

Evaluating Published Genealogies

Online Research Workshop: Verifying Your Family Tree

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Evaluation Process

Catch 22 in Using Published Genealogies

- Why aren't the books enough?
- Access to sources – correspondence to internet
- Acceptance without analysis is truly dangerous when it comes to published genealogies
- Don't always trust a compiled 19th or early 20th century genealogy completely without question

Evaluation Terminology

Was the Author...

- More experienced
- Less experienced

Was the material in the genealogy...

- More helpful
- Less helpful

The List of the Perfect 10

1 - Who's Who

Who wrote and researched the Genealogy?

- Family-researched
- Family-written, but professionally researched
- Professionally researched and written for family
- Look for other works by author in library catalog
- Search Online: Internet Archive, Hathitrust, FamilySearch

List of Reputable Genealogists

- National Genealogy Hall of Fame
- Lists of Professional Genealogists
 - Fellows of American Genealogical Society
 - Board for Certification of Genealogists
 - Members of Association of Professional Genealogists
- Authors of articles in *Register*, *TAG*, *Mayflower Descendant*, etc.

2 – Peer Review

Reputation of Author

- Book reviews
- Articles updating and correcting earlier work
- Articles exposing fraud
- Lists of recommended recent research
- Guides to published research

3 – Format

Genealogical Formats

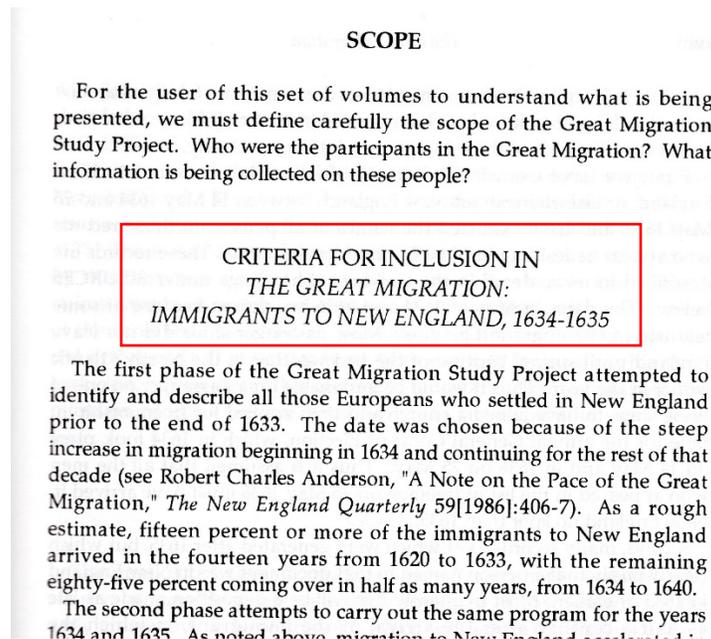
- *NEHGS Register* Style
- All-my-ancestors
- Male line descendants
- Male and female line descendants
- Groups
- None

4 – Scope

Author's Intent

- “All” my ancestors or five generations, or selected
- “All” the descendants of – or through five generations, or just the living family
- Who is in the “Group”?
- English ancestry, or beginning with American immigrant

Tip: Read the Preface for the Author's Intent



5 – Citations

Are sources cited?

- Footnotes, endnotes, embedded notes
- Clear description of the source so that the reader can find it
- Secondary sources only?
- Analysis of the source's reliability
- Other sources for information

6 – Completeness

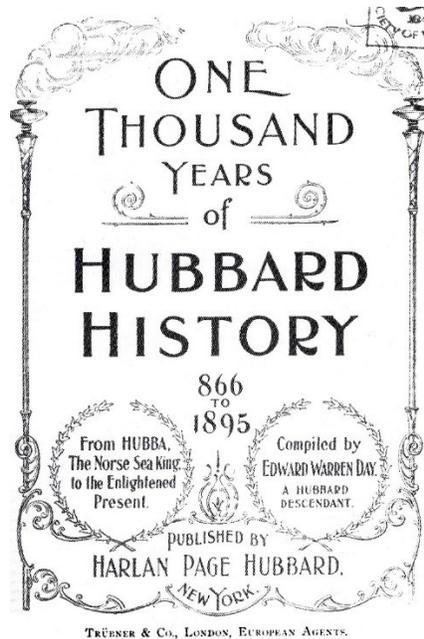
Have all logical sources been thoroughly gleaned?

- Beyond births, marriages and deaths
 - Wills, deeds, church, court, historical society collections, state archives
- Primary records
- Secondary sources that cite primary records
- Secondary sources with no citations

Effort to include everyone?

- What does “all” mean?
- Family over relatives?
- Limited by geographic area, time frame?
- What does the book specifically not include?
- Information on daughters and their children?

7 – Author Restraint



Author Restraint

- Did the author(s) intend on a multi-volume set and only complete one or two volumes?
- Where is the genealogical correspondence or notes from the author for the other volumes?
- Did the author supply an index to their 1,500 page genealogical work?

Tip: When you are picking a project set realistic goals, and also index the volume

8 – Age and Methodology

Age

- Advantages of older published genealogies
 - Author may have had access to family papers
 - Some records have been lost or destroyed
 - Access to older people who remembered a generation or two more further back
 - Correspondence with living descendants who provide the information about their immediate families
 - Does this correspondence survive at an archives like American Ancestors or elsewhere?

Oral History

Methodology

- Did they try to use the “best practices of their time”?
- Compare the style of an NEHGS Register article published the same year as the genealogy was printed for comparison for “best practices”
- Development of Genealogy Standards
 - Board for Certification of Genealogists
www.BCGcertification.org

9 – Analysis

Fundamental Rules of Genealogy

First Fundamental Rule: All statements must be based only on accurately reported, carefully documented, and exhaustively analyzed records.

Second Fundamental Rule: You must have a sound, explicit reason for saying that any two individual records refer to the same person

Courtesy of Robert Charles Anderson, *Elements of Genealogical Analysis*

Analysis of a Simple Entry

- Is it listing a full date of birth, marriage or death?
- Is a location or a region listed?
- Does this reference give you a valid source?
- Is the author still living?
- What do earlier or later genealogical books or articles state for the same facts?

10 – Access

Expanding Digital World

- Nearly every genealogy that is not under copyright (and some that are) can be accessed online
- Images being converted from microfilm
- New images directly to digital
- Scattered among various providers with various success

Evaluation in Practice – Published Genealogy

- Original, Derivative or Authored?
- When was the record created?
- Who provided the information?
- Genealogical information?
- Information – Primary, Secondary, Unknown?
- Footnotes, Endnotes, Citations of any kind?

Publications

Anderson, Robert Charles, *Elements of Genealogical Analysis: how to maximize your research using the Great Migration Study Project method* (Boston: NEHGS, 2014).

Board for Certification of Genealogists, *Genealogy Standards* (Provo, UT: Ancestry.com, 2019).

Jones, Thomas W., *Mastering Genealogical Proof* (Arlington, VA: National Genealogical Society, 2013).

Mills, Elizabeth Shown, *Evidence explained: citing history sources from artifacts to cyberspace* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 2017).

Websites

- **American Ancestors** – www.americanancestors.org
- **Ancestry** – www.ancestry.com
- **FamilySearch** - <https://www.familysearch.org/library/books/>
- **HathiTrust** – <https://www.Hathitrust.org>
- **Internet Archive** - <https://Archive.org>
- **National Genealogy Hall of Fame Members** <https://www.ngsgenealogy.org/hall-of-fame-members/>
- **Wikitree** – <https://www.Wikitree.com>
- **WorldCat** - <https://search.worldcat.org>