



## Is One Death Record Enough?

Mary Kircher Roddy examines the documents you might encounter while researching the death of an ancestor

*Images courtesy of author's collection*

**W**HICH CAME FIRST, THE CHICKEN OR THE EGG? I DON'T know that scientists will ever come up with the definitive answer to that question, but I do know that you can't understand the full life cycle of our fine feathered friend without examining both. So, too, it is with the records created around the death of an ancestor.

There can be several documents generated around the time of death. Sometimes one record will lead you to others. And often a genealogist must look at two or three or more of these records to understand the full picture. If you stop at just one record, you may be missing some important clues to further your genealogical research.

The most obvious record is the death certificate. For many localities, state-wide death registration was not required until the early 20th century, although even for some states, local jurisdictions required registration of death records many years before they were required at the state level. Other records surrounding the death include obituaries, funeral home records, cemetery records, headstone applications, headstone photographs, body-in-transit permits, bible records and wills. For each of these records, there was a specific reason it was created, and that often dictated what information would be included in the document. But a genealogist also must consider who provided the information and what they knew.

Take, for example, the death of Edward Roddy. My first bit of

information about him came from a photocopied clipping of his obituary. The newspaper is dated Sunday, Feb. 26, 1950, but the newspaper is not identified, though it is likely from the Springfield Daily News, Springfield, Ohio. Since I had the date of death, I requested a death certificate from the State of Ohio. (Note, that Ohio Death Certificates from 1908-1953 are now available for free at [familysearch.org](http://familysearch.org)). The obituary and death certificate both mentioned the Sprague funeral home, so I also contacted them for funeral records for Edward and Josephine, the wife mentioned in his obituary. The funeral home sent me Josephine's records, but the record they sent for Edward was for his nephew, Edward T. Roddy who died in December 1950. I had to make a second request to get Edward P.'s funeral home record.

To begin with, the most startling discrepancy between the death certificate and the obituary centers on Box 7 of the death certificate regarding marital status. The death certificate specifies him as "widowed". Had I only that to rely on, I would have been looking for a death record for Edward's wife prior to 1950. I

MILLS Evans of Metuchen, N. J.

**Edward P. Roddy,  
70, Succumbs In  
Dayton Hospital**

**SOUTH CHARLESTON**—Edward P. Roddy, 70, a South Charleston resident who had been a patient in the Veterans Hospital in Dayton for the last two years, died at 4:45 p. m. Saturday.

He was a veteran of World War I.

Survivors include his wife, Josephine of South Charleston; one son, John of Wilkes-Barre, Pa.; one daughter, Mary of Columbus; three brothers, the Rt. Rev. Monsignor Walter Roddy of Cincinnati, Frank of Columbus and Joseph of South Charleston, and two sisters, Mrs. Dennis Harrison of Chicago and Miss Kathryn Roddy of South Charleston.

Friends may call at the Sprague funeral home after 2 p. m. Monday. Funeral services will be held at 10 a. m. Tuesday in the St. Charles Church. Burial will be in the St. Charles Cemetery.

Unidentified newspaper clipping about Edward P. Roddy's death. It's dated February 26, 1950.



MARGIN RESERVED FOR BINDING  
THIS CERTIFICATE SHALL BE PRINTED LEGIBLY OR TYPEWRITTEN IN UNFADING INK.

**OHIO DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH**  
**DIVISION OF VITAL STATISTICS**  
**CERTIFICATE OF DEATH**

Reg. Dist. No. 2954 State File No. 11389  
Primary Reg. Dist. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Registrar's No. \_\_\_\_\_

