

He Wasn't a Captain! Strategies to Correct Myths and Mistakes Using Modern Methods

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Genealogists frequently encounter myths and mistakes during research, often without even realizing it. In the digital age, it is especially easy for incorrect information to proliferate. From conflated records for same-named people to records created intentionally to mislead, responsible genealogists must do their best to identify incorrect information and set the record straight.

Where You Might Encounter a Myth or Mistake

A myth or mistake may exist in even the most reliable record type. No class or category is immune. Some of the most common sources that are prone to include incorrect or inaccurate information are:

- County History Books
- Published Family Histories
- Family Trees
- Family Documents
- Lineage Society Applications/Ancestor Databases
- Vital Records

How to Identify a Myth or Mistake

Apply the Genealogical Proof Standard.¹



- Did you come to the same conclusion based on a review of the sources and their reliability?
 - *Wait, what sources!?! If there are no sources, proceed with caution. You will likely not be able to answer the remaining questions.*

¹. Board for Certification of Genealogists, *Genealogy Standards*, 2nd ed. (Nashville, Tenn.: Ancestry Imprint, Turner Publishing Co., 2019), 1-3.

- Did the past researcher or writer conduct reasonably exhaustive research?
- Did they understand the records and the context in which they were created?
- Did they analyze and correlate evidence from a variety of reliable sources?
- Did they resolve conflicting information?

Applying the GPS to past research can identify incorrect information, and even identify where an earlier researcher or author went wrong. If you can't answer 'yes' to all the above questions, you may be dealing with a myth or mistake.

Correcting Myths and Mistakes:

Use the available information as a finding aid to conduct your own fresh research. Prioritize original records with primary information. Identify when sources are not independent. Analyze and correlate. Document your sources. Confirm and/or rule out previously stated information. Resolve conflicts. Keep an open mind during the process.

Finally, if you're going to attempt to correct a myth or mistake, you need proof that you can share with others.

In the simplest terms, proof = a sound written conclusion based on your research. This may vary based on complexity:

- Proof statement
- Proof summary
- Proof argument

Writing Your Proof:

Regardless of the complexity of what you are trying to correct, you must clearly communicate your findings and your sources.

It should go without saying, but proofs written with correction in mind should focus on the sources and information. They should not criticize the prior author or researcher.

With some persistent myths, it may be appropriate to communicate what prior information you found to be incorrect, and why.

Your final product may take the form of a biographical sketch, a case study, or family narrative.

Ideas to Share Your Proof:

How you share your information will likely depend on where the incorrect information is found.

- Upload and attach your proof to the appropriate people on your online family trees.
 - Be sure to include your name and contact information or username on the document.
 - Think of your proof in terms of Search Engine Optimization (SEO). Include relevant search terms in your title, like the subject's name, location, or date of birth. That will help your document appear in relevant search results.
- Post it to your own blog or website.
 - Some family tree software includes a website.
 - Create a free [Google webpage](#).
- Store your proof on the cloud (like Google Drive or DropBox). Make it shareable to anyone who has the link.
 - Post your link to appropriate Facebook groups or pages. Think about county historical or genealogical groups.
 - Include your link with a nice message to those with the incorrect information in their tree.
 - *This has worked well for me: Hi there! I see we both descend from James Clark who died in Mercersburg, PA in 1821. I've researched him quite a bit, and it turns out he wasn't a captain during the Revolutionary War. I've written my findings, which you can review here. And of course, if you have any information or sources that I'm missing, I'd love to learn more!*
- Google My Maps/Google Earth
 - Create your own maps of ancestral locations (think land ownership, marriage location, burial location. Write a "description" (your proof statement or link to a longer proof summary or argument). Add photos (abide by TOS) or links to records.
- Post a book review for authored works. Again, think in terms of SEO. Include search terms in your review. Keep these brief and factual.
 - Good Reads (you can share your review to your Facebook or your blog too).
 - Amazon, even if you did not purchase a book there.
 - Google the book title, and then select 'Book Reviews.' Get ideas for where else you may write a review.
- Suggest an edit on FindAGrave.com. Send the contributor the link to your proof. They will likely correct the information if they have valid proof.

- Mail a copy to relevant historical societies, genealogical societies, and/or local libraries that may have family file folders. Ask them to keep a copy with the relevant surname files.
- Apply to a lineage society. They will preserve your research, and will often make your research available to others. If you are unable to apply yourself, you can try to submit a correction. Two popular lineage societies that accept corrections for review are:
 - [DAR Corrections](#) and [SAR Corrections](#)
- “Donate” your research with the [Allen County Public Library](#). They accept print or digital family information to share with library patrons.
- Publish
 - Newsletters or Journals
 - County, Regional and Family Associations are often seeking articles for newsletters or publications.
 - State Genealogical Associations
 - *NGSQ*
 - Book or eBook

Conclusion

Share your research by both a targeted and broad approach. Get your soundly researched and written proof directly to the people who are most likely to perpetuate the same old myths and mistakes (people who share the same research subject as you). Also, share your information in as many mediums (especially digital) as possible. For better or worse, AI in the research field is not going away. Your proof might as well be included with other search results!

Resources

Bloom, Jeanne Larzelere. “Assumptions: The Traps and Snares of Genealogy.” *NGS Magazine*, 47 (July–September 2021): 23–26.

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Carmack, Sharon DeBartolo, CG®, “Family Legends and Myths: Watching Out for Red Flags,” [Genealogy.com](#) ([genealogy.com/articles/research/90_carmack.html](https://www.genealogy.com/articles/research/90_carmack.html)).

Jones, Thomas W. *Mastering Genealogical Proof*. Special Publications of the National Genealogical Society. Arlington, VA: National Genealogical Society, 2013.