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Source Values

by [Jan McClintock](#)

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Sources and Evidence

As we progress in our family research, we use many different sources of information. One might be a family bible, one an interview with a great-aunt, one a death certificate, etc. It is vital that we record these sources -- to avoid duplication, to verify our work, and to assist future researchers. Since we cannot "prove" much of what we've recorded since, for example, we were not present at our great-grandparent's wedding, we use the evidence of their wedding to presume the facts surrounding it.

When we use the data that we've gathered along with the sources of that information to analyze our findings and make sense of the names and dates, it might be helpful if we could look back at those sources with some kind of value meter. One that would remind you of the **validity** of that particular piece of evidence -- was it direct evidence from a source like an eye-witness account, or collateral data from a source like a father-in-law's will?

For explanations of the evaluation of evidence in genealogical research, see the [resources](#) listed below.

Remember that a source is different from evidence: a source is where you got the evidence. For instance, my great-grandparent's wedding probably occurred on 8 May, 1898. I came to that conclusion by using **evidence** -- including the date of their marriage application. That evidence came from the **sources** -- including the ledger entry made at the time of their application at the county courthouse.

We don't have to use the traditional vocabulary in evaluating our evidence. We can just assign a value system based on our own belief in the source. For instance, we know that census schedules can contain errors, so we wouldn't assume the data is actual fact until we've looked at all the other available evidence and come to a conclusion.

When you decide how to record your source values, it's crucial to use the same system **consistently**. What good is a value system when it is used differently within the same family file? Keep a written key to refer to when entering new information. Here is an example of a value key that includes categories for Source and Evidence:

- 5 being direct/primary
- 4 being direct/secondary

- 3 being indirect or circumstantial
- 2 being collateral
- 1 being conflicting
- 0 being unverified

Remember, too, that these ratings do not have to be self-excluding. You may have to assign two (or more) values to a single source.

Using Reunion

Regardless of how (or if) you decide to use a source value system, you can enter your value meter in your Reunion family file one of several ways.

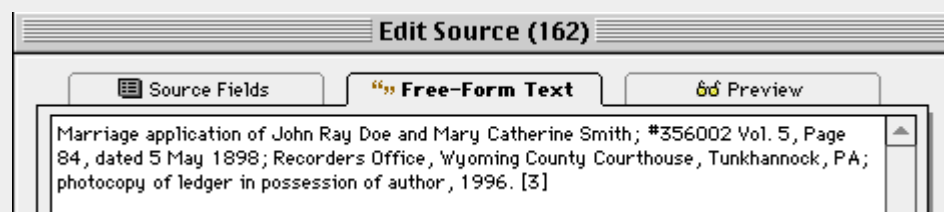
- In the text of the source record
- In the detail of the source record
- In the memo field of the event

In the text of the source record

Enter the value in the text of the source itself only if this source is used **for a single piece of evidence**. You might often use a single source for more than one fact or event -- a marriage application not only lists the names of the bride and groom, but their birthdates, the date of the application, their addresses, sometimes their occupations, their parents, etc. You probably wouldn't assign the same value to each of these pieces of evidence.

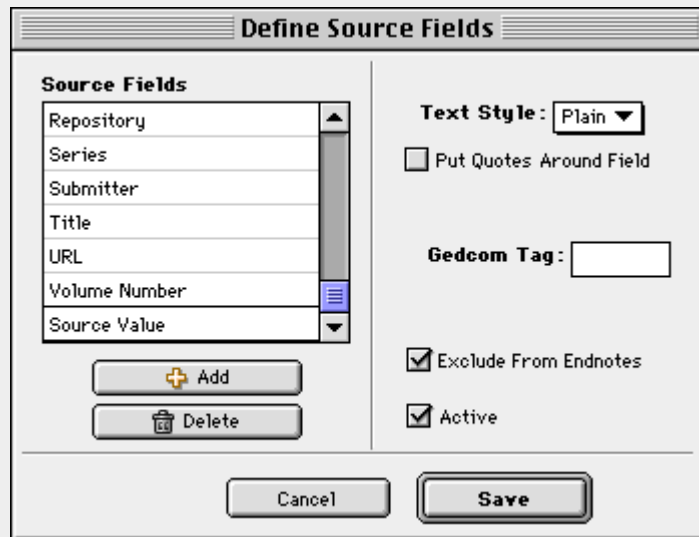
If you can use this first method, you can either add the value to the text of the free-form source, or create a field specifically for the source value when using a formatted source.

