

Record Evaluation

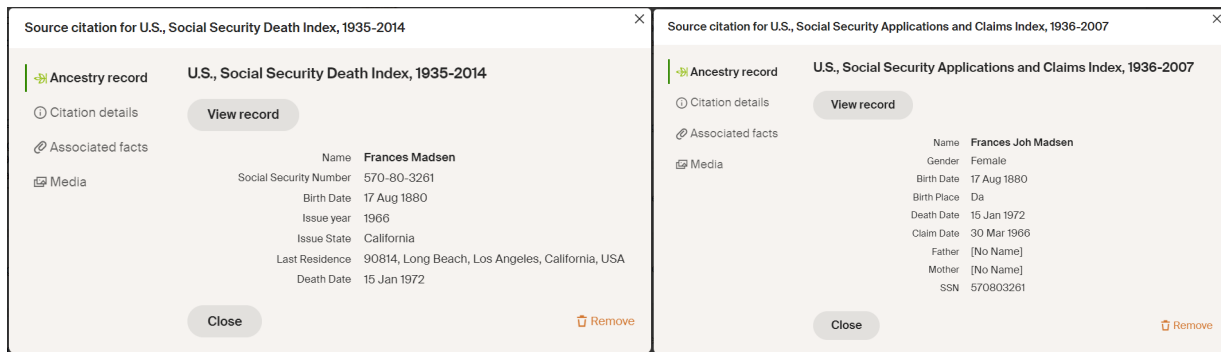
This is the process of looking at a record to learn the quality of the record for the evidence contained within. The reason we do this is to help us determine the accuracy of the information. This in turn helps us to resolve any conflicts arising from other evidence.

Today we are understanding the written records. However, you should know we often refer to our findings as evidence, not because we want to pretend to be detectives on a great mystery, but because this evidence can come in many forms, such as physical records, images of records, photographs, family histories or even artifacts like quilts, family bibles, and or memorabilia.

Indexes

Indexes are created from original records and organized in some order for easy retrieval. Therefore, **where there is an index, there was (at one time) an original record** to seek.

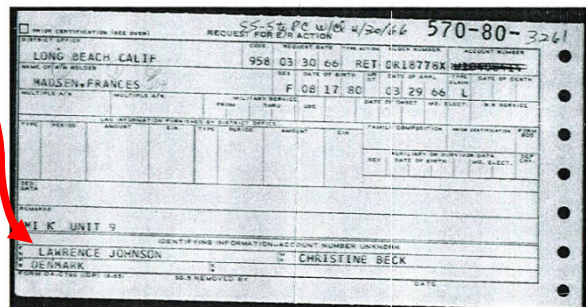
For example, in the US there is the **Social Security Death Index** (Ancestry, FamilySearch, MyHeritage, etc.) On Ancestry there is also the **Social Security Applications and Claims Index**. You might find your ancestor in one or both indexes, but these are indexes. What is *not* online is the **SS5** record. This is the record that was filled out to apply for a social security account. This may contain more information than just the index.



In this image, while it does not provide a lot of new information, you can see that Frances Madsen's parents are named toward the bottom.

Always seek the original records if they still exist.

1 SS5 for Frances Johnson Madsen



Abbreviations

Often, we are confused by abbreviations. Look for front matter or tables in the back of books and genealogies to help learn what the abbreviations mean. It seems every published work uses their own set of abbreviations.