1. PLACE OF DEATH a. COUNTY <u>Montgomery</u>			2. USUAL RESIDENCE (Where deceased lived, if institution; residence before admission). a. STATE <u>Ohio</u> b. COUNTY _____		
b. CITY (If outside corporate limits, write RURAL and give township) OR VILLAGE <u>Jefferson Twp.</u>		c. LENGTH OF STAY (In this place) <u>3 M. 5 d.</u>	c. CITY (If outside corporate limits, write RURAL and give township) OR VILLAGE <u>South Charleston, O.</u>		d. STREET (If rural, give location) ADDRESS <u>-</u>
d. FULL NAME OF (If NOT in hospital or institution, give street address or location) HOSPITAL OR INSTITUTION <u>VAC. Hospital, Dayton, O.</u>					
3. NAME OF DECEASED (TYPE OR PRINT) a. (First) <u>Edward</u>			b. (Middle) _____		c. (Last) <u>RODDY</u>
4. DATE OF DEATH (Month) (Day) (Year) <u>February 25, 1950</u>					
5. SEX <u>Male</u>	6. COLOR OR RACE <u>White</u>	7. MARRIED, NEVER MARRIED, WIDOWED, DIVORCED (Specify) <u>Widowed</u>		8. DATE OF BIRTH <u>March 13, 1879</u>	
9. AGE (In years last birthday) <u>70</u>		Under 1 Year Months <u>11</u> Days <u>12</u>	11. BIRTHPLACE (State or foreign country) <u>South Charleston, O.</u>		
10a. USUAL OCCUPATION (Give kind of work done during most of working life even if retired) <u>Retired Cement Finisher</u>			10b. KIND OF BUSINESS OR INDUSTRY <u>-</u>		12. CITIZEN OF WHAT COUNTRY? <u>U.S.</u>
13. FATHER'S NAME <u>Unknown</u>			14. MOTHER'S MAIDEN NAME <u>Unknown</u>		
15. WAS DECEASED EVER IN U. S. ARMED FORCES? <u>Yes</u>		16. SOCIAL SECURITY NO. <u>279221213</u>		17. INFORMANT'S SIGNATURE <u>K. O. Pomeroy</u>	
<b>MEDICAL CERTIFICATION</b>					
18. CAUSE OF DEATH Enter only one cause per line for (a), (b), and (c)  *This does not mean the mode of dying, such as heart failure, asphyxia, etc. It means the disease, injury, or complication which caused death.		I. DISEASE OR CONDITION DIRECTLY LEADING TO DEATH* (a) <u>Recurrent adenocarcinoma of rectum (with frozen pelvis, focal gangrenous peritonitis, &amp; metastases to ileum &amp; caecum.)</u>			INTERVAL BETWEEN ONSET AND DEATH <u>2 1/2 YRS.</u>
		ANTECEDENT CAUSES <u>Morbid conditions, if any, giving rise to the above cause (a) stating the underlying cause last.</u>			
		II. OTHER SIGNIFICANT CONDITIONS (b) <u>Peritonitis generalized with perforation (of ileum.)</u>			
		Conditions contributing to the death but not related to the disease or condition causing death.			
19a. DATE OF OPERATION <u>12-10-47</u>		19b. MAJOR FINDINGS OF OPERATION <u>Proctosigmoidectomy, 2-6-50 Ileostomy.</u>			20. AUTOPSY? Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
21a. ACCIDENT SUICIDE HOMICIDE (Specify) _____		21b. PLACE OF INJURY (e.g., in or about home, farm, factory, street, office building, forest, etc.) _____		21c. (CITY, VILLAGE, OR TOWNSHIP) (COUNTY) (STATE) _____	
21d. TIME OF INJURY (Month) (Day) (Year) (Hour) (m.) _____		21e. INJURY OCCURRED While at Work <input type="checkbox"/> Not While at Work <input type="checkbox"/>		21f. HOW DID INJURY OCCUR? _____	
22. I hereby certify that I attended the deceased from <u>Nov. 20, 1947</u> <del>Nov. 20, 1947</del> <u>2-25, 1950</u> , and that death occurred at <u>5:00 AM.</u> m., from the causes and on the date stated above.					
23a. SIGNATURE <u>A. Tomasek MD., Chf. Med. Serv.</u>		23b. ADDRESS <u>VAC. Hospital, Dayton, O.</u>		23c. DATE SIGNED <u>Mar. 10, 1950</u>	
24a. BURIAL OR CREMATION (If cremated, give date) _____		24b. DATE <u>Feb. 28, 1950</u>		24c. NAME OF CEMETERY OR CREMATORY <u>St. Charles Cemetery</u>	
				24d. LOCATION (City, town, or county) (State) <u>So. Charleston, Ohio</u>	
BIRTH NO. Do not write in this space			NAME OF EMBALMER <u>W. D. Sprague</u>		(LIC. NO.) <u>#2087-A</u>
DATE RECD BY LOCAL REG. <u>Mar. 10, 1950</u>		REGISTRAR'S SIGNATURE <u>K. O. Pomeroy</u>		25. FUNERAL DIRECTOR'S SIGNATURE <u>W. D. Sprague</u>	
				(LIC. NO.) <u>#1654</u>	

Edward Roddy Ohio Death Certificate #11389, 25 Feb 1950.

could have spent countless hours on that task only to come up with a big fat FAIL! His wife, Josephine Corrigan Roddy, didn't die until 1964. But paragraph 3 of the obituary lists first among the survivors his wife, Josephine of South Charleston.

Another discrepancy between the various documents centers on how long Edward was a patient at

the VA Hospital. While the obituary says he "had been a patient in the Veterans Hospital in Dayton for the last 2 years", Box 1c of the death certificate pegs his stay at 3 months, 5 days. These differing timespans paint a different picture of his final illness. Note that Box 19c of the death certificate mentions an operation in December 1947. That might lead to the

newspaper comment about "2 years". Further research might be done in the South Charleston newspaper to see if mention is made of Edward entering or being released from the hospital, or friends and family visiting him in Dayton. Often small, local newspapers would report these sorts of comings and goings.

