Thanks for downloading this free sample, an article published in the September-October 2019 issue of *Digging History Magazine*, which featured several articles about the Victorian Era. To purchase the entire issue see this link (the cover and table of contents are included at the end of this sample):

https://digging-history.com/store/?model_number=sepoct-2019

I hope you will consider a subscription to *Digging History Magazine*, a bi-monthly digital publication. There are now four affordable subscription options, three of which are automatically recurring until you tell me you'd like to cancel. Details can be found here:

https://digging-history.com/digging-history-magazine-subscription/

Be sure and check out the new specially-priced one-year only subscription (non-recurring with no obligation unless you tell me you'd like to continue).

Questions? Please contact me at seh@digging-history.com.

Thanks again,

Sharon Hall
Editor, Publisher, Researcher, Writer and Graphic Designer
Digging History Magazine

DON'T BE DUPED . . .

genealogical fraud has been around a long time

by Sharon Hall

October is Family History Month and a good time to again remind family history researchers to be aware of genealogical fraud. I wrote an extensive article in the February 2018 issue of *Digging History Magazine*, but in order to share with newer subscribers I'll share highlights, as well as include a few more instances I've run across.

New England was a logical place from which both genealogical fascination and fraud emanated. After all, that's where America began! Evidence suggests our European forbears were deeply interested in what has become one of the world's most popular hobbies, as mentions of "genealogy" began appearing in newspapers of the early 1700s. A 1739 obituary printed in *The Virginia Gazette* is one example:

Dr. Herman Boerhave was born on the last day of December 1668, about one in the morning,at Voorhout a village two miles distant from Leyden. His father, James Boerhaave, was Minister of Voorhout, of whom his son in a small account of his own life, has given a very amiable character, for the simplicity and openness of his behaviour; for his exact frugality in the management of a narrow fortune; and the prudence, tenderness and diligence, with which he educated a numerous family of nine children. He was eminently skill'd in history and genealogy, and versed in the Latin, Greek and Hebrew languages.[1]

The English and French expressed great interest in the topic as first mentions of the term "genealogy" began appearing in early eighteenth century newspapers. Americans may not yet have been concerned with such things, at least while they were being unfairly taxed, as reflected in an unsigned 1767 letter to "the Printer of the Pennsylvania Chronicle". The writer had recently been in the presence of a group of well-bred ladies and gentlemen, at least they appeared so to the correspondent until one man began prattling on about ancestry ("I supposed ten thousand times, an elogium on his family and connections, the place from whence his ancestors sprung"). The correspondent wasn't impressed and had little regard for whether someone descended from a prominent lineage. It seemed inappropriate to boast about one's pedigree when most people – "few, very few, can trace genealogy higher than the third generation."[2]

Perhaps coinciding with establishment of various historical societies – most notably, the New England Historic Genealogical Society (NEHGS) in 1847, along with its venerable journal, *The New England Historical and Genealogical Register* – interest in American history and curiosity of one's forbears would accelerate. NEHGS began advertising availability of its journal in newspapers around the nation in 1847:

The New England Historical and Genealogical Register. No. 3, of this valuable work is published, containing a Memoir of Gov. Endicott, with a Portrait, and a great variety of other curious matter. It is published under the direction of the New England Genealogical

Society, quarterly, at $2, by S.G. Drake, Boston. In this number we have genealogies of the Minot, Wolcott, and Parsons families.**3**

The American public began expressing interest in the genealogy of its leaders during the early years of the nineteenth century. Did fascination with George Washington, the "Father of our country", spur the movement on?

