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THE IMPORTANCE OF GENEALOGICAL ANALYSIS AND CORRELATION

by Melissa A. Johnson, CG



As genealogists, we connect various pieces of information to draw conclusions—but it isn't just the information that makes our case. Analysis and correlation are essential parts of the process. Genealogical analysis is when we examine our sources and information piece by piece to understand their context and nature, and to evaluate credibility. Correlation is when we try to discover how these pieces of the puzzle fit

or don't fit together. It is our thought process—the analysis and correlation—that turns information from our sources into evidence we can use to solve genealogical problems.

Melinda Henningfield's "Determining Linnie Leigh Gray's Birth Date," which appeared in the December 2010 issue of the *National Genealogical Society Quarterly* (NGSQ), demonstrates the importance of genealogical analysis and correlation. Henningfield establishes Linnie's date of birth despite information from eighteen sources identifying a range of birth dates between 1889 and 1894. Sources include a baptismal card, baptismal register, family Bible, Social Security application, lineage society application, funeral program, death certificate, grave marker, insurance application, various census records, Linnie's children's birth certificates, and Linnie's parents' divorce record. Each source provides either Linnie's date of birth or her age at some point in time (see Table 1 on page 249).

Henningfield's analysis begins with the Grey family Bible. She deduces that Linnie's birth date of 25 March 1890 was probably written in the Bible by Linnie's paternal grandmother, shortly after Linnie's birth (page 245). Two records pertaining to Linnie's baptism—a baptismal card and a register book—identify a different birthdate: 12 March 1894. Henningfield notes several corrections that were made to the baptismal card, including the change of Linnie's mother's maiden name and the change of Linnie's birth year from 1894 to 1890 (page 246). Each of these details is analyzed and brought to the reader's attention.

Information from other sources, including census and vital records, points to a variety of other birth dates or years. In some cases, the identity of the informant can be determined and the information's credibility can be judged. Information from some sources—including Linnie's funeral program, death certificate, and grave marker—cannot be reliably analyzed because its origin is not known (page 250). Henningfield also weighs information on factors other than the informant's credibility—for example, she gives more weight to Linnie's ages as they appear in earlier census enumerations. She gives less weight to the ages that appear on Linnie's marriage record and her children's birth records, theorizing that Linnie may have wanted to appear closer in age to her husband.

Henningfield also introduces information that doesn't specifically identify a date of birth for Linnie, but helps shed light on the question. For example, Linnie's parents' marriage date is considered, as is 1852 birth-record legislation in Kentucky, where Linnie is alleged to have been born. Also, Henningfield uses Linnie's parents' 1892 divorce record, which mentions Linnie by name, to eliminate several of the later birth dates.

Henningfield analyzes all of the information relevant to the research problem, and notes where the evidence agrees, where it conflicts, and where it connects. Henningfield had so much conflicting information that it seemed impossible to identify Linnie's accurate birth date. However, her interpretation of the evidence allows a sound conclusion to be drawn. Without her analysis and correlation, she would have a number of potential birth dates for Linnie.

Linnie's correct date of birth, as identified by Henningfield, is one that is named in several sources. However, Henningfield draws her ultimate conclusion—that Linnie was born 25 March 1890—not by relying on any one of those sources, but by considering the evidence as a whole.

NGSQ case studies don't just present information items or pieces of evidence—they offer insight into the author's thought process and reveal the analysis and points of correlation that make a convincing case.

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Melissa is a New Jersey-based professional genealogist specializing in genealogical research; writing, editing, and publishing; using DNA to solve genealogical problems; and forensic genealogy. She focuses on researching families with roots in New Jersey, New York City, Pennsylvania, and the British Isles. Melissa is editor of the *Genealogical Society of New Jersey Newsletter*, reviews editor of the *Association of Professional Genealogists Quarterly*, and past editor of *NGS Monthly*. She serves on the Board of Trustees of the Genealogical Society of New Jersey and the International Society for British Genealogy and Family History and on the faculty of several genealogical programs and institutes. Her work has been published in numerous publications.

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