

Form SS-5

Why and how to request an ancestor's Application for a Social Security Number

What is form SS-5?

Why you might want to request a recent ancestor's SS-5

How to request an SS-5

What is form SS-5?

- The Social Security Act was signed into law by FDR on Aug 14, 1935.
- The SS-5 is the form people used to register and apply for a SS number and participate in the Social Security program. It was optional.
- The SS-5 can provide info for ancestors who registered with SS and died in 1937 or later .

Note that the form has changed in layout and types of information over time. Here is an example of a newer SS-5.

SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION				Form Approved OMB No. 0960-0066	
Application for a Social Security Card					
1	NAME <small>TO BE SHOWN ON CARD</small>	<small>First</small>	<small>Full Middle Name</small>	<small>Last</small>	
	FULL NAME AT BIRTH <small>IF OTHER THAN ABOVE</small>	<small>First</small>	<small>Full Middle Name</small>	<small>Last</small>	
	<small>OTHER NAMES USED</small>				
2	<small>Social Security number previously assigned to the person listed in item 1</small>			<div style="border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 20px; height: 20px; margin-right: 5px;"></div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 20px; height: 20px; margin-right: 5px;"></div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 20px; height: 20px; margin-right: 5px;"></div> - <div style="border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 20px; height: 20px; margin-right: 5px;"></div> - <div style="border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 20px; height: 20px; margin-right: 5px;"></div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 20px; height: 20px; margin-right: 5px;"></div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 20px; height: 20px; margin-right: 5px;"></div>	
3	PLACE OF BIRTH <small>(Do Not Abbreviate)</small>	<small>City</small>	<small>State or Foreign Country</small>	<small>FCI</small>	<small>Office Use Only</small>
4	DATE OF BIRTH				<small>MM/DD/YYYY</small>
5	CITIZENSHIP <small>(Check One)</small>				
<input type="checkbox"/> U.S. Citizen		<input type="checkbox"/> Legal Alien Allowed To Work		<input type="checkbox"/> Legal Alien Not Allowed To Work(See Instructions On Page 3)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Other (See Instructions On Page 3)					
6	ETHNICITY <small>Are You Hispanic or Latino? (Your Response is Voluntary)</small>	7	RACE <small>Select One or More (Your Response is Voluntary)</small>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		<input type="checkbox"/> Native Hawaiian <input type="checkbox"/> American Indian <input type="checkbox"/> Other Pacific Islander <input type="checkbox"/> Alaska Native <input type="checkbox"/> Black/African American <input type="checkbox"/> White <input type="checkbox"/> Asian			
8	SEX				
<input type="checkbox"/> Male		<input type="checkbox"/> Female			
9	A. PARENT/ MOTHER'S NAME AT HER BIRTH		<small>First</small>	<small>Full Middle Name</small>	<small>Last</small>
	B. PARENT/ MOTHER'S SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER <small>(See instructions for 9 B on Page 3)</small>			<div style="border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 20px; height: 20px; margin-right: 5px;"></div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 20px; height: 20px; margin-right: 5px;"></div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 20px; height: 20px; margin-right: 5px;"></div> - <div style="border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 20px; height: 20px; margin-right: 5px;"></div> - <div style="border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 20px; height: 20px; margin-right: 5px;"></div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 20px; height: 20px; margin-right: 5px;"></div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 20px; height: 20px; margin-right: 5px;"></div> <input type="checkbox"/> Unknown	

It is designed to be very clear and easy to complete.

Includes questions about Ethnicity and Race.

The following info is based on the early SS-5 form.

Here is the form I requested for my grand uncle Wolff Osheroff.

Form SS-5
TREASURY DEPARTMENT
INTERNAL REVENUE SERVICE
(Revised September 1942)

APPLICATION FOR SOCIAL SECURITY ACCOUNT NUMBER
REQUIRED UNDER THE FEDERAL INSURANCE CONTRIBUTIONS ACT
READ INSTRUCTIONS ON BACK BEFORE FILLING IN FORM

DO NOT WRITE IN THE ABOVE SPACE

EACH ITEM MUST BE FILLED IN. IF THE INFORMATION CALLED FOR IN ANY ITEM IS NOT KNOWN, WRITE "UNKNOWN." PRINT IN BLACK OR DARK BLUE INK OR USE TYPEWRITER FOR ALL ITEMS EXCEPT SIGNATURE.

