

Genealogy Basics – What I learned from experience using various countries' records

By Joe Petrie

1. **Teach yourself how to research your genealogy.** Thirty years ago I read books. Now I use tutorials. Often before I conduct a free 1-on-1 consultation where I have been told that the client is looking for ancestors in a country that I have never researched, I use the FamilySearch Learning Center's Tutorials (<https://familysearch.org/learningcenter/home.html>) as my starting point. Please note that the site is just one of many sites that offer genealogy tutorials. I am proud to admit that I have used the Learning Center's tutorials for my research into Canadian, Irish and United States records.
2. **Rely on your network of relatives – they may know more about the family.** Their knowledge should be added to the research. For example, my mother's sister had done my father's tree. The wife of a Petrie first cousin gave me over a 100 records of her husband's Petrie family – over 40 were for her grandchildren.
3. **Be prepared to hit the wall.** Sometimes, no records are available. For example, I can't find the parents' records for Martin Adolphe Camus (B 1828 in the St. Malo area of France – D 1919 in North Sydney, NS). Note that I have not reached the point where I decide not to search any more.
4. **The World Wide Web's digital databases are making the genealogy easier and cheaper – less travel is required.** FamilySearch.org is free. The images of the original records of a number of Nova Scotia Parishes are available for browsing. Search FamilySearch.org/Collections/List for Images to browse. Also, the Mormon Church is rapidly digitizing their films and releasing the records in FamilySearch.org (about a million records a week). Recently, when I was reading cbgen.org's cemetery records for Immaculate Conception Cemetery on Ocean Avenue in Dominion, I found the date of death for my aunt Hazel Petrie – totally unexpected because she died in Boston, Massachusetts. Until that find, I only had a year of death from the Massachusetts Death Index in Ancestry.com .
5. **Genealogy is never finished.** I recently found records for Dad's Petrie first cousins in Vermont. I am still looking for items of vital information for one of my father's brother and sister – both were born in Dominion, NS. I am still looking for Dad's grand-uncle George Petrie who moved to Prospect NS. He and his family seems to have dropped off the face of the earth.
6. **Genealogy is hard work.** Sometimes it takes forever to find items of vital information (dates and places of birth, marriage, death and burial). For example, after over 30 years of searching, I finally found birth records for my father's older brother and sister. They are in FamilySearch.org's records for the Roman Catholic Diocese of Antigonish, Nova Scotia, Canada. Specifically, they were transcribed and digitized by volunteers using copies of the registers of Immaculate Conception Parish of Bridgeport, NS.
7. **Be persistent.** Remember that sometimes vital information will simply appear on a web site. For example, I hope that eventually, information for my uncle Roy Petrie will appear on the novascotiagenealogy web site. Also, the Irish government is slowly releasing vital Church records on a Diocese by Diocese basis. In addition in Canada and the US, Genweb sites are posting enormous amounts of information transcribed and digitized from a large variety of sources.

8. **There always a keeper of skeletons whose role is to keep the closet door closed.** My father's sister Dorothy was a keeper as was my mentor, Charles "Chick" Buchanan. Neither divulged anything "bad" about an individual – even items that they perceived as bad – that really were not. For example, my aunt never told me that her Boutilier grandmother who was twice a widow was married 3 times. My great grandmother Mary Ann Boutilier Neville, Cummings, Rockett had 7 children. My aunt sheepishly admitted one evening that everything that I told her about Mary Ann was factual. REMEMBER: Often the door should not be opened. As a result, I have a few skeletons that I am keeping.
9. **Not all Surnames are correctly recorded.** In the 1911 Automated Census of Canada records, my Dad's family Surname is misspelled at Peterie. My advice is: If there is a Soundex option on the Search Screen use it. If not, use a list of possible surnames to search for. By the way, Ancestry and FamilySearch's defaults automatically retrieve using a Soundex type option.
10. **What looks like Serendipity – a gift for discovery; a natural gift for making pleasant, valuable, or useful discoveries by accident may have been the result of hard work.** My first of many serendipity findings was the result of sending a letter to a town library in Newfoundland that was delivered to Edward-Vincent Chafe, a Certificated Canadian Genealogist and author. Ed was a major source for my articles on Northern Bay Hogan and Tobin families.
11. **You may never uncover a married woman's maiden name.** My database has hundreds of records of wives whose surnames are identical to the husband's surnames. When appropriate, I indicate that the maiden name is unknown in my notes section of the database.
12. **Don't bother to try to validate another's research. Just identify the source.** GotGenealogy.com has the following favorite paragraph of mine that I often read to my Seminar attendees:

