PROVING IMMIGRANT IDENTITIES
Methods of Proving Identity

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Class Outline:

   a. Reasonably exhaustive research.
   b. Complete citations for each source.
   c. Analyze the data.
   d. Resolve conflicting evidence.
   e. Write a conclusion based on the evidence.

2. Document Analysis.
   a. Analyze documents carefully.
   b. Infer information from the data.
   c. Be cautious of inferences.
   d. Write down why you draw conclusions.

3. American Church Books.
   a. American church records frequently list birth place.
   b. Church records can be difficult to locate.
   c. It is worth the effort to find them.

4. Spelling and Names.
   a. Be a creative “schpeller” with surnames and town names.
   b. Check for European equivalents of English given names. Charles/Carl, John/Johann, Louis/Ludwig, Trudy/Gertraud, etc.

5. Look for discrepancies in names and dates and compare data.
   a. Compare data and resolve discrepancies.
   b. Summarize research clues.
   c. Track the source for each clue.
   d. How do you know what you know?
   e. Compare potential connections with document clues.

   a. Look for names of associates that appear more than once.
   b. Tracing friends and associates will break brick wall problems.
a. Gazetteers, when effectively used are the most important tool to identify the correct town.
b. Learn the difference between a town and a parish. Be sure you identify the town where the civil or church records were kept.
c. Be a creative speller for town names.
d. Check for levels of jurisdiction
e. Why levels of jurisdiction are important.
f. Check for several towns with the same name.
g. How to use a gazetteer to identify the towns to be used in an area search.
h. Often one gazetteer is not enough, compare the information in several gazetteers to get as complete a picture as possible about the possible towns of origin.
i. Come back to the gazetteer often when initial searches don’t work out.
j. Gazetteers often indicate how many churches were in a town.
k. Search records of each church.

8. Maps.
a. Use maps to identify outlying communities from which an ancestor may have come.
b. How to do an area search.
c. Use maps to determine if an area search is needed.

9. Church and Civil Records.
a. Getting the most out of church and civil records.
b. Pay attention to witnesses and godparents.
c. Confirmation and first communion records are often your best clue for people who were “from” a town, but not born there.
d. Begin with the assumption that more than one person in town has the same name, identify every one of them, and try to eliminate them all.

a. Names uncommon in the U.S. may be common in Europe.
b. A person of the same or similar name as your ancestor may not be him/her.

11. Area Searches.
a. An area search may reveal other people with similar names.
b. An area search is part of doing exhaustive research.
c. Be sure you don’t miss small towns in the area.
d. Begin the search in a small circle, expand to a larger circle.
12. Develop a Theory.
   a. Find the best candidates.
   b. Develop a theory.
   c. Test the theory.
   d. Try to disprove the theory.
   e. Ask questions.

13. Try to disprove the theory.
   a. Search confirmation records.
   b. Corroborate unrecorded births.
   c. Prove which children died.
   d. Find families that have moved in.

   a. A rare name in the US may be a common area of Europe from which your ancestor came.
   b. Learn as much as possible in U.S. records so you don’t identify a distant cousin in Europe as your ancestor.
   c. Always be open to further evidence.
   d. Collaborate with other researchers.
   e. Find friends and neighbors. People traveled together.
   f. People can’t live on two continents at once.
   g. Try to disprove theories.
   h. Create checklists and compare them.

**SELECTED PUBLISHED CASE STUDIES**

1. Thomas W. Jones. “Organizing Meager Evidence to Reveal Lineages: An Irish Example — Geddes of Tyrone.” *National Genealogical Society Quarterly* 89 (June 2001): 98-112. (This article is a superb example of using very little information to its best advantage. A brilliant case study!)


6. F. Warren Bittner. “Dora Lühr’s Hannover Origin: A Case of Conflicting Direct Evidence.” *National Genealogical Society Quarterly* 98, no. 3 (September 2010): 165-76. (This article expands the research for this lecture.)