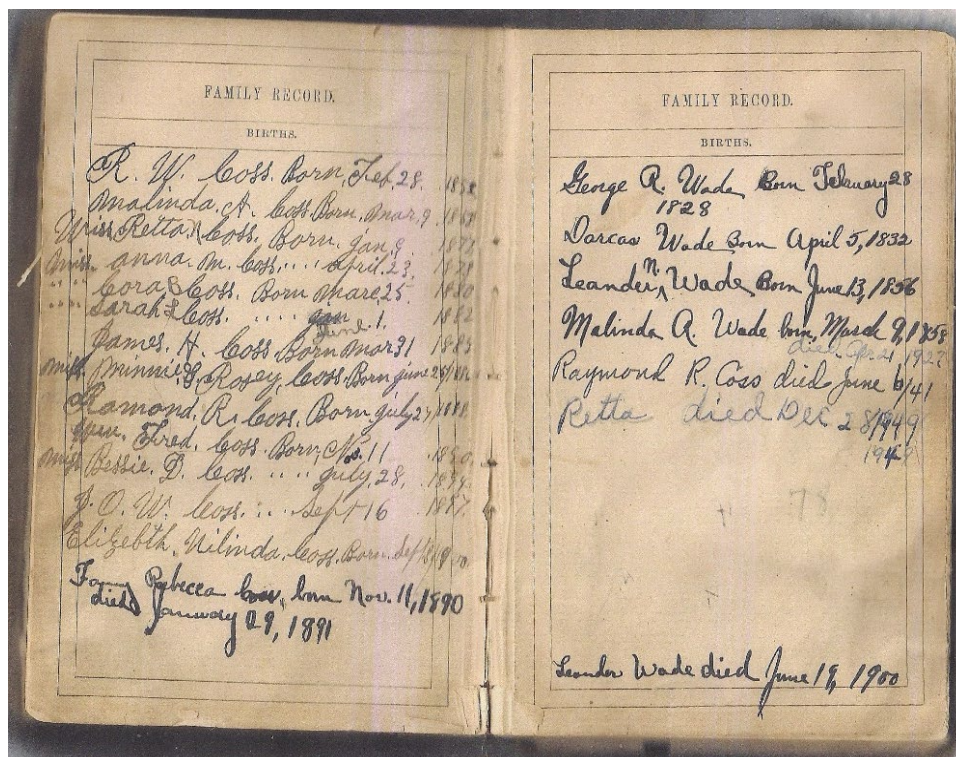
Dating Documents

Dating a document involves figuring out when it was created. This can be done by examining various clues. For instance, in a book, you can start by checking the front matter to find the publication date. You will need this anyway for a proper source citation.

Analyzing the handwriting can also provide insights, especially in determining whether the entries were made at the same time or over a period.

For example, when dating a Bible, you can look at the publication date of the book and then examine the handwriting in the birth, marriage, and death records. If the book was published in say 1906 but the dates are prior to that date, you know that the entries were after the event and might contain errors.

By examining the handwriting and ink for consistency or variation, you can determine whether the entries were made all at once or over time. Knowing the publication date and the timing of these entries can help pinpoint when the entries were made. When entries are made years later there is a possibility for errors.



2 WADE - COSS Family Bible¹

Front Matter

You always want to be looking for the front matter in any published material for additional information about the record.

When copying information from a book, make sure to include the front matter, any pages relevant to your family history, and the index. This is especially crucial if the book only exists in a physical format and is not available online. Be sure to note the repository where you found the book, as this information is essential for creating an accurate source citation.

When accessing information online, first note the page or image number you are viewing. Then, check the front matter of any microfilm roll for details about the location or the images you are looking at. This can provide valuable context regarding when and where the documents were created.

Be mindful that when looking at images online, there may be multiple record sets in one microfilm roll. Therefore, look for differences in the microfilm thumbnails in order to find the head of the record set for your ancestor.

In this case, the front matter includes a black thumbnail with information, while image four provides an index of the book's contents. Although the book is in Danish, Google Translate can often assist with translation. Many registry books commonly include an index in the front matter, which is particularly useful when researching unindexed records.

Denmark, Church Records, 1812-1924
 Vejle > Kolding Sankt Nikolaj Sogn > 1873-1881

Handwritten text on the page includes:

Event	Date	Location
Konferens med Sognepræsten	2. Juni 1873	St. Nikolaj
Konferens med Sognepræsten	2. Juni 1873	St. Nikolaj
Lykt	2. 28 Juli 1874	St. Nikolaj
Lykt	3. 28 Juli 1874	St. Nikolaj
Konferens	20. April 1875	St. Nikolaj
Lygteskifte	1. August 1875	St. Nikolaj
Lygteskifte	28. Januar 1876	St. Nikolaj
Lygteskifte	29. Juni 1877	St. Nikolaj
Lygteskifte	20. Maj 1878	St. Nikolaj
Lygteskifte	3. Februar 1879	St. Nikolaj
Lygteskifte	10. Januar 1880	St. Nikolaj
Lygteskifte	21. Maj 1881	St. Nikolaj
Lygteskifte	3. Januar 1882	St. Nikolaj

Archives - Rigsarkivet | © 1997-2024 Ancestry.com

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Vejle, Kolding Sankt Nikolaj Sogn, 1873-1881

Image 202 | Image 1 | Image 2 | Image 3 | Image 4

Marriage Records

There are so many different types of marriage records. Some are evidence for the intent to marry and others are evidence that the marriage actually took place.

