

INFO 200

Information Sources Survey Assignment

Mary Koeven

March 24, 2024

Introduction:

My information community is hobby genealogists. Genealogists are constantly seeking new information to help expand their family trees. This can include information from primary sources, such as original census records, birth certificates, and other original documents, or secondary sources, where genealogical information is compiled into a family tree chart or biography. Genealogists also make use of instructional sources, such as guidebooks and instructional blogs or videos, which can help them learn where to locate primary or secondary sources. *The Source: A Guidebook to American Genealogy* is one of these instructional sources, while WikiTree is both a secondary source with compiled genealogies, and a collection of instructional articles. Genealogists often participate in the creation of information, as discussed by Fulton (2016), and WikiTree is one example of many websites where genealogists create and share information with each other.

Research-based source: *The Source: A Guidebook to American Genealogy*

APA Style Citation:

Szucs, L. D & Luebking, S. H. (Eds.) (2006). *The Source: A Guidebook to American Genealogy* (Third ed.). Ancestry Publishing.

Position within the information cycle: Years after the event. This is a reference work, compiling lots of information from various sources into one volume.

Scope and content: *The Source* is a manual for genealogical researchers. It has a few chapters on the basic research process for genealogy and several chapters describing the most important record types for genealogical research, why they were created, and how to find them. There are also chapters describing how to research in genealogical subject areas with specific challenges, for example, African American research and urban research. Throughout the book are lists of books, websites, and other resources, as well as lists of archives and how to contact them.

Credentials and authority of the author, editor, and/or publisher: The book has several authors and two editors, and several of them hold credentials such as FUGA (Fellow of the Utah Genealogical Association), FASG (Fellow of the American Society of Genealogists), AG (Accredited Genealogist), and CG (Certified Genealogist). Several authors also hold graduate degrees in various fields. Many have been involved in the genealogical field as instructors, lecturers, writers, and officers of genealogical organizations as well as genealogical researchers. Some are archivists or librarians. The publisher, Ancestry, is one of the largest genealogical companies in the world.

Purposes and uses: *The Source* is a good starting point for genealogical research, providing a basic introduction to research and specialized chapters that point genealogists to resources that can help them solve specific genealogical problems.

Intended audience: The intended audience is individuals doing American genealogical research. Beginners to genealogy will find the book helpful, as well as advanced researchers.

Design: Reference work, encyclopedia, dictionary: *The Source* is a handbook or manual for individuals interested in genealogical research.

Currency and frequency of update: Multiple editions *and* Website. No new editions have been published since the third edition (2006), however, the publisher has a digital version of the third

edition on a wiki site, where registered users can edit the articles and post updated links to resources (The Source: A Guidebook to American Genealogy, 2017). However, the wiki site has apparently not changed much from the 2006 book, except for a few additions of hyperlinks.

Biases and gaps: *The Source* is focused on American genealogy, so it will have limitations for those researching genealogy in other parts of the world. Its coverage of software and internet resources throughout the book is outdated, although the wiki site may help remedy this somewhat. *The Source* gives only a basic overview of important topics such as DNA and citing records, but it does provide lists of additional books that will give the reader more knowledge. Coverage of other ethnic groups besides white/English is limited, even though other ethnic groups have been part of the American landscape for many generations. There is practically zero mention of how to research Asian and Pacific Islander populations. The organization of the chapters into types of records, and then the outlier categories of different ethnic groups and situations, implies that groups such as African American and Hispanic do not have the same status as the “normal” white/English group in genealogical research. This reflects the bias existing in the archives themselves, because of the way information was recorded in the past.

Value for your information community: This is an excellent “getting started” manual, especially for those who prefer a printed book to a website. There are numerous sources online which provide similar information and are accessible through a quick Google search, but this resource may be more in-depth than some of them.

Community-based source: WikiTree

APA Style Citation:

Help:About WikiTree. (2024, January 2). In *WikiTree*.

https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Help:About_WikiTree

Position within the information cycle: Hours/Day of the event. Edits to WikiTree are made by hundreds of users in real time throughout the day.

