

Citing Family Sources: Photos, Letters, Journals, Heirlooms, and More

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Lisa Stokes, AG®

stoked4genealogy@gmail.com
LisaStokesHeritageResearch.com

Overview

Using family sources adds richness and credibility to our family history projects and preserves essential details and family history information. Learn how to quickly and easily cite family sources such as letters, interviews, journals, photographs, letters, pedigree charts, and heirlooms. Strengthen your citations by documenting the line of provenance for these valuable family sources. We will explore each family source category with practical examples to help you effectively incorporate these unique sources into your genealogical research.

The Purpose of Genealogy Source Citations

What is a genealogy source citation, and why is it essential to write clear, consistent, and professional source citations for genealogy projects? Genealogy source citations are statements about sources describing the source type, who created the source, where and when the source was created, and where the source is now located.

Citation Elements & Templates

The second component of the "Genealogy Proof Standard" found in *Genealogy Standards* by the Board for the Certification of Genealogists teaches that citations must:

- Be complete and accurate.
- Support each information item that answers a question about an identity, a relationship, an event, or a situation.

Standard five from the same book states five essential elements to incorporate into proper source citations.

Who: Who authored or created the source (agency, government, person, informant, religious body, business, etc.)

What: What type of source, including a title or description

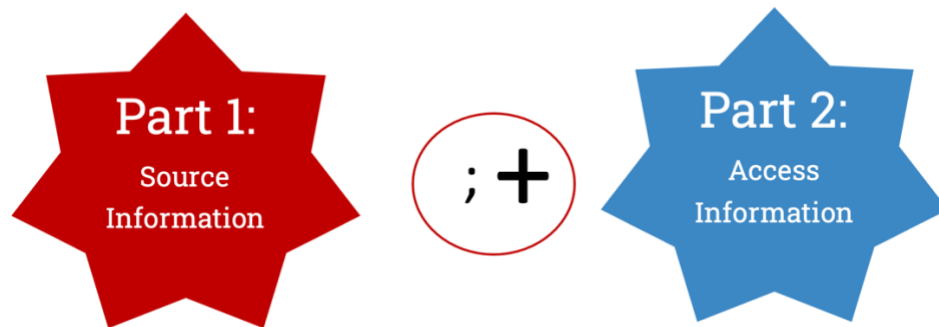
When: When the source was created, events dates, and access dates

Where: Where the source is located, publication info, and URLs

Wherein: Where within the source that specific information is located

Two Part Source Citations:

Source citations can be divided into two parts: the source information and the access information.



PART 1: SOURCE INFORMATION

Who created the source?

What type of source is it?

When was the source created?

Where was the source created?

Details: Book #, page #, "entry for..." names, dates, places, etc.

PART 2: ACCESS INFORMATION

Researcher's description

Where is the source located? (Repository)

Wherein the repository or website is the source located?

Citing information (if needed)

GSCS Master Citation Template:

Who, what, when, where, details;
researcher's description, where
the source is located, wherein the
repository or website; citing information.

GSCS Master Citation Template for Home Sources:

Who, what, when, where, details;
researcher's description,
home repository, wherein the
repository. Notes as needed.

Access Information Adaptions for home sources

- **Repository:** The researcher's home is considered the repository for home and family sources. The blue "location" section usually uses the terms "privately held by" or "in possession of."
- **Wherein the Repository:** This section is optional. I use it to remind me where something is stored. If that's not your style, delete the purple section.
- **Citing Information:** I usually don't include citing information in a home source citation, but if needed, you can add this section to show where the original document is held.

Basic Template for Family Sources

(Template) **Author**, "**Title**," **written in [date- at least year]**, **where written**, **[details]**; **original/copy of original**, **privately held by [name]**, **[address]**, **obtained [year]**, **[Optional: Research File/Project Name]**. **Note:**

- **Including notes:** Home and family sources often need explanations and provenance. Include these in a note at the end of the citation.

Follow this link for a free copy of my Citation Templates for Family Sources free printable and a link to my "Family Sources" template bank <https://lisa-stokes-heritage-research.kit.com/rootstech-2025>. These templates will give you a starting point for creating citations for family sources. You can also get a free copy of my regular Master Citation Template Bank Starter Kit printable: <https://lisa-stokes-heritage-research.kit.com/master-citation-template>.

Craft consistent source citations by paying attention to the following:

- Order of each element
- Format of each element, such as the subject's name, dates, item titles, etc.
- Capitalization of elements
- Punctuation of each element
 - Use italics for published works and use a book citation template.
 - Use quotation marks for unpublished but title works.
 - Use a description without quotation marks for untitled, unpublished works or items.
 - Use a description in parentheses after a word or phrase to further define it.
 - Learn punctuation rules on my YouTube channel, [Genealogy Source Citations: Punctuation Playlist](#).
- Formatting of all citations from each record type matches
- Identical citations are used for each unique source throughout the project

1) Family Story and Event Sources:

Family stories and events captured through interviews, journals, photographs, letters, postcards, and personal histories offer valuable insights into family history because they often provide unique, firsthand accounts.