Source citation for Web: Western States Marriage Index, 1809-2011

Ancestry record Web: Western States Marriage Index, 1809-2011

View record

Citation details

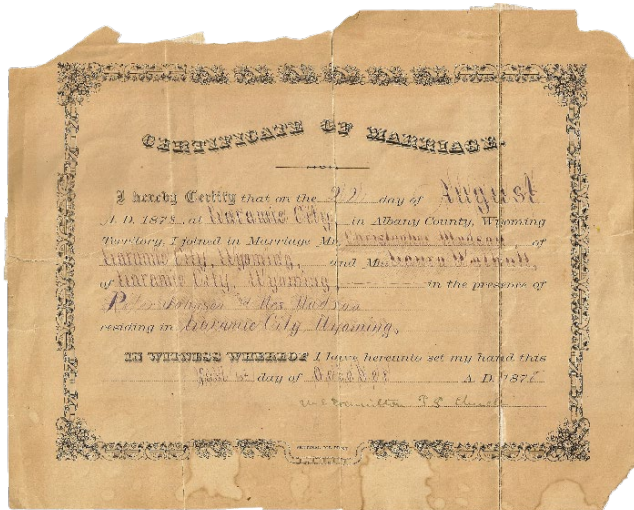
Associated facts

Media

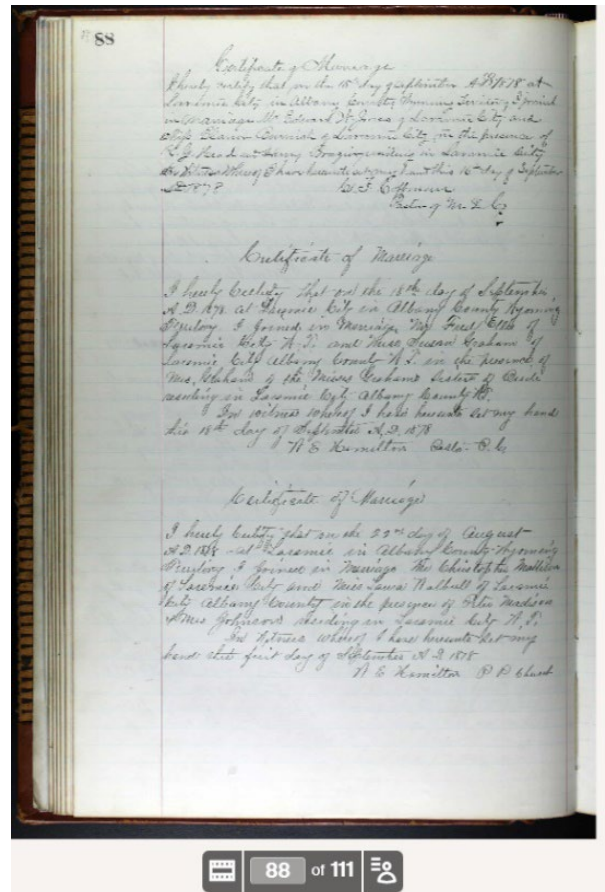
Name	Christopher Madison
Residence Place	Laramie
Marriage License Place	Albany, Wyoming, USA
Marriage Date	22 Aug 1878
Marriage Place	Laramie
Spouse	Laura Walbull

Close Remove

4 Marriage Index



5 Decorative Marriage Certificate Privately Held



3 Marriage Registry Copies of Marriage Certificates



GenealogyTV.org



YouTube.com/GenealogyTV

Intent to Marry

Marriage Banns
 Marriage Bonds
 Engagement Announcements
 Marriage License
 Wedding Invitations

Evidence of Marriage

Marriage Registries
 Marriage Certificate
 Marriage License with Return
 Decorative Marriage Certificate
 Newspaper Announcements

Evidence of intent to marry did not always result in marriage... but did most of the time.

Tip! Look for the witnesses in the marriage records. They are often family members.

Land Records

Just a quick reminder about land records: check for deeds, survey plats, maps, road records, and land descriptions in wills and probate documents.

Evidence Evaluation

Here are some things to keep in mind when examining a record. Keep in mind that not all these items may apply to every type of evidence. Always aim to find the original record, and if possible, view it in person.

In this list are items to pay attention to within a record.

- 1) Where did the record come from?
- 2) Is it an image, index, viewing in person?
- 3) Handwritten or printed
- 4) Form
 - a. Numbers
 - b. Codes
- 5) Dates
- 6) Location when originated
- 7) Author or governing body (who created it)
- 8) Official or Personal Record
- 9) Number of pages
- 10) Collection found
- 11) Original or Derivative (copy)?



