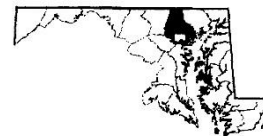


The Baltimore County Genealogical Society



THE NOTEBOOK



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March 1, 2026

Research Tips of the Quarter

by Michael John Neill and Ken Zimmerman

The Dead Don't Proof Their Own Obituaries

Think about who might have written the obituary of Grandma or a relative that appeared in the newspaper. Was it a family member with "issues" who did not provide accurate information because they did not know? Was it someone who wanted a certain family member to be left out of the obituary on purpose? Was it someone not concerned with being entirely accurate? Unless you were involved firsthand in the planning of the funeral and writing of the obituary, you may not really know who wrote the obit. Who wrote it makes all the difference.

As a genealogist, check other sources for accuracy of names, dates, and places. In addition, check missing or incorrect spellings of names. Compare with the death certificate. Look at the informant on the death certificate. Sometime females' names are not mentioned in the obituary (i.e. Mrs. Frank Shaw). Obituary newspaper is not a primary source. Most likely the person did not write his or her own obituary notice.

Set A Regular Backup Schedule And Follow It!

How often do backups need to be done? Only you can decide. However, the more you work on any of the research data you have gathered, the more often you need to schedule backups.

AI Update

By David Powell with a little help from ChatGPT and Claude

Recent advancements in artificial intelligence are fundamentally shifting genealogy from "gathering data" to "interpreting stories." In 2025 and 2026, the focus has moved beyond basic record indexing toward sophisticated tools that "read" images and synthesize complex family histories.

Universal Handwriting Recognition

The most significant breakthrough is the move toward full-text search for unindexed records.

- **Family Search's Full-Text Search:** Now a permanent fixture, this AI tool allows you to search the actual content of handwritten records (like deeds and probate) before they have been manually indexed by volunteers.
- **Ancestry's Document Transcription:** Launched in early 2025, this tool provides instant, editable typed transcriptions for personal images, including letters, journals, and even complex death certificates.

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Marriages are Made in Heaven—But Where Are They Recorded?

Part Two: Direct Records of Marriage

by the late Robert Barnes

[NOTE: The first part of this article appeared in the August 13th featurette. All counties named in this article are found in Maryland, except where specifically stated otherwise.]

INDIRECT SOURCES

In addition to the direct sources of marriages, such as church records, ministers' returns, ministers' private registers, and marriage licenses, there are many indirect sources, proving that a marriage had taken place at some previous, unspecified date. These clues may be recorded in land, court, or probate records. When using these sources, researchers should remember to check the records of surrounding counties or even adjacent states.

LAND RECORDS are the largest single type of record found in a county courthouse. A deed may state that a husband and wife sold property on a certain date, which the wife had inherited from her father. From time to time a marriage contract between a man and woman may be recorded there. I have seen an example in Dorchester County Land Records, where the date of the marriage and the name of the church were recorded. Sadly, the records of that particular church have not survived, but the land record provided the date and the name of the minister.

A deed in York County, PA., of 11 July 1761, shows that John Rester [Reister?] of Baltimore County, tavern keeper, was married to Margaretta, daughter of the late George Sohn of York County, PA. (who had kept a tavern). A deed of 28 April 1762 shows that Dr. Charles Frederick Wiesenthal, of Baltimore County, practitioner of physick, had married Elizabeth, another daughter of George Sohn.

Land Records sometimes contain ante-nuptial contracts. In 1701, Thomas Scantlebury of Talbot County, had a marriage contract with Sarah, daughter of George Fey, late of the Parish of St. David. The contract was written in Latin, and Scantlebury died by 6 June 1719 (From Talbot Co. Land Records 12:366).

PROBATE RECORDS can also be helpful in establishing the fact that a marriage took place. A testator may mention his married daughter in his will, sometimes even mentioning her husband's name. The testator may mention grandchildren with a surname different from his or hers.

After a man died, his widow might post an administration bond. If she remarried, she and her new husband would have to post another bond. Maryland genealogist Vernon Skinner suggests that when there were two "sureties" or bondsmen when the bond was posted, one may have come from the husband's side of the family and the other may have come from the wife's side of the family.

When the estate is being administered or in the final distribution, there may be a phrase stating that such and such a sum was paid to "John Smith" for his wife's filial share of her father's estate.

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Marriages are Made in Heaven, but Where are They Recorded *(Continued from p. 2)*

States and counties usually had specific courts that oversaw probate matters. Maryland had its Prerogative Court until 1777, and its county Registers of Wills offices after 1777. In addition to the wills, inventories, and administration accounts being filed in these courts, there were often petitions, which disclosed the details of family disagreements over the settling of the decedent's estate. Married women and/or their husbands would be mentioned here.