Personal History:

(Template) [Full name of Author], personal history of [Name if not author] (birth and death years), written in [date- at least year], page [#], [details]; unpublished original/copy of original, held by [name], [address], obtained [year], [optional- Research File/Project Name]. Note: [Provenance: add line of custody].

(Example) Thora (Bergeson) Watson, personal history of Addison Everett (1805–1885), written in 1963, 3 sheets, [details]; unpublished original/copy of original, held by Lisa Stokes, Provo, Utah, obtained 2024, Forsyth Box. Note: [Provenance: add line of custody].

Provenance: Documenting a source's provenance traces its ownership from the original owner to the current holder. This chain of custody establishes a direct link to the original owner, supporting the verification of relationships.

Provenance Tips:

- List the names of all owners in the chain of custody.
- Use "Unknown" or "[Unknown]" if an owner's name is unavailable.
- Enclose maiden names in parentheses.
- Add locations and relationships for clarity, if needed.

Letter:

(Template) [Writer's Name], [Writer's address], letter to [Receiver's Name], [Receiver's address], [date]; original/photocopy/transcription privately held by [name], [address], obtained [year], [optional- Research File/Project Name]. Note: [Provenance—add line of custody or letter's details].

(Example) June (Huskinson) Wallin, Boise, Idaho, letter to "Sonny & Sybil" (June & Della Huskinson), address unknown, 1 June 1940; original/photocopy/transcription privately held by Lisa Stokes, Provo, Utah, obtained 2022, Wallin Box. Note: Letter from June to her parents telling them of her marriage on 1 June 1940. Provenance: June & Della Huskinson to [living] to Lisa (Wallin) Stokes.

For another letter example, see: [Stokes-Underdown Letter and Transcription](#).

Photograph:

(Template) [Photographer if known], photo of [Name of subject or description of photograph], [Place photo was taken], [year photo taken]; original/copy of original privately held by [name], [address], obtained [year], [optional- Research File/Project Name]. Note: [Provenance—add line of custody—list individuals in photo].

(Example) ~~[Photographer if known]~~, Photo of Walter Wallin, Kentucky, before 1911; ~~original/copy of original~~ privately held by Lisa Stokes, Provo, Utah, obtained 2022, Wallin Box. Provenance Note: Emma Odor Roberts to Vada Wallin to [living] to Lisa Wallin Stokes.

Personal Journal:

(Example) [Full name of Author], journal [can include title], [journal date range], [City, State], [specific page number or entry date and details as needed]; [format of journal i.e. handwritten, typed, digital, Word doc, etc.] journal privately held by [name], [address], obtained [year], [optional- Research File/Project Name]. Note: [Provenance—add line of custody or entry details].

(Example) Jane Hansen (Harmon) Jones, personal journal "Our Mission to Arizona," 1974-1975, Tucson, Arizona, ~~[specific page number or entry date 21 Feb 1975, visiting cousin Tom Johnson; [format of journal i.e. handwritten, typed, digital, Word doc, etc.]~~ journal privately held by [name], [address], obtained [year], [optional- Research File/Project Name]. Note: [Provenance—add line of custody or entry details].

2) Research Document Sources:

Cite documents such as pedigree charts, family group sheets, genealogies, and lineage reports.

Family Group Sheet:

(Template) [Author-if known], family group sheet for [husband's name] and [wife's name] compiled in [date- at least year if available], [number of pages], [details]; original/copy of original privately held by [name], [address], obtained [year], [Optional: Research File/Project Name]. Note: [Provenance—add line of document custody].

(Example) Mary Maud M Cook, family group sheet for Henry Howard and Sarah Stone ~~compiled in [date- at least year if available]~~, one page, married 28 Sep 1684; ~~original/copy of original~~ privately held by Lisa Stokes, Provo, Utah, obtained 2025, Forsyth Box. Note: Unknown to June H Forsyth to Lisa W Stokes.

3) Bible Records & Other Books

Cite family Bible records and other books such as scrapbooks, yearbooks, and published books.

(Template) Family Bible of [Names], [date range of included information], *Title of the Printed Bible* ([Publication Place]: [Publisher], year), [Page or section, e.g., "Marriages,"] entry for [event details]; original Bible privately held by [name of current owner], [owner's location], [year obtained], [optional- storage place]. Notes: [add provenance or important analysis of the record].

