

- Murder in your Family Tree
- MPAFUG Group
- Randy Ray 2025

So.

As I have been working on my tree over the years, I started to see quite a few people that had been murdered.

Fortunately, most of them are on my wife's side of the family.

I want to keep this a little bit lighthearted before we start.

After going back into my tree to find them, I ended up with 13 people that had been murdered.

So, what do I do about it?

Should I track it and see where it leads? Ignore it?

I decided to put an Icon on the people that had been murdered and the murderer so I could remember them and locate them in my tree.

I chose this Icon from the Internet. I attach it to each person's media gallery.

Finding out that an Ancestor had been murdered was actually very easy.

I did my normal research for records and found through the obits and family stories that several had been murdered.

All these people had a short paper trail and then just disappeared. So, I automatically started searching newspapers and death certificates and using the Research Wiki on FS.

Let's look at each one starting with Agnes Armstrong. She died in 1937.

I tracked Agnes up to 1930. Then she disappeared. When I searched Newspapers the first of several articles came up that her mangled body had been found on Hwy 41 just North of Oconto. The sheriff investigated and concluded she had been struck by a car. No arrests have ever been made. She was 26 years old and just married. The husband was ruled out as he was in Milwaukee working.

I found her grave by her parents, and then I went to the courthouse to see her death certificate. Oddly, the clerks could not find her document nor an autopsy report. The sheriffs dept said they had thrown out all cold case files pre 1960 many years go.

This next man I have zero sources for. He died in 1877 at Frozen Mans Creek, in the Dakota Territory. This was a family story.

He was bushwhacked by unknown people and left for dead. His team partner was a little ways checking on the cattle they also had. When he came back, Borst had been shot in the head and was dead.

The only way I found him was by doing a newspaper search.

Curtis A Borst, 1849-1877. The article is a copy of the death inquest. It is very long so only a portion is shown.

The newspaper clipping is from the Library of Congress Newspaper Archives.

I have about 20-30 hours of research through newspapers to find this one article.

Next. For Sandra Morrison, my wife's 1st cousin and her husband Wayne Donahue.

Between 1972 and 1984 there were no records for them. Finda Grave and the death index said they both died on the same day. So, I was thinking maybe an accident. 15 May 1984.

When I ran my newspaper search this came up.....

Captain Samuel Richardson Combs. Son of my 4th Great Grandfather from Kentucky. The only proof I have of this incident is from newspapers. It was mentioned in his father's obit.

Cpt. Samuel Combs, I have many records on, he was in the War of 1812 and fought in the Indian Wars and was wounded at the Battle of the Thames against Indian and British soldiers resulting in the death of the Indian leader Tecumseh. I had 4 ancestors at this battle.

In 1833 Cpt. Sam was on the courthouse steps in Winchester, Kentucky being led in by two guards for a shooting the day before.

I censored the document because it was gruesome.

The newspaper clipping is from the Library of Congress Newspaper Archives.

It is the only account of his death I could find.

This next one I stumbled upon while searching for someone else. Leslie Combs Jr and his wife Dorothy Enslow being somewhat of a challenge.

Dorothy's mother was murdered in 1936

I did a newspaper search and nothing came up. FAG had this info;

"Juliette first married Charles Baldwin, second marriage to Frank B. Enslow. She was murdered at her home, the Enslow mansion at 1307 Third Avenue, which was later known as Steele Funeral Home. Murder is unsolved. "

I set Newspapers.com to tell me if anything does come up. A year later this article come up about their lives'. It discloses the fact that Dorothy's mother was murdered. It is a half page story about Leslie and the Enslow family.

The son was found not guilty, and the murder is unsolved to this day.

Juliette was entered into my FTM in 2018, and I just found the main newspaper article in 2024.

My source was Newspapers.com

This next one goes back to Colonial Virginia. To the grandfather of President James Madison. Ambrose Madison born 1696 in Virginia and died in Aug 1732.

Ambrose is a 4th great grandfather twice removed to me. I have two sources and a bio from the Library of Congress.

The only hard evidence is two statements virtually identical that "his slaves poisoned him."

"In the spring of 1732 Madison and his family moved to the estate, which he called Mount Pleasant. A few months later, however, he fell ill and died. Three enslaved people were convicted of poisoning him and one was executed."

Next. Frank Forcier born 1868 in Oconto died Jun 1925.

There are two census records on him and a source from FAG says he die in 1925. From being shot with a gun. That is a secondary source, so I need to prove it.

No more official records so I start searching newspapers and the Family Search WIKI. His death cert. shows up in the Michigan Death Records on the FS Research Wiki with a cause of death as being shot. Then I find a newspaper article from the Oconto Times on the Oconto Historical Society website.

“Gen Leslie Combs: It is with sincere pain that I must inform you of the death of your son, Frank Combs. He was killed by a Mr. O'Blannis on yesterday and the only person present was a young man by the name of Johnston. His statement is that he and Mr. Combs were riding up home, having been below. O'Blannis came riding past them at full speed, after they had passed O'Blennis house. After passing them some 20 yards, O'Blennis jumped from his horse, having a double barrel shotgun in his hand and immediately fired both barrels'. Frank Combs fell dead. O'Blennis absconded immediately. ... It was a military funeral.”

Update on parents provided by
Combs researcher 4/9/2013

source is FAG.

The purpose of this exercise was to show you how you can bring more things to your tree than just birth, marriage and death.

It is not difficult.

It does take some time and thought and research.

Each of our trees means something different than the next person.

I want my tree to tell a story about each person. Good or bad.

My best sources are:

Ancestry.com

Familysearch.org

Newspapers.com

Library of Congress.com (Chronicling America Newspapers)

Thank you for your time and have a great month.

Randy Ray