

How to Use Citation in a Family History Paper

A family history paper is a combination of two forms:

- 1) a researched document - which needs evidence of research
- 2) a narrative - which as a true story, needs to be accurate

For this reason, there will be some modifications to the citation expectations.

Here are some rules to follow

- 1) Treat all information as citable - that is, a reader should be able to tell where the information came from.
- 2) Try to avoid in-text citations or footnotes. Instead, aim to recognize your sources right in the text. Most narrative are told like that anyway.

3) Non-citable information:

- a. Non-citable information that is common knowledge, such as the signing of the Canadian Constitution, 1982, or that World War Two was fought on two fronts, the European and Pacific fronts.
- b. Also included in non-citable information are birth and death dates, where people lived, jobs etc, anything that if you asked any family member they would know. For example, *Henry and Margaret were married on June 5th, 1944 and soon moved into a converted chicken coop on the land that would later house three generations of Duerksens.*

4) Citable Information

- a. Citable information includes any non-common knowledge facts, stats, or information that some author has researched and published.
- b. Included in this is any disparity between information given to you by different family members. For example; *Aunt Susie says grandma and grandpa were married in 1942, but the marriage documents at the Rhineland church in Morden says it was in 1943.*
- c. Citable information includes any non-common ideas, theories, hypothesis, quotations, or philosophies
- d. Included in this are any interpretations your family members have about people or events. For example, *Aunt Susie remembers the farm to be a ramshackle collection of depression era castoffs, while her younger sister Mary has fond memories of flowering gardens, a tree swing and her mom baking cookies.* Here you have show that two people have two different ideas about a place.
- e. Also included is the personal interviews you have done. *Uncle Ron recalls Uncle John told me that Paul distinctly remembers.... Grandma's memory was fading but she did remember that she had ivory buttons on her wedding dress – a luxury!*

- 5) Gaps in knowledge.
- a. When there is information lacking, *Why did Uncle George not talk about his childhood in Russia?* Acknowledge the gaps. Say, *No information could be found about why Abram moved his family four times in five years. One can speculate that perhaps the recent famine and civil war made finding farmable land difficult.* Here you have acknowledged that you looked for information, found none, but have used your historical knowledge to come up with your own idea/theory.
- 6) Multiple Sources agree
- a. When you find that multiple family members give the same facts, or tell the same story, you can do one of two things:
 - i. Treat it just like it is common knowledge. *George was a miserable man. On more than one occasion he insulted those nearest to him. He accused a friend of theft, told his grandson he did not love him, and to a life long friend who had lost two wives and two children to cancer he said, "Well at least my family is still alive". "That's just George" is everyone's reaction.*
 - ii. Choose one or more people to attribute the stories to. *My father, perhaps out of sheer incredulity, or so as not to repeat the offences, has kept a mental log of all the nasty things his father, Abe has done to those nearest him. He even got choked up when he told me that grandpa had told my brother he did not love him enough to give him a present.*
- 7) Using unpublished Family History books.
- a. Often families will put together their own family history books, with pictures, stories and family trees. These are considered unpublished because there were not published (that is printed and distributed) by a publishing company.
 - b. With information you find here, treat that facts as common knowledge **ONLY IF YOU CAN CORROBERATE THEM.**
 - c. Treat the stories in two ways
 - i. If you can corroborate them, use the personal interview as the main source
 - ii. If you can't corroborate them, then cite the book as the source (see next page for how to cite unpublished works)
- 8) Using pictures, documents, letters etc as sources.
- a. The easiest way of using information from the above is to refer to them and then show them.
 - b. For example, *In a photograph, taken in 1919 Katherine's family stands over her coffin. Around her stand her husband, and four children, Agnes the youngest, David, George and then a taller, older girl. My mother spent many years showing this picture to many relatives trying to*

determine who she was. There was no record of Katherine having any other children but the three. And then insert the picture into the document.

- c. *My grandmother shocked us on her 90th birthday, when, looking at the word "Margaret" spelled neatly on her cake, declared that her name was not Margaret, it was Maggie. Curious the family searched documents only to find her birth certificate said 'Maggie", her Old Age Pension said 'Margaret", and her Social Insurance card said "Maggie"! Then you can insert one of the documents, or in brackets say (appendix).*

9) Using pictures, documents, letters ect in the appendix.

- a. The appendix is a collection of information that you want to add on to your research, but that do not fit into the narrative you are telling. These DO NOT need to be cited in your works cited page. However, please label documents clearly, *My grandmother's birth certificate showing her name to be "Maggie" or Photo graph at Katherine Toews' funeral, 1919. Left to right - Jakob, David, George, Agnes and Mary.*

Personal Interview

Penner, Susan. Personal Interview. 22 Nov 2010.

Penner, Susan. Personal Interview. Oct-Nov 2010.

Wiebe, David. Telephone Interview. 14 Dec 2010.

Hall, Alfred. E-Mail Interview. Nov 2010.

Book without stated Publication Information (Unpublished Works)

Give as much information as you can.

Penner Family History. Penner Family. 1987.

McDale, Henry. Plett/McDale Family History.

Letters etc.

Benton, Thomas. Letter to Charles Fremont. 22 June 1847.

Hatch, James. Letter to the author. 5 Apr. 2010.