minnie's baptism is recorded in the same church three years later on the date listed in her Bible (28 February 1865) where her name is recorded as "Johanna Sophia Wilhelmine Behr," with parents listed as "Johann Friedrich Behr" of Weetzen in Hannover and "Doris Lühr" of Osterode am Harz, Hannover.*
- Q. Compare evidence as it is introduced:  
*The close match of the names and birth places between this 1861 marriage and the parents in this 1865 baptism, both from the same church, indicates both records relate to the same couple.*
- R. Resolve conflicting evidence:  
*A comparison of all four of these records and the close match of information between them suggests that the name "Minnie" was a diminutive of "Wilhelmine."*
- S. Summarize the proof:  
*Taken together these four sources prove that Minnie Mary Bahre listed in the Bible and the 1884 marriage is the same person as the girl in the 1865 baptism.*

#### ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. **The Board for Certification of Genealogists. "Appendix D—Example Proof Summaries," in *The BCG Genealogical Standards Manual* (Washington, D.C.: Board for Certification of Genealogists, 2000), 51-64.** Written proof summaries are the best way to explain the reasoning done to analyze genealogical evidence, resolve conflicts between evidence, and explain how conclusions of identity and relationship were reached. This appendix explains industry standards for recording the conclusions reached after careful research analysis.
2. **Rose, Christine. *Genealogical Proof Standard: Building a Solid Case*. San Jose, CA: CR Publications, 2005.** A simple explanation of the Genealogical Proof Standard with examples of how it applies to research.

PUBLISHED EXAMPLES OF COMPLEX EVIDENCE  
WITH EXCELLENT PROOF ARGUMENTS

3. **Freilich, Kay Haviland. "Was She Really Alice Fling? Righting a Wrong Identity."** *National Genealogical Society Quarterly* 88 (September 2000): 225--28. A short example of indirect evidence used to correct an identity error.
4. **Jones, Thomas W. "Organizing Meager Evidence to Reveal Lineages: An Irish Example—Geddes of Tyrone."** *National Genealogical Society Quarterly* 89 (June 2001): 98–112. This article is a superb example of identifying multiple generations of a family from an area where almost no records survive. The few records that do survive are used to their best advantage. The entire article is the proof summary.
5. **Tillman, Teri D. "Using Indirect Evidence and Linguistic Analysis to Trace Polin Ries of New Orleans."** *National Genealogical Society Quarterly* 99 (December 2011): 245–74. The author uses evidence from six states and three countries to support the conclusion that four different names refer to one woman.