

# 4. Fundamental Mysteries III: The Case of the Voodoo Aunt

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1. Fundamental Mysteries III: The Case of Voodoo Aunt
  - a. Hints, Intuition, Synchronicity & Persistence
2. What is this all about: Purpose to provide beginning researchers some very simple and very helpful genealogical concepts
3. The Mystery Begins
  - a. Family Tree
4. Estella James Ganaway
  - a. Nearly all records about Estella are confusing
  - b. What to do
5. Early Estella Docs
  - a. First Marriage
  - b. 1920 Census
6. “Stella” and Angles Van Mason
  - a. Marriage License
  - b. Married in Census
7. Stella Mason’s Family
  - a. Some Results so far
    - i. Some marriage/census records found
    - ii. Talked to the two remaining children
    - iii. Talked to the remaining wives
    - iv. Talked to next-generation children
    - v. Found a cousin
  - b. Some Troublesome Thoughts
    - i. Words out, “Don’t tell ’em anything”
    - ii. Siblings defer knowledge to one another
    - iii. Some family disharmony noted
    - iv. Next gen-children know little
    - v. No one has records
8. Genealogists Know about the Land
  - a. Area Map of West Virginia – Virginia Border

9. Know about the Cemeteries
  - a. Area Map of Nearby Cemeteries
  
10. Doing Things by the Book
  - a. Created documents & information book
  - b. Gotten the names, dates, locations
  - c. Created the initial family charts
  - d. Mapped locations and cemeteries
  - e. Talked to the primary family members
  - f. Scanned the photos & images
  - g. Visited the homestead & archives
  - h. Visited the library & undertakers
  
11. Things to Know about Vital Records
  - a. Each state has their own version of what vital records can be obtained
  - b. Some records online; others can be obtained through the mail or by visit
  - c. Some ask for kinship, have a writing period—most ask for money
  
12. Frustration is Setting In, but You Know
  - a. You can sneak into this world, but “the Law” wants to know how you left
  - b. Record keeping gets better with time
  - c. Something mysterious is going on
  - d. Time to outline the Juicy Questions
    - i. Who else knew this person?
    - ii. How did she live?
    - iii. When did she die?
    - iv. How did she get buried?
    - v. Where was she buried?
    - vi. Who paid for what?
  
13. Time to Go Sideways
  - a. Find others who can contribute information
  - b. Note You may find folds of peculiar behaviors or temperament
    - i. A niece: Yes, she died, but we did not attend
    - ii. A nephew: I was in high school then
    - iii. A neighbor: I don’ t think it was in Virginia
    - iv. Another niece: I was a small child and it was too cold to go
    - v. Another niece: She died after her brother Altimont
    - vi. A cousin: Yes, the funeral was in Detroit around the holiday
    - vii. Another cousin: Most of the family lived in Detroit; some were out of town
    - viii. A nephew: I heard there was a big fight at the funeral
    - ix. A friend: I believe they took off with the body and took her home
    - x. A nephew: Might have something to do with religion or money
    - xi. A niece: My cousin said he personally paid for the tombstone

14. Somewhat Unbelievably Sparse

- a. Periodically assess what you found
- b. I've clearly found folks of peculiar behaviors or temperament
- c. New Thoughts
  - i. She may not have died in Virginia or West Virginia
  - ii. Most of her family lived in Detroit (not known before)
  - iii. She may have died in Detroit around the holiday!!
  - iv. It might have been during the cold time of the year
  - v. She died after her brother Altimont died in 1966
  - vi. She may be buried elsewhere
  - vii. There may be a tombstone
- d. Research work is now in Motown

15. What do you know about Detroit?

- a. Very little except:
  - i. Detroit is a very big city
  - ii. Wayne County is big (25 x 40 miles)
  - iii. Oldest son used to live there
  - iv. Youngest daughter still lives there
  - v. Cousin Lucille lives there
  - vi. Capital of Michigan is Lansing
- b. Learn everything you can about the vital records agencies

16. Somewhere in this 1000 square miles is Information on Estella

- a. Find out how to find things
  - i. Computer
  - ii. Write
  - iii. Phone
  - iv. Visit

17. Results: Yes, but not so Good

18. Information is still Missing

- a. So why didn't the search succeed?
  - i. Wrong name
  - ii. Wrong time frame
  - iii. Wrong location
  - iv. Wrong jurisdiction
  - v. Wrong story
  - vi. Wrong questions

