



Anchorage Genealogical Society

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August Meeting: Wednesday, 7 August 2002, 7:00 p.m. in the conference room ground level of the Z.J. Loussac Library. The scheduled speaker is Scott Jensen of Evergreen Memorial, who will present a program on graveyards and burials. Refreshments will be provided by: Merle Carlson, Sara Burkholder, Shirley Rogers and juice Pat McClure. There was no meeting in **July**.

Irish Music Festival: The Irish Music Festival presents "Galway Days" on "G" Street in Anchorage between 4th & 5th Avenues on August 3rd 2002, from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. The city will have the street blocked off for the day. Anyone interested in participating at the AGS booth please contact Lynn Pikey at 338-1923 or email at ljpmax@hotmail.com.

Seminar: The 16th annual AGS seminar is to be held Saturday the 7th of September. The pre-registration fee (until August 31) will be \$40.00 and \$45.00 at the door. All registrations postmarked September 1 or later will be at the \$45.00 rate. Registration will be from 8 – 9 a.m. and the seminar will be from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. with a lunch break. If you desire you may order your lunch when you register. For \$6.00 there will a choice of a beef, ham or turkey sandwich and coffee, tea, water or a soft drink. Richard Hooverson will be our speaker; he will present four different topics:

- Westward Ho: American Settlement Patterns
- Waters West: The Erie Canal and Great Lakes
- Life in the Past Lane: Every day life of Yesteryear, and
- Soiled Doves: Prostitution & the Under Class.

Contact Llana Markey, our seminar chairperson, at 563-7741 or e-mail ags@ak.net to find your spot in making this a successful seminar.

The registration form for online recipients of this newsletter may be obtained at our website <http://www.rootsweb.com/~akags>.

Old Photos: If you have a scanner available and you are working with old photographs or photocopies of old documents, it sometimes help to scan the document in black and white, then load the image into your photo-manipulation software. Finally make a negative of the image (this function is sometimes found on the "effects" menu). Impossible to read bits suddenly appear quite legibly. Thanks to Jerry Grover.

The Prospector, Vol. 21 No. 3 (Clark County Nevada Gen. Soc.)

Soundex Explained: Many genealogy records are indexed by a high-tech algorithm called the Soundex Code. Well, it was "high tech" in 1918 when it was invented by Robert Russell. In a nutshell, Soundex Codes provide a means of identifying words - especially names -- by the way they sound. They were used extensively by the WPA crews working in the 1930s to organize Federal Census data from 1880 to 1920. Soundex has also been used for many state and local census records and is very popular in genealogy software and databases.

Motor vehicle bureaus in the District of Columbia, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, and Missouri employ Soundex for generating the initial characters of the identification numbers on driver's licenses. The Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics uses Soundex to encode names in its crime surveys and maintain the anonymity of individuals about whom data is collected. In the days when nearly all of the data for the Census of Population was collected by actual enumerators and individuals who walked from door to door, it was discovered that many of these people spelled surnames phonetically. Thus, one might spell Smith as "Smith" while another might spell it as "Smyth" and still another "Smythe." The census records were to be indexed by the sound of each name rather than by its spelling, and Soundex was the code system used to organize this index.

If you search many records of interest to genealogists, sooner or later you will need to use Soundex Codes. Why? Well, you can often find a person's entry by his or her Soundex Code even when the names have been misspelled. This becomes important when you realize that many census takers did not speak the language of the people being enumerated. In fact, in the first 150 years of U.S. census records, the majority of Americans were illiterate and did not know how to write their own last names. The spelling of many family names also has changed over the years, but often the Soundex Code remains the same. Spelling of names varies widely in early records, especially when language difficulties have intervened. For instance, I could not find my French-speaking great-grandparents listed in the U.S. Census. I searched and searched, but never found any entries for Joseph and Sophie Theriault. I then decided to do a Soundex search. The Soundex Code for Theriault is T643. When searching for Soundex Codes, I found several entries for T643 in Ashland, Maine, including one for the family of Joseph and Sophia Tahrihult -- improperly spelled, but with the same Soundex Code. The census taker had a Scottish name, and he was listed on another census page in the same town as a being born in Scotland. I am guessing that he did not speak French. I bet he had some difficulty when speaking with my great-grandparents, neither of who spoke English and neither of whom could read or write. No wonder Theriault became Tahrihult!

The Soundex Code is not difficult to learn although I still use a small reference card when I go to the archives to look at records. Every Soundex Code consists of a letter and three numbers, such as W-252. The letter is always the first letter of the surname, and the hyphen is optional. The numbers are assigned to the remaining letters of the surname according to the

Soundex guide shown below. If necessary, zeroes are added at the end to produce a four- character code. Additional letters are disregarded.

Here is the Soundex Coding Guide: Each number represents letters:

1 = B, F, P and V

2 = C, G, J, K, Q, S, X and Z

3 = D and T

4 = L

5 = M and N

6 = R

Disregard the letters A, E, I, O, U, H, W, and Y.

Here are some of the simpler examples: Washington is coded W252 (W, 2 for the S, 5 for the N, 2 for the G, remaining letters disregarded).

Lee is coded L000 (L, there is no Soundex Code for E so the numbers 000 are added).

Now let's move on to some of the more complex rules: Any double letters in a name are treated as one letter. For example:

Gutierrez is coded G-362 (G, 3 for the T, 6 for the first R, second R ignored, 2 for the Z).

If the surname has different letters side-by-side that have the same number in the Soundex coding guide, they are treated as one letter. Examples: Pfister is coded as P-236 (P, F ignored, 2 for the S, 3 for the T, 6 for the R).

