



Genealogical Treasure Hunt – Finding Unclaimed Property Using the Internet



In the spirit of making family history research fun and, possibly, profitable, this week's "Genealogical" site is a bit different. We're going treasure hunting – you may get "skunked" (find nothing), or you may come away a bit richer – literally. This one is a good one to get your kids involved and interested in.

What Is Unclaimed Property?

Unclaimed Property consists of money and other personal assets that are considered lost or abandoned when an owner cannot be located after a specified period of time. It includes checking accounts, certificates of deposit, overpayments, gift certificates, paid-up life insurance policies, unpaid wages, commissions, uncashed checks, death benefits, dividends, insurance payments, money orders, refunds, savings accounts, stocks and contents of safe deposit boxes. Unclaimed Property does not include real estate. Generally, most property is presumed to be abandoned if no activity has been made for five years. Wages, government checks and utility deposits become unclaimed after only one year. There is no charge for claiming the funds nor is there a time limit.

It's time to hope that your ancestors didn't throw anything out and that you have what it is necessary to claim it. If you do, your will be richer (For me, it's \$160 richer!) or you may be "informationally" richer . . . or you may find nothing.

How Do I Find Unclaimed Property?

- Go to Google (<http://www.google.com>)
- Type "Unclaimed Property" and the name of the state you want to search (e.g. "Unclaimed Property" Utah). Using the " " means that Google will search for those words as a phrase.
- Look for a site that is a **state** government site. There are some sites on the internet that will do the searching for you, but they want you to pay – don't use those.
- When you get to the state site, follow the directions that they give you. Sometimes, you will need to register (Utah), but it is still free to search.
- Type in the last name. (Utah's is case sensitive, so make certain to capitalize. Also, Utah's will only give the first 50, so you may need to add a first initial. I have not run into this searching other states.)

What Do I Do If I Find Something?

- Look on the site to see what is the next step. There is probably a claim form that you print or send for.
- Gather your "proof" (In the case of an insurance policy, they may want the proof – the policy, which you may not have if it is from your grandfather, for instance. (But, you still have the fun of finding something. My grandfather had an unclaimed insurance policy from 1943 and he died in 1948. It was only \$25, but it would be fun to see how much it would be worth today.)
- Submit it. (HINT: If it says to get your signature notarized if the amount is over \$100, do it anyway even if the amount is less than that – a little \$62 saving account dormant since 1960 had earned \$95+ in interest!)