1. WOLF FIRST NAME MIDDLE NAME (IF YOU HAVE NO MIDDLE NAME OR INITIAL DRAW A LINE) LAST NAME OSHEROFF 261

2. 830 E. 163 ST. NEW YORK N.Y. PRESENT MAILING ADDRESS (NUMBER AND STREET) (CITY) (STATE)

3. WOLF OSHEROFF ENTER FULL NAME GIVEN YOU AT BIRTH

4. 56 AGE AT LAST BIRTHDAY 5. MARCH 15 1887 DATE OF BIRTH (MONTH) (DAY) (YEAR) 6. RUSSIA PLACE OF BIRTH (CITY) (COUNTY) (STATE)

7. Gerald Osheroff FATHER'S FULL NAME, REGARDLESS OF WHETHER LIVING OR DEAD 8. Sarah Unknown MOTHER'S FULL NAME BEFORE EVER MARRIED, REGARDLESS OF WHETHER LIVING OR DEAD

(MARK (X) WHICH) COLOR (MARK (X) WHICH)
9. SEX: MALE FEMALE 10. OR RACE: WHITE NEGRO OTHER (SPECIFY)

11. HAVE YOU EVER BEFORE APPLIED FOR OR HAD (MARK (X) WHICH)
(A) SOCIAL SECURITY ACCOUNT NUMBER YES NO
(B) RAILROAD RETIREMENT NUMBER YES NO
IF ANSWER IS "YES" ENTER PLACE AND DATE OF ORIGINAL APPLICATION

12. UNEMPLOYED BUSINESS NAME AND ADDRESS OF EMPLOYER, IF UNEMPLOYED, WRITE "UNEMPLOYED" (NUMBER AND STREET) (CITY) (STATE)

13. 3/18/43 TODAY'S DATE 14. Wolff Osheroff WRITE YOUR NAME AS USUALLY WRITTEN (DO NOT PRINT) USE BLACK OR DARK BLUE INK

RETURN COMPLETED APPLICATION TO, OR SECURE INFORMATION ON HOW TO FILL IN APPLICATION FROM, NEAREST SOCIAL SECURITY BOARD FIELD OFFICE. THE ADDRESS CAN BE OBTAINED FROM LOCAL POST OFFICE.

10-5529-1

DO NOT WRITE IN THIS SPACE

Why you might want to request a recent ancestor's SS-5

Here's what this form can tell you about your ancestor.

Upper right corner - SS#. The first three digits of an SS# are determined by the state in which one applies. If you are searching for someone's census record, but don't know if they lived in NY or NJ, for example, the SSN can help. Use <https://stevemorse.org/ssn/ssn.html> to decode an SS#.

1. Name. The applicant printed the name they use for employment on the form, or a clerk might've typed it. Either way, the info typically came directly from the applicant. For a married woman's maiden name, see #3.

2. Present mailing address. You might use this address to look for other records, such as a correct census record or residence for other family members.

3. Name at birth. The applicant's original name, such as maiden name. This might help you find immigration and naturalization records.

4. Age.

5. Date of birth.

6. Place of birth.

7. Father's full name.

8. Mother's name before ever married. This may be the only documentation you'll find of an ancestor's maiden name.

12. Name of employer. May be a clue as to occupation.

13. Date of application.

14. Signature!

How to request the SS-5

You can order an SS-5 for any person, as long as they are deceased. You must provide proof the person is deceased unless that person is 120 years old or older (born before 1902). The SS-5 applications are provided under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and not by the Social Security Administration.

NOTE: A Request for information CANNOT be processed for:

- Individuals who died before November 1936. No SSN existed for them.
- Individuals born before 1865 (unless you furnish an SSN).

If the person is recently deceased, you will need to provide evidence of their death. This requires that you use the mail-in option since you will need to include a copy of the death certificate, an obituary, etc. The mail-in form is available [here](#).

