



## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Series: Numerical Identification (NUMIDENT) Files, 1936 – 2007  
Record Group 47

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## **I. Questions about the Numerical Identification (NUMIDENT) Files**

### **I.1. What are the Numerical Identification (NUMIDENT) Files?**

Numerical Identification Files contain records from the Social Security Administration's "Master Files of the Social Security (SSN) Holders and SSN Applications," also known as the "Enumeration System" or the "Numerical Identification System (NUMIDENT)."

The Social Security Administration uses the Enumeration System to maintain records of each individual who has applied for a Social Security Number starting in 1936.

### **I.2. What Numerical Identification (NUMIDENT) Files has the National Archives received?**

In 2013, the National Archives received the first transfer of NUMIDENT files containing records of individuals with a verified death between 1936 and 2007 or who would have been over 110 years old by December 31, 2007. There are three types of entries in NUMIDENT: application (SS-5), claim, and death entries.

The 2013 transfer for the period of 1936-2007 consisted of:

- 49,459,293 death record entries (available for searching via AAD)
- 72,182,729 application record entries
- 25,230,486 claim record entries

### **I.3. What information is in the Numerical Identification (NUMIDENT) Files?**

There are three types of entries in NUMIDENT: death, application (SS-5), and claim records. A NUMIDENT record may contain more than one entry.

The NUMIDENT death records contain information related to the applicant's death, including full name, social security number, date of birth, sex, and date of death. The death records do not include any State reported deaths in accordance with the Social Security Act section 205(r). There are 49,459,293 death record entries in the transfer of the 1936-2007 records. **Currently only the 1936 - 2007 NUMIDENT death records are available for searching via the Access to Archival Databases (AAD) resource.**

The NUMIDENT application (SS-5) records contain information extracted from the SS-5 form "Application for a Social Security Card" or "Application for Social Security Account Number." Information in the NUMIDENT application entries include applicant's full name, father's name, mother's maiden name, sex, race/ethnic description, place of birth, and other information about the application or subsequent changes to the applicant's record. The transfer of the 1936 - 2007 records includes records for individuals with a verified death or who would have been 110 years old by December 31, 2007 for a total of 72,182,729 application records.

The NUMIDENT claim records include information on whether it is a life or death claims, full name, date of birth, sex, father's name, mother's maiden name, and place of birth. The transfer of

the 1936 - 2007 records includes records for individuals with a verified death or who would have been 110 years old by December 31, 2007 for a total of 25,230,486 claim records.

#### I.4. Why were these records created?

The Social Security Administration created and maintained these records for the purpose of tracking the earnings of U.S. workers, and determining benefit entitlements as established under the Social Security Act of 1935.

## **II. Questions about the NUMIDENT Death Files**

### II.1. What version of the NUMIDENT Death Files are accessible via AAD?

The agency transferred the NUMIDENT Death Records in 20 separate files and each record only contained information in about a third of the fields. To provide access to the records via AAD, NARA created reference versions. For the reference versions, NARA:

- Merged the 20 preserved files in order to sort the records alphabetically by last name and then create new files arranged by last name.
- Added the Source File field to serve as a cross-reference to the record in the preserved NUMIDENT Death files.
- Removed the fields relating to the second death posting (originally columns 187-336) and the third death posting (originally columns 337-486) since these fields are blank in all the records. The Number of Death Postings field shows all records only contain one death posting (originally column 487, now column 187 in AAD).
- Split the date of birth and date of death fields into separate day, month, and year fields to support date range searching since some dates may have Xs instead of valid numbers.
- Masked the Death Certificate Number field in those records where populated. Only 7% of the records contain information in the Death Certificate Number field. Upon close review, NARA discovered that the Death Certificate Number field contained telephone numbers and other miscellaneous notes. Since some of the records were created in the past 20 years and the telephone numbers may be for private individuals NARA masked the information with an “X” to protect personal privacy. See also FAQ # [III.12. Why does the Death Certificate Number field contain an “X”?](#)
- Masked selected values in the Other Number field. The Social Security Administration defined the Other Number field as used for claims numbers. However, since it is a nine-digit field that could potentially contain a social security number, NARA masked selected values to protect personal privacy. Specifically, NARA masked with “X’s” the values in this field that did not match a social security number of a deceased individual listed in the NUMIDENT Death Files. NARA masked the field in close to 9% of the records. In a few cases, the Other Number field was already populated with all X’s. For 71% of the records,

the Other Number field contains the same value as the Social Security Number field. And 13% of the records are blank or have a null value for this field.