Ancestry of George Washington. *We observe a laudatory notice in one of our exchanges of the genealogy of Washington emblazoned by a heraldist, a very pretty affair, which we recollect one to have seen, tracing up the ancestry of Gen. Washington to nobility, and thence to royalty, until we think it established very plainly that no less than three crowned heads had contributed their celestial blood to fill the veins of the first Republican President.*

We confess that until we saw this genealogical tree, it had never occurred to us to inquire, whether the "Father of his country" ever had a father himself, much less a grandfather, and least of all, whether he was of plebeian or aristocratic descent. It was enough for us to know that America had given George Washington to mankind, and in contemplating that simple and sublime character of which the world has never yet produced an equal, it could add nothing to our reverence to learn that this monarch of nature, bearing on every lineament of soul, mind and body, his seal of regal majesty, was the descendant of men who had won the bauble of a crown, and wielded an iron sceptre over unwilling minds.**4**

OK, that was a little over the top. Still, an awareness of one's potential legacy – and that of his family – took shape in the early nineteenth century, spurring on the movement which today has become the world's second most popular "hobby".

Some families strove to preserve their genealogy, keeping it as unblemished and "perfect" as possible:

Family Meeting. A meeting of the descendants of the late Holland Weeks, of Salisbury, Vt., was held on the 22d of September. Eighty of the family attended, who are all the descendants of John Alden, the first Pilgrim whose foot touched Plymouth Rock. These meetings have been held occasionally for more than a century; and one of its objects is to keep the genealogy perfect from the landing of the Pilgrims in New England to the latest posterity.**5**

Americans were proud of their heritage, and rightly so.

In 1879 Henry F. Parston signed his editorial missive as "A Britisher", puzzled over why the suggestion of erecting a statue to Major Andre, a British Army officer hanged as a spy in 1780, would be so unfavorably received by "Americans who are the riffraff and descendants of the scum of Europe".**6** Those were fighting words and "Britisher" was swiftly tongue-lashed:

"BRITISHER" BERATED

DECENT ENGLISHMEN DEPLORE HIS SPIRIT. Mr. Henry F. Parston . . . would have us believe that he is an Englishman, but he can't pass. It is not the lion's roar, but the ass bray that we hear."

ANOTHER MONUMENT SUGGESTED. I read with disgust a letter in this morning's Herald signed "A Britisher," in which he talks of riffraff, scum, &c. Now, dear sir, I would like to ask this Mr. H. F. Parston, through you, what is he doing in this country? Surely we can get along without him. I advise him to go back to aristocratic "Hold Hengland" as quick as possible, or the scum of Europe may "corrupt his good morals." I am willing to start a subscription list to raise money enough to

erect a monument in honor of the prejudiced Britisher by the name of Henry F. Parston. AMERICAN.

*POTS SHOULDN'T CALL KETTLES BLACK. If Americans are "riffraff" and "scum," as "Britisher" said through your columns yesterday, what are Englishmen? Are Britain's royal rulers of English blood? From what nation did her Prime Minister come? How about the Danish pirates from whom many Englishmen are descended, the thievish Norman conquerors . . . HISTORICUS.*7

Prickly pride in one's country and heritage aside, genealogical problems began surfacing – some much earlier than others. What entices some today (and often skews our research) is apparently the same problem early genealogists experienced – the all-too-human tendency to erroneously attempt to link one's lineage to that of someone famous (or infamous, for that matter). Genealogical fraud had been around a long time.

An early (and blatant) incidence of genealogical fraud was mentioned in regards to one of the French Revolution's leaders, Louis Antoine de Saint-Just. Saint-Just, along with other leaders, was guillotined in July 1794. In an article entitled "Character of St. Just" the revolutionary was accused of having "contrived, therefore, to derive his origin from the ancient family of Rovere St. Marc, which was extinguished long before his birth. A man dexterous at forging deeds, well known at Avignon, by the name of Pin, fabricated a genealogy of St. Just, which made him descend from that ancient family."**8** Another account implies another man had done much the same by utilizing the services of a man named Pin of Avignon, "graft[ing] himself on that illustrious house."**9**

In the nineteenth century genealogical fraud was uncovered on both sides of the pond.

