

OPERATION GRANNY FILES

The Intercensal Records Workbook

Filling the Years Between Censuses

Workbook

Mission 21: The Paper Trail of Everyday Life — City Directories, Social Security & More

Clearance Level: Biscuit-Tin Operative

operationgrannyfiles.substack.com

Year	Census	City Directory	Voter Registration	SS-5 / NUMIDENT	School Yearbook	Other

Tip: In the "Other" column, record fraternal/church membership rolls, city health board records, newspaper mentions, or employer records. Any source that places your ancestor at a specific address in a specific year earns a row.

GRANNY PRO TIP

Search city directories for at least three consecutive years.

A single year tells you where someone was. Three consecutive years tell you a story: did they stay or move? Did the occupation change? Did "wife" become "widow"? The change between years is often the most important information — and you will only see it if you look at more than one.

Part 2: City Directory Quick Reference

Where to Find City Directories

Source	Coverage	Cost	Notes
Ancestry.com — U.S. City Directories 1822–1995	Extensive, hundreds of cities	Subscription	Search by name or browse by city/year
Library of Congress (loc.gov)	Selected cities, often pre-1920	Free	Browse scanned volumes; not all indexed
Internet Archive (archive.org)	Growing collection, especially smaller cities	Free	Search "city directory [city name] [year]"
FamilySearch.org	Selected collections, growing	Free	Check under "United States — [State] — Directories"
Local public library	Varies widely	Free (in person)	Many libraries hold local runs not digitized elsewhere

Common City Directory Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Meaning
h	Home address (where they live)
r	Room / residence (boarding house)
wid	Widow / widower
bds	Boards (lives as a boarder)
(w)	Wife's name follows in parentheses
ret	Retired
clk	Clerk
lab	Laborer
mach	Machinist
propr	Proprietor (business owner)

What to Extract from Each Entry

For every directory year you search, note: full name as listed, home address, occupation, spouse name (if given), and any change from the prior year. A brief annotation beats a screenshot you will not remember in six months.

Part 3: SS-5 Order Sheet

What the SS-5 Contains

The SS-5 is the original Social Security application form. Filed beginning in 1936 when the program launched, it typically includes:

- Full name at time of application (including maiden name for women)
- Date and place of birth (often the most precise birth data available)
- Both parents' names, including mother's maiden name
- Current employer and employer address at time of application
- Current home address at time of application
- Applicant's own signature (their actual handwriting)

How to Order

Step 1: Confirm the person had a Social Security number. Search the Social Security Applications and Claims Index on Ancestry (free with subscription) or the NUMIDENT file on FamilySearch (free). Note the SSN if shown.

Step 2: Go to the SSA FOIA Public Access Link: www.ssa.gov/foia/request.html

Step 3: Request a "Numident printout" (\$28) or the original SS-5 application (\$30). As of 2024, individuals deceased more than three years ago are available without restriction.

Step 4: Include in your request: the person's full name, approximate date of birth, approximate date of death, and Social Security number (if known).

Step 5: Allow 2–6 weeks for response by mail.

My SS-5 Request Tracking

Ancestor	SSN (if known)	Date Requested	Fee Paid	Date Received	Notes
			\$		
			\$		
			\$		

GRANNY SAYS

The big records tell you when someone was born and when they died. The everyday records tell you what they did with the years in between. That is the part worth knowing.

Notes

Use this space for personal notes and discoveries.