# How Do I Know That's My Ancestor?

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People with the same name. Nicknames. Changing names. How do you know if the record you're looking at is referring to your ancestor? This session will take a close look at records and how you can tell if it's really referring to the person in your tree and not just someone with the same name.

## The Sanity Check
- Does the record even make sense for it to be that person?
- How "outside the norm" is this event? (Marrying at age 12; military service at 14; giving birth at 50, etc.)
- When it is outside the norm, what other records might exist to explain or refute it?

## What Are Your Assumptions?
- Are you reading the record accurately?
- Terms
- Are the facts driving your theory?

## People Are More Than Names
Think of all the ways you can describe a person, such as:

- Age
- Birthplace
- Relatives
- Friends
- Occupation
- Economic status
- Religion
- Military service

All of those descriptions can help you sort out records and the people they refer to. It's building your ancestor's *identity*.

## Looking Around at Others

"You'll be known by the company you keep."

People don't live in vacuums. Who are the neighbors in the census? Who are the sponsors at the baptisms? Who is buried in the same plot at the cemetery?

These other people are another way to "identify" the person in the record.

## You Have to Evaluate the Source

"What does the record say and who is saying it?" We hear that advice a lot, and it's good advice. But you need to take it one step further.

What about the source itself? How close is that source to what was originally recorded? Are you looking at the record or just an index? Is it an abstract or a transcription?

Your question should always be "Can I get back to something better?" If you can, do it.

Look at the *entire* record. What clues does it contain that will help you ***identify*** the person?