



Sonoma County Genealogical Society Family Recognition Program Rules and Application Procedures

The Sonoma County Genealogical Society (SCGS) offers three types of certificates to descendants of people who lived in Sonoma County during different periods of time.

The purposes of this program for recognition of the direct descendants of Sonoma County Pioneers, Settlers, and Builders by the SCGS are:

- Honor our ancestor's hardships borne during the settlement and development of Sonoma County.
- Provide applicants the opportunity for an independent review of documentation of their ancestry according to commonly held standards of genealogical research.
- Share genealogical research about early residents of Sonoma County in a format that may be helpful to others doing their own research.

The following rules and procedures apply to all applications for **Sonoma County Pioneers**, **Sonoma County Settlers**, and **Sonoma County Builders**. Applicants must submit an application, the application fee, and full documentation to each group they wish to join. Please read these pages before beginning the application process.

Section A: Membership Requirements and General Information

1. Applicants need not be current members of the Sonoma County Genealogical Society.
2. Applicants must prove:
 - For **Sonoma County Pioneers** that their ancestor(s) first resided in Sonoma County by 31 December 1860.
 - For **Sonoma County Settlers** that their ancestor(s) first resided in Sonoma County between 1 January 1861 and 31 December 1900.
 - For **Sonoma County Builders** that their ancestor(s) first resided in Sonoma County at least 100 years prior to the date of application.
3. A \$25.00 application fee must accompany the application. This fee is non-refundable. Upon application approval, the applicant will be presented with a Sonoma County Pioneer, Settler or Builder certificate.
4. This application and accompanying documents become the property of the Sonoma County Genealogical Society and may be used by others doing research.
5. Applications may be signed by the applicant or by the person who compiled the application for the applicant. Unsigned applications will not be reviewed.

Section B: Application and Evidence Document Preparation Procedures

1. Print out the [application form](#). Please use dark blue or black ink when filling out applications. (You may enter information in the Word document, being careful to maintain the formatting.)
2. Submit the completed application(s) with photocopies of evidence documents. Do not send

original documents as they will not be returned.

3. All photocopies submitted must be legible or must be accompanied by a transcription certified as a *True Copy* by a third party not related to the applicant, preferably a librarian or court official. A *True Copy* certification means that a third party has viewed the original and the transcription and finds them to be identical.

4. When a photocopy is not possible, applicants may substitute a typed, hand-printed, or written transcription of documents. Transcriptions must be certified as *True Copies* as defined in #3 above.

5. Only one photocopy of any document is necessary even though that document may be used as evidence for more than one event, more than one generation, or more than one applicant. If you are submitting applications for multiple family members, SCGS only needs one photocopy of documentation for common ancestors. Multiple photocopies of the same document will be discarded due to storage limitations.

6. Submit a pedigree chart showing all lines mentioned in the application.

7. Organize evidence documents by generation, according to your pedigree chart, before beginning to number them. For example, your birth certificate should be Document #1; your marriage certificate is Document #2. Number each piece of evidence in the upper right-hand corner according to its corresponding number on the [Document List](#) page. The applicant may substitute a numbered list of evidence documents produced on a computer or typewriter instead of using the Document List page. All submitted documents must be identified in this list.

8. You may, if you wish, ask that documents showing personal vital data of living persons be destroyed by SCGS after your application has been evaluated. Please complete the form, [Request for Destruction of Documents](#).

9. Fill out the application blanks using the evidence documents that will accompany the application.

10. In each generation, the vital information for the male always should be written first and the information for the female second, no matter which ancestral line(s) you are following in the application.

11. Documentation must be provided for each date, place or name written on the application.

12. Dates should be written in day, month and year format, i.e. *12 May 2006*. Dates may be estimated using censuses or tombstones. If estimating a date (*circa*), write it like this: *c 1810*. Dates calculated (e.g. from age at death on tombstones) must have *cal* written after the date.

13. Write the number of the evidence document for each fact in the space provided at the end of each application line.

14. All females must be identified by their maiden names in order to be approved. Exceptions are made only in the case of African Americans and Native Americans, and only when such ethnicity and lack of surname is proved.

15. List and submit documentation for as many spouses as possible, even if they are not in the ancestral line(s) you are following in the application

16. Please follow these directions for preparing evidence documents:

- Try to make all documents letter size (8.5" by 11"). If an item is small, please re-copy it onto letter size paper so it does not become lost. Documents larger than 8.5" by 14" will be folded to fit the archival file folder.
- **Do not use** highlighter, staples, tape of any kind, white-out products, gummed labels,

sheet protectors, or binders. Paper or binder clips are acceptable as are sticky notes but will be removed before the application is filed.

- To indicate specific evidence in difficult-to-read document photocopies, use a red pen or pencil to mark an arrow in the margin of the document or use a blue, non-photocopying pencil to underline. These pencils are available at hobby and art supply stores.
- All documents submitted must have the applicant's name and address on the back. *Do not use gummed labels.* Print, type or use a computer to print this information on each document. An inked address stamp is acceptable.

