

Kim Gehrman White  
DETERMINING THE PARENTAGE OF LAWRENCE FITZSIMMONS

## PART I – Research Question

*Were Michael Fitzsimmons who died in Kirkwood, Illinois on 15 March 1893,<sup>1</sup> and Mary Fox who resided in Monmouth, Illinois on 16 April 1910,<sup>2</sup> the parents of Lawrence Fitzsimmons, who married Bridget Riley in Warren County, Illinois, June of 1860,<sup>3</sup> and died in Columbus, Platte County, Nebraska on 28 January 1919?<sup>4</sup>*

## BACKGROUND

When Lawrence Fitzsimmons died in Columbus in 1919, Peter Schaecher said Lawrence had been born 13 October 1830 in Ireland to Mike Fitzsimmons and Mary Fox.<sup>5</sup> In consideration the informant was Lawrence's son-in-law, can this information be confirmed as the identity of his parents? Although Mary Fox is listed on the death certificate, conflicting evidence suggests she was his stepmother. In the accrual of evidence considerable conflicts in the age difference between Lawrence and Mary Fox suggest she was too young to be his biological mother.

## RECORD SOURCES CONSULTED

1. Nebraska State Department of Health, death certificate – Lawrence Fitzsimmons
2. The Republican Atlas-Advance, obituary – Michael Fitzsimmons
3. Illinois Deaths and Stillbirths, 1916-1947 – Anne Paine (*nee* Fitzsimmons)
4. 1860 U.S. Federal Census record – Michael Fitzsimmons, Lawrence Fitzsimmons
5. 1910 U.S. Federal Census record – Mary Fitzsimmons (*nee* Fox)

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1. "Michael Fitzsimmons," obituary, *The Republican Atlas-Advance* (Monmouth, Illinois), 24 March 1893, p. 8, col. 2, "Kirkwood" section; image copy, *NewspaperArchive.com* (<https://www.newspaperarchive.com> : accessed 18 June 2021).

2. 1910 U.S. census, Warren County, Illinois, population schedule, Monmouth Township, p. 3A (penciled), dwelling 66, family 66, Mary Fitzsimmons in Percy Brooks household, image, *Ancestry.com* (<https://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 18 June 2021); citing NARA microfilm publication T624.

3. Warren County, Illinois, Marriage License dated 8 June 1860, Fitsimons-Riley; Warren County Clerk & Recorder's office, Monmouth; true copy held as of 2016 by Kim Gehrman White, Portland, Oregon. *Note*: bottom section of license, signed and dated by catholic priest, in Henderson County, 10 June 1860, certifying marriage.

4. Nebraska State Department of Health, death certificate no. 985 (stamped), Lawrence Fitzsimmons (1919); Bureau of Vital Statistics, Lincoln; image copy of official record privately held as of 2016 by Kim Gehrman White, Portland, Oregon.

5. Nebraska, death certificate no. 985 (1919), Lawrence Fitzsimmons.

## PART II – Evidence Analysis

### Source 1: Death certificate — Lawrence Fitzsimmons<sup>6</sup>

INFORMATION ITEMS	INFORMANT	INFORMATION TYPE	SOURCE TYPE	EVIDENCE TYPE
<p><b>Lawrence Fitzsimmons</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Residence: Columbus, Platte Co., Nebraska</li> <li>◆ Marital status: Widowed</li> <li>◆ Date of birth: 13 October 1830</li> <li>◆ Place of birth: Ireland</li> <li>◆ Date of death: 28 January 1919</li> <li>◆ Age: 88 years, 3 months, 15 days</li> <li>◆ Occupation: Retired</li> </ul>	<p><b>Peter J. Schaecher</b> Columbus, Nebraska spouse of Margaret Fitzsimmons Schaecher</p>	<p><b>Secondary</b> <i>Peter's wife, Margaret Fitzsimmons Schaecher, likely provided pertinent information regarding her father. Neither Peter nor Margaret could have witnessed the birth of Lawrence, ergo the names of his parents, date and place of birth are all hearsay.</i></p>	<p><b>Original</b> <i>Information was provided at the time of the event. Contains multiple samples of handwriting and signatures.</i></p>	<p><b>Direct</b> <i>Directly answers question of parentage.</i></p>
◆ Father: Mike Fitzsimmons, Ireland				
◆ Mother: Mary Fox, Ireland				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Burial: Platte County, 31 January 1919</li> <li>◆ Cemetery: St. John's Cemetery</li> <li>◆ Filed: Jan. 1919, John Schmocker, Registrar</li> </ul>				

