

Soundex Code

An Additional Soundex Coding Rule Has Been Discovered

After several years of digging through old records at the National Archives, Professional Genealogist Tony Burroughs from Chicago has discovered that there are four rules to using the Soundex Code instead of the three we are familiar with. This fourth rule is not new, just wasn't published. It may solve your problems. Tony also discovered that contrary to what we had all supposed, the Soundex was not set up for the 1880 census, but for Medicare purposes, and that the 1900 census was first to be Soundexed. It was still done by the unemployed college professors of the WPA program.

The Code itself has not changed. You can find copies of that in many places. It consists of the beginning letter and 3 digits (add 0 at end if needed) of the surname. As follows:

Number Represents the Letters

- 1 B, F, P, V
- 2 C, G, J, K, Q, S, X, Z
- 3 D, T
- 4 L
- 5 M, N
- 6 R

Disregard the letters A, E, I, O, U, H, W, and Y.

Rules:

1. If the surname has any double letters, they should be treated as one letter. Example: tt = 3
2. If the surname has different letters side-by-side that have the same number in the soundex coding guide, they should be treated as one letter.

Example: ck = 2

3. If a surname has a prefix, such as Van, Con, De, Di, La, or Le, code both with and without the prefix because the surname might be listed under either code. Note, however, that Mc and Mac are not considered prefixes so code starts with M.

Now the recently discovered rule #4 : Consonant Separators

If a vowel (A, E, I, O, U) separates two consonants that have the same soundex code, the consonant to the right of the vowel is coded. Example: Tymczak is coded as T-522 (T, Y ignored, 5 for the M, 2 for the C, Z ignored (see "Side-by-Side" rule above), 2 for the K). Since the vowel "A" separates the Z and K, the K is coded. (even though both C & K are a 2)

If "H" or "W" separate two consonants that have the same soundex code, the consonant to the right of the vowel is not coded. Example: Ashcraft is coded A-261 (A, 2 for the S, H ignored, C ignored, 6 for the R, 1 for the F). It is not coded A-226.

This newly discovered, but frequently used rule in the WPA days, may be the missing link to finding your ancestor in the Soundex.

