

I talk a lot about component parts, or the basic how-to's of handling records, but what about the how-to's of building one person's life in your family tree? Genealogy has become an immediate-gratification online phenomenon, but it's not always that at all. How long should a 21st-century online researcher be expected to wait before work is done on any one person in their tree? This episode takes on that question, and replies with my ongoing battle to complete details about one person – my great-aunt Clara's third husband, John Joseph Dalain. This story contains marriages, divorces, two murders, one attempted murder, some drunk driving, and just for some spice, a hog theft. It outlines the lives of some very hard-living people in 20th-century America, and the 44 years of work that my uncle and I have put in (well, 44 years and counting) to get the story of one man told. Strap in – there's a lot of procedure here, but there's also a lot of gothic tragedy and scandalous fun!



Hello, and welcome to episode 22 of From Paper To People, Ancestors Alive! Genealogy's ever-evolving podcast. I am your hostess with the mostest, Carolynn ni Lochlainn, and I want to lead with a thank-you today: there are now 91 members in the Facebook group, and with five weekly feature columns for response AND individual members writing their own posts about their work and about events, it's becoming a really interesting place to be. I hope you'll join us too.

A special welcome to Denmark, Sweden, Belgium and the Netherlands. Love you muchly!!!

More thanks to Denise Lange of Pleasant Street Creative, because she has been giving me fantastic guidance, and the website is getting reorganized and more functional. If there are things you would like to see there, research tools, charts, links and such, that are not yet available, contact me through the website's form. I will try to address your needs.

I also wanted to issue a heads-up: I'm going to make a purposeful attempt to avoid teaching

about Ancestry for a few episodes, because frankly, Ancestry is jacked up. MIGHTY JACKED UP. They're not answering phones, not responding to customer needs, and the only way to raise them is by Twitter. I haven't discussed it here because I am really sick of users sniping about it on Twitter and I don't want to whine, but suffice it to say that the lagging, the error pages, and all of the messes that were supposed to be done as of June 1st are still a huge problem. I won't steer you into that storm, and instead, we'll be taking forays into some other tools, including those that can help you find living and recently-deceased persons - Findagrave, FamilySearch, Been Verified, and more. And, of course, there will be more interviews and more Family Cookbook episodes.

Speaking of which...What did you think of the theme music for the debut of The Family Cookbook in episode 21? Did Curt Brady knock that one out of the park or what? You too can be on an episode with that sassy music leading in to your family story and recipe. Just contact me through the website and we'll set it up.

Now, down to business...I realized as I was working a few weeks back that we haven't discussed the variety and scope of work that goes into building a clear understanding of just one life, so that's what I'm doing today. This episode is a story of marriage, murder, attempted murder, hog theft, more murder, and the research it took to find all of these stories as they constellate around, or are tangential to, one of my ancestors, John Dalain, the final husband of my paternal great-aunt, Clara Mae Odom. Building John's story took decades, starting with my uncle's work in folklore, interviewing Clara's mother Joda in 1974, but it has been worth it.

Clara Mae Odom cuts a vivid figure for me. Her life overlapped only two years with mine, but she never left Texas, so we never met. She and I were both redheads, we both had lousy taste in men, neither of us had children, and we both had a bit too much fun at parties in our earlier years. Fortunately, I recovered from my love for the bottle; Clara, not so much.

Clara's life was tragic from the start. She was born to two parents who were already on their

way to divorce in 1921 Texas. Her father, Guy Odom, was an abusive alcoholic. According to my great-grandma, Joda, she, my grandmother and Clara were barred from Guy Odom's funeral when Guy died of liver cancer and cirrhosis in 1941, products of his alcoholism, due to family jealousies. Guy, who had remarried shortly after Joda divorced him, and then again shortly after his second wife died, had a pregnant third wife at the time of his demise. Guy Odom Jr, born two months after the funeral, would never know his father. And, as far as I can tell, my grandmother and my great-aunt would never know that their half-brother even existed. I know that my father and uncles were shocked to learn of him. Unfortunately, Guy Jr died about a decade before I found record of him. He too had no children. He completely missed out on having any family from his father's side.

Clara grew up to be a nicer alcoholic than her father, but she was drawn to the ones like her dad. In fact, she married and divorced, in rather quick succession, two abusive drunks. Despite that, my uncles and my dad have fond memories of what a fun-loving person Clara was. I have a couple of photographs of her. She had a sweet and slightly chubby face and lots of red hair. My younger uncle remembers her kindness, that she was engaged in and admiring of his chemistry experiments when he was 11 or 12. My grandmother always believed that Clara was her mother's favorite, because Joda and Clara shared a taste for mischief and bad boys.