19. Time to Revisit the Knowledge Banks

- a. What was the family doing in Detroit anyhow?
- b. Genealogists need to know about the history of the times they are searching
  - i. Frequently Southern men returning from WWII went to Northern cities to seek employment (seeds for migration)
  - ii. With her husband's passing (1943) and only social security (1935) she never worked outside the home in VA
  - iii. She had lived in her house in Bluefield, VA for many years
  - iv. Transportation was mostly by car and perhaps by rail
  - v. Relatives, friends, and neighbors would last but so long

20. More Direct Questions

- a. Ask others about the information voids and abnormalities
- b. Answers are usually stunning!!!
  - i. When did she go to Detroit? "Sometime after she divorced her husband"
  - ii. Where did she live in Detroit? "First with her sons, then with her daughter, then she moved out on her own"
  - iii. Did she die at home? "No, she went to a black hospital in Detroit and died there"
  - iv. Where was the funeral held? "It was a last-minute thing, but it was at a black funeral home"
  - v. What happened at the funeral? "There was an argument among the family members; the younger boys took her back home"

21. Just like Hogwarts

- a. Help will be provided to those who ask for it
  - i. The Records
  - ii. The Marriage
  - iii. The Skinny
  - iv. The Images
  - v. The City
  - vi. The Spirit

22. Husband Number Three

- a. Marriages can be tracked by bride, groom, date, location, & religion
  - i. An old Bluefield lawyer told me to check Tazewell County Records 1950-1960 for Estelle Mason
- b. Always leave room in your search for some magical assistance
  - i. A call "from out of the blue" from a Bluefield genealogist who works 24/7 said she thought she could track it down for me and perhaps even had photos

23. Husband Number Three

- a. Marriages can be tracked by bride, groom, date, location, religion, & lawyers

24. So, What Was Her Actual Name?
  - a. Estelle, Estella, Stella, Ella
  - b. James, Jane
  - c. Ganaway, Gannaway
  - d. Ferguson
  - e. Mason, Masen, Masin, Mayson
  - f. Finny, Finney, Finley
  - g. Plus misspellings
  - h. Examples filed under
    - i. Stella James
    - ii. Estelle Mason
    - iii. Estelle Finney
    - iv. James Finney
    - v. Any order
    - vi. Male or Female
  - i. Yeah, and what about the divorce?
25. Where Did She Live/Die?
  - a. Most likely near her daughter's house
  - b. Google Search: Old black hospitals Detroit
    - i. Eastside General Hospital 2199 Cadillac Blvd (Closed—no information)
26. Death Location Is Important!
  - a. There are always quirks (peculiar behaviors) in legal jurisdictions
  - b. 4 Michigan Records Locations
    - i. At the state level (Lansing)
    - ii. At the county level (Wayne)
    - iii. At the city level (Detroit)  
but inside the city of Detroit
    - iv. At the city level (Detroit)  
but outside the city of Detroit
  - c. Records are kept in the jurisdiction location where the person died!
27. Where was the Funeral?
  - a. Google Search: "Detroit black funeral homes"
  - b. Found seven at the time
    - i. Don't be afraid to use the phone, a lot
28. Back to Romie Minor, Detroit Public Library
  - a. Unfortunately, this did not work! After a time period, records are packed up and sent to the next higher level of storage to make room for newer records
  - b. Don't stop looking till you have it in your hand
29. The Search Ends
  - a. Certificate of Death

30. Not Yet, but Close

- a. “Back Home” would be Bluefield, Virginia
- b. Five Cemeteries Near Bluefield, VA
  - i. Westlawn, WV
  - ii. Woodlawn, WV
  - iii. Oak Grove, WV
  - iv. Maple Hill, VA
  - v. Grandview, VA

31. Back Home

- a. New information is continually discovered and provided to the public-so keep looking
- b. Found at [www.findagrave.org](http://www.findagrave.org)

32. Document, Document, Document

- a. Phone calls and the talk
- b. Foot coordination, when, where, and topics
- c. Copies (paper & electronic) of every single record
- d. Archive, cemetery, and library visit reports
- e. Funeral homes and individual homes visited
- f. Copies (paper & electronic) of every image, map, online records
- g. Note things that worked and those that did not work
- h. Include electronic searches, family trees, timelines, & reports

33. Summary

- a. We found “Voodoo Aunt” Estella
- b. She now has records for all to see
- c. Two dozen research ideas have been noted
- d. Resources cited that you can use
- e. There remains more Fundamental Mysteries
- f. But today, we pass these secrets on to you
  - i. Contact Information: Michael W. Garrambone, 4138 Quail Bush Drive, Dayton, OH 45424, 937-233-3255, [mgarrambone@aol.com](mailto:mgarrambone@aol.com)