

In the genealogical community we have a number of practicing attorneys. One of them even writes a blog called The Legal Genealogist. Today, Oregon has her attention. I hope you'll take a moment to read her short blog located here:

[http://www.legalgenealogist.com/blog/2013/04/09/and-one-step-back/?fb\\_source=pubv1](http://www.legalgenealogist.com/blog/2013/04/09/and-one-step-back/?fb_source=pubv1)

We need open records in this state.

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On 4/8/2013 7:10 PM, Leslie Lawson wrote:

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*Families are Forever*

### **Vital Record Changes in Oregon– HB 2093**

April 8, 2013

Additional input for this very important issue:

The genealogical community *strongly objects* to the removal of cause of death to any death certificate. There is no reason to redact this information. When a medical family tree is needed you are making it difficult if not impossible for people to get vital information. This has been tried in other states, and people died because of this unnecessary law. As a doctor, Governor Kitzhaber should already know how very important this knowledge is.

From the Massachusetts Genealogical Council

For Melinde Sanborn, this [access to the cause of death] was important:

The result on my family was electrifying. For decades we had been concerned about uterine cancer which killed our great-grandmother. There was no history of this in the Massachusetts family, but a branch of the family had the misfortune to move to New Hampshire where death records with cause of death are closed. As it turns out, all the female cousins in NH that generation died of uterine cancer. We had to wait until 2008 to find out because they died in the late 1940s. So New Hampshire protected us from the information for 84 years – the time elapsed since great-grandmother died and the records of our cousins were released.

Something happened to that generation – perhaps there is an insight to be had into the disease. Every day I volunteer at the New Hampshire vital records I hear stories like this. It is lucky for everyone that the patient who brought Dr. Daniel Pollen a chart of three generations of early-onset Alzheimer's lived in Massachusetts, otherwise he could not have learned of his cousin's durations and deaths. No chart, no discovery of the gene, no eventual treatment.

Closed records are an abomination and a privilege I don't grant to my government. Yes, 100% open records, complete transparency. *The complacency of legislators needs to be shaken up by a determined and frankly underestimated opponent – genealogists who vote.*

You can access the white paper written by the Massachusetts Genealogical Council here:  
[http://www.massgencouncil.org/images/pdfs/mgc\\_white\\_paper.pdf](http://www.massgencouncil.org/images/pdfs/mgc_white_paper.pdf)

Records Preservation and Access (RPAC) committee has already written to you and cc'd me with a copy. There is a white paper written by them and available here: <http://www.fgs.org/rpac/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/00-white-paper-edits-c-final-version4.pdf> It is somewhat dated in sections, but still holds valid information.

And as recently as last week this article was published:  
<http://www.courant.com/news/opinion/editorials/hc-ed-death-certificates-should-be-public-20130404,0,2302401.story>

“No one wants to make life more difficult for the families. But shrouding public records in secrecy is a mistake. The death certificate simply states a time, place and cause of death, place of burial and the like. It does not provide graphic detail that might cause parents more emotional hardship. Details of the death are found in autopsy reports.”

It would appear that revenue might be a consideration. While I can understand that the state would like to garner more funds to vital records in the form of documents purchased at \$20 a piece, what effect does this decision make on the tourism dollar? I know that people come to Oregon from all over the world to do research on their family's right here. If you make those documents harder to get they have no reason to come here for at least another 25 years! (Based on this House Bill, you want to make these changes that are unnecessary and unfounded in reality.) I myself take research trips annually. I will spend on average \$1000 per trip, and I travel with others. Closing these records is not the answer. And that includes removing the cause of death on the certificates.

The genealogical community feels just as strongly that social security numbers should NOT be removed from death certificates either. It is a well known fact that identity theft is not caused by access to birth and death certificates. It's usually caused by having your wallet stolen.

If Oregon is worried about identity theft would it not seem more appropriate to have the State Registrar mark or stamp birth records DECEASED when they are notified that that person has died? Then on the very rare occasion that a thief might actually order a copy of a birth record the record will already reflect the death as the document will already be printed with the DECEASED stamp on it.

I would like to see Oregon have the courage to move records access online like

Arizona <http://genealogy.az.gov/>

Michigan: <http://seekingmichigan.org/discover/death-records>

Missouri: <http://www.sos.mo.gov/archives/resources/deathcertificates/>

I hope in the future your committee will include the genealogical community when discussing records access.

And I find it rather disconcerting that I emailed ten representatives on 4-5-2013. Of those ten, only four opened the email. I'll be sharing *that* information with the genealogical community as well.

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