

Finding Family – June 2018  
**The Wide Web of Genealogy**  
By Karen Burzduk

My favorite genealogical pastime is searching Napa County records from requests directed to the Napa Valley Genealogical Society. Each time I do, I learn more about the history and the people and pioneers of this county. As well, I also learn tips in doing genealogical research.

Recently I received a request, given the following information: First name was Ruth. Surname was unsure, which is not being revealed in this article. I was given an exact date of death. The location of death was Napa County. The requestor specifically requested a copy of an obituary that would have the maiden name of Ruth's mother. Generally speaking, a search requires a name, a date or time frame, and a location of the event.

The request came from a person in Ohio who did not have a computer. But I did! And that is exactly where I started my search, using [my Ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com) subscription. By using the name, I was given and the exact date of death, Ancestry told me Ruth was not Ruth; she was Ruby.

The next step was searching through the Napa County Library's digitized, online newspapers' database. There was no obituary for Ruby, but there was one for Vera B, whose obit mentioned that Ruby was her niece. From the obit, I gained a new spelling variation for Ruby's last name.

The Napa Valley Genealogical Society has compiled newspaper vital records, beginning in 1970, into nicely-bound books. I found Ruby's obituary (yes, I couldn't find it online, but I could find the society's paper copy), which gave me her first name as well as three others, one of which included her married name at death. Was the third name a middle name, or did it belong to a first husband? All these names needed to be searched. The obituary also revealed her daughter's name and city of residence.

I returned to [my Ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com) database, as well as the [familysearch.org](https://www.familysearch.org) website. I hoped to find Ruby's birth record from 1901 in Washington state, but its birth records were not available until 1907. But there's more than one way to confirm family information. I looked in the 1910 Census for Ruby, using the two last names I was given, and still I could not find Ruby.

With the advent of the computer— indexed and digitized records—we sometimes start looking in the wrong places. The information the requestor from Ohio wanted was right here in my backyard: the Napa County Recorder's office. California vital records are not available online, though there are indexes that can be very helpful. The Social Security Death Records index can also assist with death information. A professional genealogist, however, would not use an index to create a family tree. But amateurs, like myself, use indexes all the time.

By paying the \$21 fee to obtain a death record from Napa County, one that is clearly marked "Not for Identification Purposes," I had the name of Ruby's father, the maiden name of her mother, and an address for the informant that I knew to be her daughter mentioned in the obituary.

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If genealogy was easy, it would not be any fun! Ruby's father's surname and her mother's maiden name were not remotely similar to Ruby's maiden name. Before I snail-mailed my search documents off to the requestor in Ohio who- has- no- computer, I searched censuses for Ruby's father's family, for her mother's family, and for daughter in SF. I wanted to confirm Vera B's relationship to Ruby.

I'm taking a break for now, to clear my mind for new ideas. Actually, my work is voluntary, so I actually completed the task as requested: to find the names of Ruby's parents. The Ohio requestor without-a-computer might have some clues about Vera, about Ruby's parents' names being different than her own birth surname. Maybe she will ask for more help, or not. A new request is just around the corner. I can't wait!