“Over time, you will compile more data and those once seemingly contradictory pieces of evidence may prove to be just the pieces of the puzzle you need to prove or disprove your theory. But be consistent as you cite your sources. There are all sorts of standard citation formats that you can follow, but even if you just make up your own form for listing your sources, be consistent with it. Future researchers (your descendants) will thank you.”

For example, Colonel Francis Xavier MacGillivray of Glace Bay and Ottawa gave Daniel Mannix Petrie copies of the hand written index cards where Xavier had recorded the Petrie genealogy back to George and Isobelle Petrie who moved to Sydney in 1785 from Halifax. Daniel was in Cape Breton filming The Bay Boy. Years later Daniel gave me a copy of Xavier's research. I transcribed the hundreds of records onto a basic genealogy software – one without notes and without a process to export a GEDCOM file. When I re-entered the records into another genealogy software a major challenge was to attribute the records to Xavier – as well as other early sources, especially Charles Buchanan.
13. **Be Cautious when using Family Trees Information in Ancestry and Search Genealogy Results in FamilySearch.** Because the records are submitted by the public, they may not have been validated. Suggest that you read my “Be Cautious ...” articles on the following URL <http://www.friendsofirishresearch.org/publications.htm> before gathering data.

14. **Scottish people often use their middle name as a first name.** For example, I have a late cousin Joe whose real name is Martin Joseph. (His birth record in the Massachusetts Birth Index for 1935 in Ancestry.com identifies him as Martin Joseph). By the way his obituary identified him as Joseph Martin Petrie.
15. **Irish records for the 19th Century were not totally destroyed.** Irish census records and some other records were in fact destroyed. There are lots of records available on free web sites such as FamilySearch.org as well as on subscription sites like Ancestry.org. Some Irish Parishes began keeping registers as early as 1795. Some of my wife's Galway and Waterford county families' Birth and Marriage records are available on FamilySearch.org and also on tape for use at the Mormon Family History Center facilities. Using equipment at the local Family History Center, I copied 80 entire pages of christening records - one at a time - on to a flash drive for the Galway Parish where my wife's family attended. We had previously transcribed individual records. Also, the Irish government is digitizing County Parish Records. <http://www.irishgenealogy.ie/> is the URL. The database contains Church records for Kerry and some parishes in Cork. Ross and Dublin City. Roscommon is being digitized.
16. **USA Military Records are amazing.** A friend asked for help in finding his mother's birth place in Ireland. He gave me a list of people who may be related. I found that one man on the list was his mother's brother. Because the man served in the US Military, I have my friend a list of links to US military records. He found the Irish Townland in his uncle's military records. Soon after my friend visited his mother's townland. http://www.friendsofirishresearch.org/joe%27s_free_websites.htm is the URL for my free links documents.
17. **I use Wiki to fill in County Information.** Sometimes, when I can't find a County's name, I use Wiki. I do not use Wiki Tree Genealogy. I read Ancestry's Genforum and Rootsweb occasionally.
18. **Share your research. Do not get upset if your research shows up somewhere without attribution.** Some people are not aware of GotGenealogy.com's 10 Golden Rules. (Please see my Genealogy Basic document on the 10 Golden Rules on <http://www.friendsofirishresearch.org/publications.htm>).

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