

# Sex, Murder, and Genealogy?

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## Background

### "Dora Feldman McDonald Murders Lover" Chgo Tribune 22 Feb 1907

- Ends Blackmail; Kills; Is Insane
- Wife of Mike McDonald Murders  
Webster S. Guerin; The Goes Raving  
Mad in Her Cell
- Finish of Love Affair

### "Acquittal Given to Mrs. M'Donald" Chgo Tribune: 12 Feb 1908

- Jurors After Five Hours of Deliberation  
Declare Her Guiltless of Slaying
- Woman Calm at Verdict

### Why a Genealogist?

- Looks beyond generally known facts
- Uses documents that record primary  
sources (evidence)
  - o Facts recorded at time of event
  - o Secondary sources provide  
information about something that  
happened in the past
- Starts with the "story" and tries to find  
more facts

### What Did We Know?

- Chicago Daily News Article 18 March  
1944 by Alfred Prowitt
  - o Dora met Michael C. McDonald in  
1898
  - o Michael McDonald died while Dora  
was awaiting trial

- o After her acquittal, she said she  
wanted to go somewhere "bright  
and sunny" like Florida
- o "But the train she took went to  
California..."
- What else did we know?
  - o Dora was born in Chicago
  - o Her parents were German  
immigrants
  - o Had son Harold from first marriage
  - o She married a man named  
Newcomb
  - o She died in 1931 in California

## The Genealogist Goes to Work

- Death Records
  - o Death certificates
  - o Death notices
  - o Probate files
- Census
- City Directories
- Historic newspapers

Many of the tools are available online today

### Death Notices: Fanny & Fogel

### Off to California (via internet)

### Off to California (by airplane)

- Doris Newcomb died 1 July 1930 (state  
printed death index)
- No death notice found
- Ordered death certificate

### Death Certificate

- Husband: C.A. Newcomb (separated)
- Born in Memphis, TN
- Resident of CA for 5 years

### Census Search

- 1870 Census: Memphis, TN
- 1880 Census: Chicago; her name was Flora
- 1910 Census: Chicago
- 1920 Census: Chicago
- 1930 Census: L.A.

### Chicago City Directories

- 1900 Michael C., no Dora
- 1910 Harold at 3702 Grand Blvd.
- 1917 Dora & Harold at 4230 Grand Blvd.

### Probate Search: Los Angeles

- Started process after found death certificate
- Called at least 25 times

### Back to CA: Los Angeles

- Probate file on microfilm
- Over 200 pages
- Statement of assets
- Trust for grandson

### Proquest Historical Newspapers: Chicago Tribune

- Guerin murder basis of drama (1908)
- Dora back in Chicago from NYC (1908)
- Brother eats up M'Donald legacy (1908)

### References

Roth, Walter, *Looking Backward: True Stories From Chicago's Jewish Past* (Academy Chicago Publishers, 2002).

- Dora in Mexico with Briggs (1908)
- Mrs. Briggs gets divorce (1909)
- Dora accuses executors of fraud (1911)
- Dora's son guilty of abandonment (1912)
- Dora being sued for injuries (1915)
- Quitclaim filed against Dora (1919)
- Dora being sued for defective gas plumbing (1920)

### Marriage record for Flora Fellman & Michael C. McDonald

- Presbyterian marriage in 1895
- In Milwaukee

### **What Did We Learn?**

- Born in Memphis not Chicago
- Didn't leave Chicago until mid 1920's not soon after trial
- Heard of again but in smaller dramas
- Married in Presbyterian ceremony in 1895 not Jewish ceremony in 1898
- First husband Sam Barkley (not Barclay)

### **Primary sources insightful**