#### Analysis:

The death certificate is viewed as an **original** record; it is not based on a prior record and was created at the time of the event. The document is a pre-printed form filled in with handwritten information. The personal and statistical data section appears written by Peter Schaecher, the informant; his signature is consistent with the penmanship. The medical and death information penmanship is consistent with the doctor's signature. The date of death, burial and filing appear to have been written by the registrar. The place of burial appears written by the undertaker, above his signature line.

Parents names were given as Mike Fitzsimmons and Mary Fox, both of Ireland. The identification of Mike and Mary **directly** answers the research question of Lawrence's parentage. Although Peter's signature is on the document, his wife Margaret, Lawrence's daughter, likely provided the **secondary** information of a personal nature about her father. At the time of death, Lawrence was over 80 years old, and Margaret was about 50; many years for names and dates to be mis-remembered. As a rule, records created closer in time to the event tend to reflect

6. Nebraska death certificate no. 985 (1919), Lawrence Fitzsimmons.

more accurate information than those created years later. \* Note Lawrence’s year of birth listed on the certificate, 1830. Although not relevant to answering the research question, the year given is inconsistent with several records, not included in this assignment, that place his birth closer to an 1834 – 1835 timeframe.

**Source 2: Newspaper Obituary – Michael Fitzsimmons<sup>7</sup>**

INFORMATION ITEMS	INFORMANT	INFORMATION TYPE	SOURCE TYPE	EVIDENCE TYPE
<b>Michael Fitzsimmons</b> ◆ Residence: Kirkwood, Warren Co., Illinois ◆ Date of death: 15 March 1893 ◆ Date of birth: 1807 ◆ Place of birth: County Meath, Ireland ◆ Immigrated to American: 1847	<b>Undetermined</b>	<b>Undetermined</b> <i>Information was provided by an unknown informant or informants. We do not know how the informant(s) obtained their information.</i>	<b>Derivative</b> <i>The obituary may have been informed by the writer interviewing a family member.</i>	<b>Direct</b> <i>Directly answers the question of who Lawrence's father was.</i>
◆ Second marriage: 1858 to Mary Fox				
◆ Survived by: wife, two sons, six daughters			<b>Indirect</b> <i>A second marriage in 1858 to Mary Fox implies a first marriage. His first wife may have been Lawrence's mother.</i>	
◆ Sons and daughters and current residences:				
◆ Lawrence Fitzsimmons, Hedrick, Iowa				
◆ Mrs. James Paine, Monmouth, Illinois				
◆ Miss Rose Fitzsimmons, Monmouth, Illinois				
◆ Mrs. Jennie Wagoner, Galesburg, Illinois				
◆ Thomas Fitzsimmons, Galesburg, Illinois				
◆ Mrs. Mary Thompson, Alexis, Illinois				
◆ Mrs. Maggie Wilcox, Alexis, Illinois				
◆ Miss Bridget Fitzsimmons, Kirkwood, Illinois				

**Analysis:**

The newspaper obituary may be more *narrative* in nature than *derivative* given the amount of biographical data included. The quality of the information provided in the obituary appears to be in keeping with information assembled from a variety of sources relevant to the research of the Fitzsimmons family. The obituary provides *direct* evidence of Michael Fitzsimmons being the father of Lawrence Fitzsimmons. The statement

7. "Michael Fitzsimmons," p. 8, col. 2.

that Michael’s 1858 marriage to wife Mary (*nee* Fox), was his second marriage *indirectly* suggests Mary Fox is not Lawrence’s mother. Lawrence was born in the 1830s, approximately 20+ years before his father’s marriage to Mary. It would be wise to undertake research into the identity of Michael’s first wife as a candidate for Lawrence’s mother.