Harriet de Salis

Harriet de Salis was a British authoress (publishing under the name "Mrs. de Salis") of numerous books in the late nineteenth century. She was well known for a variety of published cookbooks and it appears she fancied herself an expert on an array of other subjects such as raising dogs (*Dogs: A Manual for Amateurs*, 1893) and poultry (*New-Laid Eggs: Hints for Amateur Poultry-Rearers*, 1892). Her book, *The Housewife's Referee*, was a "treatise on culinary and household subjects".

Mrs. de Salis also had a rather short career in the field of genealogy. In the 1870s she began sharing tidbits of genealogical "research" which came to be recommended by one of the most distinguished resources for early American ancestry, The New England Historic Genealogical Society. Harriet had formerly worked with Joseph Lemuel Chester, who although born and raised in America, left the country and settled in England in the late 1850s.

Chester embarked upon a career in genealogical research after receiving a commission from the United States government to research wills recorded in England prior to 1700, thereby contributing vital research data concerning early American ancestry. Chester was the person who revealed the de Salis deception after she confessed to him she had fabricated at least two wills. By 1880 Mrs. de Salis' genealogical career was over and eventually her fraudulent claims were corrected.

Horatio Gates Somerby

Meanwhile, back in America, Horatio Gates Somerby (1805-1872) was subtly perpetrating a similar fraud. As Paul C. Reed noted in his 1999 article published in

American Genealogist, Horatio Gates Somerby was "not necessarily better at fakery than Mrs. de Salis".[10] Somerby probably thought he could get away with it because records were far less accessible than they are today.

Still, Somerby had "an enviable reputation on both continents as an antiquarian". Just months before his death in London in November 1872, Somerby had thwarted efforts by "supposed American heirs" to claim "British gold". Quite succinctly, as the accompanying headline implied, it was "A Bubble Burst".[11]

Nevertheless, any researcher coming across a reference to Somerby (also known as H.G. Somerby in newspaper accounts) or any other known or suspected fraudster , should regard the genealogical information lightly until you locate actual records to back up his nineteenth century research. One such example is a long editorial published in 1873 regarding descendants of Thomas Chase. The family had employed the services of Somerby to investigate English records.[12]

The King of Genealogical Fraud

Google "genealogical fraud" and the top results you receive will, without a doubt, include a charlatan whose life's work still affects genealogy research today. Much has been written about the man known as Gustave Anjou, although that wasn't his birth name. He was born in Sweden, the illegitimate child of Carl Gustaf Jungberg and the family housekeeper, Maria Lovisa Hagberg.

After serving a prison term for forgery in 1886, he changed his name to Gustaf Ludvig Ljungberg. Following his marriage in 1889 Anjou took his wife's maiden name and changed the spelling of his first name to Gustave.

After immigrating to America in 1890, Gustave was up to his old tricks – more or less back in the forgery business. Anjou began developing a mail-order business, targeting wealthy American families who were willing to pay $9,000 for their family history. That was a lot of money and today would probably equate to well over $200,000.

Coal baron Josiah Van Kirk ("J.V.") Thompson ended up paying Anjou over $50,000 to research several family lines he was interested in. Thompson had declared voluntary bankruptcy in 1917 and began devoting himself to genealogical research, with hopes to compile his research, publish it and make a tidy profit. In 1930, before an Orphan's Court, defending himself against contempt charges, Thompson admitted to paying the considerable sum to Anjou.

Anjou would travel – his obituary cited some sixty trips to Europe and several around the world – to "research" his clients' ancestries. He would place various noble and royal ancestors on their family trees, often using made-up European parishes and forging wills and vital records. Many of these genealogies would be published, reprinted several times and distributed to the genealogy collections of large libraries.

