

Evidence Explained: Citing History Sources from Artifacts to Cyberspace

9.28 Mortgages & Sales of Servants

Slaves were typically classed as *chattel*. They could be mortgaged and sold. While sales of chattel did not have to be publicly recorded in most jurisdictions, the recording of chattel *mortgages* was almost always required. When citing a mortgage, if the title of the register does not include the word *mortgage* (or *deed of trust* as it might be variously called), you should add that detail to your First Reference Note.

Source List Entry

Florida. Escambia County. Deed Records, 1821–1865. Comptroller’s Office, Pensacola.

First Reference Note

1. Escambia County, Florida, Deed Book G: 32, Christin to de Rioboo, mortgage of Joe, 1839; Comptroller’s Office, Pensacola.

Subsequent Note

11. Escambia Co., Fla., Deed Book G:32.

9.29 Slave Passes for Travel

Most slave passes were documents used temporarily and locally, allowing slaves to travel within their neighborhood without being taken up as a runaway. Permanent recording in county or city registers was not the practice. When a master did choose to record a pass for out-of-state travel, it usually represented de facto manumission to circumvent a state’s anti-manumission laws. A typical citation might be constructed like this one:

Source List Entry

Louisiana. Natchitoches Parish. Conveyance Records, 1857. Clerk of Court’s Office, Natchitoches.

First Reference Note

1. Natchitoches Parish, Louisiana, Conveyance Book 53:23, John Payne to Jane et al., free pass to slaves for interstate travel; Clerk of Court’s Office, Natchitoches.

Subsequent Note

11. Natchitoches Par., La., Conveyance Book 53: 23.

VITAL REGISTRATIONS (BIRTHS, DEATHS, ETC.)

9.30 Background

Across time, maintaining vital registrations (aka *vital records*) has been

a function of both civil and church authorities. In some cases, historic church registers of baptisms, marriages, and burials were appropriated by the state to create an archive of civil registrations. (The first *état civil* records of France, covered at 9.49, are a prominent example.) In other cases where church sacramental records were the only form of vital registrations—as in the parts of the United States that originated as French and Spanish colonies—those records have not been secularized. They remain private and are treated in chapter 7, Church Records.

One fundamental rule should be observed when citing vital records. *The name of a principal party should be cited exactly as it appears in the record or the index*, whichever you cite. Otherwise the entry may not be relocatable in the databases now used for most sets of vital registrations. Your narrative may discuss an individual by his or her “family call name,” but your corresponding citation must render that name as your source has it. Your family may spell its surname in a distinctive fashion, but if the registration or database spells it otherwise, you must cite the exact spelling used in your source. If you wish to “correct” the spelling of a record, you would do so by placing your spelling in square editorial brackets after the spelling used by the source.

When using registers from prior centuries, you should not make assumptions about surnames or apply modern conventions. If the child’s name is rendered with no surname and the record does not specifically say that the parents are married, you should not assign the father’s surname to that child. A child born outside of marriage may not have used the name of the father cited in the registration. Or that culture may have followed different naming conventions.

Other key issues to consider, when citing U.S. vital records, are these:

- Is your resource a *register* or a *certificate*?
- Was your certificate created at the time the event occurred or does it represent a modern extraction of data from an earlier record?
- Does your certificate represent a *full* extraction from an earlier record or is it a *short-form certificate* (9.40)?
- Was this record created by a local, state, or national agency?

The elements you include in the citation can vary according to the nature of the record and your own need. Fundamental rules are these:

- If the document is locatable by book and page number, as with the Kansas City record at 9.32 below, you do not need to cite the date.
- If the record set includes the year as part of the file number, you