## II.2. What are some of the limitations of the NUMIDENT Death Records?

- The NUMIDENT Death files do not include records of all deaths between 1936 - 2007.
  - In particular, the files do not include any state reported deaths in accordance with the Social Security Act section 205(r). An estimated 10% - 30% of reported deaths to the Social Security Administration are state reported deaths.
  - The absence of a record for a person is not proof that the person is alive.
  - The files do not include deaths for individuals who never received a social security number.
  - The Social Security Administration began maintaining death information using automated (computer processing) methods in 1962. Information on deaths prior to 1962 may be incomplete or missing.
- The records may contain misspellings, typos, or incorrect values. For example:
  - If the agency did not have the day, month, or year for a date of birth or date of death, they filled in the values with Xs or 0s.
  - There are records with a year of birth occurring after the year of death. For example, the record lists a birth year of 1950, but a death year of 1905.
  - There are some records with a year of birth and year of death that are over 115 years apart.
  - Many first and last names contain only initials, not the full name.
  - Names may be misspelled or truncated.

## II.3. Are there plans to correct inaccuracies in the NUMIDENT Death Records?

No. As an archives, NARA's role is to preserve the integrity of the records that Federal agencies transfer for archival preservation, even if the records include objective inaccuracies or missing information. For that reason, NARA does not correct or revise accessioned records.

## II.4. How do these records differ from those in the Social Security Death Index (SSDI)?

The NUMIDENT Death records available on AAD are output from the Master Files of the Social Security (SSN) Holders and SSN Applications, also known as "The Enumeration System."

The Social Security Death Index contains records derived from the Social Security Administration's Death Master File, which is an extract of the death information in NUMIDENT.

The NUMIDENT Death records available on AAD contain some of the information that is used to create the Social Security Death Index.

The Social Security Death Index usually includes fields of information for state SSN issued and lump sum payment. However, these are not fields in the NUMIDENT Death records. This information may be in the NUMIDENT SS-5 or Claim records, which are not yet available for searching on AAD.

### **III. Questions about searching the NUMIDENT Death Files and search results via the Access to Archival Databases (AAD) resource**

#### **III.1. How do I find records in the NUMIDENT Death Files?**

Searching these records is similar to searching other files in AAD. Like other files, wildcard characters (% or \*) are useful when searching. In addition, you may need to use a combination of other fields in your search as a way to help identify records. But when searching keep in mind that some fields may be blank and the information in the records may contain misspellings or other inaccuracies. So you may need to use less search criteria to retrieve all possible matches.

There are nine NUMIDENT Death files organized alphabetically by last name (see table of files in the [Appendix](#)). For the most efficient searching, if you know the last name of the individual for whose record you seek, select the file potentially containing that last name and search that file by the Last Name and other fields.

#### **III.2. How do I search by name?**

There are four name fields to cover all possible parts of a name: First Name, Middle Name, Last Name, and Suffix Name. Start a name search by entering the first name and last name in the appropriate fields. If you are unable to find a match, try searching only by the first name, only by last name, or the beginning of a name (at least three characters) followed by a wildcard character. Also try searching using various spellings of the name.

Historically, married women are likely listed under their married last name in the NUMIDENT Death files.

Some of the names contain misspellings and obvious typos such as numerical characters and punctuation. For example: 3RAIN, 6USH, {URGESS, \*AYWOOD, A\ESSES, HOLDEN, PA&KER, W2TSON, and N1NEZ. There are 63 records with last names that begin with a number or punctuation. These records are in the file “Last names U through Z and non-alphabetic.”

First and/or Last Name Fields may be populated only with initials and not the full name. In general, the middle name field only contains an initial. Some last names appear to include an initial then the last name. In these cases, it is possible the initial could be for a middle name, especially if the individual had multiple middle names.