But the focus of today's work, and of the life that I decided to build in my tree to help honor Clara once my work on Clara was nominally complete, was that of her final husband, John Joseph Dalain. According to my father and my uncles, he was the only one who treated her with love and respect. Some of Clara's life is still obscured at present by a dearth of records; the other husbands weren't around for very long, either. But Clara and John's marriage, at least ten years in duration, marked the end of her life. She died, also of cirrhosis of the liver and alcoholism, just four months after he passed. I know that she was very ill because one of my uncles told me that she called very shortly before her death, complaining of discolored skin from the booze and the liver damage. Researching John Dalain would help me to bookend Clara, and to lay her story to peace. From the beginning of my work on the family's

history, I was determined to see their marriage honored. This is the story of how I put it all together, and of what remains to be done.

My work started from family folklore memorialized on cassettes and transferred to paper, decades ago. John Dalain was listed as Clara Mae Odom's husband. From there, I moved it into Personal Ancestral File, and from there, into Family Tree Maker that I eventually synced with Ancestry. I continued by pestering my grandmother, my father and my uncles with questions until I isolated a few simple facts. My father said that John was a merchant mariner, so I was fairly certain that anything I turned up showing a John Dalain as a sailor or seaman would be correct. This was a very good lead. I estimated John's birth year as being the same as Clara's, roughly 1920, as a starting point. Everyone told me that John had a thick Massachusetts accent, so I added Massachusetts, USA as his birthplace.

Some time in the late 1990s or early 2000s, I searched online for Clara's death certificate. By this time, my tree was in a gedcom file, and I was syncing with Ancestry. Nobody in the family could recall when she had died exactly, and Texas vital records collections in Austin had been burned in a fire or something. At any rate, I had to approach the individual county to find her certificate, but I wasn't even sure where she had died. My dad suggested Fort Worth, and I ended up finding a nice librarian there who researched and found Clara's death certificate and mailed me a copy. From that, I learned that Clara had died in Houston, in Harris County. It showed the facts of her death - the cirrhosis, the alcoholism - but it also showed that she died a widow. Family members told me that they died around the same time, and I knew that she lived a good portion of her life in Houston, so I gave John Dalain a death place of Texas, United States, and a date of before 1966.

Three or four years and multiple spyglass searches later, I still couldn't find anything in Ancestry - not even in someone else's crappy tree. This was the definition of a brick wall. But Texas has been very good about continuing to make their Vital Records available online. For instance, Clara's death certificate came online, indexed and searchable, about four years ago. So, I maintained hope.

A year or two ago, once the Magical Mormon keyhole was added to the free Ancestry membership for LDS members, I went over to FamilySearch, where I had already added Clara Mae Odom to the one world tree, and added John Dalain as her husband, crossing over what little information I had so far. Unfortunately, there wasn't enough there to trigger FamilySearch hints. I did some keyword searching through their system, but again, I found nothing. John Dalain and Clara Odom were married after the 1940 census, and we all know that the 1940 is the most recent US Census available, so there was bound to be a dearth of records for them together. I had hoped to find something for John Dalain before the 1940 census, but with so little on him, and no information about his parents, there was no way for me to recognize him for sure in FamilySearch, where context is notably absent. I had to leave FamilySearch alone, and return to my favorite place, Ancestry, where I could make mistakes and potentially screw it up thoroughly before I had a decently-documented, correct version of John Dalain's life.

Continued, periodic spyglass searches for Census records under the name John Dalain on Ancestry yielded nothing, but a year or two ago I began to find Boston Passenger and Crew lists that looked promising. They showed a John J Dalain shipping between Boston and three different ports in Venezuela in 1935. Then two records from the US Navy Support Books from 1943 showed a John J Dalain in a Yearbook of the Esso Fleet, stating that he was receiving his 10-year button for service as a Second Mate among Seagoing Personnel in the Deck Department. For those of you younger listeners, Esso was an oil company that later became Exxon. This fleet shipped petroleum products all over the world in World War II in support of the war effort. The 10-year button meant that he had started serving with the Esso Fleet in 1933, which pushed his birth year back a bit, so I had to adjust that to something more like 1913.

