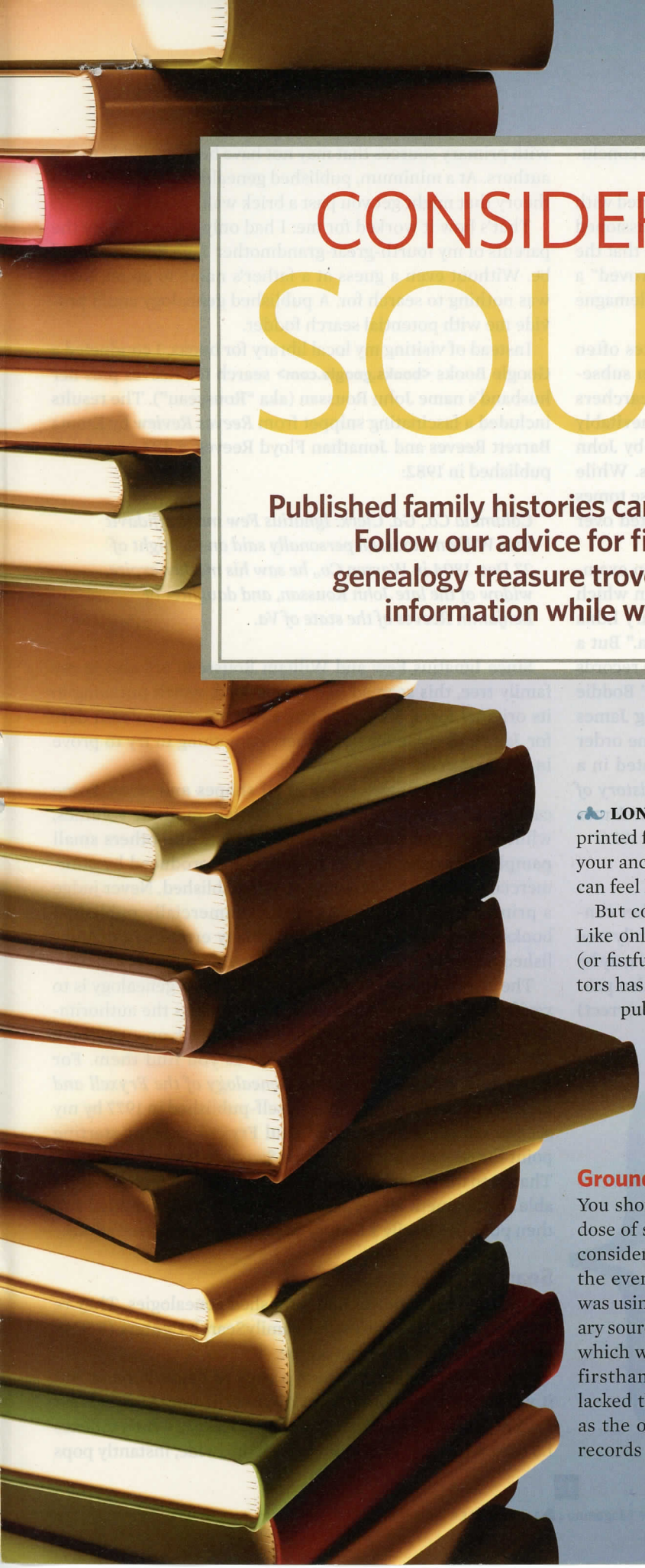


CONSIDERING THE SOURCE

Published family histories can save or sink your research. Follow our advice for finding these potential genealogy treasure troves and mining the good information while weeding out the bad.

BY DAVID A. FRYXELL

LONG BEFORE PEDIGREE files populated the internet, printed family histories gathered and preserved the stories of your ancestors. Finding such a book with your surname on it can feel like winning the genealogical lottery.

But consulting published genealogies isn't without risk. Like online family trees, they need to be taken with a grain (or fistful) of salt. Just because something about your ancestors has been printed in a book doesn't make it fact. While published genealogies can lead you down the research path to success, they could also pull you into a research quagmire full of false information. We'll help you navigate these potentially perilous guides and gather the good information while rejecting the bad.

