Source Citations
the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

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"Citation is an art, not a science."
Elizabeth Shown Mills

Source citations can be:
Good – clearly stating the source and where to access it
Bad – completely lacking in useful details
Ugly – decent information, but really long and confusing
Non-existent – as in the case of Great Grandma's Cherokee heritage

When you might need to create a source citation?:
- Creating a new source on the *FamilySearch* Family Tree
- Uploading a source to your online tree
- Entering a source into your personal database
- Writing a family history book
- Writing a proof statement
- Writing an article for publication

Why should you cite your sources?
- To evaluate and analyze each source you find
- Prove your research findings
- To find your sources again
- Enable anyone else to locate the source
- Show that you've done reasonably exhaustive research

Steps to citing a source
A good source citation will include details that allow you or anyone else to locate the source.
- **Step One: Understand the source**
  - Closely examine the source

> **SOURCE:** A document, book, article, microfilm, photograph, website, etc. that gives you information, which becomes evidence in proving a conclusion.
>
> **CITATION:** A statement identifying the specific location of a source and details about that source.

- Note all the information included in the source
- Discover who created the source - you may need to do some investigating if this is a website or a photocopy of a document.

- **Step Two: Create Your Citation by answering 5 questions,** the format taught by Thomas W. Jones in *Mastering Genealogical Proof,* Chapter 4.
  - **Who** created the source?
  - **What** is the source?
  - **When** was the source created or when did the event happen?
  - **Where within** the book, film, magazine, database, etc is the source located?
  - **Where in the world** is the source located?

How to cite a source by answering the 5 questions

WHO?
This refers to either the author of the source, the creator (often a religious or government entity), or the informant. In the example below, Carter County, Oklahoma is the government entity that issued the marriage license.

Carter County, Oklahoma, photocopy of original marriage license and certificate, unpaginated, Shults-Rayston,11 December 1898, Indian Territory Southern District, recorded 1943, County Court Clerk, Ardmore, Oklahoma.

WHAT?
If this is a published work such as a book, include the full title in italics. If it is not published, such as a personal history, use quotes around the title. If there is no title, describe the record, as shown here.

Carter County, Oklahoma, **photocopy of original marriage license and certificate,** unpaginated**, Shults-Rayston,**11 December 1898, Indian Territory Southern District, recorded 1943, County Court Clerk, Ardmore, Oklahoma.

WHEN?
- Typically cite the year a book or microfilm was published; for a journal or magazine, add the month or season.
- For a website, add the access date. Because URL's change, the date could help to relocate the source.
- If the source is unpublished, use the date it was created or the date of the event it reports. In some cases it might be necessary to include both, as shown below.

Carter County, Oklahoma, photocopy of original marriage license and certificate, unpaginated, Shults-Rayston,**11 December 1898,** Indian Territory Southern District, **recorded 1943**, County Court Clerk, Ardmore, Oklahoma.

WHERE WITHIN?

- In a published source, this could be a volume or page number.
- In an online database, cite the image number, or any other way to explain to others how to find the source again.
- For a government certificate, this would be the document number.
- If a source is not published, such as an unbound collection of documents, try to identify an order and describe it: "folio 3, page 25."
- In the example below, the marriage record has no document number, so it is designated as "unpaginated."

Carter County, Oklahoma, photocopy of original marriage license and certificate, **unpaginated,** Shults-Rayston,11 December 1898, Indian Territory Southern District, recorded 1943, County Court Clerk, Ardmore, Oklahoma.

WHERE IN THE WORLD?

- If the source is published, such as a book, this would be the publication location.
- If an unpublished source, such as a manuscript, letter, or document, name the location where the event took place and where the source is held.
- The example below shows the location of both the original marriage jurisdiction and where the marriage record is currently located.

Carter County, Oklahoma, photocopy of original marriage license and certificate, unpaginated, Shults-Rayston,11 December 1898, **Indian Territory Southern District**, recorded 1943, County Court Clerk, **Ardmore, Oklahoma.**

Layered Citations

What about a source that is now digitized and accessed through a website such as *FamilySearch* or *Ancestry*? Include both the physical source citation, then all of the digital source citation information, **separating the two sections with a semicolon.** A third section might be necessary if referencing the original microfilm reproduction of the source, as shown below.

Mason County, Kentucky, "Marriage Bonds, Book 4, 1855-1857," Scott–Frank bond (2 September 1857)**;** database and digital images, "Kentucky Marriages, 1797-1954," image 305, *FamilySearch* (https://familysearch.org : accessed 24 Jun 2012)**;** citing FHL Microfilm 281,846.

Different Citation Formats are used depending upon the project.

- **Reference notes** are used to prove a fact such as the date or place of an event. The previous examples used this format, which would also be used when uploading a source to *FamilySearch* or *Ancestry*. Reference notes in a report can appear in two places.
  - **Footnotes:** inserted throughout the article, referenced by number and appearing at the bottom of the page
  - **Endnotes:** listed at the end of a chapter, article, or book

The following example shows a citation referencing a specific page in the book.

Thaddeus Brockett Rice, *History of Greene County Georgia,* (Macon, Georgia : J.W. Burke Company, 1961)**, 394.**

Shortened reference notes are used after the first full citation in a report, as shown below.

Rice, *History of Greene County, Georgia,* 394.

- **Source List Entry:** Often called a bibliography, this is the master list of books, microfilm, or other sources we have consulted for our research. This is usually used at the end of a book or an article. No specific mention is made of page numbers or other details. Authors are listed alphabetically by last name.

Rice, Thaddeus Brockett. *History of Greene County Georgia.* Macon, Georgia : J.W. Burke Company, 1961.

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