Records on Ancestry were starting to flesh out a bit more about John Dalain's life. But still, so many things were lacking. I decided to do the next thing in line - last autumn, I went to newspapers.com. With such an unusual last name - D A L A I N - and a name that would not be commonly found in Texas, I decided to look at Texas newspapers for any listing of a John J

Dalain. Surprisingly, I found two major events listed. The first was a marriage from 1947. It was to a wife that neither I nor any of my family members knew about at all. In fact, when I informed my father of this marriage, he said he doubted that Aunt Clara had even known about the existence of this first wife. The society page article, in the Galveston news dated 13 April 1947 reads as follows: "Dalain-Nelson. The marriage of Mrs. Martha Nelson, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. E E Gains of Jonesboro, Louisiana to John J Dalain, son of Mrs. Marcella Dalain of Boston, Massachusetts, was solemnized at 10 p.m. Thursday at the home of Reverend J. R. Hillman, who officiated at the service. Mrs Zane G Stevenson was the bride's only attendant and wore a red street-length frock with black accessories. Mr. Stevenson attended the bridegroom. The bride wore a blue street-length dress and black accessories. Following a brief stay in Galveston, the couple will reside in Texas City."

This was a real eye-opener, and it offered me something I did not have before – in addition to providing me with an initial marriage for John Dalain, it also provided me with his mother's first name! This was major. It also confirmed that John Dalain was, indeed, from Boston, and that his mother was alive in 1947, living in Boston. Since John's father's name was not provided in the marriage announcement, I had to assume that Marcella's husband was deceased, or that he was missing from the family due to divorce or abandonment. This allowed me to update the Ancestry tree by entering Marcella, with Dalain in parentheses, as her surname, and an estimated birth year of 1893 (20 years before John's estimated birth year), and an estimated death year of after 1947. I presumed a death place of Boston, Massachusetts. I was able to confirm from this, at least with some more confidence, that John Dalain was indeed born in Boston. And I was able to add not only Martha Gains, but also her parents and her first husband, a mystery man with the surname Nelson and an estimated birth year identical to Martha's, to the tree. I started to research Martha's parents and found that they were Enoch Elihue Gains and Nora Bell Morgan. I found them in FamilySearch, connected up my research between Ancestry and FamilySearch, cleaned up some duplicates, and linked John Dalain to Martha by marriage in FamilySearch as well, thus connecting up two sections of tree in FamilySearch that had not been connected before. Then, I added a residence in 1947 of Texas City, Texas to both Martha Gains and John Dalain in Ancestry. So

things were going pretty well.

But then I came to the second, devastating set of facts that were illuminated in newspapers.com. In articles dated 5 December and 6 December 1949 in four different newspapers in Galveston, Longview, Corsicana, and Harlingen, I learned how Martha Gains Dalain died, in a little town called Humble, Texas. But there was nothing humble about her death. All the articles tell the same story, but the best accounting is in the Valley Morning Star of Harlingen Texas dated 5 December 1949. It reads as follows - "Houston Cafe Shooting Fatal to Woman. One bullet fired in a Humble road cafe early Sunday wounded a man and killed his wife. Mrs. John Dalain, 34, Houston, was killed. Police said the first bullet hit Mrs. Dalain's husband, went through his shoulder and then struck his wife in the neck. Charges of murder and assault to murder were filed against Rollie Alfred Candelier, owner of the cafe."

I searched the papers further, but there was no more mention of Rollie Alfred Candelier, nor of any phase of legal proceedings in this case, so I decided to look further into Martha's family. I found her death certificate on Ancestry. It showed that she died in a place called Patsy's Cafe. The death was listed as a homicide, the time of injury was 4 December 1949, 1:15 a.m. The means was a gunshot wound to the chest. John and Martha had been married for 2 years. She was 34 years old, he not much older. Oh, and "road cafe" equals "road house bar," by the way. John had shipped out for years on oil tanker, after all. Clara liked him. And my uncle said that John was definitely a "bad boy." John and Martha weren't drinking coffee at 1:15 in the morning.

I left this whole area alone for about six months, but no new hints popped on Ancestry. A spyglass search did yield the 1940 census, which showed me that John was single, living in Boston in both 1935 and 1940, his profession was that of a seaman, and that he also ran a boarding house for employees of a nearby hotel. The birthdate was off, but censuses are unreliable for birthdates and some of this specific page looked like it was filled in later. Since it is the only census record I have found for ANY John Dalain at any time, and the profession and location were correct, I believe that it is him and that the census-taker made some

errors.

