



## Unit 1 - Lesson 1 - The Big 5



**W**ho can get excited about learning the Genealogy Standards of Proof? Everyone who wants to avoid the disappointment of false starts, common beginner mistakes and wasted efforts.

There is nothing more disheartening after months of work than discovering that your results are in question. Just like the lady who travelled to Scotland to visit the town her ancestors came from, only to find out when she returned home that she had visited the wrong town; or the two fellows who thought they were distant cousins and after many years of thinking they were related found out they were not; they are still friends, so that's pretty nice. Even I have experienced this – I contacted another genealogist thinking I may have finally broken through a very frustrating brick wall, only to find out that I was the source of information this fellow used, even though it clearly states on my website that the evidence for the individual in question is unproven.

Discovering that all of the hours you have spent were wasted and now you have to start again is unfortunately, and all too often, a situation that a beginning genealogists may face. Why? Only because you did not know the **Big 5 Basic Guidelines of the Genealogical Proof Standards**. Not knowing that some sources may contain errors and that not all research, either in print or online, is credible and factual can be a costly and/or time consuming mistake.

That is why we at Genealogy Beginner are going to set you up for success with the knowledge and awareness to avoid a similar situation for yourself. By following some simple guidelines, this never needs to be you. After this course, you will have developed the impeccable habits of the wise researcher. You will know the basic principals of and the reasons why you need to work to a standard of proof. You will learn how to look for a reliable source and how to spot misleading information, and you will have spent your time and money wisely.

### *Welcome to your first lesson in Beginning Genealogy.*

In this lesson, you will be learning about the basic principals and standards of conducting genealogical research. At the conclusion of this lesson, you will understand the value of clear, concise and factual research, and why it is so important to all of us.

**There is no big secret to be unveiled — what it all comes down to is asking the following questions:**

- **Have you written down where you found your information?**
- **Have you reasonably searched every resource?**
- **Does all of your information point to the same conclusion?**
- **Are there any conflicts that need to be resolved?**
- **Can you retrace your steps and defend your argument?**

These are the questions that make up the five elements for the Genealogical Proof Standard as set out by the Board for Certification of Genealogists (BCG).

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To read more about the Board for Certification of Genealogists (BCG), visit  
<http://www.bcgcertification.org/resources/standard.html>

## Five Elements for the Genealogical Proof Standard

### 1. Reasonably Exhaustive Search

This is fairly straight forward: a reasonably exhaustive search entails an in-depth search of existing sources. It does not mean you have to look at every available record or cite every source. Followers of this rule lower the chances of drawing a wrong conclusion and spreading misinformation. A reasonably exhaustive search can include a search of Birth, Marriage, and Death records as well as Obituaries, Cemetery records or Monumental Inscriptions.

Let's have a look at  
the records of



**Alexander  
Walker  
McCallum**

Statutory Index 1857 and 1856 for the **birth** of Alexander Walker McCallum in Cambusnathan.  
Birth: 1856 November 23rd @ 5:30 p.m. Cambusnathan, County of Lanark  
At Cottages Newmains.  
ALEXANDER WALKER MCCALLUM, Son of:  
F. William McCallum, Enginemmen, Informant, Present.  
M. Martha McCallum, m.s.



Statutory Index 1873-1879 for the **marriage** of Alexander Walker McCallum to Catherine Drever Sinclair.  
Marriage: 1879, December 31st., Sanday, County of Orkney at Cleat, Lady Parish, Sanday.  
ALEXANDER WALKER MCCALLUM, 23, bachelor, Schoolmaster, Kirbister Schoolhouse, Orphir  
Son of:  
F. William McCallum, Locomotive Super intendant  
M. Martha McCallum, m.s. Walker  
to: CATHERINE SINCLAIR, 20, Spinster, Farmers Daughter, Cleat, Lady Parish  
daughter of: F. Peter Sinclair, Farmer.  
M. Catherine Sinclair, m.s. Calder  
Signed David Calderwood, Minister, United Presbyterian Church.