There are two important rules to keep in mind when you order a copy of someone's SS-5. The Social Security Administration states that:

- "We use the '120 year rule' when disclosing information from our records for extremely aged persons when no date of death exists. We normally do not assume that an individual is deceased without proof of death (e.g., death certificate, obituary, newspaper article, or police report)." Therefore, if your subject was born in or after 1902, you probably ought to use the paper application and provide the death information we discussed above.
- "We do not release the parents' names unless they are proven deceased, have a birth date more than 120 years ago, or the number holder on the SS-5 is at least 100 years of age. Otherwise, these names may be redacted."

NOTE: Not all deceased Americans had an SSN.

- Never worked
- Self-employed did not qualify
- Railroad employees had separate benefits

The current fee is

- \$30 for a mailed in request
- \$21 for an online request

Steps

Much of this is from The Legal Genealogist at

<https://www.legalgenealogist.com/2020/11/16/ordering-the-ss-5-2020-style/>

1. Find the person's SSN by searching the SS Death Master File.
You do not need to know the Social Security number of the individual, but it can help the SSA locate the correct form. You are charged the fee even if the SSA is unable to locate any information on the person.

NOTE: If your ancestor is in the SSDI, they should have an existing SS-5. Not everyone was entered into the SSDI for various reasons.

- Didn't have an SSN
 - Death not recorded
 - Married women listed under their legal name, which may not be their maiden name.
- Try searching the SSDI using the Steve Morse website: <https://stevemorse.org/ssdi/ssdi.html>
 - First trying the Search Engine "Death Master File"
 - Try Ancestry if you have a subscription. Otherwise use Michael's [library hack](#).
 1. Right-click "View Record" and copy link.
 2. Paste link into search bar.
 3. Add the word "library" after "www.ancestry" to get "www.ancestrylibrary.com/etc."
 - Familysearch and MyHeritage do not show the SSN.

3. Decide whether you will mail a request or submit it online.
 - Download paper form from SSA at <https://www.ssa.gov/forms/ssa-711.pdf>
 - Assuming that the person is deceased, you can submit a request under the FOIA.
 - NOTE: You could order a Computer Extract of the SS-5. It has much less info and the fee is \$28.

4. On the FOIAonline web page <https://www.ssa.gov/foia/request.html>
 - Agency Selection - Use the dropdown menu to select Social Security Administration. Read the info that comes up. It refers to an "Additional Information" section. I do not see that.
 - Request Type - Pre-filled with FOIA. You cannot change it.
 - Contact Information - If you include an email address, you will get a confirmation that your request has been received.
 - Processing Fees - Leave it alone, or lower it to \$30 if you like. Only the actual fee amount will be charged (\$21.00).
 - Description - Include the person's name, SSN if known, and date and place of birth if known. Essentially, duplicate the info you're going to enter again under the Additional Information field.
 - Request Expedited Processing and Request a Fee Waiver - Leave these as No (those are not available for this kind of request anyway).
 - Additional Information - Use the dropdown menu to choose "Photocopy of Original Application for a Social Security Card (SS-5) for a Deceased Individual." You will now get an entire form to fill out. Fill out as much as you can:
 - Certification — generally No (it costs \$10; generally not needed)
 - Are You Providing the Subject's SSN? — It will cost less if you answer Yes and provide it
 - Social Security Number
 - Date of birth
 - Name of Individual at Birth — enter as First Middle Last
 - Gender
 - Deceased Individual's Parent/Mother's Name at Birth — mother's maiden name in full if known
 - Deceased Individual's Parent/Mother's Married Name(s)(if any) — mother's married name if known
 - Name(s) of Individual(if other than above/other names(s) used) — e.g. a woman's maiden name
 - Deceased Individual's Parent/Father's Name at Birth — if known
 - Attach Support Files.

For newer deaths, deaths of younger persons, and as to anyone whose name you can't find in the SSDI, supply acceptable proof of death. Examples:

 - a copy of a public record of death; or
 - a statement of death from a funeral director; or
 - a statement of death by the attending physician or the superintendent, physician, or intern of the institution where the person died; or
 - an obituary with sufficient identifying information
 - Click Preview. This opens a new page. Review it.
 - If satisfied, check the I Agree boxes at the bottom and click Submit. This will bring up a web page to pay online.

What next?

- I received the requested SS-5 in about 2 weeks.
- The SS-5 itself is one page.
- An additional four pages were sent explaining what they sent with info about forms they may have sent in lieu of the SS-5.