(Example) Family Bible of James Thomas Roberts and Elizabeth Myres Cook, event dates listed 1845-1973, *Self-Pronouncing Edition of The Holy Bible* (no publication place listed: The Light of the World Publishing, 1888), "Deaths," entries for James Thomas Roberts, Elizabeth Myres Cook and their children; original Bible privately held by Lisa Wallin Stokes, [address withheld], obtained 2019, Wallin archival box #1. Provenance note: Unknown, to Vada Wallin, to [living], to Lisa Wallin Stokes.

(Book Template- Publisher Format) [Author- First Middle Last], *Title: Subtitle*, [Edition/Volume if applicable] ([Name of City, State where originally published]: [Publishing Co.], year), [page #], [other entry details].

4) Certificates & Government Documents

Birth, marriage, death, school, and government certificates are often preserved and passed down through family lines. These official records are valuable for verifying dates, locations, and relationships in genealogical research.

Naturalization Certificate

(Generic Certificate Template) **Name of Agency**, **[Type] Certificate**, **File # [#]**, **entry for [Name]**, **[details]**; **original/certified copy privately held by [name]**, **[address]**, **obtained [year]**, **[optional- Research File/Project Name]**. Note: **[Provenance—add line of custody]**.

(Example) **U.S. Department of Justice**, **Certificate of Naturalization**, **File # 7812759**, **Petition #53788**, **entry for George Kenneth Forsyth**, **16 May 1960**, **Seattle, Washington**; **digital copy of original/certified copy privately held by Lisa Stokes**, **Provo, Utah**, **obtained 2024**, **Forsyth Folder**. Note: **George Kenneth Forsyth to [living] to Lisa Wallin Stokes**.

5) Heirlooms & Memorabilia

Physical objects and items such as heirlooms, memorabilia, ephemera, announcements, programs, and obituaries often contain meaningful family history information. Including citations in your heirloom inventory and a citation card with each heirloom is a great way to track your heirlooms.

Heirloom: A personal item or a household item, owned by an ancestor and passed down to descendants

Examples: pocket watches, quilts, kitchen items, jewelry, artwork

Memorabilia: An item or object kept or collected for sentimental value to remind one of an important event or a person

Examples: ticket stubs, announcements, event programs, report cards, military insignia, shadow boxes, newspaper clippings, playbills

Heirloom

(Template) **[Item description]** of **[original owner or creator and details]** (**owner's birth and death years**), **[date of item if known]**, **[place item was obtained or created]**, **[additional details]**; **[item] privately held by [name]**, **[address]**, **obtained [year]**, **[optional- storage place]**. Note: **[Provenance—add line of custody]**.

(Example) Etched glass pitcher given to Charles White Hinman and Weltha Eliza (Hartley) Hinman (~~owner's birth and death years~~), on their wedding day in 1916 in Cardston, Alberta, Canada; pitcher privately held by Lisa Wallin Stokes, Provo, Utah, obtained 2013, kitchen cabinet. Provenance note: Weltha Eliza (Hartley) Hinman to June Hartley (Hinman) Forsyth to [living] to Lisa (Wallin) Stokes.

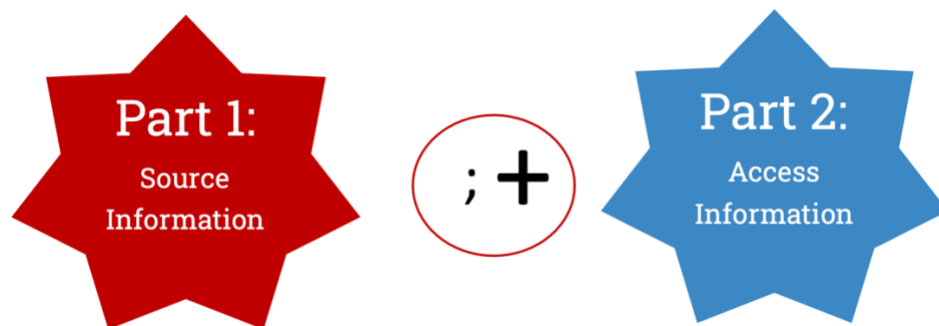
Funeral Program

(Template) Funeral program for [name] ([birthyear–death year]), [funeral date], [other details]; original/copy of original privately held by [name], [address], obtained [year], [optional- Research File/Project Name]. Note: [Provenance–add line of custody].

(Template) Funeral program for George Kenneth Forsyth (1916-2016), 30 January 2016, in Taylorsville, Utah; ~~original/copy of original~~ privately held by Lisa Wallin Stokes, Provo, Utah, obtained 2016, Forsyth File. Note: ~~[Provenance–add line of custody]~~.

Simplify Shortened Citations

Shortening Citations: The simplicity of a two-part system is that the second section can be removed to quickly shorten a subsequent citation.



Shortening Published Books: Published books require a specific citation format, including a distinct method for shortening, which includes only the author's surname, the book title, and the page number.

For Further Study

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