Grounds for suspicion

You should approach a published genealogy with a healthy dose of skepticism for a number of reasons. Genealogies are considered secondary sources—they were written long after the events described actually occurred, by an author who was using other resources to gather the information. Secondary sources are considered less reliable than primary sources, which were created at the time of an event by a person with firsthand knowledge of it. Moreover, early genealogists lacked the professional standards adhered to today, as well as the official repositories and widely available digitized records even amateurs now enjoy. They had less access to

sources for confirming information, so their research conclusions may be based on suspect sources.

There's also a chance that the research was conducted with a bias already in mind. Wealthy patrons often commissioned histories of their families—with a not-so-subtle hint that the genealogist would be better compensated if he "proved" a lineage going back to a historical figure such as Charlemagne or Richard the Lionheart.

Even into the 20th century, published genealogies often contained mistakes that have been perpetuated in subsequent books and now, in online family trees. Researchers with colonial and southern ancestors, for example, inevitably come across the many thick volumes cranked out by John Bennett Boddie from the 1930s through the 1960s. While containing many pages of valuable information, these tomes are also notorious for errors that have been repeated over and over as fact.

Genealogist and author George G. Morgan cites an example in *Seventeenth Century Isle of Wight Virginia*, in which Boddie lists the 13 children of Nathan Bodie and Mary Edna Eidson including "Amorilla," born 1839, and "Manda." But a comparison with the 1850 census and later marriage records reveals an "Amanda," but no "Amorilla" or "Manda." Boddie also lists the couple's sons in birth order, including James Russell and Jesse. Morgan points out this exact same order (omitting Amorilla and Manda, however) is repeated in a later book by Eytive Long Evans, *A Documented History of the Long Family*. In fact, however, records show that James Russell was born in 1830, after brother Jesse, born in 1826.

The good with the bad

So if published genealogies are so perilous, why bother consulting them at all? The truth is, as you push your family tree back before modern records, these secondary sources may be the only answers you'll ever find. Such books can also provide information you can then further support (or correct) with primary sources that may not have been available to the authors. At a minimum, published genealogies can give you a theory that might get you past a brick wall.

Early genealogists lacked the professional standards adhered to today, as well as the official repositories and widely available digitized records even amateurs now enjoy.

That's how it worked for me: I had only a blank where the parents of my fourth-great-grandmother Jane Reeves should be. Without even a guess at a father's name to go on, there was nothing to search for. A published genealogy could provide me with potential search fodder.

Instead of visiting my local library for books, I conducted a Google Books **<books.google.com>** search for Reeves plus her husband's name John Roussan (aka "Rousseau"). The results included a fascinating snippet from *Reeves Review* by Emma Barrett Reeves and Jonathan Floyd Reeves, a 483-page book published in 1982:

> *Columbia Co., Ga. Clerk: Ignatius Few made affidavit that William Roussan personally said on the night of 27 Dec. 1804 in Warren Co., he saw his mother expire, widow of the late John Roussan, and daughter of Benjamin Reeves of the state of Va.*

Since Ignatius Few and William Rousseau are also in my family tree, this seemed like a solid lead, worth pursuing in its original form. Suddenly, too, I had a possible death date for Jane and name for her father—something to try to prove in other sources.

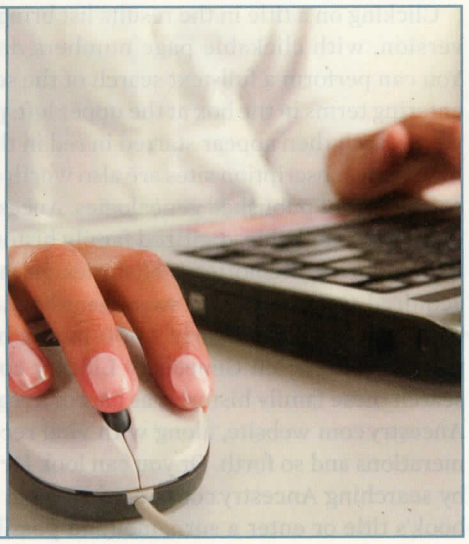
Printed genealogies come in all shapes and sizes. Some can be hundreds of pages long or contain multiple volumes, while others can be short paperbacks and still others small pamphlets. Some, such as Boddie's, are produced by commercial publishers, but many are self-published. Never judge a printed genealogy by its cover. Commercially published books can be riddled with just as many errors as self-published histories—or more.

