

Genealogy Basics – A North Sydney, NS, Tobin Family History Story

By Joe Petrie

INTRODUCTION TO FAMILY HISTORY:

The United Kingdom and Ireland Genealogy web site (www.genuki.org.uk) home page has a Getting Started in Genealogy tab. I strongly recommend that seminar attendees who have never done genealogy read the material in the section. The following is from the first page.

“Genealogy and Family History

Genealogy is the study of the descendants of families and persons from an ancestor or ancestors. This study is undertaken by many people out of interest in their personal and family origins. As a hobby, it can become pleasantly addictive, at least to the person concerned. However, the study is also undertaken professionally, not just in order to provide a commercial service that can be used by people who are seeking help in researching their origins, but also for very serious legal and financial reasons. Thus, there are accepted standards for doing genealogy "properly" - standards that we recommend you seek to learn and emulate.

The term Family History used to be regarded as synonymous with Genealogy, but now it applies to biographical research into one's ancestors - the aim typically being to produce a well-documented narrative history, of interest to family members and perhaps future generations. Thus, the study of family history involves putting flesh on the skeleton that is produced by genealogy - and involves the study of the historical circumstances and geographical situation in which ancestors lived. (The resulting ability to associate historical events with particular generations or individuals of your family can help history come really alive for you.)”

When I cover Family History in my Genealogy Seminars, I focus on the following from the above: **“the study of family history involves putting flesh on the skeleton that is produced by genealogy - and involves the study of the historical circumstances and geographical situation in which ancestors lived.”**

BACKGROUND:

I am a Family Historian for a few of my ancestor families. My Tobin grandfather (William Richard “WR” Tobin) was raised in North Sydney.

This family history story is about WR’s sister, Sister Joseph Aloysia Tobin, SCH (Annie Bridget Tobin). She was the 4th of 8 children of Richard Francis Tobin of Northern Bay, Newfoundland and Honora Catherine Dooley of North Sydney. (Six of the eight children were born in North Sydney.) Annie Bridget was born in North Sydney on 2 February 1877. She was baptized 4 days later at St. Joseph’s Parish in North Sydney. She attended school at St. Joseph’s. She entered the Sisters of Charity of Halifax at Mount St. Vincent's in Halifax on 10 July 1895. She began her Novitiate on 1 Nov. 1895. She professed her first vows on 6 Aug 1898 and final vows on 28 Jul 1908. She taught for over 50 years in Bermuda, Boston and Canada.

In August 1948, Sister Joseph Aloysia Tobin celebrated her Golden Jubilee at St Patrick's Convent in Roxbury MA. (She taught Grade 5 there.) The Mass was celebrated by her nephew, Rev. Benedict J Tobin, OSB of St Anselm Abbey and St Anselm College of Manchester NH. My oldest brother Leo was the altar boy. Her three living siblings attended: Mary Elizabeth (Sister Maria Loretta, SCH of North Sydney), John Francis of Watertown MA and Josephine Bernard Ryan (wife of Judge Joseph T. Ryan of Brooklyn and New York City, NY). There were countless nephews and nieces who attended. At least one family came from Canada. There was one grandniece and three grandnephews who attended. At age 9, I was the youngest of that generation.

There was a large assortment of gifts. One stood out. It was from Congressman John William McCormack of Massachusetts.

He was a rare individual. He was a lawyer (a member of the Massachusetts Bar) who never completed high school or college. He was a professional politician. He served in the Massachusetts Legislature. He served in Washington DC as the Congressman from the Massachusetts 12th District. When he was elected, he was one of 5 Democrats of the 15 Congressmen from Massachusetts. Beginning in 1940, he served as the Majority Leader of the 76th US Congress. It was the second most important position in the House of Representatives – second to the Speaker. From 1940 to 1962, he served as Majority Leader or Minority Leader. When the Republicans were the majority Party, he served as Minority Leader. Joseph Martin, another Massachusetts Congressman, served as Speaker. In 1962, Congressman McCormack became the Speaker of the House of Representatives. He served as Speaker until he retired in 1973. Speaker McCormack's papers are at Boston University. Speaker Martin's papers are at Stonehill College.

