

# Are Those My Parents? Proving Kinship: A DAR Case Study

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Proving kinship is vital to connecting generations. Kinship proof may be needed for those who want to join a lineage society while others just want documented proof their research is correct. Whatever the reason, a record or records that answer the questions directly or indirectly will be needed to do this. This is not difficult for generations born after the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century because most citizens of the United States are easily identified by their birth certificate and social security record.

## Joining a lineage society

Joining a lineage society is a great way to honor your deceased ancestors. There are many types of lineage societies ranging from small family organizations to national groups. Most require annual dues and detailed research to be accepted. If you are not a member of a lineage society but qualify, you should consider joining. Even if you are not a member, if you find your ancestor listed in their collection, make sure to request a copy of the file. This may save you many hours of research since admittance requires kinship proof and documentation.

## Getting started

The first step to join a lineage society is to **decide which lineage society you want to join** and identify an ancestor that qualifies. Some lineage societies require a sponsor to issue an invitation before you can apply while others allow you to apply directly. Details on their application policy can be found on their website.

Once you decide on the society you want to join and identify the ancestor that qualifies, then **check to see if that society has an online database** and your ancestor's name is already listed. If your ancestor's name is not listed, then not only will you have to prove kinship to that line, but you will also need to submit other documentation showing your ancestor qualifies. The additional documentation will depend on what type of society it is. If you want to join USD 1812, then you'd have to prove your ancestor is the same person who served in that conflict as well as your kinship to him. If you are trying to join a local or state early settler society, you would have to prove kinship and also that the person resided in the specific locality by the date for that specific society.

Once you've checked to see if your ancestor is listed in the society's online database (if they have one), **contact the local registrar / historian to get the paperwork to start the process**. For some lineage societies, there are downloadable forms on their website that can be printed and sent to the registrar to start the process.

## The Application

Each lineage society has different eligibility requirements to join (female, male, legitimate heirs, settlers by a certain time / place, served in a specific war, on a specific ship, etc.). For some lineage societies you must be invited to join by someone already a member of the organization while others will allow you apply yourself if you are sponsored by someone who is already a member. Most societies have a fee to join, but this cost varies. Refer to their website for more specific details and their deadlines.

Things to remember

- Follow the directions on the application!!!
- Each generation must have kinship proof. For those that lack direct evidence, an indirect proof argument should be included for that generation.
- The review of your application will take time, so be patient.

## The Documents

In order to qualify for a lineage society, applicants need to prove lineal parentage starting with themselves back to the applicant ancestor. This is not difficult for generations born after the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century because most citizens of the United States are easily identified by their birth certificate and social security record. You must prove kinship for each generation using good quality records. Include vital records (B,M,D) for the husband and wife for your direct line, if the record exists. Birth records are considered a primary source and can be used to prove kinship only if the parents of the child are listed on the record. If you have a copy where the parents are not listed, then contact the state health or other similar department and order a copy of the “long” form.

As you move earlier in time proving kinship becomes increasingly difficult. Those born in the late 1880s to early 1900s may not have a birth record if they lived in a rural location. Some of those people may have applied for a late or delayed birth registration when time came to apply for social security benefits. Make sure to check for these delayed records if the birth record is missing. Copies of the application for social security, church birth and baptismal entries, guardianships, records found in military pension files, and bible records can also be used to prove kinship when used in conjunction with other sources such as census and probate records if the relationship to their parents is clearly stated.

Proving kinship when no birth record exists can be difficult but is not impossible. Sometimes it can be easily remedied by finding a will for the child’s deceased parent where the child is listed by name as an heir. Other times an indirect proof using many sources such as probates, census, court records, deeds etc., will have to be used to show how the family connects. Occasionally applicants will have to prove their kinship to the parent through a sibling then prove how their ancestor relates to their sibling such as using deed where siblings are listed as such. Other times, cluster research will be needed to show a potential possibility and eliminate all other choices. If the kinship is not clearly identified a short explanation or proof argument should be included in the application. Sometimes these proof arguments are published in local or national periodicals and journals.

Helpful records for proving kinship:

- Birth records
- Death records
- Marriage record (post 1900s)
- Church records
- Bible record
- Obituaries
- Probate / court records
- Land records
- Cemetery & related records
- Census records (federal & state)
- Military records
- Tax records
- County / local histories
- Maps

## Putting it All Together

Each lineage society form is slightly different. Make sure to carefully follow the directions for completing the form for that specific society. Some require digital submission of all documents while others prefer paper copies of all records. Regardless of the method of submission be organized so it is easier for the registrar to find the applicable documents for each generation.

## Popular methods to prove kinship

**Directly** – this method is where you find a record for that person that states the relationship directly such as a birth record, bible record, church record, will, deed, military record, etc.

**Indirectly** – this method uses a variety of sources correlating evidence to establishing kinship. A written proof argument is often needed when proving kinship indirectly. Methods to prove kinship indirectly include:

- Using a variety of sources for that person
- Establishing kinship through a sibling whose kinship to their parents is provable
- Using cluster research for the person and extended family, friends, and others
- Using elimination to show the family left is the only possibility

## Lineage Society kinship steps

- Establish birth details (date and place)
- Determine potential parents
- If needed, eliminate other possible parental choices
- Find records with that person and potential family
- Find other records for potential family and / or extended family
- Find records that directly list potential parents or encourage enough circumstantial evidence to build a kinship case

## Kinship tips

- Don't assume kinship. Everything must be proven!
- If you are looking at probate records, obtain copies of all the records (estate papers, journal records, court records, etc.) not just those found online, especially if they died intestate.
- Not all records are online, so you may need to dig deeper and check the local records too.
- Kinship evidence sometimes is listed in the neighbors' records such as in the sale bill (people such as family, friends, and neighbors buying items from the deceased's estate).
- Just because they are on the same record together does not prove they are related.
- Search for statements of relationships in deeds and probate records for earlier generations.
- Search cemetery interment records for extended family members who may be buried in the same cemetery or plot.
- Use military service records and widow's pension files for affidavits and statements of kinship.

## Further reading

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