Not content to forge his clients' genealogies, Anjou forged his own as well. According to Robert Charles Anderson, author of an article entitled "We Wuz Robbed!", an Anjou genealogy would typically consist of four recognizable features:

- A dazzling range of connections among dozens of immigrants (mostly to New England).
- Many wild geographical leaps, outside the normal range of migration patterns.
- An overwhelming number of citations to documents that actually exist, and actually include what Anjou says they include.

- Here and there an "invented" document, without citation, which appears to support the many connections as noted in the first item.[13]

One can imagine what all the fakery could lead to – estate fraud stands out as one of the most damaging. Someone basing their claims, even if unknowingly, on a fraudulent genealogy would have themselves been committing fraud.

It wasn't uncommon either for so-called "confidence men" to pepper advertisements throughout American newspapers searching for "missing heirs", the prospects of which were "ripe for the picking" on the unsuspecting (and gullible) general public. Newspapers like the *Boston Evening Transcript* and the *New Orleans Times-Picayune* began running genealogy columns in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Because "Dr." Anjou was considered an "expert" his work was sometimes cited as a resource.

Of course, Gustave Anjou wasn't a genealogist, but rather a forger of genealogical records. Somewhere along the way he "obtained" a Ph.D. apparently as *The New York Times* reported on November 17, 1905 that "the library of Gustave Anjou, Ph.D., an extensive collection of American history and genealogy, was sold." The collection consisted of "privately printed or locally published family and local histories of America, Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England", which unknowingly at the time were likely based largely on falsified records.[14]

In 1921 an article appeared in the *Baltimore Sun*, stating Anjou was willing to pay $100 for information about the Jack/Jacques family. Was Anjou about to be exposed and perhaps he decided to establish some sort of legitimacy? Although it's unclear as to why, by 1927 Anjou had dropped his fees considerably as he spread the net wider to garner more clients – making his fees and services "within the reach of many". However, he made no guarantees as to the accuracy of the genealogies provided.

An article appeared in the December 12, 1927 issue of *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, sounding like the editors might have figured out that Anjou was mostly a fraud, mildly mocking the "gullible with social aspirations . . . trying to convince themselves that there may be something after all" to Anjou's mail-order offer. For only $250 they might receive a complete list of "forefathers running back to the Crusaders."[15]

Of course, Anjou's mail-order catalog included glowing testimonials like this one:

I am delighted at what you have accomplished in regard to our line, and am really amazed at it, as all clews back of my grandfather seemed obliterated and shrouded in oblivion. I consider you quite a genius in this particular work.[16]

Anjou conducted his scam from an office building on Staten Island. He was described as "a well-groomed man of 60 with gray hair, a waxed mustache with turned-up ends and he speaks with a foreign accent." He could not promise royal ancestry, however, the caveat being that many "noble families did not have stamina enough to become ancestors of our sturdy immigrants".[17]

Gustave Anjou died on March 2, 1942 and his obituary, published in several newspapers across the country, was a little short on details of his life (or maybe not – since after all this was what he was known for):

Gustave Anjou, 78, genealogist who made 60 trips to Europe and several around the world, tracing lineages of wealthy families at a price of $9,000 a pedigree, died Monday night.[18]

It would take years, however, to uncover the blatant fraud following Anjou's death. Some newspapers would cite his research for years to come. Meanwhile, false information continued to be propagated and other fraudulent genealogies were uncovered in the meantime. Such was the case of the Horn Papers.

Don't Be Hornswoggled

Anyone who has (allegedly) spent countless hours transcribing, writing and editing a voluminous work like *The Horn Papers* would welcome a glowing review. That wasn't going to happen for this particular author as his work was quickly and viciously attacked:

This publication is an extraordinary concoction, a brew of many ingredients varying widely in kind and in quality. It definitely requires, not a short review, but an extended critique involving hundreds of hours of research, many dollars of expense, and thousands of words of print. However, in a brief review, it may be said that it is a most remarkable compound of good and bad perspective, of relevancy and irrelevancy, of authenticity and inauthenticity, and of accuracy and inaccuracy. Its sponsors, editors, and authors are lawyers, genealogists, and local antiquarians, greatly serious but inadequately founded in the niceties of historical criticism and historiography, a shortcoming for which no blame attaches to them.[19]

