

June 2017

This month's tip is on searching the Social Security Death Index, a valuable genealogy tool. It lists deceased people within the United States. The Social Security Administration (SSA) Death Master File (DMF) contains more than 84 million records of deaths that have been reported to SSA. When first created, the SSDI only listed people receiving Social Security benefits at the time of death. Later the database was expanded to include almost all deaths. This file includes the following information on each deceased person, as applicable: name, date of birth, date of death, state or country of residence (prior to Mar 1988), and ZIP code of last residence.

Due to identity theft concerns, the Social Security Administration stopped releasing updates to the SSDI a few years ago, and a few web sites that previously had made the SSDI available online have since deleted the records from their web sites. While not as extensively available, the SSDI is still accessible and searchable online. Death records for the past three years are not available. The Social Security Administration has stopped issuing updates to the Death Master File, but the original database, current through January 2011, remains in the public domain and is still available online from a number of web sites.

Some web sites have updated their records from 2011 through 2012. For example Family Search shows records that are current as of February 28, 2014. Also, the National Technical Information Service (NTIS) has issued a final rule establishing a program through which persons may become "certified" and therefore eligible to obtain access to Death Master File (DMF) information about an individual within three years of that individual's death.

In most cases, only the first ten letters of each individual's first name are shown in the SSDI. Also, middle initials are shown, but complete middle names are not recorded in the database. Using only ten letters almost always produces results. Not all the online databases will display all the available information about the person listed in the SSDI, and you may have to try several online services to find the best results. Information about geographic allocation of Social Security numbers can be found at <http://www.ssa.gov/employer/stateweb.htm>. Social Security Numbers used to be assigned by the location where the Number was issued, not by the person's birthplace.

The Social Security Death Index (Death Master File) can be searched at any of the following:

MyHeritage: Must sign up for a free account to view record details:

<https://www.myheritage.com/research/collection-10002/us-social-security-death-index-ssdi>

Steve Morse's One Step Genealogy: <http://www.stevemorse.org/ssdi/html>

FamilySearch: <https://familysearch.org/search/collection/1202535>

Ancestry: Displays a short version of the record, but requires a subscription to view all the details.

<http://search.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=3693>

GenealogyBank: requires a paid subscription to view record details.

<http://www.genealogybank.com/explore/ssdi/all>

The **American Ancestors** operated by the New England Historic Genealogical Society states that SSDI access is free to all who visit, but they must either register for a free guest account, or pay for subscription to view their search results.

<http://www.americanancestors.org/databases/social-security-death-index/about/>

WorldVitalRecords.com: Requires WorldVitalRecords.com account. A free 7-day trial account is available.

<http://www.worldvitalrecords.com/indexinfo.aspx?ix=ssdiall&affpid=1022>