Boxes 14 and 15 of this death

certificate are used to identify the father and mother of the decedent. Some death certificates also ask for the birthplaces of the parents, but the form in use in Ohio in 1950 did not. The information specified on Edward Roddy's death certificate as to parentage is decidedly uninformative.

Perhaps some of the inaccurate or missing information has to do with the informant indicated in Box 17. Often when looking at a death certificate, it is possible to infer some relationship between the decedent and the informant; perhaps you recognize the name of a child or spouse, or at least the informant's surname is familiar. But in the case of Edward Roddy's informant, there is no apparent connection with Edward. The same signature appears at the bottom of the certificate as the Registrar, so it is likely the informant/registrar is an employee of the VA hospital where Edward died.

It is at this point that the question, "Why was this record created?" comes into play. A primary purpose of a death certificate is to provide evidence that a person died so such things as pensions can be stopped, or a claim can be made on a person's life insurance or social security benefits. Another necessity satisfied by the creation of a death certificate is to review the cause of death to determine if foul play is involved. A third significant reason is to provide mortality data for statistical purposes. Note that none of these reasons involve the names or birth locations of the decedent's parents. Thus, the absence of the names of Edward Roddy's parents is not a significant flaw in the creation of a valid death certificate.

But let's ask that same question about an obituary. Obituaries are primarily written for the family and friends of the deceased to let people know of someone's death and the time and place of any memorial services. The loss of a person is felt most acutely by the people closest to them, so the listing of survivors and family members notifies the community of the grief of the family. In addition to a list of survivors, obituaries sometimes mention such items as

the subject's parents, his occupation and hobbies, and specific details on military service.

Both the death certificate and the obituary provided the name of the funeral home. It is always helpful to get the funeral records if you can. As you can see in Figure 3, they provide a wealth of additional information, but again, there are conflicts among the documents.

First for the new information, we get the golden bit a genealogist

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Yearly No. 9      **Funeral Record and Ledger**      Monthly No. 6

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Name Edward Roddy      Place of Birth South Charleston, O.      Date Mar. 13, 1880  
 War Veteran World War I      Social Security No. \_\_\_\_\_  
 Place of Death Vet Hospital, Dayton, O.      Date Feb. 25, 1950      Age 69 Years 11 Months 12 Days  
 Cause of Death Carcinoma - Amblyoma - Reticum  
 Sex Male      Color White      Social State Married      Occupation Manager  
 Name of Father Barthley Roddy      Nativity Ireland  
 Name of Mother Eliza Roddy      Maiden Name Barnett      Nativity Ireland  
 Physician Dr. Mangerson      Time of Funeral 10 A.M.      Services at St. Charles Church  
 Interment at St. Charles Cem.      Date Feb. 28, 1950      Minister in Charge Fr. Roddy  
 Assisted by Fr. Harbrecht      Obituary by \_\_\_\_\_  
 Pall Bearers \_\_\_\_\_

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Choir \_\_\_\_\_  
 Description of Furnishings, Casket No. 341      Style Royal      Make St. Melitic      Color Half      Blended Liner  
 Name Plate \_\_\_\_\_      Handles, No. \_\_\_\_\_      Style Colombian      Robe or Suit 84 1/2  
 Charge to Family and Vet. Adm.      Address \_\_\_\_\_

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Lot No. \_\_\_\_\_      Owner's Name \_\_\_\_\_      Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 Section \_\_\_\_\_      Division \_\_\_\_\_      Position \_\_\_\_\_       Other Graves       Present Grave       LOT

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Additional Information \_\_\_\_\_

DR.		CR.	
Services and Casket	410.00	Date <u>Cash - Kathryn</u>	<u>3/7, '50.</u> # <u>404/36</u>
Embalming	615		
Vault <u>Weber Air Seal</u>	80.00	<u>Bal. 150.00</u>	
Hearse	240	<u>April 24, 1950</u>	<u>Y. S. Dress</u> 150.00
Extra Mileage	27.50		
Dress or Suit <u>Blue suit, Royal Gen. 58 1/2</u>	83		<u>567/36</u>
Underwear	248		
Shower Blanket	25.00	<u>Jan 9, '50</u>	
Hair Dress	615		
Telegrams	25.00	<u>Pl. to N.Y. S.C. 3/1, '50</u>	
Minister Singers Organist	615		
Cemetery Permit	615		
Cemetery Grave	615		
<u>Marina Hamilton, Paid</u>	615		
Sales Tax—Services and Casket	615		
Sales Tax—Other Merchandise	615		
Total	\$ <u>554.36</u>	Total	

Figure 3: Edward Roddy Funeral Record and Ledger, Sprague Funeral Home.

is always looking for – the names of the parents, Bartley and Alice Barrett Roddy, natives of Ireland. Those little facts will lead to many more research opportunities.