The obituary provided the names of seven potential siblings of Lawrence Fitzsimmons. These names should inform future research into determining who the parents were for the daughters and other son mentioned. Their names alone do not tell us whether Michael was their father or stepfather. For this exercise, the obituary acts as an article of evidence that, Mrs. James Paine, aka Anne *Fitzsimmons* Paine, and Lawrence are siblings.

**Source 3: Death Record – Anne Paine (*nee* Fitzsimmons)<sup>8</sup>**

INFORMATION ITEMS	INFORMANT	INFORMATION TYPE	SOURCE TYPE	EVIDENCE TYPE
<b>Anne Paine (<i>nee</i> Fitzsimmons)</b> ◆Date of birth: 2 February 1840 ◆Place of birth: Ireland ◆Date of death: 27 March 1922 ◆Place of death: Monmouth, Warren, Illinois ◆Burial: 30 March 1922, St. Mary's cemetery ◆Age at death: 82 ◆Occupation: Housekeeper ◆Marital status: Widow ◆Spouse name: James Paine	<b>Undetermined</b>	<b>Undetermined</b> <i>Information was provided by an unknown informant.</i>	<b>Derivative</b> <i>See analysis</i>	<b>Indirect</b> <i>Indirectly answers the question of who were Lawrence's parents. See analysis for further commentary.</i>
◆Father: Michael Fitzsimmons, Ireland				
◆Mother: Bridget Deering, Ireland				

**Analysis:**

The death record is a **derivative** source and has been created from an original certificate. Since the record is a **derivative** and I suspect the record’s information is relevant, I have applied for a copy of the original. The original should provide the name of the informant and

8. “Illinois Deaths and Stillbirths, 1916-1947,” database, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:N365-ZB7> : accessed 18 June 2021), Anne Paine, 27 Mar 1922; Public Board of Health, Archives, Springfield; FHL microfilm 1,556,745.

understanding who that was helps inform the quality of the information provided. I do not suspect the information contained is inaccurate but procuring a photocopy would reveal transcription errors. This record is found in a collection that “contains one-page pre-printed death certificate forms filled in by hand or typed.”<sup>9</sup> The names of Anne’s parents provided were Michael Fitzsimmons and Bridget Deering, both of Ireland. Anne’s date of birth was given as 2 February 1840, clearly before her father’s second marriage to Mary Fox.<sup>10</sup>

Limited to five sources for this exercise prevents presentation of an assemblage of evidence supporting my suggestion that Lawrence and Anne are full siblings. (With a leap of faith), I submit that the information *indirectly* suggests an answer to who were Lawrence’s parents. Anne’s father’s name, Michael Fitzsimmons, is likely the same person as Mike Fitzsimmons referenced on Lawrence’s death certificate; strongly suggesting a sibling connection. Anne’s mother’s name, Bridget Deering, *indirectly* suggests she may have been the first wife of Michael Fitzsimmons and in turn, mother of Lawrence.

**Source 4: 1860 Federal Census – Michael Fitzsimmons, Lawrence Fitzsimmons<sup>11</sup>**

INFORMATION ITEMS	INFORMANT	INFORMATION TYPE	SOURCE TYPE	EVIDENCE TYPE
<p><b>Lawrence Fitzsimmons</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Residence: Tompkins, Warren, Illinois</li> </ul>	<b>Undetermined</b>	<b>Undetermined</b> <i>Information is scant; not enough to identify the informant.</i>	<b>Original</b> <i>Document is a digital image of a "fair copy" of the original population schedule</i>	<b>Indirect</b> <i>Lawrence's age of 22 is 11 years junior to Mary's age of 33. This indirectly supports the suggestion that Mary, Michael's second wife, is not Lawrence's mother.</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Age 22, Inferred birthdate: 1838</li> </ul>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Birthplace: Ireland</li> <li>◆ Married in the past year</li> <li>◆ Occupation: Laborer</li> </ul>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ <b>Delia Fitzsimmons (nee Riley)</b></li> <li>◆ Age 16, Inferred birthdate: 1844</li> <li>◆ Birthplace: Ireland</li> <li>◆ Married in the past year</li> </ul>				

9. “Illinois Deaths and Stillbirths – FamilySearch Historical Records,” research wiki, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org> : accessed 18 June 2021); path, FamilySearch > Research Wiki > United States > Illinois > Vital Records > Illinois Deaths and Stillbirths, 1916-1947.