- 12) Tone... (first person, i.e., wills), official (i.e., clerk of court), third person (family narratives).
- 13) Type of copy (image, original, photocopy, microfilm, book, etc.)
- 14) Quality of Document (Torn edges, creases, stamp marks, etc.)
- 15) Ink Quality
- 16) Missing parts?
- 17) Attached documents (i.e., transcripts, genealogies, etc.)
- 18) Dates within
- 19) Accuracy
- 20) Rarity
- 21) All Persons Named
- 22) Identifying information about persons within, i.e., ages, places.
- 23) Items mentioned (i.e., inventory in a probate package). This can give context into the wealth and or lifestyle of your ancestor.

Things to Consider

1. History of the Location:

Understanding the history of a location is crucial when evaluating historic records. The political, social, and economic conditions of an area can greatly influence the content and context of documents. For instance, boundary changes, wars, or natural disasters can affect the availability and accuracy of records. Additionally, cultural norms and local laws can shape how records were kept and what information was deemed important. Knowing the historical context helps to interpret the records more accurately and can reveal why certain events occurred, migration patterns or why ancestors may have made particular decisions.

2. Ancestors' Timeline in RESEARCH NOTES!

Creating a timeline of your ancestors' lives is essential for accurate historical record evaluation. This timeline should include key life events such as births, marriages, deaths, migrations, and significant achievements or changes in status. By aligning these events with the historical timeline of the location, you can better understand the circumstances surrounding each record. For example, understanding when an ancestor moved to a new area can explain why certain records are found in unexpected places. This timeline also helps in identifying potential gaps in the records and prompts further investigation to fill these gaps.

I do this through the Research Notes process, starting with a date, item, then abstracted information and conclusions in each paragraph.

3. Push-Pull Immigration Factors:

When evaluating records related to immigration, it is important to consider both push and pull factors that may have influenced an ancestor's decision to migrate. Push factors are conditions that drive people away from their homeland, such as economic hardship, political oppression, or natural disasters. Pull factors are the attractions of a new location, like economic opportunities, political stability, or the presence of family members. Understanding these factors can provide insight into the motivations behind migration and help explain the timing and destination of the move. This context can also aid in

locating additional records, such as passenger lists, naturalization papers, and community records in the new location.

4. Look for Signatures:

Signatures can provide valuable insights when examining historic records. They can confirm an individual's presence at a specific event and establish their literacy level and social status. Comparing signatures across different documents can help verify an individual's identity, especially when names are common, or misspellings occur. Additionally, signatures can sometimes include unique flourishes or styles that reflect personal traits or regional influences. In some cases, the absence of a signature, such as a mark made by an "X," can indicate a lack of literacy or legal rights, providing further context about the individual's social standing or circumstances at the time.

Other Unofficial Evidence

Documents that state or suggest the following are clues, but not proof.

- “Widow”
- “His Wife”
- Divorce Records (is proof)
- Court Records
- Informants “Spouse”
- Guardianship Records
- Wills
- Childrens Death Certificates
- Woman’s same last name
- Newspapers

Next Steps

When evaluating a document, there are several key steps to follow that can deepen your understanding and enhance the accuracy of your research. Here are some recommendations:

1. Finding the Original:

Whenever possible, seek out the original version of a document. Original records are the most reliable sources of information because they are closest to the event or transaction they document. Originals may contain details not present in copies or transcriptions, such as marginal notes, seal impressions, or specific types of ink and paper that can offer additional context. They may also clarify ambiguities that arise in later reproductions. If the original is not accessible, a high-quality image or microfilm version is the next best option. Visiting archives, libraries, or repositories where the originals are housed is ideal, but many institutions now offer digital access to their collections.

2. Transcribing:

Transcribing a document involves creating an exact, word-for-word copy of the original text. This process is essential for making the document accessible and searchable, especially if it is handwritten or in an archaic script. Transcription requires careful attention to detail, as even minor errors can alter the meaning of the text. It is important to preserve the original spelling, punctuation, and formatting to maintain the document's integrity. Additionally, noting any unclear or illegible parts and providing context, such as editorial comments or footnotes, can be helpful. This step is crucial for preserving historical accuracy and for providing a clear basis for analysis and interpretation.

