

BAGGING A LIVE ONE: CONNECTING WITH COUSINS YOU NEVER KNEW YOU HAD

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INTRODUCTION: Bagging a live one is often a bigger rush than finding the dead ones. Bagging a live one who knows something about family history is gold.

Who are the live ones?

Probably not first cousins – generally I find I know these. Usually they are 3rd or 4th cousins – offspring of great-grandparents siblings or great-great-grandparent’s siblings. I have also used the same strategy to track descendants of my ancestor’s FAN Club (friends, associates and neighbors). Communicating with FAN descendants helps me to understand the FANs and thereby my own ancestor.

How do you find them?

STEP 1: Start with the census

Look in 1850 – 1940. Plan of attack is to piece together a family. You see the kids, they grow up, get married, have children. Try to find a family unit in 1930 or 1940 with people in it born between 1915 and 1940.

Look at various state birth indexes – it’s easier to find a person if you have the exact birthdate – the 1930 & 1940 census will get you close, but try the following for exact birth dates:

- Ancestry.com has a number of birth indexes. You won’t find every state, but some states such as California, Texas and Ohio are quite comprehensive for the time frame.
- FamilySearch.org has some birth indexes and records with exact birthdates.
- Even if you can’t find the exact birthdate, the approximate date you get from the census will help.

STEP 1a: City directories

Similar approach with city directories. Follow through them in an orderly fashion. A man born in 1920 grows up, gets listed in a city directory in 1941 at some address and in 1962 you may find his child, now employed and therefore listed in the directory living at his same address.

STEP 2: Check to see who is dead

1. Social Security death index – this is available at many sites, including:

- Familysearch.org
- Ancestry.com
- <http://stevemorse.org/ssdi/ssdi.html>
- DOBsearch - <https://www.dobsearch.com/death-records/>

Before ~1988 you only get month and year – having exact date makes it easier to get an obituary.

2. **Other Indexes:**

- FamilySearch.org – Familysearch seems to have more death records than they have birth records. And more are being added

- Ancestry.com – some of their death indexes list the mother’s maiden name, helpful for searching for married females or families with a common surname
- Online searchable death indexes - <http://www.deathindexes.com/> links to many state resources
- Italian Genealogical Group - <http://www.italiengen.org/> A great resource for New York City Records
- Google “State Death Index” – you may hit on one you want.

STEP 3: The Dead Ones – You can’t bag ‘em. But they still might tell you something.

1. Mine the SSDI – When you find a relevant death listing on SSDI, put in same zipcode and surname. You might find the name of a spouse or child. (This technique only works if the SS record shows last benefit and/or last residence – sometimes it doesn’t)
2. Obituaries – get them using death dates you found from above work. Some of the many sources for obituaries:
 - Gen Gathering – <http://www.gengathering.com> – something like RAOGK on a small scale
 - New York Times Historical Backfile – often available for free from your public library
 - Great site for NY State newspapers: <http://www.fultonhistory.com/Fulton.html> Also try NY State Historic Newspapers - <http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org/>
 - Ancestry.com
 - Genealogybank.com – Newspaper Archives AND Recent Obituaries
 - Newspapers online – many have archives from late 1990s to current (San Francisco Chronicle, etc)
 - Some libraries will do a look up of an obituary – check out the library website for details
 - Online newspaper archives wiki - links to many newspapers around the world http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:List_of_online_newspaper_archives
 - California Digital Newspaper Collection – <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/cgi-bin/cdnc>

Pick easy ones: “Prunella Hildegartner of Elmira, New York” will be easier than “John Smith of Los Angeles.”

STEP 4: Make a List of Live Ones

The 1930 and 1940 toddlers who you haven’t found on a death index (so are likely still alive), the survivors mentioned in the obits, these are the people we are looking for.

STEP 5: Locate contact details for the live ones

Internet telephone directories and people finder sites. These sites are kind of a rabbit warren. Follow the links in one, and they will lead you to others. But not every search will lead you to all the others, so compile your own list in your genealogy toolbox. My second tip would be to keep clicking through until it’s time to give them your credit card number – most will give you some clue that you can then put into another search engine, to get you contact address or phone number.