10. “Illinois Deaths and Stillbirths, 1916-1947,” *FamilySearch*, Anne Paine, 1922.

11. 1860 U.S. census, Warren County, Illinois, population schedule, Tompkins Township, p. 232 (penciled), dwelling 1610, family 1620, Lawrence Fitzsimmons household, and p. 238 (penciled), dwelling 1656, family 1666, Michael Fitzsimmons household, database with images, *Ancestry.com* (<https://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 18 June 2021); citing NARA microfilm publication M653, roll 234.

INFORMATION ITEMS	INFORMANT	INFORMATION TYPE	SOURCE TYPE	EVIDENCE TYPE
<b>Michael Fitzsimmons</b> ◆Residence: Tompkins, Warren, Illinois ◆Age 53, Inferred birthdate: 1807 ◆Occupation: Day Laborer ◆Birthplace: Ireland	<b>Undetermined</b>	<b>Undetermined</b> <i>Information is scant; not enough to identify the informant.</i>	<b>Original</b> <i>Document is a digital image of a "fair copy" of the original population schedule</i>	<b>Indirect</b> <i>Lawrence's age of 22 is 11 years junior to Mary's age of 33. This indirectly supports the suggestion that Mary, Michael's second wife, is not Lawrence's mother.</i>
<b>Mary Fitzsimmons (nee Fox)</b> ◆Age 33, Inferred birthdate: 1827				
◆Birthplace: Ireland				
<b>Rosanna Fitzsimmons</b> ◆Age 11, Inferred birthdate: 1849 ◆Birthplace: Ireland				
<b>Jane Fitzsimmons</b> ◆Age 7, Inferred birthdate: 1853 ◆Birthplace: Rhode Island				
<b>Mary Fitzsimmons</b> ◆Age 6/12, Inferred birthdate: Feb 1860 ◆Birthplace: Illinois				

**Analysis:**

Enumerators for the 1860 census were instructed to make “one fair copy” of the returns, careful to make a faithful reproduction of the original sheets. This copy was forwarded to the federal government.<sup>12</sup> This is a derivative of the original and may contain errors from the transcription of the original entries. We view this record as an **original** document. The image copy is well produced, no shadows or blurs on pages referenced. The penmanship is impeccable and easy to read.

12. Department of the Interior – Census Office, *Eighth Census, United States – 1860: Instructions to U.S. Marshals & Assistants* (Washington, D.C.: George W. Bowman, public printer, 1860), “Disposition of Returns,” page 12, item 11; U.S. Census Bureau (<https://www.census.gov/history/pdf/1860instructions.pdf> : viewed 22 June 2021) Census.gov > Library > Publications > Instructions to U.S. Marshals & Assistants.

The informant is undetermined but was likely the head of household or his wife. Both Lawrence and his father Michael had not been married long at the time of the 1860 census: Lawrence less than a year and Michael about 2 years according to his obituary. If their wives were the informants, the year of birth for a husband may be off by a few years, given its *tertiary* nature. It is not hard to imagine Lawrence wanting to appear younger than he was to a wife of 16.

Neither census record answers the research question of who Lawrence’s parents were. However, the *indirect* evidence of Lawrence and Mary’s inferred years of birth support the proposition that Mary, Michael’s second wife, was not old enough to be Lawrence’s mother. Mary is a mere 11-years senior to Lawrence given the dates provided.