Statutory Index 1938-1942 for the **death** of Alexander Walker McCallum  
Death: 1942, February 4th, Durness, County of Sutherland at Rispond, Parish of Durness  
ALEXANDER WALKER MCCALLUM, 85, School Teacher, Widower of Catherine Drever Sinclair  
Son of:  
F. William McCallum, Works Manager..deceased  
M. Martha McCallum, m.s. Walker..deceased  
Cause: a) Cirrhosis Liver, 4 months b) Jaundice, 4 months  
As certified by Mary J.S. Cuthbert, M.B.?, Ch.B, D.P.H., Durness.  
Informant Wm. McCallum Son, present, c/o Gowans, 36 Woodlands Drive, Glasgow.

Additional searches for AW McCallum will bring up several census returns as well on which we find him listed with his wife and children. This would constitute a reasonably exhaustive search of the available records. With this information, we would be able to confidently draw at least two conclusions. First, AW McCallum was married to Catherine Drever Sinclair and, second, his parents were William McCallum and Martha McCallum m.s. Walker.



## 2. Complete and Accurate Citation of Sources

This is exactly as it states — document each and every source you use and tell us where you found the information. Make notes on ones that you did not use and list some of your reasons for not using them. Following this rule will help you back track your steps and gives credibility to your research.

In the above example, you will note that the information for AW McCallum was found in the Statutory Indexes for the years recorded. Now, let's say you found an interesting tidbit of information about an ancestor that was not connected to a Birth, Marriage or Death record. What if you found a story in an old newspaper or on the internet? How would you cite that source? Let's have a quick look at a nice little tidbit I found concerning AW McCallum's brother Thomas. An excerpt of the story reads:

**“Cricket was introduced to Addiewell in 1870 when the White Star Cricket Club was formed. The first bats were supplied by a local joiner, Mr. T. McCallum”**

To site this source, I list where I found the information. I found it at the following web address: <http://www.btinternet.com/~james.fanning/westcalderm/> which lists their source as follows:

The article is titled:

***“Addiewell : First of the Shale Villages”***

From West Lothian Courier - Friday, June 30th, 1967

[westcalder.co.uk](http://westcalder.co.uk); A collection of historical material relating to the West Calder area

Well, all of this is great, but this is a lesson on Genealogical Proof of Standards; so how do I know that this is my Thomas McCallum? I know this because a reasonably exhaustive search of the census for the time and area in question showed only one T. McCallum who was a Joiner by trade.



***T. McCallum***

## 3. Analysis and Correlation of the Collected Information

This tenet asks you to apply some critical thinking to your research. By analyzing your data you can better interpret the evidence of your sources and align your conclusions. The following story of Clara Rawson will demonstrate Analysis and Correlation.

On the next page you'll see the Death Certificate of Clara Rawson. You'll see that Clara passed away on August 1, 1908.

There is a story in Clara's family about the tragic circumstances of her death. Clara was killed in a fire that destroyed most of the community in which she lived. It does not give the cause of death on Clara's death certificate, so in order to corroborate the story, we need to find another source before we can draw a conclusion. A little more digging and we are able to find a clue. In the limited edition historical booklet "Fernie – 90 years ago," we found a picture with the date of the disaster – August 1, 1908 – the same day as Clara's death. However, it does not name any victims of the fire, and the accompanying article only mentions a woman who fell victim to the blaze. It does not name her so we can still not draw any conclusions. We have to seek yet another source.

A letter of enquiry to the BC Provincial Archives does reveal that another historical book about the community was published in 1997 and it contains information about Clara. On page 88 of that book, it tells of how Clara, who was bed-ridden, could not be moved from the path of the fire in time. In desperation, her loved ones dug a deep hole, wrapped her in blankets that had been soaked down with water, and buried her — praying for her safety. Sadly, it resulted in her death.

Now having analyzed the evidence, we can reasonably conclude that Clara Rawson did perish in the Fire of 1908.

