

# Printed Legends and Missing Footnotes: Dissecting 19th and 20th Century Compiled Genealogies

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## Understanding Compiled Genealogies

The idea of creating a compiled genealogy has been around for many centuries, yet to many in the United States the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century saw a tremendous amount of these publications produced. Often the goal of a publication was to trace the descendants of a single immigrant to the United States (often New England) while also speculating on the immigrant's origins, primarily through a study of that surname in the United Kingdom.

During this time, compiled genealogies rarely included citations, or even brief references for the information they contained. In many instances these books were compiled by sending questionnaires to those sharing the immigrant's surname in an attempt to gather the necessary data to document an individual's connect to the immigrant ancestor.

A few key elements of compiled genealogies should be understood:

1. Female lines were not often traced, as information was gathered from those sharing the same surname as the book's main subject.
2. Lines which are not continued in a compiled genealogy do not indicate that an individual did not marry or have children, only that no documented descendants of that individual were found (or returned a completed questionnaire).
3. Information provided in these compiled genealogies should not be used as definitive proof of a line of descent from an immigrant.
4. Because individuals often provided the data, it is likely that there are names, dates, and locations that cannot be verified in original documents (as they were the "personal knowledge" of the individual submitting the data).
5. All information within a compiled genealogy is suspect, and requires research and verification.

## **Major Sections**

Genealogists typically begin their search of a compiled genealogy with the index and might miss crucial information if they do not examine a publication's other sections. While each book is unique, a few common sections exist in a majority of compiled genealogies:

### **Explanatory Note**

Often overlooked, this section includes important details as to the book's organization, symbols used, and how information (names, dates, and locations) are presented.

### **Introduction**

The introduction of a compiled genealogy often establishes the scope of the book and comments on the importance of the family in relation to American history. In addition, this section might also provide clues as to the methods and sources used by the author to gather data for the publication.

### **English Origins**

Sometimes an entire section is devoted to the immigrant ancestor's potential English origins. Often this section was compiled from the reports of a genealogist hired by the author (or a family association) living in the United Kingdom to study the surname. This information should be carefully examined, as they rarely provide a documentable English lineage.

### **Genealogical Data**

The main section of the book traces the descendants of a common ancestor. A numbering system is sometimes used to help track and organize descendants of a given individual, though no universal system was used for every publication. This section frequently includes short biographical sketches and is subdivided by the children of the main immigrant and subsequent generations of descendants.

### **Index**

As no index is perfect, it is essential to not rely entirely upon the book's index. Indexes might separate those who share the immigrant's surname from those who married into the family. In addition, some books contain an index of topics or localities, which can be useful to researchers.

## **Beyond the Compiled Genealogy**

Numerous printed resources exist to help verify and document the information found in compiled genealogies, in addition to conducting research in primary and secondary sources. These resources include:

### **Revisions and Additions**

A book's author or compiler might produce a short list of revisions or additions after the compiled genealogy was originally published. Generally, only a few copies of these additions and corrections were produced and might not be found in the same library as the original book. Examine resources like WorldCat <<http://www.worldcat.org>> for works that have similar titles or similar authors to any compiled genealogy you find. In addition, it never hurts to look at the same compiled genealogy in multiple libraries – as a patron (with good intentions) might have penciled in corrections.

### **Study Projects**

Large study projects might exist that can provide further information on a family. One example is *The Great Migration Study Project* which documents all immigrants to New England between 1620 and 1633 (series one) and 1634-1635 (series two). Each sketch within this project includes information related to an immigrant's English origins (if known) and references to all documented data known about the immigrant and his family. Other projects or publications, such as *Genealogical Gleanings in England* can be used to verify the English origins of an immigrant.

### **Printed Local Histories**

Depending upon its publication date, a local history might include a section of genealogical sketches. Carefully compare the information in these sketches to the data found in a compiled genealogy. Look for any differences or similarities that might provide you with a clue as to the information's source.

### **Scholarly Genealogical Journals**

Several articles including updates and corrections to data printed in compiled genealogies can be found in scholarly genealogical journals. These journals are available at the Family History Library and other locations. Key journals include:

- *The American Genealogist* (TAG): partially online at AmericanAncestors.org <<http://www.AmericanAncestors.org>>.
- *The Connecticut Nutmegger*: partially online at AmericanAncestors.org <<http://www.americanancestors.org>>.
- *The New England Historical and Genealogical Register*: online at AmericanAncestors.org <<http://www.americanancestors.org>>.
- *The New York Genealogical and Biographical Record* (the Record): available online at the New York Genealogical and Biographical Society <<http://www.newyorkfamilyhistory.org>>.

### **Family Associations**

Thousands of family associations exist throughout the United States that gather data related to the descendants of an immigrant to the colonies. Connect with these association for information relating to an updated version of the compiled genealogy – or any projects to expand (or verify) its contents.

### **DNA Studies**

Numerous DNA studies using technologies provided by FamilyTreeDNA <<http://www.familytreedna.com>> and other similar companies have been started by individuals seeking to trace descendants of a common ancestor. Cyndi's List also maintains a large list of current DNA studies <<http://www.cyndislist.com/surnames/dna/>>.

### **Finding Materials**

It can also be beneficial to search for the original papers of the compiled genealogy's author. Usually found as part of large collection, these documents can include original questionnaires, research notes, and other important details. To find these materials, search for collections related to the author's name, the title of the book, the book's publisher, or the main surname(s) at:

- *ArchiveFinder* (formerly ArchivesUSA): Subscription service containing a directory of 5,596 repositories including the *National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections* (NUCMC).
- *ArchiveGrid*: A service provided by RLG, containing thousands of collections from repositories throughout the United States.