COURT RECORDS may go by a variety of names: Judgment Records, Judicial Records, Proceedings, Minutes, or Dockets. Many kinds of legal disputes are recorded there, and they might well involve a remarried widow and her new husband.

Courts may exist at the County or State (or Provincial) Level. Colonial Maryland had several courts: the Provincial Court, the Prerogative Court, and the Chancery Court. Each of these courts bequeathed us several series of records, all of which should be checked for marriage clues and other biographical data.

The Provincial Court had a series called Judgment Records, and another called Provincial Court Land Records. Judgment Records contained many petitions and other documents, which provide marriage clues.

The Prerogative Court series included wills, administrations, inventories, and distributions. The day-to-day activities of this court are found in the Testamentary Proceedings, which contain information not found anywhere else. In 1721 Martha Bullock, widow of Francis Bullock, renounced her right of administration on the estate of Francis Bullock and recommended her son John Kersey. Since no marriage of Francis Bullock to a widow Kersey has been found in the surviving church record, this item represents an important clue.

The Chancery Court dealt with disputes concerning wills, estates, and contracts. The depositions and petitions are filled with references of interest to the family historian. In 1713 Henry Tanner of Charles County deposed that 26 years earlier he had lived as a boarder in the house of Elizabeth, mother of William Glover, son of Giles Glover. Elizabeth was the widow of Kenelm MacLoughlin, and the son William Glover was in the care of Francis Meek, who married William's sister.

COUNTY COURTS contain records of civil and criminal cases, which are also a fruitful source of marriage references. Talbot County Judgment records for January 1697 reveal that Timothy Lane married the widow of Henry Alexander, who had died leaving two children, John and Katherine. In March 1690/1 John Williams petitioned the Dorchester County Court that his wife Elinor had borne a son by her former husband, and the child was kept from his mother by the child's grandfather, Humphrey Mould.

This item in Dorchester County Judgment Records for June 1744 provided an exact date of marriage: Neil McCallum, minister of Dorchester Parish, was accused that on 10 September 1742 he joined in marriage John Anderson and Ann McHill or Ann McKell, and that Ann was the sister of John Anderson's wife's mother's sister. In other words, Anderson married the aunt of his first wife. The minister was found not guilty.

Beginning in 1777, Maryland's county courts began to issue marriage licenses. A minister was supposed to report to the court any marriages he had performed. In the Baltimore County Marriage License Record Book, there was a space for the minister's name. If he returned the report and his name was filled in, you can be sure that the marriage actually took place. If his name is missing, you cannot be sure, unless you find confirmation elsewhere. There are several reasons why the minister's name may be missing. The minister may have performed the marriage but neglected to return the list to the court. He may have returned the list to the court but the clerk of the court never recorded the minister's name in the space provided.

THE MARYLAND STATE PAPERS contain the marriages returns of persons married by license by Rev. John Bowie for April 26 to Nov. 10, 1778. These are noted in the "Calendar of Maryland State Papers: The Black Books," item 1549.

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Marriages are Made in Heaven, but Where are They Recorded *(Continued from p. 3)*

THE SCHARF PAPERS, deposited at the Maryland State Archives, contain several "certifications of marriage," most of them filed by members of the Beall Family. These papers also contain many marriage license returns that ministers returned to the government showing the dates of marriages they had performed in a given time period.

COURT REPORTS may contain data pertaining to marriages or other data. See Stephenson, "Extracts from Maryland Court Records," National Genealogical Society Quarterly 53 (3) 201-202. Depositions in various court cases indicate that there is a missing register from St. Paul's Parish in Baltimore County.

While this article has concentrated on the records of Maryland, researchers should investigate the archives and libraries of their own states to track down those elusive clues. [END OF ARTICLE]

NOTE: The late **Robert Barnes** was one of Maryland's leading genealogists and an expert on marriage records. He is the author of a three-volume series on Maryland marriage records spanning the period 1634 to 1820. Other publications include:

MARYLAND MARRIAGE EVIDENCES, 1634-1718

COLONIAL FAMILIES OF MARYLAND: Bound and Determined to Succeed

MISSING RELATIVES AND LOST FRIENDS

Maryland Marriages, 1634-1777

Maryland Marriages, 1778- 1800

Maryland Marriages, 1801-1820

Marriages and Deaths from Baltimore Newspapers, 1796-1816

Marriages and Deaths from the "Maryland Gazette," 1727-1839

Baltimore County Marriage Evidences and Family Relationships, 1659-1800

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AI Update *(Continued from p. 1)*

AI-Driven Discovery & Organization

- **Ancestry.com's:** Smart Search (currently in beta) is an AI-driven, redesigned search interface that uses your family tree data and search history to automatically prioritize relevant records. It features a cleaner layout with intuitive filters, such as date sliders and location drop-downs, to quickly narrow down results for specific ancestors.
- **MyHeritage Cousin Finder:** A 2025 release that uses "SmartMatch" technology to find potential cousins and common ancestors across trees without requiring a DNA test.
- **Research Planning:** Genealogists are increasingly using generic AI models like Claude and Perplexity to analyze existing research and generate structured plans for breaking through "brick walls" in 2026.