Here we have the Death Certificate of Clara Rawson showing her date of death as August 1, 1908.

BIRTHS, DEATHS AND MARRIAGES REGISTRATION ACT.	
SCHEDULE B.--Deaths.	
Registration District of <i>East Kootenay Southern Division</i> <i>382/08</i> <i>33. R</i>	
Name and surname of deceased.	<i>Clara Rawson</i>
When died.	<i>Aug 1<sup>st</sup> 1908</i>
Where died.	<i>In Fernie</i>
Sex.	<i>Female</i>
Age.	<i>59</i>
Rank or profession.	
Where born.	<i>Glostershire England</i>
Certified cause of death, and duration of illness.	
Name of Physician, if any.	
Signature, description and residence of informant.	<i>Reg Rawson, Miner, Fernie B.C.</i>
When registered.	<i>Sept 26. 1908</i>
Religious denomination.	<i>Church of England</i>
Signature of Registrar.	<i>J. H. McMillin</i>
REMARKS.	
I hereby certify the foregoing to be the correct Record of the death of <i>Clara Rawson</i> in pursuance of the provisions of the above-mentioned Act.	
As witness my Hand at this	<i>26<sup>th</sup> Fernie</i> Province of British Columbia, day of <i>September</i> A.D. 1908
<i>382/08</i> <b>FILED AT FERNIE</b> <b>SEP 26 1908</b>	<i>J. H. McMillin</i> Registrar.

8,000/2/10



By analyzing your data you can better  
interpret the evidence of your sources and align your conclusions.

In other words, after collecting clues from every possible location, compare the information you've found to try and solve your family mystery.

## 4. Resolution of Conflicting Evidence

It is more common than you may think to find documents that have conflicting information. In this case, you may have to use deductive reasoning to resolve the conflicts. If you can not resolve the conflicts, the rule-of-thumb is simply to not publish your findings. Another acceptable method is to present both sets of information along with an admission that you have not reached a satisfactory conclusion.

*Now it is time for you to do some of the work. Here is your assignment.*

Your ancestor is Betsy Sinclair; you know she was born in Latherton, Caithness, Scotland in about 1827 because you have an old family diary that mentions this. That is all you know. Now follow these steps:

- **Step One: Go to the LDS search site** <http://www.familysearch.org/eng/>
- **Step Two: Enter her name in the correct fields**
- **Step Three: Enter her date of birth, plus or minus 2 years** (*it will give you the option*)
- **Step Four: Enter the country of birth**
- **Step Five: Document your findings**
- **Step Six: Post your findings on the forum under**  
<http://www.genealogybeginner.com/community/genealogy-standards-and-guidelines-lesson-1/>

I will meet you there and we can talk about how we can resolve or not resolve this conflict, what steps we could take, and what our final analysis might be.

## 5. Soundly Reasoned, Coherently Written Conclusion

When writing your conclusions, it is best to rely on the credibility of your supporting documents. By taking this approach you will avoid basing any conclusions on a bias or presumption. What you aim to do is clearly demonstrate how the evidence led you to the conclusion. This does not mean you have to do a report — your conclusions are simply the information you present in your Family Tree, along with your cited sources and any relevant notes you have taken along the way.

## Wrap-up

As you can easily see, sharing information is a huge part of genealogy and that is the primary reason for a Genealogy Standard of Proof. Now you have a good understanding of both why you need to know and how to use the Genealogy Standards of Proof. More importantly, you will be able to avoid some very painful missteps. If you have any questions, visit the Beginning Genealogy Forums Unit 1 Message Board.

In our next lesson we will be focusing on your tree and filling out your Family Group Sheet.

*See you on the forums!*

**Articles:** <http://www.genealogybeginner.com/category/lesson-1-articles>

**Glossary:** <http://www.genealogybeginner.com/category/glossary>

**Forum:** <http://www.genealogybeginner.com/community/genealogy-standards-and-guidelines-lesson-1/>