The First Name field only allows for 16 characters and the Last Name field only allows for 21 characters. Longer names may be truncated or cut-off.

For names that contain a suffix such as SR, JR, III, the suffix may be in the Suffix Name field. Or the suffix may appear in the last name field with a space or hyphen after the last name. For example: COFFEY-JR, WALL-III, ASPER IV, and DODD SR.

### III.3. How do I search by names containing punctuation or spaces?

Names that contain a prefix such as “Mac,” “Mc” “Le,” “Van,” “O,” etc., may or may not contain the appropriate space, apostrophe (‘), or hyphen (-). Some names may contain a different character (space or hyphen) instead of the appropriate character. For example:

- D’ANGELO, D ANGELO, and D-ANGELO
- LA FLEUR, LA-FLEUR, and LAFLEUR
- MC DONALD, MC-DONALD, and MCDONALD
- MAC ARTHUR, MAC-ARTHUR, and MACARTHUR
- O’BRIEN, O-BRIEN, OBRIEN, O/BRIEN, and O BRIEN
- ST JOHN, STJOHN, and ST-JOHN
- VAN ACKER, VAN-ACKER, and VANACKER
- VAN DEN BERG, VAN-DEN-BERG, VANDE-BERG, and VANDEBERG
- MARY LOU, MARY-LOU, and MARYLOU
- DELGADO-DIAZ and DELGADO DIAZ
- LABOY-RIVERA and LABOY RIVERA

AAD ignores punctuation in search criteria. Punctuation in the records and in search terms is treated like a space for searching purposes. For example, a search for the first name MARY-LOU returns matches on MARY-LOU and MARY LOU. A search for MARY LOU returns matches on MARY LOU and MARY-LOU, but a search for MARYLOU only returns matches on MARYLOU and not matches containing a space or punctuation.

To search for a name that may contain punctuation or spaces, enter the name as originally spelled. If you are unable to find a match, try searching on variations of the name excluding any punctuation or spaces.

### III.4. How do I search by birth or death date?

You can search for a specific date or a range of dates per file. There are separate month, day (day of the month), and year fields for birth and death dates. To search by month, day, and/or year you need to enter search criteria in all the appropriate fields. You do not need to enter search criteria in all three fields. You do not need to enter both a birth and death date.

Since some records are missing date information, you may wish to start by searching only by year or by year and month. See also [FAQ# III.5. Why do some dates have an XX, 00, or XXXX for the value and “Not captured or reported” or “Invalid Number” for the meaning?](#)

You can search the month and day fields by selecting criteria from the “Select from Code List” on the Fielded Search page. You can select multiple days or months to search for a range of dates. For example, if you know the birth or death occurred in the summer, you might select the codes for June, July, and August. Or if you know the birth or death occurred in the beginning of the month, you might select the codes for the first (1) through the fifteenth (15). If you do not know the month and/or day, it is best to leave those fields blank.

You can search for a specific year or change the search operator to search before, between, or after certain years. Search by year using the four-digit year, such as 1890, 1953, or 2004.

Example date searches:

- To search for records with a death that occurred on January 1, 1980:
  - For the Date of Death (Month) field, select the code for January
  - For the Date of Death (Day) field, select the code for 1
  - For the Date of Death (Year) field, enter 1980
  - Since the Date of Death (Day) information is not captured in about 20% of the records, alternative searches include:
    - Revise the search criteria for Date of Death (Day) field to select the code 00 or XX for “Not captured or reported” in addition to or instead of the day selected
    - Revise the search to just by month and year and do not include search criteria for the Date of Death (Day) field
- To search for records with a death that occurred in or before 1940:
  - For the Date of Death (year) field, change the search operator to “less than or equal” and enter 1940 for the search value
- To search for records with a birth that occurred in the summer of 1939, 1940, or 1941:
  - For the Date of Birth (Month) field, select the codes June, July, and August
  - For the Date of Birth (Year) field, change the search operator to “between” and enter the 1939 for the first search value and 1941 for the second search value
- To search for records with a birth that occurred in the last week of March in 1899 or 1900:
  - For the Date of Birth (Month) field, select the code for March
  - For the Date of Birth (Day) field, select the codes for 25 (or earlier), 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, and 31
  - For the Date of Birth (Year) field, change the search operator to “between” and enter the 1899 for the first search value and 1900 for the second search value
  - Since the Date of Birth (Month) and Date of Birth (Day) information is not captured in some of the records, alternative searches include
    - Revise the search criteria for Date of Birth (Day) field to select the code 00 or XX for “Not captured or reported” in addition to or instead of the days selected
    - Revise the search criteria for Date of Birth (Month) field to select the code 00 or XX for “Not captured or reported” in addition to or instead of the month selected

