

Beginning Genealogy Step 3: Locate a Useful Source

by Lois Abromitis Mackin

Editor's note: In the Fall 2010 issue of *Minnesota Genealogist*, the author outlined five steps that the MGS Beginning Genealogy course is built upon. In our last issue, she presented Step 2: "Decide what you want to learn." In this issue, she takes us into Step 3.

In the MGS Beginning Genealogy Course, we encourage students to work through five steps:

1. Write down and organize what you know
2. Decide what you want to learn
3. Locate a useful source
4. Learn from the source
5. Use what you learned.

This column focuses on Step 3: "Locate a Useful Source." Here's where you start discovering new information to answer the research question you developed in Step 2. To successfully perform Step 3, you need to know three things:

- What are genealogical sources?
- Where do you find them?
- What kind of information is typically contained in each type, or, to put it another way, what kind of genealogical source is likely to contain the information you want?

Let's take a quick look at the first two questions, starting with an inventory of genealogical sources. These can include personal or family memorabilia and photographs—the "home sources" we talked about in Step 1. They also include a universe of public and private documents—census records; government records of births, marriages, deaths, divorces, and adoptions; church records; cemetery markers and records; land records; military records; probate records; immigration records; naturalization records; business records; books; manuscripts; newspapers; directories—the list is nearly endless.

Of these, the first ones beginning genealogists should get to know are census records, vital records, church and cemetery records, immigration records, and naturalization records. These five types of records are the basic building blocks for your genealogy. They will give you the foundation of your family story.

Now for the second question: where do you find these five genealogy building block records?

- U.S. federal **census records** are held by the U.S. National Archives. The federal population schedules, the kind of census record genealogists use most often, have been digitized and are available online at www.ancestry.com and other sites.
- Almost all **vital records** – government birth, marriage, and death records – are kept by the state or local agencies that created them. Sometimes older birth, marriage, or death records are held by state, local archives or historical societies. In some cases, indexes to these records have been made available to researchers; you may even find these online. The first place to look for **church records** is in the church that generated them. Like birth, marriage, and death records, they may be held by an archive or historical society. Older church records may have been published, and some may even have been placed online. **Cemetery records** too are most often in the hands of the cemetery that created them (and the cemetery markers, of course, are in the cemetery). "Readings"—recordings of information on cemetery markers—have been made of many cemeteries, particularly older ones, by historical and genealogical society volunteers. Newer cemetery readings often include photographs. You can find many cemetery readings and photographs online, and older cemetery readings may have been published.
- Originals of most U.S. **immigration records** since 1820 are in the National Archives. These are mostly in the form of passenger lists, or "manifests." They have been microfilmed, and many have been digitized and are available online. Earlier records can be found in state historical societies and archives; many have been published.
- In 1906, maintenance of U.S. **naturalization records** was centralized by the federal government. Pre-1906 naturalization records are found in the archives of city, county, state, or federal courts. Many of these records have been microfilmed, and many are available online. Publication of naturalization indexes, either in print or online, is a favorite project of historical and genealogical societies.

You can see that, to locate these records, you need

to sharpen your skills in library, archival, and online research!

Several published guides will help you find out where the records you need are located; the most up-to-date of these is *Ancestry's Red Book: American State, County, and Town Sources*, edited by Alice Eichholz, Ph.D., CG. (The third edition is the most recent, but the older editions are still useful.) For your research convenience, *Ancestry.com* has recently placed the *Red Book* online as part of its free Ancestry Wiki.

You'll also want to learn about the catalog of the Family History Library in Salt Lake City, which houses the world's largest collection of genealogical records. The catalog contains listings of all the records microfilmed by the Genealogical Society of Utah—including major holdings of all five of the building block record types. For a very low price, you can order copies of these microfilms to be sent to the Family History Center near you. (There are 31 in Minnesota—find the closest one at <https://library.familysearch.org/> and stop in—but call first to verify operating hours.)

Of course, you'll want to check the collections of books and other genealogical materials at the Minnesota Genealogical Society <<http://www.mnngs.org>>, the Minnesota Historical Society <<http://www.mnhs.org>>, and your local library system. Through MNLink <<http://www.mnlinkgateway.org>>, you can search the catalogs of libraries and arrange to have the materials you want delivered to your local library via interlibrary loan. Also check out WorldCat <<http://www.worldcat.org>>, an online "union catalog" of holdings of more than 10,000 libraries worldwide. WorldCat will not only tell you what's been published, but also the location of the copy closest to you.

Next time, we'll continue our discussion of Step 3 by taking a look at some useful genealogy websites, and then move on to the third question—What kind of record might contain the information you want?

Lois welcomes questions or suggestions for future topics! Contact her at LoisMackin@aol.com.

Joel Clein, legally dead since birth, dies at 85

Legally Dead? Since Birth?

By J. H. Fonkert, CG

"My father has been legally dead in the state of Georgia since 1922, when he was born," said his daughter, Cheryl Divine, of West St. Paul.

Joel Clein was legally dead for 85 years before he passed away in St. Louis Park, Minnesota. Or, so the family says. Weighing only 2 ¼ pounds at birth in 1922, he was not expected to live, so the Georgia hospital where he was born worked up a death certificate.

Clein was very much alive when the 1930 census-taker visited. Joel Clein, 8, lived in Atlanta with his parents. His father, Max, was a pharmaceutical

salesman. Joel carried the death certificate with him through life, including through battles in World War II, for which he earned two Bronze Stars. Clein was one term from finishing pharmacy school the War called. He served as a pharmacist's mate on the USS Enterprise, but never completed his degree.

Actually, Joel Clein was probably not legally dead. A death becomes legal only when the certificate is filed at the courthouse, and in this case it was probably never filed; an index of Georgia death certificates contains Joel Cleins. The same principal applies to marriage records. A marriage license does not prove a marriage; only a filed marriage return does. Genealogists always look behind the record for proof that the event occurred.

Sources:

1. Paul Levy, "Joel Clein, legally dead since birth, dies at 85," *Minneapolis StarTribune*, 9 September 2007.
2. 1930 U.S. Census, Fulton County, Georgia, Enumeration District 56, Sheet 38A (stamped 267), Atlanta, Ward 4, dwelling 182, family 309, Max Clein; *National Archives and Records Administration microfilm T226, roll 361; digital image viewed at www.ancestry.com 18 May 2011.*
3. *Georgia Health Department, Office of Vital Records, Indexes of Vital Records for Georgia: Deaths, 1919-1998; viewed at www.ancestry.com, 18 May 2011.*