The key to success when using a published genealogy is to verify all the claims. Don't accept the book as the authoritative source. Collect primary records that back up everything the author says and correct errors as you find them. For example, a thin booklet called *Genealogy of the Fryxell and Lusty Families (Moline, Illinois)*, self-published in 1977 by my second cousin once removed Paul Fryxell, was my starting point for researching my father's Swedish-immigrant family. Thanks to the completeness of Swedish church records, I was able to document all the names and dates he'd compiled and then push the family's history back many more generations.

Searching the stacks

It's never been easier to find published genealogies. They're available at local libraries and FamilySearch Centers (FSCs), and even in digitized form online.

My father happened to have a copy of Paul's booklet, but it would have been simple to discover if not. A search for *Fryxell genealogy* in WorldCat **<worldcat.org>**, which indexes 1.5 billion items in 10,000 libraries worldwide, instantly pops



TIP: When searching the Library of Congress catalog for published genealogies, add surnames and/or places associated with your family to your keywords to narrow your search results.

up the title and reveals that Paul's humble pamphlet is in the collections of 14 libraries, several of which have microfilmed it. Try the same search with the surnames you're researching, then type in your ZIP code and WorldCat will list the libraries from nearest to farthest from you. You may also be able to save yourself a trip by borrowing a published genealogy through your local library via interlibrary loan (ILL).

In addition to WorldCat, you can also consult a book, *Printed Sources: A Guide to Published Genealogical Records* by Kory L. Meyerink (Ancestry). This 840-page compendium has writeups on each source, so you can get a sense of whether a published genealogy is worth pursuing before you try ILL or other ways to get your hands on it. Want to know whether a surname or title you're interested in is mentioned in *Printed Sources*? It's available for limited preview in Google Books; you can search within the book using the Google Preview in ShopFamilyTree.com **<shopfamilytree.com/product/printed-sources--a-guide-to-published-genealogical-records-9780916489700>**.

Another easy way to find out if a published genealogy exists for your ancestors is to search the Library of Congress catalog **<catalog.loc.gov>**. A keyword search here for *"Reeves family"* found 152 titles. I could easily skim the long list for phrases that might indicate a book that mentions my family. "Rousseau" in a book's title is probably too much to hope for, but I could look for other familiar surnames as well as for places this family lived, such as Virginia and Georgia. *Reeves Family of Georgia* by Arthur Ray Rowland looks promising, especially with its subtitle: *Primarily in Fayette County [Georgia], with Beginnings in England and Virginia, North Carolina and South Carolina.*

You can use the same strategies to narrow your search. In addition to searching for *Smith genealogy* or *Smith family,* try adding related surnames and/or places. (This is especially important for common surnames.) Repeating my Library of Congress search using *Reeves family Virginia,* I got a better-targeted 13 titles. To really fine tune your Library of Congress search, click the Guided Search tab, which lets you use the Boolean operators *and, or* and *not,* and search for words as phrases.

A similar approach works for searches in the aforementioned Google Books, where you can not only uncover published genealogies of interest but often peek (and search) inside. Among the 7 million titles searched by Google Books, some display the full text and many more allow you to see selected pages or "snippets," such as the one I found on the Reeves-Roussan/Rousseau clan. If a book is still commercially available, either used or new, Google lets you click to sites where you can purchase it.

Another search for published genealogies that can bring a book right to you—or at least to your nearest FamilySearch Center (FSC)—is the Family History Library catalog at **<www.familysearch.org/#form=catalog>**. The recently redesigned catalog search lets you select from a drop-down menu to search by place name, last name, titles, author information, subjects, call numbers, film numbers or keywords (still in beta testing). If you already know the title of a book you're hoping you can access through your local FSC, zip right to it with a title search. Otherwise, try searching by last name, which will find books mentioning that surname even if not in the title. You can narrow your results using the bar that appears on the left; click on "Family Trees" to focus on