17. Each legal name change for anyone listed on the application must be documented.

18. SCGS recommends that applicants keep photocopies of the application and all accompanying documents.

Forms of Proof

Sources should be as near original as possible. Primary information is based on first-hand knowledge, testimony of an observed event. All else is derivative material (transcriptions, abstracts, edited material, etc.) and is less reliable.

Each fact must be accompanied by a supporting document. Submit full pages showing identifying column headings. Never send your only file copy. We do not return your copies. On each document, place a full citation following the format given in Elizabeth Shown Mills' *Evidence Explained: Citing History Sources from Artifacts to Cyberspace*.¹ Citations must be complete enough so that another person can find it. See also *Mastering Genealogical Proof* by Thomas W. Jones.

Section C: Guidelines for Evidence

This section is not a comprehensive or exclusive listing of the types of evidence acceptable as proof of ancestry. It is meant only to provide examples of some generally accepted types of evidence and to point out the limitations of certain types of proof.

The nature and extent of the evidence submitted with all applications should be sufficient to prove that the applicant is directly descended from the ancestor(s) named in the application and shall be sufficient to differentiate between any two persons of the same name who might be residing in the same area at the same time. Documents used as evidence, either alone or in conjunction with other acceptable documents, must state the fact to be proved. Inferred evidence is not acceptable. All documents submitted must have a Document Number, preferably located in the upper right corner. This number must correspond to the fact(s) it proves on the application page(s) and to the description on the Document List.

Evidence Types

1. Vital statistics, courthouse or other government records, and church records usually are considered excellent evidence documents. Other evidence such as Bible records, diaries or letters, censuses, newspaper clippings, county histories and family records contemporary to the facts reported are considered as corroborating evidence.

¹Mills has a website that may prove helpful. See <<https://www.evidenceexplained.com/>>.

2. Oral, written, or published family traditions may be in error and cannot be accepted as evidence.
3. Printed or manuscript genealogies, genealogical records or compilations, family group sheets and charts, family reunion records and similar material are not considered evidence unless the document is contemporary with the information being proved and is supported by other evidence.
4. Old letters or family records can be accepted as evidence for only the facts that the writer could logically know as contemporary knowledge. Identification of the writer and the document date is necessary as is a statement of the document's provenance. *Provenance* is defined as *the history of the ownership of a particular item*.
5. Unsupported information from an amateur or professional genealogist is not acceptable, including such records printed in genealogical, historical, or similar publications. Scholarly journal articles that are supported by citations to acceptable documentation may be acceptable.
6. Published or manuscript material authored by the applicant or his family will not by itself be accepted as evidence, but may be included with other qualifying evidence.
7. A marriage license is not acceptable evidence for a marriage; it only proves intent. If no marriage return or record exists, write the word *Lic* after the license date on the application.
8. Pre-1880 censuses cannot be used as sole evidence of relationship since no familial relationships are stated in these records.
9. Pre-1850 censuses cannot be used as sole evidence of residence for anyone other than the head of household.
10. Land or real estate tax records are acceptable only if they specify that the individual was a resident of Sonoma County.
11. Photographs of tombstones are acceptable for evidence of birth and death dates and for relationships actually stated on the stone. Include the name and location of the cemetery in which the tombstone is found. Most published compilations of tombstone readings are acceptable. Tombstone photographs must be transcribed when they are difficult to read. Tombstones must be contemporary in style with the ancestor's death date.
12. Documents written or printed in a foreign language must be accompanied by a translation into English and the translation certified as a *True Translation* by the translator (a third party; not the applicant or his/her family member).
13. Lineage applications, accepted or unaccepted, from other patriotic or hereditary societies are not considered evidence.
14. E-mail is not considered evidence.
15. Information taken from Internet resources or electronic publications must be acceptable in its original form. The original source must be cited as well as the web page URL and date accessed. If taken from an electronic publication on CD or other media, bibliographic information for the electronic publication must accompany the original source citation.
16. Images of actual documents and records that are available on-line are acceptable, but must include the original document citation if that information is not visible on the copy submitted.
17. Transcriptions and abstractions from web sites such as *Heritage Quest*, *Ancestry*, and from many genealogical organization sites are considered acceptable evidence but must have the original source fully cited as well as the basic URL citation. Web site information will be judged on an individual basis as to the credibility of the data presented.
18. Ancestral File (and similar undocumented genealogical databases) information is not

acceptable.

19. The Social Security Death Index (and similar documented and governmental indexes) may be acceptable.

20. Examples of implied evidence which are not acceptable are

- Unnamed individuals specified in court records as *heirs* or *heirs-at-law* are not proved by such records unless it is known that applicable laws at the time included only bloodline descendants.
- A father is not proved as being in an area just because his child was born there. The birth only proves the mother and child were in that location on that date.
- Blood descent is not necessarily proved by owning the same land as an earlier owner of the same name.
- Census proximity does not prove relationship.