Jackson is coded as J-250 (J, 2 for the C, K ignored, S ignored, 5 for the N, 0 added).

Tymczak is coded as T-522 (T, 5 for the M, 2 for the C, Z ignored, 2 for the K). Since the vowel "A" separates the Z and K, the K is coded.

Names with Prefixes: If a surname has a prefix, such as Van, Con, De, Di, La, or Le, the code should ignore these prefixes.

However, coders sometimes miss this rule, so they might assign the Soundex code either with or without the prefix. Because the surname might be listed under either code, a thorough search of the Soundex index should include both forms. Note, however, that Mc and Mac are not considered prefixes, according to the National Archives and Records Administration. Once again, however, not everyone knows this particular rule, so you might want to search both with and without the Mc or Mac coded.

VanDeusen might be coded two ways: With the prefix included, V-532 (V, 5 for N, 3 for D, 2 for S) or with the prefix excluded, D-250 (D, 2 for the S, 5 for the N, 0 added).

Consonant Separators: If a vowel (A, E, I, O, U) separates two consonants that have the same Soundex Code, the consonant to the right of the vowel is coded. Example: Tymczak is coded as T-522 (T, 5 for the M, 2 for the C, Z ignored (see "Side-by-Side" rule above), 2 for the K). Since the vowel "A" separates the Z and K, the K is coded.

If "H" or "W" separate two consonants that have the same Soundex Code, the consonant to the right of the vowel is not coded.

Example: Ashcraft is coded A-261 (A, 2 for the S, C ignored, 6 for the R, 1 for the F). It is not coded A-226.

American Indian and Asian Names: A phonetically spelled American Indian or Asian name was sometimes coded as if it were one continuous name. If a distinguishable surname was given, the name may have been coded in the normal manner. For example, Dances with Wolves might have been coded as Dances (D-522) or as Wolves (W-412), or the name Shinka-Wa-Sa may have been coded as Shinka (S-520) or Sa (S-000).

While the rules sound a bit complex, they do become easier with a bit of practice. For those of us who are too lazy to go through the coding exercise, the computer age has brought many new tools. Most modern genealogy programs will tell you the Soundex Code of any name that you enter. In addition, a number of online Soundex Machines are available, including those at:

<http://resources.rootsweb.com/cgi-bin/soundexconverter>,

<http://www.searchforancestors.com/soundex.html>,

<http://www.geocities.com/Heartland/Hills/3916/soundex.html>,

<http://www.pa-roots.com/soundex.html> and

<http://www.genealogy.org/soundex.shtml>. On any of these sites, you type in a last name, and then the site will display the correct Soundex Code. Yet Another Soundex Converter (YASC) at

<http://www.bradandkathy.com/genealogy/yasc.html> will even convert a long list of names to their Soundex equivalents; you do not have to enter them one at a time.

The National Archives and Records Administration publish a free brochure, entitled using the Census Soundex. To obtain a copy, send an e-mail to inquire@nara.gov and ask for General Information Leaflet 55, usually referred to as GIL 55, Make sure that you include your name, postal address, and "[GIL 55 please](#)".

Anyone hosting genealogy pages on a UNIX or Linux Web server might want to know about a bash script called soundex.ss that is available at <http://www.unixreview.com/documents/s=7458/uni1026336632258/0207e.htm>.

If you are familiar with bash, you can add a Soundex machine to your Web site. A similar program, written in C, is available at http://www.unixreview.com/documents/s=7458/uni1026336632258/0207e_C.htm.

My thanks to Mark D. Aubrey for telling me about the soundex.ss bash script.

While Soundex is a great tool and in widespread use, it certainly is not perfect. For example, it fails when the first letters are different. For instance, Knowles is coded as K542 while both Noles and Nollles are N420. Likewise, Cantor is C536 while the

similar sound of Kantor is K536.

Soundex also has a number of shortcomings when dealing with Eastern European Jewish names. Two Jewish genealogists, Randy Daitch and Gary Mokotoff, developed a more sophisticated system, more suitable for Jewish genealogy. The Daitch-Mokotoff Soundex is becoming the de facto standard for on-line lookups on Jewish-related web sites. You can read more about the Daitch-Mokotoff Soundex in an article written by Gary Mokotoff at <http://www.avotaynu.com/soundex.html>. Numerous other improved Soundex methods have been developed in recent years and are in widespread use on numerous computer databases. However, these newer "improved Soundex" methods have never seen much use in genealogy databases. Now, have fun with census records!

Eastman's Online Genealogy Newsletter, Vol. 7, No. 28 – July 15, 2002

Classes: Beginning Genealogy Classes will be starting Saturday 14 September 2002 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. at the Senior Center. These classes are a four-week series and are open to the public, inform your friends and relatives and they are free. Contact Kathy Roberts at kr Roberts@gci.net or 243-1757.

Archives Move: According to an AP article in the July 29, 2002 edition of the Omaha World Herald, the Paul and Helen Henderson Oregon Trail Collection that had been housed at the American Heritage Center at the University of Wyoming in Laramie for more than 20 years has been moved to the North Platte Valley Museum in Gering Nebraska. This collection includes 375 diaries, guides, journals and letters of western and trail travelers from 1805 to 1883. The museum started a renovation project in March, in part to house the collection. The collection will be stored in a fireproof vault with a separate viewing area adjacent to the vault. John Versluis, Museum Director, said they hope to have the museum and collection open for public viewing this fall after the construction is completed. "With the new Western History Archive we'll be one of the largest research centers on Oregon Trail History, but it goes beyond the Oregon Trail," he said.

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See you at the Meeting!