Google (Genealogy) Books
How to find rare and out of print family history books online

A LITTLE-USED RESOURCE FOR GENEALOGISTS
Google Books (www.books.google.com) is a valuable resource for bibliophiles (book lovers), and this is especially true for family historians who rely mainly on old, obscure, out-of-print and inaccessible books. Google now offers researchers free access to a vast online library of searchable books which might otherwise be very difficult to find.

Many well-known libraries have partnered with Google by lending their books to the effort. Included are repositories with which genealogists are familiar: The University of Wisconsin (including the Wisconsin Historical Society Library), Cornell, Harvard, Princeton, Oxford and the New York Public Libraries. Google Books is a "work-in-progress", but a growing one. Of the 130 million books believed ever printed, Google has digitized 30 million by 2015, and it adds nearly a million pages each day.

Google Books digitally gently scans each page of a book, and then it creates an index of each word on each page. To this vast collection of indexed words and phrases, Google adds the libraries' catalog information, including subject categories, authors' names, publication data, and catalog numbers.

All of this becomes searchable for free, but requires a free "Google Account." If you have a Gmail address or Google Home Page, you already have an account. But if not, getting a Google Account is straightforward: you will be prompted to sign-up when you first try Google Books.

SEARCHING GOOGLE BOOKS
Using Google Books for a genealogical search is a two-phase task:
- First broadly *identify a list of promising books* relevant to your research – for instance: Bradford Family History.
- Then *search within individual books* for specific recognizable family branches and ancestors.

IDENTIFY PROMISING BOOKS
There are a few different ways to approach Google Books searches. The most direct way to search is from Google Books main search page at www.Books.google.com. Find a familiar Google search box. Enter a broad terms like:

bradford genealogy

or try casting a wider net:

bradford genealogy OR "family history" OR biography OR pedigree

(note: the word **OR** must be capitalized and **family history** must be in quotes for best results).

I don't recommend Google Books' *advanced search* option; whose link is near the text entry box on the basic Google Books search page. It is too easy to exclude whole books with complicated and overly restrictive searches. If I exclude *Mortimer Bradford*, to whom I am not related, I may inadvertently exclude some books in which he is named, but in which my sought ancestors also appear.

If you are the daring, you can skip the Google Books search page altogether and enter your search directly into your web browser's address box. Carefully copy the following search string, substituting your ancestral search criteria for the text in red:

http://books.google.com/books?q=genealogy+bradford+date:1700-1820

The three terms for which you may provide substitutes are:
1. **genealogy** (optionally substitute *biography, pedigree, military, cemetery, birth, marriage, death, obituary, bible, family,* etc.)
2. **bradford** (substitute one of your surnames)
3. **1700-1820** (substitute a date range relevant to your search)

The Google Books search results page will be familiar to you; it looks like any other Google Search – except the items are exclusively book titles.

VIEWING BOOKS ONLINE
Based on the copyright status of each book, Google Books provides one of four views: **Full View, Limited View, Snippet View**, or **No View**.

Full View is available for many of the oldest books whose copyright protection has lapsed. When a book is no longer copyrighted, Google provides online images of the entire book. In many cases, these public domain books can be downloaded to your PC as PDF files which can be read by Adobe Reader (also a free downloadable program: www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep2.html). Be careful, though: large book files can take-up a lot of space on your hard drive.

Limited View is typically found with newer books that are still available for retail purchase. Like books for sale on Amazon.com, a collection of representative pages are shown. But, don't expect your ancestors to appear in the few selected pages that the publisher has allowed for public viewing. Google Books' does provide links to booksellers and local libraries to allow you to buy or borrow the title, though.

Snippet View provides images of parts of pages from copyrighted materials – brief clips that include your search terms and about 50 surrounding words. More than half of my search results offer Snippets only. You will find Snippets a little frustrating, but this is Google Books' way of dealing with the "fair use" provision of copyright laws. For these copyrighted books, if not for Snippets, we'd have no view at all. Even though Snippets seldom provide enough detail to satisfy your curiosity, they often give you enough information to decide if the book is worth purchasing or requesting from a library.

No View is what it sounds like. You are provided an assurance that your search terms are found in the book, but no text from the book or page images are provided. This may be due to the terms of the lending institution or preference of the copyright owner. Whatever the reason, the Google Books search result provides only basic information about the book – like a card catalog entry. Links to retail booksellers or nearby libraries may also be provided.

From the results page, you can choose to view *All Books* matching your criteria or only those books that offer *Full View* or only those with *Limited View*. Choosing anything other than All Books risks missing out on relevant books, however.

SEARCH FOR ANCESTORS WITHIN BOOKS

When you click on a book title from within the search results list, you are taken to an image of a page (or Snippet) that contains your search terms. Located to the right is a menu of additional options, including "Search this Book". Use the "Search this Book" box to re-enter your surname or a full name. Hitting the *Go* button produces an index of this book listing all pages that contain your ancestors' name. This allows for a quick and efficient search only of relevant pages.

ABOUT THIS BOOK FEATURE

Each book offered as a search result also provides an "About this Book" link. This is where you find the source citation facts for a book that contains information about an ancestor. The "About this Book" page supplies author name, publication data, any other editions, images of the title page and selected other pages (often lithographs), short text clips of popular passages, a list of related books and, in the Full View, a button links to read or download the book.

MY ONLINE LIBRARY FEATURE

Another interesting feature of Google Books is the "Add to my Library" link. Because of your Google Account sign-in, Google Books knows who you are, and it offers to build an online list of books you have added to "your electronic library". A bibliography of selected books is then available as a personal library accessible from any Internet enabled PC, tablet or smart phone.

LOCATE A NEARBY PUBLIC LIBRARY

Finally, if the book is held in the catalogs of nearby libraries, Google Books offers a list of closest public libraries based on your zip code. Inexplicitly, this link is sometimes missing. The work-around is to enter the desired book title in the Google Books advanced search page (the link for which is near the text entry box of the Google Book basic search page) and then click the radio button to limit the search to "Library Catalogs".

STEP-BY-STEP "HOW-TO" FIND OLD BOOKS ONLINE

First open Google Books and do a basic search for an ancestor:

From Google's search results page, refine your results and identify a promising individual book to open:

Finally, from within the promising individual book, search (again), this time for specific ancestors: