

# **Genealogy Basics: Using US Records of Aliens Pre-Examined Prior to Admission at the U.S.-Canada Border as a Border Crossing Record Substitute**

**By Joe Petrie**

## **Background:**

Ancestry.com has over five million Border Crossing records for Canadians crossing into the US. Those Border Crossing records; especially those for Canadians immigrating to the US, are a valuable resource for genealogists – mostly because the forms identify where the individual was going, the next of kin, the date and place of birth etc. I have the image of my Cape Breton father's Border Crossing record from 1925. I never found a Border Crossing record for my Cape Breton mother who came in October 1926.

Mom's immigration story is interesting. My mother and her sister (mom's only sibling) often told us about the circumstances that led to mom's immigration. Mom had taught at St Anne's in Glace Bay from 1922 to 1926. She worked in the summer time in the office of a local Coal Company. In the summer of 1926, because she could not find a summer job in Glace Bay, she took a position in Boston. (She stayed with Helen Casey of Glace Bay.) Late that summer, because of a commitment at the Boston job, she petitioned the Glace Bay School Board to let her arrive a few days late – in effect to appoint someone else to temporarily fill-in for her. Her petition was not approved. She could return on time or find other employment in Glace Bay. She decided to return to Glace Bay to collect her prized possessions and return to her job in Boston. (It was a good thing for her sons because she later met and married our father in Boston – and I doubt that they would have met in Cape Breton.)

I always assumed that Mom returned to Boston in October 1926 by bus or by railroad. Because I could not find a record in Ancestry's Border Crossing Records for my mother's Border Crossing, I kiddingly told people that either Mom's Border Crossing record was probably lost. In reality, I still tried to find one!

Periodically, Ancestry updates Border Crossing records. Whenever Border Crossing Records are updated, I would enter my mother's information and search for an October 1926 record. My goal was to find a Border Crossing record for her!

Why? As a genealogist, I always want to have all the information I can. One critical piece was missing.

Also, I want no loose ends. Being unable to determine when in October 1926 Mom immigrated was a loose end. In my view, October of 1926 was not specific enough.

Well! I accidentally found a Border Crossing substitute with mom's record.

Specifically, I found her record in the Halifax records identified in Ancestry as US Records of Aliens Pre-Examined Prior to Admission at the U.S.-Canada Border.

Before I recount my accidental discovery, I'll cover the sources of US Records of Aliens Pre-Examined Prior to Admission at the U.S.-Canada Border:

Ancestry describes the three current sources as follows:

*Records of Aliens Pre-Examined at Saint John, New Brunswick, Prior to Admission at the U.S.-Canada Border, compiled ca. 1917 - ca. 1942.* Micro Publication A3450. RG 85. 7 rolls. National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.

*Records of Aliens Pre-Examined at Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, 1923-1933, Prior to Admission at the U.S.-Canada Border.* Micro Publication A3463. RG 85. 3 rolls. National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.

*Records of Aliens Pre-Examined at Winnipeg, Manitoba, 1922-1954, Prior to Admission at the U.S.-Canada Border.* Micro Publication A3451. RG 85. 11 rolls. National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.

There are nearly 140 thousand records in the database. They are almost as specific as a passenger manifest.

The form itself looks like the typical forms that were filled out by immigrants to the US from other countries.

The form contains typical vital information like Place and Date of Birth, where the individual could be located, even how much money the individual had etc. (Mom's record showed \$200 – which was a big surprise to me!)

Finally, supposedly, for every record, Ancestry provides an image of the completed form.

On the next to last page, you'll see the image of the form that was completed for my mother. I only wish that the image was clearer.

## The Source of my Accidental Discovery:

My Mom once told us about getting a Baptismal Certificate from St Anne's in Glace Bay that had her given name as Elizabeth Loretta (not Loretta Elizabeth).

Recently, simply because I decided to look at all available Ancestry records for Mom under any name, I searched Ancestry for Elizabeth Loretta Tobin born in 1904 in Glace Bay. (I still need to search for Ethel L. Tobin and Ethel Tobin – names Mom eventually used in Boston until her marriage.)

A screen print of the Ancestry Search Criteria follows:

The screenshot shows the Ancestry website search interface. The browser address bar displays 'www.ancestrylibrary.com'. The page header includes the Ancestry logo and navigation links: Home, Search, Message Boards, Learning Center, Charts and Forms, and New Collections. The search form is filled with the following information:

- First & Middle Name(s):** Elizabeth Loretta
- Last Name:** Tobin
- Place your ancestor might have lived:** Glace Bay, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, Canada
- Birth Year:** 1904

There are checkboxes for 'Exact...' next to each field. A 'Search' button and a 'Show more options' dropdown are visible below the form. To the right of the search form, there is a 'Receive Records at Home' section with a 'Send Your Find Home!' button and a 'Five Minute Find: Sending Documents Home From the Library View Video' link. Below this is a 'US CENSUS RECORDS' section with a grid of years: 1940, 1930, 1920, 1910, 1900, 1890, 1880, 1870, 1860, 1850, 1840, 1830, 1820, 1810, 1800, and 1790. An 'All >' link is also present. At the bottom of the page, there is a 'UK CENSUS COLLECTION' section. The Windows taskbar at the bottom shows the time as 10:22 AM.

The following is a screen print of the records that resulted from the search.

The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying search results for Elizabeth Loretta Tobin on Ancestry.com. The browser's address bar shows the search URL. The page title is "All results for Elizabeth Loretta Tobin". On the left, there is a sidebar with "All Categories" and "Shortcut Keys". The main content area shows "Results 1-20 of 29,159" and a "Matching Person (from family trees)" section. This section includes a silhouette icon and details for Loretta Elizabeth Tobin, born 7 Mar 1904 in Cape Breton, Canada, married 2 Aug 1931 in Boston, Suffolk, Massachusetts, USA, and died 22 Jan 1979 in Dedham, Norfolk, Massachusetts, USA. Her spouse is listed as Leo Ignatius Petrie. Below this, the "Matching Records" section lists three records: "U.S., Records of Aliens Pre-Examined in Canada, 1917-1954" for Elizabeth Loretta Tobin (born abt 1904 - Glace Bay, Nova Scotia, Canada); "Massachusetts, Passenger and Crew Lists, 1820-1963" for Ethel L. Tobin (born abt 1904 - Glace Bay, Canada; departed Halifax, Nova Scotia; arrived 7 May 1931 - Boston, Massachusetts; residence: United States of America); and "Canada, Voters Lists, 1935-1980" for Mrs Elizabeth Tobin.

The first is a record of one of Ancestry's Public (Family)Trees. I will not cover it because she was an in-law; her connection to the family is through her marriage to my father.

Both of the next two records are my mom's records. I'll skip the Pre-examination record for a paragraph on the Massachusetts Passenger record. The passenger record is also a record that I had no knowledge of - a Massachusetts Passenger record for Ethel L. Tobin in May 1931. I suspect that my mother went to Halifax to visit her grandmother, her aunt (Sister Maria Loretta), her sister May Tobin and her cousins and probably former teachers at the Mount St Vincent. Maybe she was announcing her engagement to Leo I. Petrie from Bridgeport and Dominion, NS. They married in Boston on August 2, 1932.

Now I'll cover the Pre-examination record.

The Ancestry transcript of the record follows:

Name: Elizabeth Loretta Tobin  
Gender: Female  
Race: Irish  
Age: 22  
Birth Date: abt 1904  
Birth Place: Glace Bay, Nova Scotia  
Marital Status: Single  
Pre-Examination Date: 2 Oct 1926  
Pre-Examination Location: Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada

The following is an image of the actual Pre-examination form:

The image shows a scan of a U.S. Department of Labor, Immigration Service Form 14-2140, 'Manifest of Aliens Pre-Examined in Canada, 1917-1954'. The form is for Elizabeth Loretta Tobin, born abt 1904 in Glace Bay, Nova Scotia, Canada. She is 22 years old, single, and Irish. The pre-examination date is October 2, 1926, in Halifax, Nova Scotia. The form includes fields for name, age, sex, race, occupation, place of birth, nationality, language, money shown, last permanent residence, destination, going to join, purpose in coming, time remaining in U.S., name and address of nearest relative, and support of landing. The form is handwritten and includes a serial number of 1518 of 3991.

Tobin: Loretta Eliz.		OCT - 2 1926				
MANIFEST	Part of Halifax, N. S.	Date	Serial No.			
Family name	Tobin	Given name	ELIZABETH LORETTA			
Accompanied by						
Age	Sex	M. S.	Occupation	Place of birth		
22 Yrs. Mos.	F			Glace Bay, N.S.		
Nationality	Race	Read	Write	Language or alphabet	Money shown	
Irish	Irish				200	
Last permanent residence	Town	From	Town	To	State	Where
Passage paid by	Ever in U. S.	From	To	Where		
Going to join	Name	Complete address				
Relative or friend						
Purpose in coming and	Head tax status	Height	Complexion	Hair	Eyes	
Time remaining in U. S.	paid	5 Ft. 5 In.	fair	brn	brn	
Name and address of nearest relative	Name	Address				
whence alien came						
C. I. V.	Place of issue	Section and subdivision of Act of 1914, under which issued				
No. 417	Halifax, N. S.	Sec. 4 Par 6				OCT - 2 1926
Support of landing	Date of landing	Name of S. S.				
Records by	Previously examined at	Date	Previous disposition	Present disposition, P. I.		

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR, Immigration Service. Form 14-2140. 14-2140

Please note that some fields on the above form are unreadable. Originally, they may have been filled in by pencil.

Also, please note that at the very top of the form, her correct given name was typed. I wonder if this was added after Mom applied for citizenship in the 1930s.

In addition, please note that I assume that Mom arrived in Boston either on Saturday October 2 or Sunday, October 3, 1926 on a Cunard ship. (I can't find a record for the arrival or for the passengers.) Remember that the Cunard line was founded by a Canadian.

Finally, the form indicated that Mom was a student. At Mount St Vincent's in Halifax, Mom had completed the equivalent of a Normal Teaching Degree which included here grade 12 credits. When she applied for teaching positions in Boston, and provided transcripts, she was informed that grade 12 credits were unacceptable. To teach in Massachusetts, she needed to complete another year to get her Normal School (Associate) degree. She needed to complete 3 more years to earn a Bachelor's degree. It was hard to take that news after having taught from 1922 to 1926.

In 1960, when I was recovering from serious illness, Mom talked about going back to college to get a degree. Because she never drove, I volunteered to take her to any of 3 local State Teachers colleges. I thought that I would take courses there also. After lots of time and thought, she decided to postpone – again. I took courses in computer science which after graduate school was the foundation for a successful career as a computer specialist in the federal government and later as an Adjunct Professor of Computer Science at a local community college.

Finally, remember that I still do not have a firm date for my Mother's arrival in Boston. There is potentially another source. Before Mom was naturalized, she was required to submit an Intent document. Supposedly, the Intent forms are being digitized and indexed. When the Intent forms are available, I hope to identify the ship and the actual date that the ship arrived in Boston.

#

Your corrections, comments and suggestions are appreciated. Please Email me at [joe-apg@norwoodlight.com](mailto:joe-apg@norwoodlight.com) .

Joseph F. Petrie

Founding Member, Friends of Irish Research (FIR)  
Member, Cape Breton Genealogy and Historical Association (CBGHA)  
Member, Family History Society of Newfoundland and Labrador (FHSNL)  
Member, New England Historic Genealogical Society (NEHGS)  
Member, Association of Professional Genealogists (APG)