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- **Family History Library Catalog** <www.familysearch.org/#form=catalog>
- **Genealogy.com** <www.genealogy.com>
- **Google Books** <books.google.com>
- **Library of Congress** <catalog.loc.gov>
- ***Printed Sources: A Guide to Published Genealogical Records* by Kory L. Meyerink (Ancestry)**
- **WorldCat** <worldcat.org>

TIP: When searching in a book online, look at results in the index pages first. Instead of wading through pages of results, examining hits within the index can be a quicker way to confirm the book's contents are relevant to you.

published genealogies. Here you can also zoom in just on finds that are available via FSCs. Note that printed books don't circulate to FSC, but if the book is on microfilm, you can borrow it for a small fee.

Getting digital with it

FamilySearch also lets you access published genealogies in digital form online via its free Family History Archive **<www.lib.byu.edu/fhc>**, a partnership with Brigham Young University's library and several leading genealogy libraries. (You can also click on Books on the FamilySearch home page and follow the link.) Many published genealogies are among the nearly 18,000 digitized volumes searchable here, each of which has been indexed by surname. You can also search by title or author, as well as by full text, and an advanced search lets you hunt for phrases and exclude search terms. Unless you already know the title of a book you're after, start with the surname search to narrow your results; then you can switch to full-text searching to scour specific volumes.

My surname search for *Reeves*, for instance, brought 16 results—many of which don't have Reeves in the title, so I'd easily have overlooked them. The results list includes a description of each item and a list of the main surnames found therein. Not all surnames in every volume are included as keywords, but you can find them with a full-text search.

Clicking on a title in the results list brings up the digitized version, with clickable page numbers down the left side. You can perform a full-text search of the selected volume by entering terms in the box at the upper left; pages with hits for your search then appear starred in red in the list of pages.

Several subscription sites are also worth checking for their collections of published genealogies. Ancestry.com **<ancestry.com>** has searchable, digitized family history books, grouped under Stories, Memories & Histories. Because Ancestry.com acquired Genealogy.com **<www.genealogy.com>** in 2002, its collection includes nearly 2,000 family histories found in the Genealogy.com Genealogy Library collection. You can search these family histories as part of a regular search of the Ancestry.com website, along with vital records, census enumerations and so forth. Or you can look for relevant volumes by searching Ancestry.com's card catalog: Enter part of the book's title or enter a surname (and possibly another term, such as a location) in the keyword blank. You can filter by collection if a card catalog search retrieves other databases; just click on the Stories, Memories & Histories link. Keep in mind that surnames are often spelled different ways: A search for Reeves family histories fails to turn up *Reliques of the Rives (Ryves)*—but it's there.

Once you've found a promising volume on Ancestry.com, clicking on the title takes you to a search form page, with a clickable table of contents on the right. The latter makes skipping to the index much simpler. You can also search for a page number or by keyword, which can even be another name; I tried searching for first name *Benjamin*, last name *Rives* and keyword *Jane*, for example.

Genealogy.com arranges the Genealogy Library differently from Ancestry.com and offers different search capabilities. You'll find some under Historical Records—larger compilations focusing on many families, such as *Colonial Families of the United States of America* and some of Boddie's works. The vast majority, however, are grouped under Family Books and 1850 US Census; you can see a surname index of most of these at **<familytreemaker.genealogy.com/glc/links/c/c-people,surnames.html>**. Genealogy Library titles are searchable en masse, or you can browse to a promising-sounding title and then search just that volume: Click the title, click First Page of Book, then select Search Book from the menu at the upper left.

If your search within a book happens to pop up a page from the index, skipping to the index can be a quicker way to check the contents than wading through several screens

Never judge a printed genealogy by its cover. Commercially published books can be riddled with just as many errors as a self-published history.

of search hits. My search of *Reliques of the Rives (Ryves)* for *Benjamin* returned an unwieldy 136 hits, but high on the list was an entry I could tell was from the index. Zipping there and then browsing with "next page" and "previous page," I got to the listing for mentions of Benjamin Rives—each page number hotlinked for quick navigation—without the clutter of others named Benjamin (or with Benjamin as a surname). If you're searching for a name that's also a common word, such as Young or Few, this strategy of seeking out the index is a must, on this site and others.