3. Abstracting:

Abstracting involves summarizing the key information from a document while omitting less relevant details. This process is useful for creating a concise overview of the document's contents, especially when dealing with lengthy or complex records. An abstract should include essential details such as names, dates, places, and significant events or transactions. It is important to maintain the original meaning and context while condensing the information. Abstracting is particularly helpful when dealing with a large volume of documents, as it allows researchers to quickly assess the relevance and significance of each record without having to read the entire text in full.

4. Source Citation:

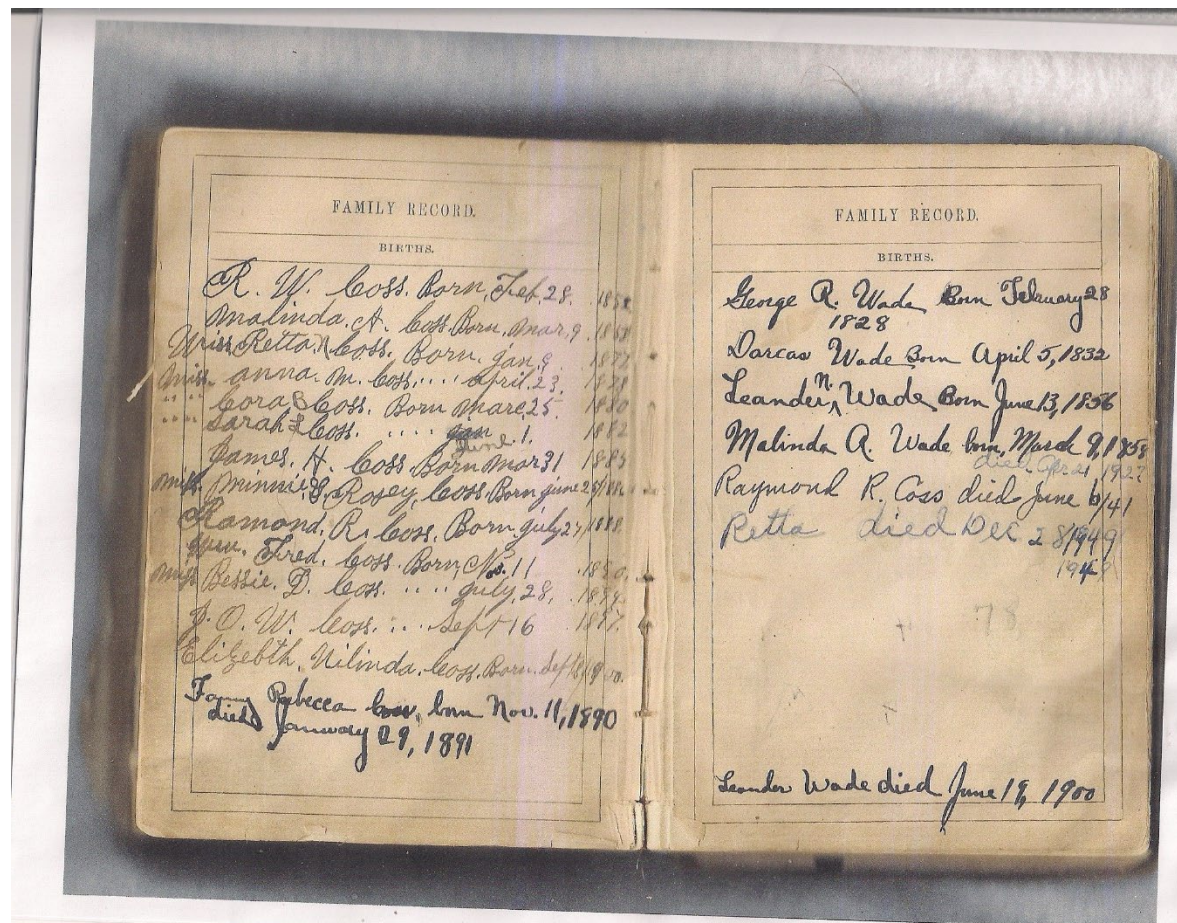
Properly citing sources is a critical aspect of historical research. A source citation provides the necessary information for others to locate the original document and verify the research. It typically includes details such as the author, title, date, repository, and specific location within a collection (such as a volume or page number). Accurate citations not only lend credibility to your research but also help in tracking the provenance of the information, which is essential for verifying its authenticity. In genealogy, we use the book [Evidence Explained by Elizabeth Shown Mills](#) (affiliate link) as the gold standard (similar to Chicago Style) for source citations.

