



It Can Be Frustrating

Ohio County Clerk Raymond J. Falland pores over the record books in an attempt to locate information for one of the many persons who seek the date of their birth or other biographical information from his office. The search he's found, can be frustrating at times. (N-R Photo – Muhleman)

RAYMOND J. FALLAND

Submitted by Carol Bell.

Raymond J. Falland, Clerk of Ohio County Court for 42 years (1926 to 1968), was my great uncle. He was the first person to introduce me to birth and death records, and I am still using what he taught me in my genealogy research. This 1966 *Wheeling News-Register* article describes some of the odd documents people tried to use back in the 1960s as proof of age for applicants for Social Security and Medicare benefits.

PICTURES OF TOMBSTONES INCLUDED

Odd Proof Offered to Back Age Claims

By Daniel L. Cusik, News-Register Staff Writer
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Wheeling's Social Security Office has received some odd documents as proof of age for applicants for Medicare and Ohio County Clerk Raymond Falland knows some of the reasons why.

Falland finds that being a link with the past can have its own unique problems when it comes to finding birth records for local residents who want to apply for Social Security and Medicare.

Many people want to blame Falland for not having their records on file when, in reality, there may never have been a record. "At one time it wasn't mandatory to keep birth records," Falland said. "Midwives often didn't report the births they assisted in since it wasn't their duty to do it. Sometimes a doctor was tired after delivering a baby in West Liberty or other outlying areas and went home to sleep without ever making official records of the birth."

Falland indicated that oversight is not the only reason for a lack of records. Understatement is often the culprit. "We get a lot of little old ladies who give their ages as '21 - plus'" Falland said. "Even marriage records show little white lies like that." The clerk's office can only put down what information it receives and cannot imply or assume anything.

When one man came to Social Security offices, he had the picture of a tombstone cut for his wife when she had died a few years back. On the stone was his own birth date.

Proof of date of birth is important in filing a claim for Social Security and many other legal documents. Another applicant brought a picture of his mother's tombstone, which shows her date of death as being more than 65 years prior to the applicant's submission for benefits.

Edgar A. Poe, director of SS in Wheeling, said as a person approaches 65, he should begin searching for documents to prove his age. Sometimes these can be difficult to find. "If they wait until the last minute," Poe said, "it could delay their first payment."

Poe said that Social Security officials demand "The best proof of age available." They state that if a birth certificate isn't available, they would like some record established before the applicant's fifth birthday. This would generally be a baptismal certificate, early census record, the entry by the delivery doctor in his books, or some similar record.

People who haven't been able to turn up with these proofs in Wheeling have had some out-of-the-way data in hand to substitute for them. One man brought his 65-year-old son, another brought a carefully preserved foreign language document which a translator found to be no more than a letter to the claimant advising him that he had a losing lottery ticket.

Jail records, whisky ration books, lifesaving citations and newspaper articles all have been used by applicants.

Importance of establishing the date of birth can be seen in the time you are old enough to qualify, how much work you need to qualify, the amount of the benefits, and when the work test no longer applies. All evidence submitted to the SS people is not always correct. Some people have submitted 12 different documents, all with inconsistent dates of birth. But a claim can be completed, subject to later verifications and if the earlier record differs from the allegations of the application, the claim may still not be overruled.

"Often, we have to go through the whole rigamarole, too," Falland stated. "Insurance policies can give information, but some don't carry insurance. Then we try voting records but they say they don't vote because there is no good reason to vote. Many were never baptized, and if they were they might tell you

that the church burned down or that floods washed away all the records. It goes on and on, round and round," Falland sighed.

Falland indicated that the last resort is to write to the Bureau of Census in Pittsburgh, Kansas. "But sometimes they have the same trouble we find here. The people don't know where they were born at all. You get to the point where you want to ask them why they were born."

With the advent of Medicare and the need for records to prove age for application for the coverage, Falland's office has seen a 10 to 15 per cent increase in requests for records. Deputy clerk Olga Oszustowicz said that nearly 25 or 30 requests come in each day by letter or phone.

One letter, received yesterday, has three, single-spaced typewritten pages of information about family members, background and other facts, and it didn't help a bit. The records simply weren't in Falland's office because they probably never were there to begin with.

"There is too much procrastination about records," Falland said. "Boys being discharged from the service are told to register their discharge papers. They don't, and then they come here a few years later and wonder why we can't give them information on it."

Some people write to Falland's office because they think Wheeling is the state capital and should, therefore, have all the records. Some were not born here and even may not have been born in West Virginia.

Falland said, "One other reason for not having records on some of the older people was that the assessor used to make appraisals of families and charge ten cents for each new child. Often, if he was a friend of the family, he might eliminate the charge on the most recent child. That also meant that the child wasn't even recorded by the assessor."

Falland finds it incredible that, in an age where man has so many records attached to him, he may not have access to the most important one of all.