Incorporating information

After you've found some ancestral clues in published genealogies—whether in a library volume or a digitized book online—what should you do with that information? Given our caveats about the accuracy of such family histories, the answer obviously isn't to slavishly copy everything you've found straight into your own family tree. If you keep a "working" version of your tree, you might want to enter a generation or two—carefully noted by source and the quality of that source, marked as "tentative." Or, another option is to add the information to your research log, again carefully citing the source. That way, you'll remember what data you're setting out to prove—that Benjamin is the father of my Jane Reeves, for example.

Then use the clues you've harvested from published genealogies to hunt down proof. Even disproving such data can sometimes lead to better answers: Seeking Benjamin Reeves/Rives, for instance, whom another history said was born in 1721, I might discover that his son (born 1758) or his nephew (born 1770) by the same name is actually Jane's father.

If a published genealogy gives you a window into more recent times—with census records to check, for example—or well-documented ancestries, you may quickly be able to jump from supposition to proof. Getting the crucial fact from my cousin Paul's Fryxell history that our family hailed from Vättlösa parish in Sweden unlocked the whole of that nation's extensive church records, available on FHL microfilm and now on Ancestry.com (after its purchase of Genline **<www.genline.com>** in 2010). So not only could I document everything in his published genealogy, but start a march back in time to the 17th century.

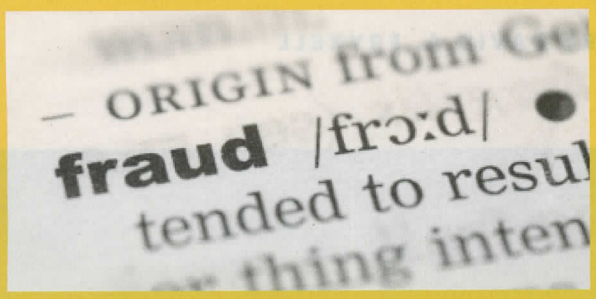
When published genealogies deal with time periods or locales lacking such neat records, using them to definitively break through your brick walls may require patience. Primary sources can be hard to come by, and in some cases may be nonexistent. The absence of such records, indeed, may be what drove you to search out published family histories in the first place.

Still, the clues from published genealogies can be essential. I now have an inch-high stack of printouts on Benjamin Reeves and his family, going several generations back.

Armed with a name, you can search not only primary sources but also online family trees and forums such as RootsWeb **<rootsweb.ancestry.com>** and GenForum **<www.genforum.com>**, which sometimes contain transcriptions of records or references to sources you can follow up on.

A published genealogy may also help narrow down *where* to look; I'd already figured Virginia was home for Jane's family, but now I'm narrowing in on Prince William County. Knowing that can unlock land records, which are often the only resource for documenting early American families.

I may never definitively prove that Benjamin Reeves was my fifth-great-grandfather. But thanks to published genealogies, I can have a lot of fun trying—a lot more fun than staring at a brick wall without a clue. ■



Not the Whole Truth

In addition to John Bennett Boddie's error-prone family histories, you'll need to watch out for other fraudulent genealogies—and books that cite them.

Keep an eye out especially for the works of Gustav Anjou (1863-1942). Anjou wrote genealogies for wealthy clients, charging nearly $9,000 per book. He forged records to give clients the results they wanted. Many of Anjou's published genealogies are available through the Family History Library. You can see a list of surnames he researched at **<www.geni.com/projects/Gustav-Anjou-Fraudulent-Genealogist>**.

Another offender, William F. Horn, authored *The Horn Papers* in 1945. The three volumes, which recount the settling of lands surrounding the Ohio River headwaters, are backed up by documents and artifacts Horn forged. He received $20,000 for his work.

Obvious clues to poor research include a lack of sources, heavy reliance on secondary sources (see page 41), and dates that don't add up (such as a child's birth when the mother was age 6). See **<familytreemagazine.com/article/six-symptoms-of-a-sick-genealogy>** for more ways to spot errors in family trees. Always use primary sources to verify the information you find in a published genealogy, and remember, if something seems too good to be true, it probably is.

Contributing editor **David A. Fryxell** hits the genealogy books in Silver City, NM.