**Source 5: 1910 Federal Census – Mary Fitzsimmons (nee Fox)<sup>13</sup>**

INFORMATION ITEMS	INFORMANT	INFORMATION TYPE	SOURCE TYPE	EVIDENCE TYPE
<p><b>Percy Brooks</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆Residence: Monmouth, Warren, Illinois</li> <li>◆Age 39, Inferred birthdate: 1871</li> <li>◆Birthplace: Missouri</li> <li>◆Married: 15 years, first</li> <li>◆Occupation: Bar Keep, Saloon</li> </ul>	<p><b>Undetermined</b></p>	<p><b>Undetermined</b></p> <p><i>The likely informant was Bid Brooks, wife of Percy and daughter of Mary Fitzsimmons. Likelihood does not equal confirmation.</i></p>	<p><b>Original</b></p> <p><i>Document is a digital image of the original population schedule.</i></p>	<p><b>Indirect</b></p> <p><i>This indirectly supports the suggestion that Mary, Michael's second wife is not Lawrence's mother. Mary is noted as mother of 4 children in total and not the 8 children attributed to Michael Fitzsimmons in his obituary.</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆<b>Bid Brooks (nee Fitzsimmons)</b></li> <li>◆Age 40, Inferred birthdate: 1870</li> <li>◆Birthplace: Illinois</li> <li>◆Children: 0</li> <li>◆Married: 15 years, first</li> </ul>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆<b>Mary Fitzsimmons (nee Fox)</b></li> <li>◆Age 82, Inferred birthdate: 1828</li> </ul>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆Birthplace: Ireland</li> <li>◆Mother-in-law</li> <li>◆Widow</li> </ul>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆Children: mother of 4, 3 living</li> </ul>				

13. 1910 U.S. census, Warren Co., Illinois, pop. sch., ED 144, sheet 3A, dwell. 66, fam. 66, M. Fitzsimmons in household of P. Brooks.

### ***Analysis:***

The enumerators of the 1910 federal census were instructed in the following manner regarding copies, “Try to make the entries on the schedule with such care that copying will not be required.”<sup>14</sup> The census record is viewed as a digital image of the ***original***. The penmanship of the enumerator is consistent and legible. The digital copy is a little faint, but not so much that the information is obscured. There are no attempts at changing the data through erasure or interlining on the three entries referenced in the table above.

The informant is undetermined but was likely Bid Brooks (*nee* Fitzsimmons), wife of the head of household and presumed daughter of 82-year-old Mary Fitzsimmons. It is also reasonable to imagine Mary Fitzsimmons was present when Bid met with the enumerator. Without confirmation of whom the informant was, it is presumed the information provided was a combination of ***primary*** (Bid would have known how long she and Percy had been married) and ***secondary*** information. Bid would have been told her birthyear and place of birth from her mother, and any personal information about her husband is clearly ***secondary***, as well.

The record provides ***indirect*** evidence that Mary was unlikely to be Lawrence Fitzsimmons’ mother as she was noted to be the mother of 4 children in total, not eight as ascribed to her husband Michael in his obituary.

## **PART III – SOURCE ASSESSMENT**

**Source: Death certificate — Lawrence Fitzsimmons<sup>15</sup>**

### ***Analysis of reliability:***

The death certificate is a facsimile (no erasure marks, blurring or cropping) of the original, and was provided by the Nebraska State Department of Health. The physical condition is excellent. This is a pre-printed form filled in with handwritten information and the penmanship is legible. There is no indication of whether the deceased died at home or in hospital. The date of death provided by the doctor was 28 January 1919 and the doctor signed the certificate on 30 January 1919. The undertaker signed the document on the date of burial, 31 January 1919, and the certificate was filed by the registrar, “Jan 1919;” no day provided.

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14. Department of Commerce and Labor, *Thirteenth Census of the United States: Instructions to Enumerators* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1910), 39. “Copying schedules,” p. 16; pdf file, U.S. Census Bureau (<https://www.census.gov> : accessed 22 June 2021).

15. Nebraska death certificate no. 985 (1919), Lawrence Fitzsimmons.



The informant was Peter J. Schaecher son-in-law of the deceased. Peter was certainly informed of the personal details for Lawrence by Margaret *Fitzsimmons* Schaecher. The information provided by Peter/Margaret – sex, color, marital status – certainly was primary information. Lawrence’s date and place of birth, father and his nativity, and mother and her nativity, was secondary information to Margaret and Peter. I believe Peter and Margaret were reliable informants. Margaret was Lawrence’s 6<sup>th</sup> born, of 13 children and nearly 50 years old at the time of her father’s death, and Lawrence was over 80 years old when he died; both would be forgiven for faulty memories creating unintended misinformation. An informant who does not witness a birth, marriage, death, etc., is only as reliable as the information they have read or heard.