You know, of course, that eventually I had to run a tree on Rollie Alfred Candelier. There was no way that I was going to let this ride – I needed to know why he shot my great-uncle and killed Martha, and to understand whether or not he went to prison. For that matter, I wanted to know whether John instigated the argument, or was arrested later. If Rollie Alfred Candelier didn't go to prison, did he successfully plead self-defense? Did Rollie hit on Martha, and did John literally step in to shut Rollie down? The only way I saw to clarify things in the short term was to work that tree. So, just last week, I leaned forward and fell down the rabbit hole.

First, I returned to traditional methods by calling the Humble, Texas Museum for some information about Patsy's Cafe, but that yielded nothing because the Museum is closed for repairs due to Hurricane Harvey. So I ran Rollie's tree on Ancestry, fleshed out his relatives, connected it over to FamilySearch and, while I was at it, cleaned up a bunch of really simple and annoying errors that people had made in FamilySearch so that everything was correct on that side.

Rollie had two wives during his life. He was married to the first at the time of the shooting, in 1949, to a woman who would die a few years later, but not before producing a child in 1950. This timing suggested that Rollie didn't go to prison. Records alone couldn't confirm or deny this, though, because the 1950 census, which would show his whereabouts, will not be available until 2022.

Now, have you been checking Twitter lately? There's a great hashtag that's been circulating – #YouKnowYoureAGenealogist – and a lot of the responses are about falling into a research hole for 18 hours, forgetting to eat, falling asleep at the computer, getting caught up in mirror trees for days at a time, that sort of thing. I went there without meaning to...I researched for about an extra 8 hours because I felt compelled to look at the other members of the Candelier family so I could figure out WHY Rollie did what he did. And what I found was fascinating.

One of the things that interested me in the Ancestry records that I could find was that Rollie's brother Russell went to prison ten years before Rollie shot my great-uncle. Russell was listed in the Texas Convict and Conduct Register as a prisoner at Huntsville Penitentiary for hog theft. He was received into the prison on the 12th of March 1937 and was to be held until February 10th of 1939. Apparently, he got out on the 27th of September 1938 for good behavior. Perhaps he made up for that hog theft during his incarceration at Huntsville by abstaining from sausage. We will never know. There are no other records, on any other service including Newspapers.com, that give any information about this arrest, crime, conviction, incarceration, or leniency. But the hog theft sure is fun.

Meanwhile, as Russell was headed into the pokey in 1937, brother Chester Candelier was going to court for driving drunk. I found that tidbit in Newspapers.com. But upon bouncing back to Ancestry, I found an even more tragic show of violence in the family - in 1928, 19 years before Rollie solved his argument with my great-uncle using a bullet, someone did the same with Rollie's older brother Adolph, using a knife in Wink, Texas. I found Adolph's death certificate on Ancestry. A quick cruise over to Wikipedia told me that Wink was only properly incorporated a few months after Adolph died, and that it was an oil boom town filled with oil camps and essentially run by organized crime. What all of this shows is that the Candelier boys were a pretty rough and ready crew, and that Rollie, owning a roadside bar in a town named for an oil company - Humble Oil - probably didn't think anything of carrying that pistol, nor of pulling it.

I'd gotten a better feel for Rollie's family, anyway, by drifting off into surrounding family members and their stories. But the most surprising bit of research came from another Ancestry user - a relative of Rollie's. She had Rollie on her public tree, nicknamed "Pat," and because of her diligence, I was able to see a photo of the man who killed Martha Gains Nelson Dalain, the man who shot my great-uncle and changed his life forever. Hoping for some folklore, I sent her a message. I asked what she knew about the shooting, and she stunned me - she told me that her older cousin, still living, said that Rollie had killed a man. She never knew it was a woman. She also said that Rollie never, to her knowledge, went to

prison. This Ancestry user told me that Rollie was her grandmother's nephew, but that she never met him. And that told me a bit more about the family – his contemporaries knew that Rollie shot and killed someone, and it was apparently OK if it was a man, but not if it was a woman, so the story morphed into something more palatable. And isn't that what I've been saying all along, that folklore has kernels of truth in it but that ultimately it can't be relied upon as fact? This proves that point.

