


# QuickSheet: Your Stripped-Bare Guide to Historical Proof



**QuickSheet**  
Your Stripped-Bare Guide to  
**HISTORICAL 'PROOF'**  
Elizabeth Shown Mills

*Proof is a conclusion we reach from a body of evidence. No single source can ever be proof! No one piece of information can provide it. No one bit of evidence can stand alone. Quality "proof" requires:*

- thorough research to find all relevant information
- correct interpretation of each piece of information
- careful correlation of details
- skillful analysis of the full body of evidence as best as available
- credible resolution of all conflicts
- a written account of our evidence and our conclusions
- a willingness to keep an open mind if new evidence emerges

Evaluating the Source	Evaluating the Information	Evaluating & Processing the Evidence
<p><b>What:</b> A source is the object or thing that provides information. It is a physical artifact to be examined separately from its contents.</p> <p><b>Is it an original record—i.e., the first and soundest of the first written account?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is it a derivative record—i.e., dictated, transcribed, retranscribed, digitized, etc.?</li> <li>• Is it a translation—an attempt to help by someone who studied many sources and then blended findings with personal conclusions to create a work of original authorship?</li> <li>• Is the source in good physical condition or does it have features that obstruct use, obscure, or contradict?</li> <li>• Do you have the complete record or just a fragment?</li> </ul> <p><b>If the source is an original:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is the handwriting legible?</li> <li>• Is its material, processing, or right correct consistent with the contents of the document?</li> <li>• What is its provenance—its origin and its chain of custody?</li> <li>• Is the entire part of a record that also needs to be reported for an accurate understanding of what you have at hand?</li> </ul> <p><b>If the source is a derivative:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How much has the material been reworked? How many generations is it removed from the original?</li> <li>• Is its content faithful to the original?</li> <li>• Can you access the original?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Who:</b> Each assertion must be evaluated separately. Within any given source, individual pieces of information can vary in quality.</p> <p><b>Is it possible to identify the informant—i.e., the person who provided the information?</b></p> <p><b>If so:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is the assertion based on primary information—i.e., firsthand knowledge on the part of someone who was a participant or eyewitness to the event?</li> <li>• Is the assertion based on secondary information—i.e., transmitted or relayed knowledge such as hearsay, tradition, etc.?</li> </ul> <p><b>If not:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do informants provide the information cited in the text of the record, or did a significant time lapse occur during which details may have faded?</li> <li>• How do the informants of sound mind and memory when the informant was reported?</li> <li>• Is the informant's language and "voice" consistent with the time and place?</li> <li>• Is the informant compatible with the informant's reactions or writings elsewhere?</li> <li>• For other purposes use the document content and the informant provided?</li> </ul> <p><b>Why:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why the informant an impartial observer or was there cause for bias, or was recording an original such as a gravestone case in which the informant had a vested interest?</li> <li>• Does the informant have a track record of reliability, or have other assertions by the informant proved wrong or questionable?</li> </ul>	<p><b>How:</b> Information is evaluated only when relevant to a research question. It also may have to provide a complete answer to that question.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the information explicitly address the research question—i.e., direct evidence?</li> <li>• Is the information simply suggestive or does it even potentially relevant to some people and not—i.e., indirect evidence?</li> <li>• The <i>you</i> drawing an inference from the absence of a circumstance that should have occurred in the situation related to the record—i.e., negative evidence?</li> <li>• Is the evidence available on its face, or is it contrary to established norms?</li> <li>• Does the evidence conflict with relevant findings from other sources?</li> <li>• If contradictions exist between pieces of evidence, have you researched the discrepancies in a manner appropriate to the time, place, and circumstances?</li> </ul> <p><b>When you have formed an hypothesis:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are there links in your argument or logic that need filling with additional research?</li> <li>• Does your hypothesis withstand all attempts to disprove it?</li> </ul> <p><b>When you present your proof argument:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have you explained the research problem?</li> <li>• Have you identified all sources used?</li> <li>• Have you discussed all uncertainties?</li> <li>• Have you documented every statement?</li> <li>• Have you clearly stated your conclusions?</li> </ul>

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## Reviews

*This publication is great. It is full of wisdom and knowledge You will not really feel monotony at at any time of the time (that's what catalogs are for relating to when you ask me).*




*(Dr. Everett Dicki DDS)*

## QUICKSHEET: YOUR STRIPPED-BARE GUIDE TO HISTORICAL PROOF



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2014. Soft Cover. Book Condition: New. 8.5 x 11 in. Collector Bookstore is a retailer of new books located in Leavenworth, Kansas. We specialize in price guides and reference books for the antiques and collectibles industry. According to professional genealogist Elizabeth Mills, 'Proof' is a conclusion we reach from a body of evidence. No single source can serve as 'proof.' No one piece of information can provide it. No one bit of evidence can stand alone. To support this thesis, Ms. Mills suggests three ways to arrive at 'proof': Evaluating the source; evaluating the information; and evaluating and processing the evidence. In the first instance she shows us that a source is a physical container, to be evaluated separately from its contents. In the second instance she demonstrates that each assertion must be evaluated separately. And finally she explains that information is evidence only when relevant to a research question. To define 'proof' once and for all, Ms. Mills then provides a "Process Map for Historical Researchers," established on the principle that sources provide information from which we identify evidence for analysis. A sound conclusion may then be considered 'proof.' It goes without saying that this two-sided laminated QuickSheet is the surest and quickest guide to 'proof' the historical researcher is ever likely to need.

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