But note the discrepancy between the death certificate and the funeral record regarding Edward's birthdate. Both seem to agree that it was 13 March, but the death certificate indicates 1879 and the funeral ledger says 1880. A follow-up with the 1880 census shows Bartley and Alice with a 1-year-old son, Edward. If you only had the funeral ledger you might spin your wheels looking for a non-existent birth record in 1880.

The three documents also conflict as to time of death – the obituary and funeral record say 4:45 PM, but the death certificate says 5 AM. This discordance might never be resolvable.

A question comes to my mind when I look at the bottom half of the funeral record, the ledger section. As they say, "Follow the money". I want to know why his sister, Kathryn, and not his wife, paid for the funeral. On the four censuses in which Edward and Josephine were married to each

**Application for Headstone or Marker**  
(Please make out and return in duplicate)

**CHECK TYPE REQUIRED**  
(See Instructions attached)  
 UPRIGHT MARBLE HEADSTONE  
 FLAT MARBLE MARKER  
 FLAT GRANITE MARKER  
 BRONZE MARKER

**ENLISTMENT DATE** 11/23/17  
**DISCHARGE DATE** 6/26/19

**SERIAL No.** 237651  
**PENSION No.** 0-2 953 953

**STATE** Ohio **RANK** Pvt.  
**U. S. REGIMENT, STATE ORGANIZATION, AND DIVISION** Motor Truck Co #842 American Mission Reserve (Mallet)

**NAME (Last, First, Middle Initial)** RODDY, Edward P.  
**DATE OF BIRTH (Month, Day, Year)** 3/13/80  
**DATE OF DEATH (Month, Day, Year)** 2/25/50

**NAME OF CEMETERY** St. Charles Cemetery  
**LOCATION (City and State)** South Charleston, Ohio

**SHIP TO (I CERTIFY THE APPLICANT FOR THIS STONE HAS MADE ARRANGEMENTS WITH ME TO TRANSPORT THE STONE FROM THE FREIGHT STATION TO THE CEMETERY)** St. Charles Cemetery  
**NEAREST FREIGHT STATION (City and State)** South Charleston, Ohio  
**POST OFFICE ADDRESS OF CONGREGATE** South Charleston, Ohio

**DO NOT WRITE HERE**  
**FOR VERIFICATION** MAR 14 1950  
**ORDERED** COLUMBUS, MISS. 12 APR 1950  
**NO.** 7910667

I certify this application is submitted for a stone for the unmarked grave of a veteran. I hereby agree to assume all responsibility for the removal of the stone promptly upon arrival at destination, and properly place it at the decedent's grave at my expense.

**APPLICANT'S SIGNATURE** Josephine Roddy  
**ADDRESS (Street, City, State)** South Charleston, Ohio  
**DATE OF APPLICATION** 3/7/50

**DDMG FORM 623** **REV 1 JUL 48** **IMPORTANT—Complete Reverse Side** **18-1148-7 GPO**

Figure 4: Application for Headstone for Edward P. Roddy.

other, 1910-1940, not once do they appear in the same household; Edward lives with his mother or Kathryn. I don't have an explanation, but the funeral ledger gives me one more clue as to the closeness of Edward and Josephine's marriage.

While the fact that Edward died in the VA hospital gives us an inkling he was a veteran, the obituary and funeral record point us specifically to World War I, but don't provide much more detail. However, another record generated at the end of Edward's life was the Application For

Headstone or Marker (Figure 4). This one, often-overlooked record gives us his enlistment and discharge date, his regiment (Motor Truck Co #842), as well as his serial number and pension number. This data will make the next step of research, looking for his military and pension records, that much easier.

Examining these four records in parallel gives the researcher a more complete and accurate picture of the death of Edward Patrick Roddy. Certainly they present conflicting information, but it is only because we have all of them that we recognize there are conflicts and adjust our research strategy accordingly. If we relied on only one, we would never have the true, full story. ©

MARY KIRCHER RODDY has a certificate in Genealogy and Family History from the University of Washington. She likens genealogy research to the logic of a Sudoku puzzle with a big, juicy payoff at the end.

## finding death certificates

"Centers for Disease Control – Where to write for vital records" has state-by-state links: [www.cdc.gov/nchs/w2w.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/w2w.htm)

"Online Searchable Death Indexes and Records: A Genealogy Guide" [www.deathindexes.com/](http://www.deathindexes.com/)

FamilySearch.org continues to add more material every week. Currently they have images of: Arizona Deaths, San Francisco (CA) area Funeral Home Records, Philadelphia (PA) City Death Certificates and more. Check back often. <https://familysearch.org/search/collection/list>

Missouri Death Certificates – more than 2.2 million death certificates [www.sos.mo.gov/archives/resources/deathcertificates/](http://www.sos.mo.gov/archives/resources/deathcertificates/)