

Genealogy Basics – Attribution

By Joe Petrie

Attribution in genealogy simply requires that a user of someone's research gives credit to the author of the research by identifying the author as the source. For web sites, books and newspapers, it means that the user identifies the source.

Genealogy blogger Kenneth R. Marks in his 2013 article entitled Attribution, Ethics and Apathetic Genealogy Bloggers says:

“To me there are 3 kinds of relevant behaviors in genealogy blogs or genealogy related sites:

“The first are those who are doing what in my view are ILLEGAL activities - out and out copying of others original work and taking credit for it. The legal system has to take care of this issue, which is a pain for the original author unfortunately. Nothing more needs to be said about this abhorrent behavior.

“The second are those who are APATHETIC. These are folks who do not include detailed citations and footnotes in their articles that may include full references to others work. They might attribute the work via a link to an original post as well as naming the original author, both of which pass the "ethics test" in my view. But a detailed citation is not included. Want to see how it should be done? Two that I read frequently are Michael Hait and Judy Russell. They always have detailed citations and are great role models. Full disclosure - I consider myself apathetic in this regard. If you do not think that full citations are necessary please don't inundate me with comments since this article is not about blog citations. As long as you attribute, everything is cool ethics wise in my opinion. And I already said I am apathetic about these citations.

“The third are those that are UNETHICAL - this article is about them, and is a bit of a rant because they tick me off - and they tick others off as well, but the behavior is too common.

“So what constitutes UNETHICAL or borderline unethical behavior? Here are three examples and one example that is not:

You write an original blog post. You are quite proud of it. Someone takes your link, writes an intro but does not mention your name as the author and posts it on their Facebook page. So it appears that THEY have written the original post. Of course, if someone clicks the link AND you have your name on the blog page where the post appears then at least you get the traffic and folks see that you wrote it. BUT most blog authors do not have their name as the author prominently displayed. So the person who took your link and wrote his own intro in a sneaky way gets the credit.

“Naked linking - actually is not unethical because by not having an intro it is usually obvious that the person posting the link say in a Facebook Group or on G+ is NOT the author. I still don't like it though. I like intros.

“Borrowing someone else's idea or writings and thoroughly scrambling or adding to it, which makes it look like your own may not pass the "illegal" test but it sure passes the "unethical" test.

“But here is the behavior that really torques me - you write a blog post about a new genealogy related technology or a new website that you have found that would be helpful to many others. You do the research and spend the time writing and proudly publish your article and make the links available on Social Media. Then some yo-yo reads your post - writes his own post - includes the link to NOT your post, but to the newly found website or technology company's url directly and makes no mention that they found the information from you. I see this on a few Facebook Pages from some not to be named genealogists all the time.

“The folks who do this need to be called out. Every time you see it - send them a private message This does not have to be a public thrashing. It is totally unfair to the original author and creator of the article. Besides being bad manners it is out and out unethical

“We are not naive - we know that we do not own these links that we have found. All we ask is that you attribute the original post or idea to the original author.”

Which category do I fit into? I am APATHETIC. I do not always include detailed citations and footnotes in their articles that may include full references to others work. This is especially true for gathered material from FamilySearch and Ancestry. Those sources always add and never delete. One exception for example is files from FamilySearch.org/Collections/List/ which users only can browse because there is no index (and may not ever have an index). Another is Ancestry's Public Member Trees because the author can easily delete the file.

For over 30 years, I have collected thousands of records. I developed an approach to attribution that I still use. Because my first genealogy software was missing a number of features, like Notes and GEDCOM, my approach was to store paper audit trails. One day about 6000 records into building my genealogy database, I found that I simply could not add more records.

Moving to a new genealogy database required me to enter all new records. I selected Personal Ancestral File (PAF) because it had the features that I needed. Wiki describes PAF as follows:

Personal Ancestral File (PAF) was free [genealogy software](#) provided by [FamilySearch](#), a website operated by [The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints](#). It allowed users to enter names, dates, citations and source information into a database, and sort and search the genealogical data, print forms and charts, and share files with others in [GEDCOM](#) format. PAF also linked images and other media files to individual records. Wiki notes that in 2013, PAF was discontinued.