- PEOPLEFINDER www.peoplefinder.com – This site tends to evolve. As of the date of the syllabus, if you put in a name, and city or state, it would often an address and telephone number. I can't vouch for the veracity of the information, but it's worth a shot. Site gives ages and potential relatives. See also www.peoplefinders.com
- DOBSearch – www.dobsearch.com Use the People Finder link near the top. Put in name, city (if you can/want) and state – it will come back with Name, Age (sometimes), Previous Cities and Relatives. You can pay to see more, but often that will be enough. I find the age column particularly helpful to know if I've got the right one.
- 411.com – seems to have name, address, age info. Data may/may not be current
- Whitepages.com – it seems this has become a pay site
- Switchboard.com – along with 411.com & Whitepages – now a pay site
- Pipl.com – lots of different kind of links. Even some of the sponsored ones will get you through to an address and potentially phone for free. Has links to Facebook and websites (church, school, sporting events, etc) that may lead to work email, etc. as contact info. **Can search by email address or even (sometimes) Ancestry “handle”.**
- Instantcheckmate - <http://www.instantcheckmate.com/> gives ages, cities/previous cities, associates. Long process and payment seems required to get detailed information
- 10digits - <http://10digits.us/> - address, phone, (info may be out of date)
- FamilyTreeNow - <http://www.familytreenow.com/> - Controversial site. Has a lot of genealogy records (census, military, etc), and also “Living People Records” showing “Possible relatives” giving birth month and year, as well as “Known Addresses” which has actual street addresses and time frame listed for use at that address.
- Fast People Search - <https://www.fastpeoplesearch.com> – lots of free info. Includes email.
- Peek You – <https://www.peakyou.com> – may have info but may lead to Been Verified which seems like an endless loop, after 5-10 minutes you have to pay
- FamilySearch US Public Records Database - <https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/2199956>

GOOGLE - You may find someone listed as a donor in a charity or alumni publication, maybe you'll get an e-mail address, maybe you'll get a hint as to profession. Maybe they are authors and you can contact them through a newspaper or publisher.

ANCESTRY.COM -

Ancestry has the U.S. Public Records Index and U.S. Phone and Address Directories, 1993-2002. Often you will get a phone number from here. Sometimes they are still at the same number, but it may be that the area code has changed, so just check what the current area code is for the city.

WHITEPAGES.COM, Switchboard.com, etc... – use these site the following ways

*Put in the names you got from www.peoplefinder.com in here to get a phone number.

*Take the phone number you got from Ancestry and do a reverse address look up.

*Sometimes an obit will give you an address where a person resided when they died. Check out who owns it now; maybe it's a relative.

*Click on the name on Whitepages.com to get detail view. Above the location map for a name is a button for "Neighbors." Read through this list of names – maybe one is related, particularly if it's a small town.

If the town is small enough and the surname is unusual enough, just call up someone with the same name and say who you're looking for. You might not hit on the one you want but people with the same surname in a city often know each other or at least know of each other and can direct you to the person you want.

Try a reverse address search. Maybe you will get lucky and the person in the house now will know something about a previous resident, or perhaps put you in touch with old-timers in the area who might.

Techniques for unlisted ones

Property Records – Google the following: County Recorder for the county you want. Often the deeds are available on-line for download in PDF format – you can get an address of the property. Maybe you just get a tax parcel number and you go to the tax assessor's website to get the property address. (Most places keep property records on a county basis – Connecticut (maybe others) keeps them on a town basis.

Sometimes the deeds will give you spouses and place of residence. I found cemetery plot left to 4 people – value of \$10 on the plot, but I got 4 heir's names, their spouse's names and their city of residence. Deeds will give you seller and purchaser – perhaps they are related.

"Deed of trust" is one of the terms you are looking for when you are searching the county recorder sites. Those generally have contact details.

STEP 6: Lather, Rinse and Repeat

Follow the process of identification and location of contact information for EVERY descendant you can find. Some of those phone numbers you found are no longer in service. Some of the descendants you find won't know anything, or will have lost contact with the family, or won't talk to you. But maybe their sibling or cousin will.

STEP 7: Bag 'em!

So, what do you do with this information? I'm a caller. (My children think I'm a stalker!) Most people I've contacted seem to want to talk but a few don't. You can also write, maybe sending a copy of an obituary or a photo to pique their interest. Including a self-addressed stamped envelope will sometimes help. I called and called one person and never got an answer. The phone had been disconnected because they moved, but the mail was still being forwarded and a month or so later my SASE came back with a letter and a new friend!

Tips for calling or writing:

- Know how you are related
- Tell them a little about what you are doing and how you connect with their family. But don't divulge too much info, because if the person is not who you think they are, you don't want to be giving them too much information

- Use the nuggets of information you found in your search for their contact details to make a connection. Maybe you found that they run a Notre Dame alumni golf tournament in their area, and you're a big fan of the Fighting Irish, or maybe you both volunteer at your local animal shelter. If you can find something in common with them, they'll be more likely to speak with you.
- Have paper and pencil handy. If they've got info, they might just start talking with names and dates and relationships so you need to be prepared.
- It's not just about you. Often you can fill in details for the live one you have bagged!