



## Records Preservation & Access Committee

Federation of Genealogical Societies, National Genealogical Society,  
International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies

P. O. Box 200940  
Austin, Texas, USA 78720-0940

October 18, 2014

Jennifer Jessup  
Departmental Paperwork Clearance Officer  
Department of Commerce, Room 6616  
14<sup>th</sup> and Connecticut Ave. NW  
Washington, DC 20230

RE: Information Collection Comment  
Limited Access Death Master File  
Subscriber Certification Form

Dear Ms. Jessup:

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the “Limited Access Death Master File, Subscriber Certification Form.” RPAC wants to thank NTIS and the Department of Commerce for allowing genealogists to become certified for access to the Limited Access Death Master File and for continuing to provide genealogists with access to the Death Master File through March 25, 2014 when Section 203 of the Bipartisan Budget Act went into effect. The Department’s recognition of genealogists as stakeholders and essential users of the information contained in the Death Master File is much appreciated.

The request for comments included an estimated number of respondents as 700. Although a few genealogists applied for certification, the number was much lower than we initially expected for several reasons:

1. The data made available in the temporary certification program was inferior to the data genealogists were used to receiving from genealogy data aggregators. Missing data included the middle name or initial, the name of the state in which the Social Security Number was first issued, and the city and state where the last payment was sent, all of which information is necessary to help distinguish individuals with a common given name and surname.
2. The cost of applying for certification was \$200 which taken by itself was reasonable, but added to those costs are the expenses necessary to keep the information secure. In many cases professional genealogists are small business people who work from their homes and providing a segregated and secure work place will result in additional costs. Failure to comply with the security requirements could result in a \$1,000 fine or fines.
3. The online annual subscription price for access to the NTIS database is \$995 for a single user which is much more than professional genealogists have been paying for a robust search engine such as Ancestry.com which provides access to hundreds of different databases of United States records for an annual fee of \$189.00.

Dee Dee King, CG, a well-known forensic genealogist, wrote about her certification experience and her use of the NTIS DMF in the article “Demystifying the DMF” *Forensic Genealogy News*, Council for the

Advancement of Forensic Genealogy, Volume 4, Issue 3, April 2014, a copy of which can be found at [http://www.forensicgenealogists.org/wp-content/uploads/CAFG\\_Vol\\_4\\_Issue\\_3\\_DMF-Special.pdf](http://www.forensicgenealogists.org/wp-content/uploads/CAFG_Vol_4_Issue_3_DMF-Special.pdf).

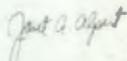
RPAC supports the forensic genealogists for certification by the Department of Commerce for access to the DMF: who assist the Department of Defense in locating heirs for the repatriation of remains from previous wars; assist county coroners in the identification of unclaimed persons; work with attorneys in locating missing and unknown heirs involving estates, trusts, real estate quiet title actions, oil and gas and mineral rights, and other similar legal transactions; trace and track heritable medical conditions where finding distant cousins can facilitate early treatment and possibly prevent a premature death; research stolen art and artifacts for repatriation; and identify American Indians, Native Alaskans, and Native Hawaiians to determine eligibility for tribal benefits.

RPAC further recognizes that many genealogists do not need access to the Social Security Number (SSN) which is the key element which makes identity theft of the deceased and any resulting tax fraud possible. Thus we are recommending that the DMF public file which was available prior to the passage of the 2013 Bipartisan Budget Act, be made available to data aggregators with the SSN redacted. Genealogists need all the information previously available from the Social Security Administration including the middle name or initial, the name of the state in which the Social Security Number was first issued, and the city and state where the last payment was sent. Genealogists need to access the information through the data aggregators who provide a more sophisticated search engine. Making these non-secure data elements available to the public will lessen the number of individuals requesting certification and thus reduce the estimated expenses of the Department of Commerce for the certification program.

RPAC was pleased to see the recent Government Accounting Office (GAO) report dated August 20, 2014 which acknowledged that an estimated \$5.2 billion in fraudulent identity theft income tax refunds were made in 2013 while preventing \$24.2 billion through the use of existing IRS filters. The GAO recommended a number of additional steps that the IRS needs to take to reduce tax fraud from identity theft including accelerating the filing of W-2's and use of more filters to prevent multiple refunds to the same address or account. We were also pleased to see that evidence of the nature and magnitude of tax fraud by identity theft cases in 2011 became available with the publication of the report of the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration (TIGTA) in September 2013 and can be found at: <http://www.treasury.gov/tigta/auditreports/2013reports/201340122fr.pdf>. The extent of tax fraud from identity theft of the deceased was less than 2% of the total and we expect the number to be even lower for 2012 when the IRS improved their use of filters and genealogy website service providers voluntarily began redacting the Social Security Numbers from their websites for deaths which occurred within the last three to ten years.

RPAC is a joint committee of the Federation of Genealogical Societies (FGS), the National Genealogical Society (NGS), and the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies (IAJGS) as sponsoring members. The Association of Professional Genealogists (APG), the Board for Certification of Genealogists (BCG), International Commission for the Accreditation of Professional Genealogists (ICAPGen), and the American Society of Genealogists (ASG) also serve as participating members. By invitation, RPAC also includes participation from a few commercial providers of genealogical information. For more information about RPAC see <http://www.fgs.org/rpac>. I may be contacted by email at [access@fgs.org](mailto:access@fgs.org).

Sincerely,



Janet A. Alpert, Chair

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