When I prepare to publish a Modified Register Report, I review my notes to ensure adequate attribution. Currently, I am preparing a Register Report for the Descendants of Patrick Tobin and Judith Keefe of Gowran County Kilkenny Ireland and Northern Bay Newfoundland.

The following is my latest Note for my Maternal grandfather William Richard Tobin (1870 – 1922) a Barrister for over 20 years who was born in Newfoundland, was raised in North Sydney NS, educated at Dalhousie, served in the military, practiced law in North Sydney and Glace Bay, married in North Sydney, raised his family in Glace Bay, died in Glace Bay and is buried in Holy Cross Cemetery, North Sydney. Also, that it has been reformatted to highlight the attribution.

Sources:

Oral History: From Miss Mary (May) A. Tobin (WR's eldest daughter) and from me, Joe Petrie (a grandson).

Genealogical Libraries: The Antigonish Casket newspaper articles were read at the Public Archives of Nova Scotia (PANS). Newspaper articles about WR's activities in North Sydney and Glace Bay were read at the Beaton Institute in Sydney, Nova Scotia. Also material was gathered at the Newfoundland Archives in St John's. Finally, material was gathered at the New England Historical Genealogical Society (NEHGS) Library in Boston.

Books: Seary, E. R. Family names of the Island of Newfoundland / E.R. Seary, with the assistance of Sheila M.P. Lynch, St. John's : Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1998. I read the book at the NEHGS Library in Boston.

College: Dalhousie in Halifax.

Newspapers: RC Diocese of Antigonish, the CASKET. The Cape Breton Post. I read both at Libraries.

Web Sites: cbgen.org for the Dooley Funeral Home records and for Holy Cross Cemetery records, novascotiagenealogy.org, Ancestry Library.com, Ancestry.org for the Censuses of 1881 - 1921; Ancestry.CA and FamilySearch.org/Collections/List/ for the RC Diocese of Antigonish Parish Marriage Record.

According to my aunt May Tobin, William Richard (aka Will and WR) was born in Argentia, Newfoundland in August 1870. (The Census of 1911 listed his birth as August 1870.) As she told it, her grandparents were returning via their boat to their home in Channel from visiting family in eastern Newfoundland. Aunt May indicated that her grandmother went into labor. They landed in Argentia Newfoundland where my Aunt May claimed that WR was born.

Grandfather listed Channel as his birthplace on official documents.

One day at the New England Historic Genealogical Society Library, I read in Seary's book about the Hogan, Mackey and Tobin Surnames in Newfoundland. It listed a William Tobin who was baptized in Channel in 1870. I secured a copy of a Baptismal Certificate for grandfather's baptism in Channel at a mission church. The priest who performed the ceremony recorded it as 1870. His mother's brother Percy was his godfather. The document was provided by a volunteer at the Newfoundland Archives in St. Johns.

Grandfather and his sister Mary Elizabeth were the only children born in Newfoundland. The rest of the children were born in North Sydney.

I think that WR attended Dalhousie in Halifax until about 1890. He was 20. Dalhousie's Alumni Office confirmed that he attended but did not graduate. I think that he left Dalhousie to join the service and to read for the Bar exam.

He was a member of the United Empire Service League which at the time required the candidate to have been a service member. His grave in Holy Cross Cemetery in North Sydney has a marker for the United Empire Service League which was re-named 3 years after he passes away to the Canadian Legion. A photo of his grave marker is in cbgen.org/Records/Cemetery.

I wonder whether the William Tobin who was born in 1870 and served in the 63rd Regiment, Halifax Rifles was my grandfather. The regiment had previously served in the North West Rebellion, 1885. (Note that there was a Tobin family living in Halifax at the time. Terrance Punch, PhD, wrote his Master's Thesis on a Halifax Tobin family.)

WR's enlistment must have been short because in the Census of 1891, he was identified as a Law Student. He read for the Bar. On October 5, 1893, the CASKET newspaper of the Diocese of Antigonish reported that he passed his Law Exams. On July 23, 1895, the CASKET reported that he took the FINAL Law Exams. On Sept. 19, 1895, the CASKET reported that he passed the FINAL Law Exams. On October 24, 1895, the CASKET reported that he was admitted to the Bar on October 17, 1895. I read the Newspaper articles at the Public Archives of Nova Scotia in Halifax.