- Revise the search criteria to leave out the Date of Birth (Day) and/or Date of Birth (Month)

III.5. Why do some dates have an XX, 00, or XXXX for the value and “not captured or reported” or “Invalid Number” for the meaning?

It appears that the Social Security Administration used Xs or 0s when the month, day of the month, and/or year for a birth date and/or death date was missing. In order to enable searching on these fields, NARA included the meaning “not captured or reported” or “invalid number” for Xs or 0s in these fields.

The number of records with X in date fields:

X in birth month, day, and year	109,904 records
X in birth month and day	3 records
X in birth day only	31,860 records
X in birth day and year	272 records
X in birth year only	11,140 records
X in death day only	9,601,214 records

III.6. How do I search by Social Security Number?

Enter the nine-digit social security number in the Social Security Number field. Include any leading zeros, but do not include spaces or dashes.

Prior to 2007, the first three digits are the area number and were assigned by geographic region. To search based on an area number, enter the first three digits and use a wildcard to retrieve all numbers in a file for that geographic region. For SSN assigned after 2007, first three digits no longer have geographic significance. See “The Story of the Social Security Number” in the Technical Information for more details on the evolution and meaning of the social security number.

III.7. What are the ZIP code fields and how do I search by location?

The NUMIDENT Death Files include the Residence Zip Code and Death Payment Zip Code fields.

- It is likely the Residence Zip Code field reflects where the individual last lived. 27% of the records contain no information in this field.
- The Death Payment Zip Code field reflects where the Social Security Administration sent the lump sum death payment. 91% of the records contain no information in this field.

The ZIP code fields may contain the 5 or 9 digit ZIP code. Some of the records include fewer characters than the 5 or 9 digit ZIP code. Some records may contain X instead of numbers.

To search the ZIP code fields, you may want to start by entering the 5-digit ZIP code followed by the wildcard character (\* or %). This will return all records beginning with that 5-digit ZIP, with or without the 4-digit extension.

### III.8. How do I determine the city and state associated with the ZIP code?

The United States Postal Service provides the means to look up ZIP Codes to see the current city or town for that ZIP code. You can look up ZIP Codes on the United State Postal Service's website at [www.usps.com](http://www.usps.com). Please note this is a privately run website and we provide this information without any endorsement.

However, ZIP codes and associated geographic boundaries may change overtime. You may need to refer to other sources to determine the specific city, town, or county associated with a ZIP code listed in the records.

### III.9. Why can't I find a specific record(s)?

There are many reasons why you may not find the record(s) you seek:

- The NUMIDENT death files do not include records of all deaths between 1936 - 2007. In particular, the files do not include any state reported deaths in accordance with the Social Security Act section 205(r). An estimated 10% - 30% of reported deaths to the Social Security Administration are state reported deaths.
- The files do not include deaths for individuals who never had a social security number. It is possible some individuals never applied for nor received a social security number. For example, when the Social Security Administration began issuing social security numbers in 1936, not all individuals had to apply because some places of employment were not covered by the Social Security program. Children did not always receive a social security number and may have passed away before receiving one. See "The Story of the Social Security Number" in the Technical Information for more details on the history on the requirements for social security numbers.
- The Social Security Administration began maintaining death information using automated (computer processing) methods in 1962. Information on deaths prior to 1962 may be incomplete or missing.
- The records contain misspellings and other inaccuracies. You may need to search using various spellings of names or broaden your search. See also FAQ# [II.2. What are some of the limitations of the NUMIDENT Death Records?](#)
- There are nine (9) NUMIDENT Death files organized alphabetically by last name (see table of files in the [Appendix](#)). If you know the last name, be sure you are searching in the correct file. It is possible that the last name may be spelled with a different first letter (for example a C instead of a S) so you may need to search in more than one file using different spellings.

