



The Kalamazoo Valley Heritage

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Cite Your Sources: The Roadmap of Your Genealogy

September 18th General Meeting Topic
Judith Halseth

On September 18, Toni Benson, Local History Librarian for the Van Buren District Library, provided 68 KVGS members and guests with valuable information on citing genealogical sources and avoiding pitfalls in citations. She distinguished between primary evidence recorded at the time of the event, and secondary evidence-recorded at a later time or by no witnesses.

Toni provided examples of using footnotes when the information comes from more than one source. She cautioned about not attributing more information to a source than is actually contained in the document. Toni stressed the importance of looking at all versions of a record-church, town, county, state, or federal, and viewing the original record whenever possible. "Don't cite sources you haven't reviewed yourself-it is both risky and unethical."

Many thanks for Toni Benson for this informative presentation.



Toni Benson

Sue Sanders

Peggy Brumbaugh discussed copyright issues as they pertain to genealogists at the KVGS general meeting on Monday, October 16, 2006.

Genealogists need to know that they can protect their valuable research by registering with the U.S. Copyright Office. There is a fee and some paperwork, but your family history will be filed in the Library of Congress. On the downside to copyrighting your family history, if someone copies your work illegally, there still may be expensive legal fees involved to receive justice!

Genealogists may quote any documents generated by the U.S. Government without permission. These documents include court, military, burial, and census records.

Items published before 1923 are not copyrightable, that is, they are in the "public domain," which means you do not need permission to quote from them. If an item was created but never published, it still may be protected by copyright.

The amount that may be quoted without permission from copyrighted documents is open for interpretation. The official web site of the U.S. Copyright Office, www.copyright.gov, states, "There is no specific number of words, lines, or notes that may be safely taken without permission". Please note: it was stated at the meeting that 3 pages of a manuscript may be quoted without permission. This statement was an error.

Copyright law is complex, and the definitive site to refer to is www.copyright.gov. The FAQ section is very helpful. Peggy emphasized that ANY material you use in your family history, copyrightable or not, needs to be cited correctly.