Julian P. Boyd, Princeton Librarian and renowned authority on western Pennsylvania history, was not impressed by Horn's voluminous work. Boyd (and others) found a large section of the three volumes (about 350 pages) to be of dubious scholarship. Unfortunately, this reflected badly on William F. Horn, great grandson of Jacob Horn, who had written a series of essays spanning this noted section based on Jacob's diary, yet without much in the way of documentation and footnotes. Another historical reviewer, Alfred P. James, agreed.

The first part had been easy, merely a verbatim recitation of Jacob's diary entries. The problems Boyd saw were in the section aforementioned, written by W.F. Horn in essay fashion where he appeared to take considerable license with known historical facts. Today, we might refer to such writing as "historical fiction" – some basis in fact with fictional "filler".

Julian Boyd was a vocal critic, although other scholars didn't agree with his harsh analysis. Doctors Paul Gates and Julian Bretz, renowned and professional historians who specialized in frontier history, didn't see outright fabrication, but a publication "badly edited by amateurs whose chief sin was lack of scholarly training."[20]

What to do when a situation like this one presents itself, when two sides of experts disagree? Form a committee, of course! Clearly, a thorough investigation was in order spearheaded by Dr. Guy Stanton Ford, editor of *The American Historical Review*.

Historical societies in Pennsylvania, Virginia, Maryland and West Virginia were asked to appoint representatives to the committee. As far as Julian Boyd was concerned there were essential questions which required answers: Were *The Horn Papers* authentic? If proved inauthentic, which parts were true and which were fabricated? Secondly, if the committee found clear instances of fabrication, what was Horn's motivation for publishing something of such dubious scholarship and authenticity?

One of the initial challenges, as one 1947 scholarly *William and Mary Quarterly* article pointed out:

Every historian has heard of fake Washington signatures or of Lincoln letters

sold for the pecuniary advantage of the faker; but clearly this was a case of a different sort. At no time was there any hint that The Horn Papers were printed with intent to defraud anyone or to make money for anyone. It was equally clear that the Papers were not intended as a hoax or a mischievous prank.[21]

W.F. Horn of Topeka, Kansas transcribed and edited Jacob Horn's records related to western Pennsylvania, southeastern Ohio, western Maryland and northern West Virginia history. Horn began writing to editors of various newspapers throughout those regions, attempting to convince them to print articles based on these historical papers.

Horn explained and briefly highlighted dates, characters and locations related to local history. Heretofore, he hadn't published anything, admitting that much of it agreed with another noted historical account, although his information would "clear up many things". Horn was offering to share his family's history via articles submitted to regional newspapers (quote is verbatim, notwithstanding punctuation and spelling errors):

Now if the "Observer" feels that the people of present Washington County, will be interested in obtaining a fairly clear knowledge of the "first days" in the settlement of the County from these records, please let me know soon, and I will prepare the article stating only varified [sic] facts, with Charts, notes, and dates of all events which the records Mentions in references.[22]

It would have been hard for local historical societies to ignore Horn's family papers since, as it turned out, they did contain valuable evidentiary material which helped solve more than a few historical mysteries.

For instance, W.F. Horn served as historian of the Greene County Historical Society and in September 1939 was conducting research to uncover the location of a "missing" fort. He had just discovered a few artifacts on privately owned land, explaining it was no accident that he found evidence of the fort which had theretofore evaded excavation.

Horn had only to point "with pride to certain historical papers handed down to him and specifically telling the exact location of the fort." The stockade had been built in 1747-48 by the French during the French-Indian War on Mount Calm, the highest point in what became Fayette County. So confident was he that Horn predicted "his documents may slightly upset certain long-established details of Fayette county's earliest known history."[23]

By this time W.F. Horn fancied himself an expert, having relocated to Pennsylvania for a time. Several articles had been published in local newspapers in 1933-36 and generally well-received.