Ha Ha! — Famous quote that applies (all too often) to questionable genealogy: "Get your facts first, then you can distort them as you please." —Mark Twain.

Your Stripped Bare Guide to Citing & Using History Sources

Author: Mills, Elizabeth Shown

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www.genealogical.com

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Paperback \$27.50

Publisher: Genealogical Publishing Company

Sources provide information, from which we identify evidence for analysis. A conclusion drawn from sound analysis may then stand as *proof*. In these two sentences, Elizabeth Shown Mills defines the proper use of sources to come to valid conclusions in historical research. Your Stripped Bare Guide, Mrs. Mills' latest work on citing and using historical and genealogical sources, is an abbreviated distillation of the evidence analysis she outlines in minute detail in her classic work, Evidence Explained: Citing History Sources from Artifacts to Cyberspace, Fourth Edition.

Ms. Mills new book lays out the essentials you need to know to do reliable history research. Here the author prescribes Thirteen guidelines for evidence analysis to help you select reliable sources and evaluate your findings. Also central to the work are fourteen easy-to-follow templates that provide you with patterns for citing any kind of history source, online, from any corner of the globe. These are the same templates that Elizabeth Mills created for the 2024 Fourth Edition of her magnum opus, Evidence Explained. Finally, Your Stripped Bare Guide to Citing and Using History Sources represents a completely new replacement for her 1997 publication, Evidence! Citation and Analysis for the Family Historian. And like that book, it also functions as the genealogist's lighter, portable tool for working with sources when away from home or just consulting the guidelines.

'Stripped Bare Guide' Introduces Beginners to Evidence Style Citation. Elizabeth Mills, the celebrated genealogist and doyen of historical citation practices, knows that most beginning genealogists will be intimidated by her magnum opus, Evidence Explained: Citing History Sources from Artifacts to Cyberspace, New Fourth Edition. In part, this is why we have published her diminutive new book, Your Stripped Bare Guide to Citing and Using History Sources.

As Mrs. Mills explains, the new book, "offers . . . the simplicity of the little *Evidence!* [the 1997 precursor to Stripped Bare] updated with Evidence Explained's critical instructions on the building of citations—including its game-changing universal templates that enable beginning researchers to cite any type of historic record, in any form, no matter how or where it is accessed."

'Stripped Bare Guide' Clarifies Terms Used to Distinguish Sources. You don't need to get a law degree to be a genealogist; however, some of the words and phrases used to describe or assess sources can get technical. For example, do you know the difference between a proof argument and a proof statement? How about indirect evidence versus indirect source? And what about negative argument, negative conclusion, negative evidence, and negative findings?

Fortunately, Elizabeth Shown Mills' new book, Your Stripped Bare Guide to Citing and Using History Sources explains the meanings behind all such terms—in plain English—in the handy glossary near the end of the book. This sample illustration from pp. 108-109 attests, once again, why every serious genealogist should want a copy of Your Stripped Bare Guide within an arm's reach.

"Stripped Bare Guide" Explains "Construction Basics" of Historical Citations. The third chapter of Elizabeth Shown Mills' masterful guidebook, Your Stripped Bare Guide to Citing and Using History Sources, lays out the criteria for the construction of citations. In a sense, this chapter specifies the building blocks that all citations must include in order to fully account for an historical source. And, as Ms. Mills notes at the beginning of the following chapter on Universal Templates, "it is the mix and match nature of these building blocks . . . that will let you select the pieces of information" necessary to complete one of her citation templates. As we see from the building block, "the 5 Ws" described below, every citation must answer five questions:

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Baltimore County Genealogy Society

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3rd Floor, Room 308 (Elevator Available)

Monthly Meetings:

4th Sunday of the month. January & June are research days 12-4 p.m.

- Eastern European Group—11:45 a.m. to 2 p.m.
- General Meeting—2 p.m. to 3 p.m.
- Speaker—3 p.m. to 4 p.m.
- Library open 12 noon to 2 p.m. for research before meeting
- No monthly meetings in July, August, and December.

Our Research Days are:

2nd Thursday of the Month—10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

2nd Saturday of the Month—10 a.m. 2 p.m.

4th Thursday of the Month 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.