5. Adding to Research Notes:

Incorporating findings into your research notes is a vital step in documenting and organizing your research process. Research notes should start with the date, then item and include a summary of the document, insights gained, questions raised, and connections to other sources or evidence. They are a space for reflecting on the implications of the document's content and for planning future research steps. Well-organized notes can help track the progress of your research, highlight gaps in information, and support the formulation of new hypotheses. Additionally, research notes can serve as a valuable resource for future projects or for sharing findings with other researchers. Keeping thorough and accurate notes ensures that your work is transparent and reproducible.

Each of these steps contributes to a rigorous and thorough approach to historical research, helping to ensure the reliability and depth of your findings. As you continue to develop your research skills, you may find additional techniques and strategies that enhance your work.

Document Examples



2 WADE - COSS Family Bible

¹ Wade-Coss Bible Records, 1828-1949, digital image "Family Record" pages from unknown Bible; scanned by unknown, <https://www.ancestry.com>, 2024. Originally shared by Thomas Rogers, Thomas Rogers Family Tree on Ancestry.

SS-5, PC w/CR 4/30/66 570-80-3261

REQUEST FOR E/P ACTION

PRIOR CERTIFICATION (SEE OVER)

DISTRICT OFFICE: LONG BEACH CALIF

CODE: 958 REQUEST DATE: 03 30 66 TYPE ACTION: RET BLOCK NUMBER: DR18778X ACCOUNT NUMBER: ~~570-80-3261-14~~

NAME OF A/P HOLDER: MADSEN, FRANCES

SEX: F DATE OF BIRTH: 08 17 80 MO: 03 DATE OF APPL.: 29 66 TYPE CLAIM: L DATE OF DEATH:

MULTIPLE A/P: MULTIPLE A/P: MILITARY SERVICE: FROM: THRU: USE: DATE OF ONSET: MO. ELECT.: A/P SERVICE:

LAG INFORMATION FURNISHED BY DISTRICT OFFICE:

TYPE	PERIOD	AMOUNT	EIN	TYPE	PERIOD	AMOUNT	EIN	FAMILY COMPOSITION	PHYS CERTIFICATION	FORM 805

DEB DATA:

REMARKS: MI K UNIT 9

IDENTIFYING INFORMATION--ACCOUNT NUMBER UNKNOWN

LAWRENCE JOHNSON CHRISTINE BECK

DENMARK

FORM OA-2760 (OSP) (8-55) SS-5 REMOVED BY: DATE:

2

6 SS-5 Record for Frances Madsen

3

SERIAL NUMBER: 679 1. NAME (Print): CHARLES BURTON CONARD ORDER NUMBER: 965

2. ADDRESS (Print): 16312 VAN OWEN VAN NUYS LOS ANGELES CALIF

3. TELEPHONE: VAN NUYS 4. AGE IN YEARS: 27 yrs 5. PLACE OF BIRTH: LOS ANGELES 6. COUNTRY OF CITIZENSHIP: U.S.A

DATE OF BIRTH: State 5-2854 apr 17 1913 California

7. NAME OF PERSON WHO WILL ALWAYS KNOW YOUR ADDRESS: Mrs. Alma Marie Conard 8. RELATIONSHIP OF THAT PERSON: wife

9. ADDRESS OF THAT PERSON: 16312 Van Owen Van Nuys Los Angeles California

10. EMPLOYER'S NAME: Los Angeles City Police Dept

11. PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT OR BUSINESS: 100 North Spring Los Angeles Los Angeles California

I AFFIRM THAT I HAVE VERIFIED ABOVE ANSWERS AND THAT THEY ARE TRUE.

REGISTRATION CARD D. S. S. Form 1 (over) 16-17105

Charles Burton Conard (Registrant's signature)

7 WWII Draft Registration Card - Original Record

² Frances Madsen, Social Security no. 570-80-3261, 29 Mar 1966, "Application for Account Number: (Form SS-5); Social Security Administration, Baltimore, Maryland.

³ "U.S., World War II Draft Cards Young Men, 1940-1947," images, Ancestry (<https://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 6 August 2024), card for Charles Burton Conard, serial no. 679, Local Board no. 176, 18540 Sherman Way, Reseda, Los Angeles, CA; National Archives, St. Louis, MO, RG 147; Box: 356.

Additional Suggested Lessons

[The Process of Research](#)

[Getting Organized from the Start](#)

[Research Notes Path](#)

[Transcribing and Abstracting](#)