However, not long after the papers began to be published, opposition arose claiming Horn's information was contradictory when compared to other historical records. Some incidents reported in the papers appeared to be fabricated, but when Horn was asked to document his findings, with more hubris than may have been warranted given later challenges, he replied that since the papers came from three times great grandfather Jacob no other proof was needed.[24]

The historical societies of Pennsylvania, Maryland, Ohio, Virginia and West Virginia began to investigate the papers' findings and eventually concluded in 1946 that *The Horn Papers* were indeed largely inauthentic, having begun their analysis "with an impartial mind." It didn't take long for committee members to discover evidence in the first two volumes which had raised the hackles of Julian Boyd in the first place.[25]

For instance, the use of certain terms like "hometown", "race hatred" and "frontier spirit" cast doubt on authenticity simply because those terms wouldn't have been in usage during the eighteenth century. Also of note were references to "virulent opposition on the part of Jacob Horn and his fellow pioneers to the king, parliament, and the royal government of Virginia", something which would not have likely occurred during the 1740s and 1750s since colonists were still "dependent on British power to defend them against the French and Indians."**26**

It is curious that *The Horn Papers* were still installed in various library historical collections despite obvious flaws. George Swetnam, journalist for *The Pittsburgh Press* railed against them in 1958 and again in 1972, calling them "History's Biggest Hoax". Forty years after W.F. Horn offered his expertise in solving historical mysteries, Swetnam was still incensed over the "horrible fiasco".**27**

The problem, of course, is the propagation of sketchy history as factual. The long-term effects extended far beyond the boundaries of western Pennsylvania and surrounding environs. In 1980 an Edmond, Oklahoma resident sent an inquiry to a genealogy column, "Our Keystone Families", published in *The Daily News* of Lebanon, Pennsylvania. She had discovered frequent mentions of her ancestors in *The Horn Papers*, but had also heard they were "not accurate in all respects". If true, "how can one verify things published in them?"**28**

If there ever was a case of *caveat investigator*, this is prima facie evidence. By all means utilize historical texts which may point the way to clues about your ancestors, but also back it up (which means digging on your part) with records, especially if those are not readily cited.

Genealogical research is aided by web sites like Ancestry, Family Search and more, but you can still find references to these inaccurate and fabricated genealogies as family researchers may be a bit over-eager to find a connection to someone "famous" (or "infamous"). In our instant society, we want everything NOW and shows like Finding Your Roots and Who Do You Think You Are? often leave some with the impression that you can sit down in a matter of hours and map out your family history.

If you've relied heavily on "hints" that lean more to conjecture rather than solid historical facts and records to fill out your family tree – and one or more of your family lines is on "The Anjou List" (included as a special supplement to this issue) you might want to do a little more research to ensure you aren't perpetuating any myths and hoaxes, and as the saying goes "barking up the wrong (family) tree."

While researching this article I came across a number of heir scams in nineteenth and early twentieth century newspapers. These are actually quite fascinating both from a historical and genealogical standpoint. It's almost certain some of them have potential to affect twenty-first century research. Look for more stories in future issues.

DIGGING HISTORY

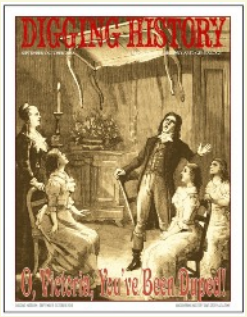
SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2019

A MAGAZINE OF HISTORY AND GENEALOGY

O, Victoria, You've Been Duped!

DIGGING HISTORY

A bi-monthly publication of Digging History Media
Web Site: www.digging-history.com
Contact Us: seh@digging-history.com



IN THIS ISSUE