The story of John Dalain was capped last week by the best discovery of all. After months and years of waiting for a new document hint, something finally popped: John Dalain's death certificate appeared as a hint on FamilySearch, not Ancestry. This climactic hint resulted from the perfect marriage of all sources: folklore, Personal Ancestral File, Family Tree Maker, Ancestry, and Newspapers.com all worked together to create the profile on Ancestry, and once I crossed it over to FamilySearch, an indexed record finally became available to me. It only took 44 years! The death certificate was GOLD. It showed his full name – John Joseph Dalain. It provided his birth date and place, 1 September 1909 in Massachusetts. It gave his parents' full names – Dominic Dalain and Marcella Stonkus – which gave me more to work with because this was the first mention of his father's name anywhere, and the first mention of his mother's maiden name. It gave his profession at the time of his death – real estate broker, which was something that conflicted with the family lore that he was a cook when he died. And it gave his cause of death – congestive heart failure and acute coronary occlusion. Apparently, he was in the hospital for two weeks before he died, so he must have been ill for a while. It listed Mrs. Clara Mae Dalain as the informant, so I knew that the record corresponded to his marriage to my great-aunt and therefore was the right John Dalain. It listed Brookside Memorial Cemetery in Houston as his final resting place. I attached the death certificate to John's profile in FamilySearch, added all of this information to the Ancestry tree, and then crossed the specific information from Ancestry over into FamilySearch to make sure that the specific data items, like full name and birth date, were correct. I also added his parents' updated names to Ancestry, and crossed them over to FamilySearch.

I then checked Findagrave, but there was no listing for John's grave at all in Brookside, so I

created one using all of the data I had collected. I requested a headstone photo and linked Clara to him as his wife, with an estimated marriage year since their marriage license and certificate have not yet appeared anywhere online. Then, I looked for Martha's Findagrave record, but not only was she not listed - her cemetery hadn't been created. I created the cemetery using GPS data I found in a Google search, then I created her memorial. I added the photo of her death certificate to her memorial, and his death certificate to his. I linked Martha to John's memorial in Findagrave as his wife, along with their marriage year. That finished my work linking everyone outside of family tree sites.

To polish off this episode, while I was in the Urban Cafe I googled John's longtime employer, the Esso Fleet, and I found a volume about it on Google Books. It had a bookplate stuck inside the cover that reads "Gift of the Humble Oil & Refining Company." The book's introduction states that the fleet's sailors worked for the Standard Oil Company and the Panama Transport Company, delivering oil, planes, PT boats and landing craft, tanks and trucks to multiple locations in the European and Pacific theatres during the Second World War.

This helps the pieces fit together even more clearly - Venezuela is a large oil exporter, so John's early Esso employment was on oil tankers of some sort. He must have lived in the Houston and Humble area around 1947 because of his employment with the Esso Oil Company. Yesterday, I joined and submitted a question to shipsnostalgia.com, a message board site I found in a Google search, looking for information about how to find the ship or ships that he served on, and his specific service records. Veterans of the Esso Fleet are members there, and I hope that with their guidance, I can assemble his employment and service records. I have more work ahead of me to find out what else might shed light on his life, not only in adulthood, but on the origins of his parents. His mother's name looks to be Lithuanian, but his father's could be Italian, French or Irish. There are no clear records on them at all yet, so there is much yet to be done. Just today, I spoke to one of my uncles, and he told me that John drove a Cadillac convertible in 1956 or so, which gave me an estimated marriage year for John and Clara of 1955. New information will continue to trickle in. Eventually, I hope for a marriage certificate. And I need to contact researchers in Harris

County, Texas to see if they would chase down arrest and court records for me regarding Rollie Candelier's arrest and the possibility that John was arrested as well.

Regardless of all the crazy Candelier drama, what I've learned is that John Dalain was both a bad boy and a bonafide hero. He worked a dangerous job. He liked to carouse with both of his wives, but he stood in front of Martha and took the bullet first. And, as far as I am concerned, his marriage to Clara, which was by all accounts a good one, a marriage that he stuck out despite her visible alcoholic decline, was also an act of romanticism, heroism, or both.

I will continue to research John Dalain. He's not my blood, I never knew him, and I'll never meet his people, I'm sure. But what I've learned about his life tells me that he deserves to be known.

That's all I've got this week. Thanks so much for listening! My contact form is on point, so stop by ancestorsalivegenealogy.com and use it to drop me a line. Find me on Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Patreon and Facebook using the links there as well.

Until next time, have a great week, do your research, don't be a Jeffrey, keep building lives, and above all, Expect Surprises!


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