For **free-form text sources**, you might want to confine the value of the source within a **sensitive data** delimiter, which you could then exclude from reports. Or create your own code for the value, like "V=3", and add it to the text. The example below includes my source value at the end within brackets. [3]



For **structured sources**, in the Edit Source window, click and hold the **Add Field** pop-up menu, and choose Other, then click the **Define Fields** button (or choose the **Options -> Define -> Source Fields** menu item from any family card). In the Define Source Fields window, click the **Add** button, and name the new field. If you wish to exclude the source value from endnotes, here is your opportunity: check the **Exclude from Endnotes** box. Also, by checking the **Active** box once you create and use a "value" field, it will be available to you via the **Add Field** pop-up menu each time you use the Edit Source window. [**Help -> Search for Help**,

"active fields"]



Define Source Fields

Source Fields

Repository
Series
Submitter
Title
URL
Volume Number
Source Value

Text Style: Plain ▼

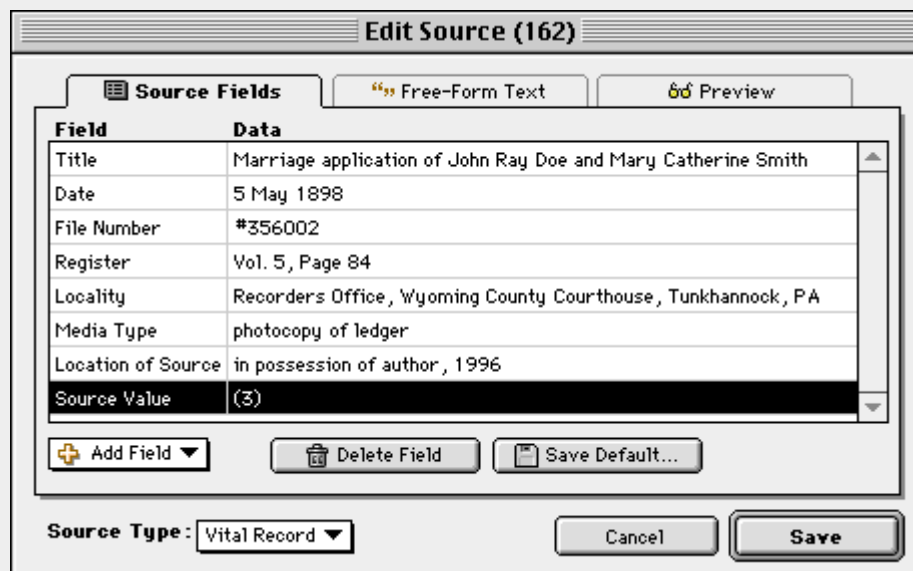
☐ Put Quotes Around Field

Gedcom Tag:

☒ Exclude From Endnotes

☒ Active

Now the Source Value field is available for me each time I enter a new source (or edit an existing one).



Edit Source (162)

Source Fields | Free-Form Text | Preview

Field	Data
Title	Marriage application of John Ray Doe and Mary Catherine Smith
Date	5 May 1898
File Number	#356002
Register	Vol. 5, Page 84
Locality	Recorders Office, Wyoming County Courthouse, Tunkhannock, PA
Media Type	photocopy of ledger
Location of Source	in possession of author, 1996
Source Value	(3)

Source Type: Vital Record ▼

Using the Detail Field

Perhaps the best way to keep track of each piece of evidence's value is to use the **detail** field of the source. This links the specific use of the evidence from the source to the value you've assigned. A different detail field is available **to each instance of a source** in a fact, event, or note. For instance, you've used the marriage application for

- Application date - source value 5
- Birthdate of the bride - source value 3
- Birthdate of the groom - source value 3
- Address of the bride - source value 3
- Address of the groom - source value 3
- Occupation of the bride - source value 2
- Occupation of the groom - source value 2
- Father of the bride - source value 4

Each time you use this source for one of these events or facts (or in a notes field), you can add a different source value in the detail field. To use the detail field, make sure to click the **Show Source Citation** button in any Edit Person or Edit Family window. Then select the specific source in the bottom frame, and move your cursor to the Detail field.

Source Citations : Occupation		Detail
5	Family tradition and word-of-mouth.	
162	Marriage application of John Ray Doe and Mary Catherine Smith, 5 May 1898,	3

Source details can be omitted from reports altogether, or they can appear with either endnotes or citations. You can set your preferences using the **Options -> Reports** menu item, and clicking on **Source Citations**. Using the "Ignore" feature here is like making the detail sensitive data -- it won't show up in reports. [[Help -> Search for Help, "source details"](#)]

Using the Memo Field of Events

Another, but limited, choice is to enter a value meter in the **Memo** field of an event. This would keep the actual data and its value together, but would separate the source from the value. Furthermore, it would only work for events, since other entries do not include a memo field. In the example, I've assigned different values to sources 58 and 51, as they apply to the birth date and place.

Edit Person				
Harry Bine ROSENGRANT			Person ID: 210	
Name	Events	Facts	Notes	Flags
Type	Date	Place	Memo	
Birth	30 Sep 1881	Clinton Twp, Wyoming Co, PA	58: 2, 51: 5	
Death	24 Oct 1966	Abington, Montgomery Co, PA		
Burial		Starkville Cemetery, Wyoming Co, PA		

Resources

Greenwood, Val, "The Researcher's Guide to American Genealogy" (Genealogical Publishing Co., 2nd Ed. 1990), chapter 4.

Mills, Elizabeth Shown, "Evidence, Citation and Analysis for the Family Historian" (Genealogical Publishing Co., 1997)

Rose, Christine, "What Happened to Preponderance of the Evidence?" (Rose Family Association, 1998)

Stevenson, Noel, "Genealogical Evidence: A Guide to the Standard of Proof Relating to Pedigrees, Ancestry, Heirship, and Family History" (Aegean Park Press, 1989)

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