THE GIFT:

It was an "all expenses" paid trip for two to Washington DC. It included a guided tour by Congressman McCormack. Sister Joseph Aloysia Tobin took her sister, Sister Maria Loretta Tobin, as her guest.

Imagine the advance work by Congressman McCormack and his staff to arrange for the trip. All aspects had to be approved in advance by the Mother Provincial in Halifax. I assume while the two nuns were there that they slept in a Convent etc. At age 9, I never asked.

Imagine the nuns' surprise of going to the White House to meet President Harry Truman who let the two nuns take a turn of sitting at his desk in the Oval Office. I assume that were given the usual gifts from the President's staff as mementos of the trip. I don't remember seeing any. At age 9, I never asked.

After they returned to Boston, they were allowed to visit their siblings' families. (My late Tobin grandfather was the oldest child of the 8 children.) Their visit with us went longer than expected. My parents attempted to arrange for them to have dinner with us. No luck. However, they were allowed to eat dinner with the Pastor of our Parish and his 4 curates. Our Pastor was delighted. (He was the former Editor of the Pilot, the Archdiocese weekly newspaper.) He loved hearing about the trip and the visit with the President. For years, he talked of my mother's aunts who ate dinner with him that evening.

I wonder what Sister Maria Loretta thought of the trip. She hardly ever left Canada.

I wonder if the Nuns were very uncomfortable in their habits in the Summer heat and humidity of Washington DC.

I wonder how Sister Joseph Aloysia and Congerssman McCormack were connected. Supposedly, Sister Joseph Aloysia Tobin was John McCormack's teacher. I can't prove it!

MORE ABOUT MY TWO GRANDAUNTS:

Sister Joseph Aloysia Tobin died of a stroke in Boston on 23 August 1953 at age 76, 55 years after she took first vows. She is buried it the Sisters of Charity plot in St. Mary's Cemetery, Needham, a few miles from the Wellesley Mount Saint Vincent Mother House.

Sister Maria Loretta died in North Sydney on 29 March 1954 at age 82, 49 years after she took her first vows. She is buried with a few other nuns in Old St Joseph's Cemetery (Goat Hill). Her parents and Cape Breton ancestors (Dooley and Ormond) are buried in the same cemetery.

SUMMARY:

I am the Family Historian for a few of my (and my wife's ancestors') families.

In this case, I lived it the historical event!

In addition, my family was close to my mother's Tobin relatives. The source of my given name Joseph was Sister Joseph Aloysia. (People often look strangely at me when I say that I was named for a Nun.)

Being named for someone runs in my family. Mom (Loretta Elizabeth Tobin) was named for Sister Maria Loretta (Mary Elizabeth) Tobin, grandfather's younger sister. There is another Tobin cousin with the name of Loretta. A Tobin cousin is named Maria. My brother Charles was named for an Uncle. My Dad was named for Pope Leo.

As an aside, when I taught at MassBay Community College in Wellesley, MA, I often visited Sister Joseph Aloysia Tobin's grave in Needham MA on my way home from work. I also visit my parents grave in West Roxbury when returning home from Boston. I enjoy the memories that result from the visits.

#

Your corrections, comments and suggestions are appreciated. Please Email me at joe-apg@norwoodlight.com.

Joseph F. Petrie, AB (Economics and Business – St. Anselm College, 1962)
MA (Economics – Boston College, 1967)
Doctoral Program, (Economics – Boston College, 1963 – 1967)

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, Association of Professional Genealogists (APG)
Member, New England Historic Genealogical Society (NEHGS)
Volunteer Research Correspondent, Cape Breton Genealogy and Historical Association (CBGHA)
Member, Friends of Morrill Memorial Library, Norwood, MA
Resident Genealogy Volunteer, Morrill Memorial Library, Norwood, MA
Genealogy Volunteer, St Anselm College, Manchester NH
Genealogy Volunteer, Fiske Library, Wrentham MA
Genealogy Volunteer, Irish Cultural Centre of New England, Irish Fest, 2016, Canton MA