

## **FAMILY STORIES: HOW TO EVALUATE, MODIFY, DOCUMENT, OR DISCARD THE TALES YOU GOT FROM GRANDMA**

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1. There were three brothers who immigrated to America: one went north, one went west, and one came south. [Found in lots of families, not true, just keeps getting repeated.]
2. "Why, yes, I remember Cousin Flossie. Her line ended, had no children, I suppose." [Cousin who wrote this failed to mention that Flossie was married to the Mayor of Savannah who wrote a book that included her genealogy and MINE! -why was she dismissed?] [Cousin who wrote this did not like a Catholic couple separating, so she just eliminated them from the tree.]
3. You were born while we were on vacation in McCaysville, GA. [Born on vacation?]
4. Her birth record was destroyed in the courthouse fire. [Birth was ca. 1868, courthouse burned only once, 1838] [Family's excuse for not having a birth record without any knowledge of when birth records, that is certificates, were started in Georgia]
5. General Sherman burned all the courthouses in Georgia so there are no records. **FALSE**
6. Our surname was only spelled one way, never any other way. **FALSE**
7. Grandmother was an Indian/had Indian blood because of this or that characteristic. **NO**
8. If your surname is Thomas (or any other surname), then you must have had a long line of ancestors with that name. [Belief that today's surnames all have a history. Note two presidents.]
9. They brought that furniture with them on the *Mayflower*. [Very small ship, no furniture.]
10. The belief that every ancestor who fought in the Civil War for the South was an officer, and that every Indian was a princess. [If you believe that one, we have a Bridge in Brooklyn....]
11. Our family farmed, but didn't own slaves. [Rewriting history in many cases. Check census.]
12. How did your ancestors meet? Can the story be documented?
13. Always take down the phrase someone uses word for word. Don't try and "modernize" it. Things that seem simple or rather unimportant today, had greater meaning in the past.

Examples: Aunt Clara-'She Kept a Clean House'.

Or for another relative (described by a neighbor): "She was a woman about town."

Or "They were separated" --did not always mean divorced

14. For anything that can be documented, keep looking until you have exhausted all possible sources. Only then confront your relatives, and always in private, for another solution.

Example: Auntie says quit looking for grandma's marriage, because grandma never married anybody.

15. Names: be careful to record first names and especially nicknames as the family used them, and annotate anything else you find in your notes. My great-grandmother was called "Jennie or Ginny." When I found her in the census her name was "Eugenia." My grandmother then said, "Mama always said her name was Eugenia, but my sisters told her it had to be Virginia, hence several grandchildren were named Virginia after her."

16. Who were family members named for? Don't assume you know.

My grandmother named my father for her best friend's husband, her second son for the doctor and a minister, only my father (and later me) ended up with a family surname as one of our names. She named a daughter, in 1920, Edith. Any significance to that name then? Others named children for governors, sheriffs, and counties!

In my Willis family they had fifteen children born c. 1835 to 1860 to survive, but not a single one of them bore a family surname as a clue.

17. Unless you have checked all the records, don't believe it when they say, they never went to court, or left any records, because they were too poor, or they never got into trouble. A lot of people are in the courthouse for things that today we would not imagine.

18. If a relative married his "first wife" at a rather advanced age for the times, don't take the family's word for it that there was not an earlier marriage. A lot of people never wanted to admit that their father or mother had been married before.

19. We have lost Aunt Sally's branch, don't think we could ever find them. That may have been OK in 1950, but in 2020 it is not very plausible with the Social Security Death Index, Google searches, all kinds of websites for people directories, and all the information on Ancestry.com, including the 1940 census, as well as a mass of city directories. Newspaper sites are another great source for finding lost but fairly recent relatives.

20. No one in our family ever moved to Nebraska! [Wonder how it got settled?] Or, they went to Texas, but I cannot find them there. Forgetting, that to get to Texas, which sometimes just meant that they went "West," they had to pass through Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana, and might have gone to Arkansas or Oklahoma.

21. All states kept the same kinds of records. Not the case, and a lot of good, juicy information could be found in records if someone happened to move to another state and leave a record.

22. Have you gotten your family's coat of arms?