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Obituary Index Tips

The [St. Joseph County Public Library's Obituary Index](#) is one of the most popular databases the Library has. Last month alone, 562 people visited the Obituary Index website and made 4,228 searches. Over the past year, 41,333 searches have been made. Each month, people from all over the country (and sometimes from foreign countries!) send us dozens of requests for obituaries.

But even if you are a seasoned Obituary Index user, you might not be using the Index to its full capacity. Let me share a few tips to help you get better results when you search.

First, keep in mind that the name you are looking for, whether it is a first or last name, may not always have been spelled as it is spelled now. Also, sometimes funeral homes make mistakes in the name when placing an obit in the newspaper (and of course, sometimes we indexers make mistakes when copying the name out of the paper). Think about how the name sounds, think about ways the name could be misspelled, and then plug in some variants of the name. For instance, the surname "Niezgodski" appears in our database also as "Niezgodska" (the feminine version), "Neizgodski," "Niesgodski," "Niezgodzki/a," and even "Neid."

There are also a few shortcuts you can use to find complicated names like this that might be misspelled or spelled in various ways. If the person has a first name that might be misspelled, try searching for the last name. If the last name might be misspelled, and the person has a distinctive first name, try searching for just the first name. You can also type in the first few letters of a first and/or last name, and search that way. As an example, someone looking for a "Gertrude Woodard" and not finding her could try searching for "Gertrude" alone or for "Gertrude Woo". That would lead the searcher to an entry for a "Gertrude Woodward" that is clearly the right one. (This is a real case where the name was spelled incorrectly in our index; we have since fixed the misspelling.)

You also might have noticed that sometimes the Obituary Index entries are not in the correct order. Instead of being listed as "Smith, Clarence A.", the listing might read "CLARENCE A. SMITH". If you were looking at a long list of results, you wouldn't find this name where you expected it to be, in the S section; instead, it would be in the C section. We fix these names when we find them, but many still persist. Also, many women are listed as "Mrs." For example, Harriet Smith is listed as "Smith, Mrs. Harriet"--and therefore her names shows up 10 pages later in the list than where you'd probably look. Again, we fix these when we find them, but many are still there. Sometimes women's names don't appear in their own obituaries at all; they might be in the index under their husband's names, such as "Smith, Mrs. George" or "Smith, George, Mrs." So remember to try looking for a spouse's name as well.

One way to overcome these problems is to use the Advanced Search button. This option lets you search for a name or a fragment of a name, combined with other information. For example, you can search for the name "Smith" and the decade 1960s. This way you will get a much smaller pool of results to look through. It's not a good idea to put in too much information, though. If you put in a full address such as "1500 McKinley Avenue", you might not find what you're looking for--simply due to the fact that the address may be given in the index as "1500 McKinley" or may not be included at all. For the same reason, it's best not to include middle initials or names in your search.

Another nice feature of Advanced Search is that you can search in the Notes field. That field can hold such information as a spouse's name or, for a child, parents' names. So the Notes field gives you a way to search for someone whose name you do not know but who is



Obituary Index Tips (continued)

related to someone whom you do know.

As you can see, the Obituary Index is a wonderful resource but does have a few quirks. If you spot mistakes in the Obituary Index such as misspellings, erroneous birth or death dates, incorrect spouse's names, and so on, please let us know. To prevent ill-willed people from adding errors to the database, we do ask for evidence of the correct fact. A copy of a newspaper article with the correct information, the name portion of a bill that is addressed correctly, a copy of an official document--anything reliable will do. If we work together we can make the Obituary Index even better than it already is!

Upcoming Local Events

Come visit Main Library on **Tuesday, November 13**, and prepare to spend the whole day:

- We're offering a new "**All About Ancestry.com**" program! I'll be giving an informative one-hour talk about Ancestry on Tuesday the 13th at 10:00 AM. My talk will include an overview of Ancestry, useful search strategies, ways to get freebies from Ancestry, and a surprise ending. I'll also answer your questions about Ancestry questions during the final half-hour. We'll meet in the Dickinson Room on our Lower Level. There are only 18 spaces left, so be sure to call us at 574-282-4621 to preregister.
- Stick around afterward and do some research in Local & Family History.
- Stay for another program in late afternoon. The **Historic Preservation Commission** (HPC) of South Bend and St. Joseph County will have its regular monthly public program at 6:00 PM in the Humphreys Multimedia Room on our Lower Level. A speaker from the **Chicora Foundation**, a nonprofit organization, will talk about **historic preservation**. The Chicora Foundation is working on a restoration project for City Cemetery with Amy Herdman, the Assistant Director of the HPC, and the local Schuyler Colfax Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR).

Did You Know?

Here's something you may not know: the Schuyler Colfax Chapter of the DAR meets regularly in our library. Because of that, the Schuyler Colfax Chapter's registrar, Margaret Heinek, is at SJCPL on the first Tuesday of each month. Usually she is here and available, in the Molloy Room on the Lower Level or in the Local & Family History Room on the second floor, for an hour or two before the meeting starts at 2 pm. This is a great opportunity for anyone interested in joining the DAR; Margaret is an expert on the rigorous research that the DAR requires in order to apply for membership. You may contact Margaret Heinek at Marheinek@aol.com.

Thank you to DAR Regent Carolyn Strutner for providing this information about DAR activities. Does your history, genealogy, or heritage society have programs coming up? E-mail me at l.feil@sjcpl.org, and I'll try to mention it in this monthly e-newsletter.