Scope and content: The site has over 36 million genealogical/biographical profiles. An estimated 22% of those profiles contain 3 or more sources to verify the information (Space:WikiTree Statistics, 2023). The site also has a forum and help articles to provide instruction on genealogy research and editing WikiTree (for example, Help:How to Get Started with Genealogy, 2023).

Credentials and authority of the author, editor, and/or publisher: WikiTree was founded by Chris Whitten, creator of WikiAnswers, which became Answers.com. He is apparently a hobby genealogist. The site is led by a team of volunteers and is not affiliated with other genealogy sites like Ancestry or FamilySearch, nor is it affiliated with Wikimedia, the organization behind Wikipedia. Edits can be made by any user, and there are several resources to help users understand how to properly verify genealogical information and find credible sources. Before they can make any edits on public profiles, new users are required to sign an “Honor Code” stating they will cite sources, try to keep the tree accurate, respect copyrights, and collaborate with others.

Purposes and uses: WikiTree is a wiki site, meaning the content of the website can be changed by the users. The website also has a forum and private messaging features to enable users to communicate with each other. The purpose of the site is to create a “single family tree” showing how all of mankind is connected to each other. Users can upload their family trees, edit profiles, merge duplicates, and collaborate on projects. The site has a Facebook page and a YouTube channel and promotes “challenge” events to encourage users to collaborate and compete. Often the challenges are centered around celebrities or historical figures, and users are encouraged to

find their genealogical connection to the celebrity and ensure all the profiles in the chain of connection are verified with accurate sources. Challenges are also organized based on specific surnames or unconnected or unsourced profiles, with users competing to see how many profiles they can improve in a certain amount of time. Badges are awarded based on editing achievements.

Intended audience: Anyone interested in genealogy. People may visit the site for genealogical information even if they do not contribute to the site.

Design: Web site or online community. This is a collaboratively edited website.

Currency and frequency of update: New edits are made throughout the day, every day.

Biases and gaps: Information on the site is limited to what the users put there. Famous people are more likely than non-famous people to have detailed and well-sourced profiles, but only if users have taken the time to edit their profiles. Editing the site can be difficult for new users, and there is a bit of a learning curve, which means even if someone visiting the site sees a problem, it won't always be fixed right away.

Value for your information community: WikiTree provides a place for genealogists to collaborate on research and help each other learn. It is a community space where genealogists can meet like-minded individuals and previously unknown relatives. Many WikiTree profiles link to genealogical profiles on other sites such as FamilySearch, Ancestry and MyHeritage, so there is some cross-platform information exchange going on as well.

Compare, Contrast & Reflection:

Both *The Source* and WikiTree can be a starting point for a beginning genealogist's research.

Both include information on how to do accurate genealogical research. Both provide references to other resources to help genealogists expand their search. However, while *The Source* provides

extensive information from experienced genealogists, WikiTree contains a fair amount of unsourced genealogical information. Yet some of the information in *The Source* is outdated, and WikiTree readily acknowledges its own limitations with regards to factual accuracy. Both sources can be useful for different scenarios. Someone looking for a thorough description of genealogical records and how to do genealogical research will prefer to read *The Source*, while someone who is trying to get started with an online genealogy community and/or building their family tree on the internet will want to use WikiTree.

References

Fulton, C. (2016). The genealogist's information world: creating information in the pursuit of a hobby. *Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, 8(1), 85-100.

Help:How to Get Started with Genealogy. (2023, February 21). In *WikiTree*.

https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Help:How_to_Get_Started_with_Genealogy

The Source: A Guidebook to American Genealogy. (2017, July 8). In *Ancestry.com Wiki*.

https://wiki.rootsweb.com/wiki/index.php/The_Source:_A_Guidebook_to_American_Genealogy

Space:WikiTree Statistics. (2023, December 3). In *WikiTree*.

https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Space:Wikitree_Statistics