

WinnebagoLand Genealogical Society Podcast

Episode 3: The Vital Records Index

Sue Goodacre: This is Sue Goodacre with the WinnebagoLand Genealogical Society. I'm going to give you a little bit of a background on our society and the obit project, as we call it, at the Oshkosh Public Library.

Back in late 1999, the WinnebagoLand Genealogical Society had volunteers that started going through the old Oshkosh Dailey Northwestern papers (starting in 1949 and working backward) looking for death notices, funeral notices, obituaries, and any mention of someone's death. We compiled an index which is in hard copy form at the Oshkosh Public Library and is available online through the Oshkosh Public Library website. Once we finished with the Oshkosh Daily Northwestern, volunteers moved onto indexing the Oshkosh Weekly Northwestern and other smaller papers that have been published in the area and the microfilm is available at the Oshkosh Public Library.

Joan Radke: Excuse me. I'm looking for obituaries. Can you help me?

SG: Yes I can. There are the index binders on the shelves here at the library that you can use to see if there is an obituary for the person you are looking for, and you can then look at the microfilm to find your obituary. Make a copy or save it to your computer or some other device.

JR: Is there a way to do this from home?

SG: Yes! You would have to go to the Oshkosh Public Library website. The website is www.oshkoshpubliclibrary.org. Once there lick on Local History, then Popular Resources, then Oshkosh Online Vital Records Index. You can enter the name you are looking for, click the time frame you want (any, before, after, or between) and what you want to search for, Obituaries, then click on Search. Remember, this is just an index. You would have to either come down to the library and use the microfilm or send a request to the library. Capitalization is not required. Names may be typed in either upper or lower case. Omit punctuation marks such as a period.

JR: OK, once I'm on the website and I do a search form Jane Smith. It doesn't find one. Now what?

SG: If you are looking for a female you might want to do a search with the last name Smith and the first name Mrs. This search will bring up all of the Mrs. Smiths. Obituaries for women could be listed under her husband's name only.

JR: That found her listed as Mrs. John Smith. It didn't find George Smith. Why?

SG: Some obituaries use initials rather than a person's name spelled out. The obituary may be listed under G. Smith rather than George Smith. This would need to be searched using the last name Smith and the letter G as the first name.

JR: What if I don't know the correct spelling?

SG: If you are uncertain of the exact spelling, type in as much of the name as you know. For example, Dickens for the last name Dickensen on Dickenson. Results are displayed alphabetically by name and include all variations of the name you entered. If you enter Smith, you will see results displayed alphabetically as Coppersmith, Goldsmith, Hammersmith, Hoffsmith, and then Smith. This allows you to search for names and spelling variations.

JR: Why are there more than one listed for Albert T. Morgan?

SG: There may be multiple listings for individuals because death or funeral notices have been indexed in addition to obituaries. In the 1930s to 1950s, the first notice is usually an obituary listing facts of the deceased life, survivors, and funeral plans. The second is a funeral notice, often telling who the pallbearers were, sometimes who sang, and out of town relatives who attended are sometimes listed. This practice was discontinued in the early 1960s. After that time, a second notice is likely to be a correction or addition to the family information. They may also be in different papers. You should always check the other ones listed.

JR: Why are there different names coming up when they aren't the surname I entered?

SG: These have a connection with the surname you entered.

JR: Why are some of the names highlighted?

SG: You can click on these names for additional information, usually the name of the spouse.

JR: so now that I have found the people I have been looking for and I'm ready to send in my request for photocopies, how much is it going to cost?

SG: Due to the high demand you should limit your requests to six at any one time and submit additional requests after you have received all of your prior requests. Requests for photocopies must be made by mail with payment enclosed. Please enclose \$5.00 for each item requested (one obituary and one funeral notice would be \$10.00). Residents of Winnefox Library System (residents of Winnebago, Fond du

Lac, Green Lake, Marquette, and Waushara counties) receive a discounted price which is 25 cents per microfilm copy (same amount paid by users in the library building) plus 50 cents postage per batch of up to six items, rather than the \$5.00 per copy. Mail requests to Oshkosh Public Library, Attn: Reference Department, Vital Records 106 Washington Ave. Oshkosh, WI 54901.

JR: What if I have people that died in Neenah, Menasha, or the Winneconne areas?

SG: For obituaries that could have appeared in Neenah New Times (May 19, 1919 – December 31, 1943), The Dailey News Times (January 3, 1944 – December 31, 1943) or the Twin Cities News Record (January 1950 – May 1984) you can contact the Neenah Public Library at 920.888.6315 or neenahpubliclibrary.org. Obituaries could have appeared in the Menasha Record (1903 – 1949) or earlier Menasha papers, contact the Menasha Public Library at 920.967.5166 x720 or at menashapubliclibrary.org. For obituaries that appeared in the Winneconne News during the years of 1871 – 1874, 1876 – 1879, 1909 – 1911 and 1929 – 1969, try the Winneconne Vital records Database.

JR: This project is brought to you by the Oshkosh Public Library.

SG: While indexing the Wisconsin Telegraph of December 9, 1881, an obit was found stating that Mrs. Smith of Oshkosh had heard of the death of her father in Neenah at the age of 103. The deceased was born in Giant Rock, Canada and served in the War of 1812. He leaves a wife, age 99. But no name was ever given for the man – a real problem for an indexer. Fortunately the Neenah Times of December 10, 1881 did give his name as Charles Castonia. It gave his birth as July 6, 1779 at San Roche, Canada and said he married Genevieve Pecor in 1871. They lived in Neenah 18 years and their daughter was Mrs. Brashaw. The moral: check more than one paper for obits.