

# 10 Ways to Find an Ancestor's Married Name

**John M. Hoenig describes several ways to establish an ancestor's married name.**

WHEN YOU ARE WORKING on establishing an ancestor's descendents, you will often find the names of unmarried female offspring. In some European countries, married women use their maiden name for official records, so tracking daughters forward in time may not be difficult. However, in North America, tracing female ancestors forward can be challenging. Here are ten possible ways to do it.

### **Marriage License Applications**

Most women probably got married sometime between the age of 18 and 22 so you might start a search of marriage license applications for the corresponding years in the last county for which you have an address. If that doesn't work, you'll have to try earlier and later years, and also try searching records for other counties. Records will be generally be found in either the county courthouse or the state's archives or both.

### **Death Books and Death Certificates**

When a person dies, someone has to supply information for the death certificate or death book. Check the certificates of your female ancestor's parents and siblings and maybe you'll find your ancestor.

### **Obituaries**

Check obituaries for your female ancestor's parents and siblings and you might find your female ancestor listed along with her city of residence. If you don't live close to where your ancestor lived, your choices are to visit a library in a large city to check its collection of newspapers, contact a library close to your relative's residence and ask them to look for you, post a request for a look-up on a bulletin board or check online indexes. The Obituary Daily Times ([www.rootsweb.com/~obituary/](http://www.rootsweb.com/~obituary/)) contains an extensive index of obituaries

for the most recent few years. An important feature is that the maiden names of married women are included in the database so a search for the maiden name will turn up the married name.

### **Cemeteries**

There are two ways to use cemetery records. First, search the tombstones for maiden names (the maiden name follows the French word *nee* which means "born"). Cemeteries are often arranged by groups - people from the same town in the old country, or from the same church in the new country, are often buried near each other and relatives are often buried together. When a married daughter dies, she is likely to be buried either near her family or near her husband's family. In the former case, you have a good clue. Second, some people pay for upkeep of graves. In this case, the cemetery office may have a record of this. If a daughter pays for her parents' graves you may be in luck.

### **Probate Papers and Property Records**

Your female ancestor is likely to show up in the wills or probate papers of her parents and possibly of her aunts and uncles and siblings. A second cousin told me she remembered meeting a relative named Batya about 40 years ago but she couldn't remember Batya's surname. I didn't think I'd have any chance of finding her but when I looked for the probate papers of another relative who died childless, I was surprised to see two nephews, a niece, and a grand niece listed as potential heirs. The grand niece was Batya and I learned her married name.

Property records are also likely to reveal the names of descendents. The parents may have sold property to their daughter and son-in-law or the daughter may

have inherited part of the estate and sold her share of the property.

### **Census Returns**

Check every census (federal and state) for your female ancestor's parents and siblings. Women often headed to a parent's or sibling's home to give birth and this temporary stay might be recorded in a census. Similarly, children of your female ancestor might stay with the grandparents for a while. In addition aged parents often lived with their children for extended periods. I have also discovered several distant cousins living with relatives, especially when they first came to America.

### **City Directories**

Sometimes city directories provided information on marriages, deaths and relocations. A 1900 city directory from Saratoga Springs, New York, revealed that a cousin moved to New York City the previous year. A 1941 directory from Glen Ridge, New Jersey, told me who a relative married and that they moved to West Orange. A 1955 directory from Glen Ridge told me the date another relative passed away. A reverse city directory can be used to determine who lived at an address. If you check the parents' address, you may find the daughter living there.

### **High School Reunions**

Many local libraries maintain collections of high school year books and a file of newspaper clippings about school reunions. Such articles list the names of people attending and will give the maiden name of married celebrants. As an added bonus, the newspaper article describing a relative's 35th high school reunion had a photo of the participants who traveled the farthest, and I obtained a picture of my relative.

### **Family Photographs**

# Research Techniques

One of my best sources of information is photographs of the family that I collect from every relative I can. Any surnames written on the back that I don't recognize are worth checking in the marriage license indexes. Sometimes, the most valuable photos are the ones I can't identify. A photo taken in a photographer's studio in a city not previously associated with the family might be a clue as to where to look for a marriage license.

## **Business Records**

Sometimes a daughter and son-in-law take over a family business. It is worth checking business registrations as well as listings and advertisements in city directories and telephone books.





