

# When Referencing Published Family Genealogies *Use Caution!*

By Howard Maynard Faulkner

Libraries, historical societies, state archives and museums are filled with published genealogies. Many date back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century or earlier, especially from those from England, France, and other European countries. More likely they date from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century in this country and they were prepared for the more affluent of us by writers who would do most of the research and handle the publishing as well. While many are reasonably accurate all should be carefully examined before relying on the information as being fact.

In recent years with the explosion in genealogical interests worldwide and the ease of publishing with high quality software, thousands more published genealogies come into being monthly. Many are distributed only to immediate family members, but most will have at least one copy placed in the local library, a regional historical society, or perhaps the nearest Family History Center of the Mormon Church. Many are placed 'online' for all to see (and use?).

Not all published genealogies are created equal. Some follow recommended standards, others clearly do not. Many have been carefully researched, others less so. Documentation techniques vary and many are sloppy, inconsistent and of little value. While some are beautifully bound with hardcover and gold leaf they may be forgeries. Others are simply prepared in an acceptable format and may contain gems of information not available elsewhere.

So how do we know if the published genealogy we have found in say the New Hampshire State Library is the *real deal*? There can be no easy answer to this question. Some clues that I have found helpful include: Who is the author, When and Where was it published, and What is the Timeline covered? More importantly can you identify any listed individuals that *you have proven* from your own research? The more the better of course. Generally, and initially I treat these published genealogies as suspect until I have had considerable time to examine them carefully to a point that I will feel comfortable in using any newly found data.

I must say that I have been richly rewarded in using published genealogies when I take the time to carefully study and compare them with data I am comfortable with. They will frequently give *clues and hints*. I have found important documents (like wills and inventories), old maps of geography that I am interested in, photographs of those I know only by name, and much more. On one occasion I found a church seating plan dated c.1680 which identified where my ancestor's pews were located in the first meeting house in Northampton, Massachusetts.

About forgeries. Perhaps the best known group of early American family genealogy forgeries prepared in this country was done by Gustave Anjou (1863-1942). The *Genealogical Journal of the Utah Genealogical Association* (GJUGA) in 1991 identified 109 of his fraudulent works. A list of these may be found at: (<http://www.familychronicle.com/Fraudulent.html>). with additional information at [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org). You may wish to check the surnames with those in your database. The GJUGA has also identified published genealogies, prepared in part or whole by the following authors, as being so unreliable they should not be used: Charles H. Browning, C. A. Hoppin, Orra E. Monnette, Horatio Gates Somerby, Frederick A. Virkus and John S. Wurts.

In short, don't overlook this unique and possibly helpful resource. But *Keep the salt handy!*