### III.10. Why do some fields say "Undefined Code" or "Invalid Number?"

A meaning of "Undefined Code" may be because that field contains a value whose meaning is unknown or was not included in the agency provided code list. This is particularly the case with the data in the Program Involvement, Special Date of Birth Exception Indicator, Special Exception Change Indicator, Master Beneficiary Record Exception, and Source of Death Fields.

### III.11. Why are some fields not populated?

There are several reasons why some of the fields are not populated:

- Some of the fields were populated on an exception basis. This means the default value for the field is blank and it is only populated to indicate that there is an exception. This is the case with the Special Date of Birth Exception Indicator, Special Exception Change Indicator, and Master Beneficiary Record Exception Fields. For these fields, the code list only includes the code that indicates the exception and does not include the default value of blank. Only 1% of the records have values in these fields
- It appears that the agency created these records with the flexibility to add more information in the future. The “filler” fields are blank fields that the agency could use in the future. These fields are not populated.
- The agency may have not needed to populate a field or lacked the information to do so. The detailed field information in AAD usually indicates what percentage of the records may be blank for a particular field.

### III.12. Why does the Death Certificate Number field contain an “X?”

Only 7% of the records contain information in the Death Certificate Number field. Upon close review, NARA discovered that the Death Certificate Number field contained telephone numbers and other miscellaneous notes. Since some of the records were created in the past 20 years and the telephone numbers may be for private individuals, the information is exempt from disclosure per the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) (b)(6). NARA masked the information with an “X” to protect personal privacy. If you have additional questions about this field, please contact the Electronic Records Reference Branch at [cer@nara.gov](mailto:cer@nara.gov).

### III.13. What is the Source File field?

The Source File field is not part of the original NUMIDENT Death records. In creating a reference version of the records, NARA added this field to serve as a cross-reference to the record in the preserved NUMIDENT Death files.

Except for the Death Certificate field and the blank second and third death postings fields, there is no additional information in the preserved file than what is available through AAD. See also FAQ# [II.1. What version of the NUMIDENT Death Files are accessible via AAD?](#)

## **IV. Questions about obtaining other death and social security records**

### IV.1. How can I obtain a copy of a death certificate?

In general, death certificates are created by local authorities where the individual died. With some exceptions, death certificates are not considered Federal records and they are not at the National

Archives. Instead, death records are usually held by state agencies. You will need to contact the appropriate state agency for copies of death certificates.

Records relating to deaths overseas or while in military service may be included in records held at the National Archives.

Information on locating death certificates and other vital records is available at:

<http://www.archives.gov/research/vital-records/>.

#### IV.2. How can I get a copy of the original Social Security application form (SS-5)?

You can request a copy of a deceased individual's Social Security record from the Social Security Administration. You can make the request online at: <https://secure.ssa.gov/apps9/eFOIA-FEWeb/internet/main.jsp>. For more details, please visit the Social Security Administration's Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) page at: <https://www.ssa.gov/foia/request.html>.

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## V. Appendix

NUMIDENT Death Records, 1936 - 2007

Number of records per first letter of the last name and corresponding file on AAD:

A	1,556,388	Last names A through B
B	4,594,827	
C	3,634,372	Last names C through D
D	2,358,711	
E	933,497	Last names E through G
F	1,775,614	
G	2,536,994	
H	3,651,062	Last names H through J
I	200,144	
J	1,431,903	
K	1,915,043	Last names K through L
L	2,316,368	
M	4,636,464	Last names M through O
N	892,700	
O	702,754	
P	2,455,432	Last names P through R
Q	90,159	
R	2,628,024	
S	5,004,275	Last names S through T
T	1,732,563	
U	119,065	Last names U through Z and non-alphabetic
V	677,572	
W	3,052,256	
X	2,817	
Y	283,804	
Z	276,422	
Begin with number or punctuation	63	