

Using “Correlation” to Reveal Facts that No Record States

Presented by

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Correlation: the process of comparing information items to identify connections and contradictions. —See reference 1, standard 20.

Correlating Evidence

- Correlation is the opposite of analysis, which examines sources and evidence items one by one, identifying their strengths and weaknesses.
- Correlation involves two or more evidence items or sources (often many more than two).
- Correlation is a process of comparing and contrasting.
- Instead of looking at inherent strengths and weaknesses, correlation looks at patterns and points of connection, agreement, and disagreement.
- Correlations usually are “source dense” and heavily footnoted.

Methods of Correlating

How you correlate depends on the research question, available evidence, and purpose of the correlation. Methods that work in one situation may not be appropriate for another. Researchers usually choose one of five methods—or a combination:

1. *Narrative*. The evidence is compared in a prose format.
2. *List*. The evidence is listed in a way that shows patterns and other features. Each item in the list may compare or contrast evidence items
3. *Timeline* (also called a chronological list). The evidence is listed from earliest to last. Timelines often show why evidence could or could not pertain to the person who is the subject of the research.
4. *Table* (also called a matrix or spreadsheet). The evidence is displayed in rows and columns. Their headings vary with the evidence available and the research question. Patterns may emerge that no single source states.
5. *Map*. Locations identified or platted on a map reveal a tract’s unrecorded history and relationships among its owners.

In each case the researcher points out patterns, parallels and conflicts, similarities and dissimilarities, and points of agreement and disagreement in the evidence pertaining to a research question or hypothesis.

Examples

Narrative

The correlated evidence in this narrative establishes that Philip was born about 1763. See reference 9.

Philip's first listing, in 1786, as a Fairfax County taxpayer above age twenty suggests he was born in 1765.¹⁴ If he avoided paying taxes in his early twenties, as many men did, he was born a few years earlier. In any case, becoming a taxpayer in 1786 is consistent with having been a minor in 1783 but old enough for a victim of trespass, assault, and battery.¹⁵

List

The correlated evidence in this list extends the identity of Earl McLain's father. See reference 11.

Eight points, however, suggest that Earl McLain was Charles's son—that after Earl's mother (Ida) divorced Charles he married Emma Cope:

- The two husbands' names, including middle initial, are identical.²⁵
- Both worked as carpenters and in the lumber industry.²⁶
- Chronology fits—the McLain-Cope marriage followed the McLain divorce by seven years.²⁷
- The last record of Ida's spouse places him in Van Buren County, Michigan.²⁸ The first record of Emma's husband says he resided there.²⁹
- Ida's husband was born in Michigan in 1848–49.³⁰ Emma's spouse reportedly was born in Michigan on 13 January or 1 February 1849.³¹ (Censuses reporting Charles's birth between 1854 and 1862 might be discounted because of their inconsistency.³² Charles's desire to appear closer in age to Emma, born in 1865, might explain the marriage record's indicating he was born 1853–54.)
- Charles's reported age when he married Emma—thirty-two years—is late for a first marriage.³³
- The information that Charles's marriage to Emma was his first may have resulted from his not telling her about his previous marriage and divorce.³⁴
- If two Charles D. McLains of comparable age lived simultaneously in southwestern Michigan, they appear concurrently in no known listing.³⁶

Correlation is an essential component of the Genealogical Proof Standard (GPS), which requires (a) a thorough search for evidence sufficient to determine a correct answer to a genealogical research question, (b) clear and accurate citations to all sources relevant to that answer, (c) analysis and correlation of evidence relevant to the answer, (d) resolution of any evidence conflicting with the answer, and (e) clear writing and documentation explaining or showing *why* that answer is the correct answer. The GPS overarches fifty-six genealogical research standards. See reference 1.

Examples

The correlated evidence in this timeline establishes that Lewis Pritchett of Fauquier County was Lewis Pritchett of Stafford County, positioning him geographically and chronologically to be Philip Pritchett's father. See reference 9.

Timeline

- 1744 Married Mary Lattimore in Overwharton Parish, Stafford County³¹
- 1748 Son Lewis christened in Overwharton Parish³²
- 1756 Witnessed a Prince William County deed to his father-in-law³³
- 1759 Taxed in Fauquier County (the year it was formed from Prince William County)³⁴
- 1765 With wife Mary of Stafford County joined Lattimore heirs in selling slaves in Fauquier County³⁵
- 1776 Signed a legislative petition in Stafford County³⁶
- 1778 Witnessed a Fauquier County deed³⁷
- 1780 Owned land on Aquia Creek waters in Stafford County³⁸
- 1782 Paid tax on one hundred acres in Stafford County³⁹
- 1783 With a five-person household, paid personal property tax and land tax on one hundred acres⁴⁰
- 1785 Paid personal property tax for one male over age twenty-one, two horses, and four cattle⁴¹

The correlated evidence in this example reveals the relationships stated in the bulleted list. See reference 12.

Narrative with List

In February 1804 Elizabeth Crow, “orphan of James Crow_[s] . . . made choice of Obadiah Overton for her guardian.”¹⁷ Children in this time and place had guardians when they had property or legal matters to administer.¹⁸ Nothing suggests Elizabeth had property; a desire to marry as a minor apparently had motivated her to select a legal representative. On 16 August 1804, six months after her guardianship choice and as required for Virginians under age twenty-one, her guardian consented to her marrying.¹⁹ From all adult males in Orange County, why did Elizabeth select Obediah Overton to be her guardian? Correlating the 1804 Overton-Crow guardianship record with the 1788 Overton-Crow marriage record suggests the following:

- “Ellender” Crow was James Crow’s widow.
- Elizabeth Crow was not only James’s orphan but also Eleanor’s daughter.
- Upon Obediah’s marriage to “Ellender,” he became Elizabeth’s stepfather.
- As Elizabeth’s stepfather, Obediah was a logical and likely choice for Elizabeth’s guardian because he was a closely related adult male.
- James Crow died before 1788, when his widow married Obediah.²⁰
- Elizabeth Crow was born 1783–88, because she was under age twenty-one in 1804, when she selected a guardian, and was born probably before Eleanor’s remarriage in 1788.

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