The names given for Lawrence’s parents directly answers the research question. This original source of information is preferable to a derivative and/or an authored/narrative, nevertheless an original source does not equate to a correct source. One might even argue the presence of an internal inconsistency; Lawrence’s birth year of 1830 and Mary Fox named as his mother. However, the contradiction only exists if you know Mary’s year of birth.

#### ***Analysis of background context:***

Registration of deaths in Nebraska on a statewide level began in 1904.<sup>16</sup> The necessity of committing signature to a legal document has the effect of bringing out the truth. Peter and Margaret had no motive to provide an inaccurate birth year, nor give the name of a stepmother and not his true mother’s name.

The death certificate from 1919 does not provide an ideal example of how background information is used as part of a genealogist’s toolbox. The law in Nebraska for the registration of births may be the only reason this certificate was produced versus posting a death notice in a local newspaper. Geographic boundaries, societal norms, property inheritance laws, etc., are not germane to the simplicity of this document and the research question posed.

#### ***Analysis of information relevance and soundness of presumptions:***

In considering sources for unearthing information, we elect to “exclude all sources and information items that seem irrelevant.”<sup>17</sup> However, we do not exclude sources because they are perhaps a derivative and not an original, or a county who’s who book and not a published history with source citations; don’t fall prey to what Dr. Thomas W. Jones has referred to as “source snobbery.”<sup>18</sup> The death certificate alone answers the research question of who the parents were of Lawrence Fitzsimmons. Analyzing and questioning each information item extracted from that

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16. “Nebraska Vital Records,” research wiki, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org> : accessed 23 June 2021); path, FamilySearch > Research Wiki > United States > U.S. Vital Records > Nebraska > Vital Records.

17. Board for Certification of Genealogists, *Genealogy Standards, second edition* (Nashville, Tennessee: Ancestry.com, 2019) p. 25, #42.

18. Thomas W. Jones, “Perils of Source Snobbery,” *OnBoard* 18 (May 2012); PDF image (<https://bcgcertification.org/skillbuilding-perils-of-source-snobbery/> : accessed 24 June 2021).

record, despite it being an original, lead to the derivative, death record for Anne *Fitzsimmons* Paine being a notable resource. That record has become an important building block for launching research into Bridget Deering as a potential mother for Lawrence.

In genealogy as in life, care must be taken in making assumptions. To assume Mary Fox was Lawrence's mother simply because it was stated on his death certificate is an "unsound assumption,"<sup>19</sup> if it cannot be validated with corroborating evidence. Taking into consideration the year of birth for Lawrence on the certificate (1930) and the year of birth for Mary Fox Fitzsimmons (1828) from the 1910 census, we realize the assumption cannot be validated with that evidence item since Mary would have been about two years old at the time of Lawrence's birth. Genealogy standard #45 provides a sound framework for working with three types of assumptions - fundamental, valid, and unsound<sup>20</sup> -and not having an assumption make an . . . you know the saying.

### ***Analysis of evidence:***

Considering the research question, the death certificate directly answers the question posed. It would be negligent as a genealogist not to perform research on both persons named as parents, as well as understanding how the informant, Peter J. Schaecher, may have been related, or not, to the deceased. We want to extract from each item scrutinized evidence relevant to answering our research question, characterized as direct, indirect, or negative evidence items. The integrity of the work rests on not taking the easy, and direct answer of Lawrence's parentage from an original document and claiming it as proof but performing our thorough and reasonably exhaustive research and taking the next steps toward tests of correlation.

### ***Assignment parameters:***

1. Create a focused research question.
2. Select five sources, no more, related to the research question.
3. Evidence Analysis and Source Assessment exercises.
4. No more than ten pages, minimum font size for document body, 11-point, footnotes, 8-point.
5. Cite all sources referenced.

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19. BCG, *Genealogy Stds.*, p. 27, #45.

20. *Genealogy Stds.*, #45.