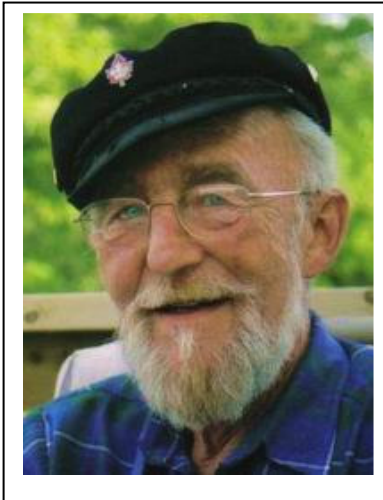


SSDI



When researching American ancestors, many people turn to the Social Security Death Index. This is a database of people who died since 1962 (when they started computerizing the records) and up to July 2005 and who received benefits from the Social Security Act.

The information in the database includes the names, social security number, date and state of issuance, date of birth, date of death and last address of record. The place of issuance does not prove the person was living there and the last address does not mean that the person died there. It usually indicates where the last benefit (a burial allowance) was paid to. The value of the SSDI is that, if you are able to isolate your ancestor in the list, then you can write for a copy of their application for Social Security.

That application will likely have specific information of place of birth and even the maiden name of the person's mother. The cost of a copy of the application is around twenty-five dollars, U.S., so you want to be fairly sure that the person is your ancestor and not just someone of the same name and born around the same time. I once received an application with the right name, age, and place of death. The only problem was that this person was a black man and the one I was looking for was white.

The Social Security Act officially began in 1937, in response to the hardships of the Depression. In the early days of the Act, not everyone received a Social Security number. Farmers, housewives, government employees, people with separate retirement plans, and the unemployed were excluded. It was only from 1988 that all children had to have a Social Security Number.

It is also possible that some people did not claim Social Security benefits and, therefore, their name would not be included.

The SSDI database is available at: <http://ssdi.rootsweb.com/> and you can get more information on the Social Security system at: <http://rwguide.rootsweb.com/lesson10.htm> . RootsWeb even provides a template for a letter requesting an application, so nothing could be easier. It can take several months for the copy to arrive, so it is a good plan to have something useful to do while waiting.

Those Pesky URLs

From time to time, especially with long URLs, our browser will return a message giving some excuse for not being able to find it. I'm sure we have all been thrilled with these cryptic messages; "This site is not available on this server", or some other equally unhelpful bit of news. My own reaction is that it is just too lazy to look for the site and would rather give us a weather report from Kapuskasing.

What I do in this case, after having told the computer exactly what I thought of it, is to type in the Home Page URL. This is the part at the beginning that usually ends in '.com, .org, .ca, etc.' and see if I can easily navigate to the page I was looking for from there.

If that is not too clear, then I try the site map or site plan and usually it is fairly easy to find what you want there. Click on your page of choice and you are off to the races. If none of these work, then the site may be down for maintenance or is overloaded with hits. In either case, tomorrow is another day.

There is also the possibility that the site is really no longer at that address. It may have a new URL or may have been closed down. At that stage it is often just as well to get on with the rest of your life and not worry about it any longer.