In 1896, WR advertised that he was a Barrister - Solicitor - Attorney at Law - Conveyancer practicing across from the Hotel Vendome in North Sydney.

In North Sydney, he was a Councillor.

Sometime about 1901 - 1902, he moved to Glace Bay. I'm speculating that Grandfather wanted to move on because Glace Bay was starting to boom, because he and his wife had lost their first child, a son (buried in Old St. Joseph's in North Sydney) and because his father died about 1900 - 1901. (His mother was listed in the Census of 1901 as a widow.)

Aunt May was born in 1902 in Glace Bay.

Also, in 1902, he was a member of the Glace Bay Rugby Team, the championship team. I have a team newspaper photo. From the photo, he appears to have been the Coach. He was the only one not in uniform.

He was an Alderman in Glace Bay.

He was the town solicitor.

He was a Commissioner (an appointed member) of the Glace Bay School Board.

In 1907, he was visiting his mother at her Archbold St North Sydney home when he noticed fire coming from St. Joseph's Catholic Church on Convent St. According to my aunt, grandfather raced to the church and saved the sacred vessels.

Mother and my aunt always thought that his death in 1922 was sudden. In reality, he died of a heart condition that had been diagnosed about a year before.

He was stricken in the Court House and taken to his home (on the way to St. Joseph's Hospital in Glace Bay). He died before he reached the hospital. His death certificate is in novascotiagenealogy.com.

Interestingly, the Death Certificate and Dooley Funeral Home records indicate that Grandfather was born in North Sydney in March 1870. (I believe that the Dooley record was the source of the Death Certificate.) My mother and Aunt May supposedly were the informants. I doubt that they were because they were in Halifax when their father passed away.

I think that my Aunt's oral history on his birth place and date is correct. She visited Newfoundland a number of times to collect information. Also the oral information was collected after she discussed the facts with her Tobin grandmother and aunts (Sr. Maria Loretta, SCH and Sr. Joseph Aloysia, SCH.) She learned that her Tobin grandfather was not from St Johns, Newfoundland. She found that the March date of birth for her father and the place of birth were incorrect. She also found that that a March date was not logical because March was not suitable for a pregnant woman to travel. As a result the August birth date is the date that I always use. I do not believe that grandfather's mother would have been visiting relatives in March

In the Census of 1901, his birth year was listed as 1869.

Now, if I only had a copy of an obituary!

I deliberately left out Ancestry's Public Member Trees because the contributor can delete them. There is one author with records for my Tobin grandfather that I'd like to commend. In 2013 Jonathan White published two Public Members Trees which included my grandfather. Mr. White did a marvelous job of attribution. The following is a screen print of his record in the "Jonathan White Tree 2013."

The screenshot displays a web browser window with the URL trees.ancestrylibrary.com/tree/49611641/person/20232905867?ssrc=&ml_rpos=4. The page is titled "Media Gallery" and "Family Members". The "Timeline" section lists the following events:

Year	Event	Location	Sources
1870	Birth	Argentia, NL, Can.	1 Source
1870	Christening	Channel, Nf, Can.	
1900	Marriage to Mary Ann Camus	North Sydney, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, Canada	1 Source
1922	Death	Glace Bay, Cbi, N.S., Can.	1 Source
1922	Burial	North Sydney, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, Canada	1 Source

The "Family Members" section includes:

- Parents: Richard Francis Tobin (1840 -), Honora Catherine Dooley (1852 - 1932)
- Spouse & Children: Mary Ann Camus (1870 - 1917), Douglas Anselm Tobin (1901 - 1901), Mary Aloysia Tobin (1902 - 1985), Loretta Elizabeth "Ethel" Tobin (1904 - 1979)

The "Source Information" section shows a citation for "Hogan - from Joe Petrie.FTW" and "Unsources Citations".

Please note that in the bottom of the right pane that Mr. White named the file that he submitted to Ancestry "Hogan – From Joe Petrie". In the left pane, all events, were attributed. Kudos!

Unfortunately, there are Ancestry Public Member Trees that do not have attribution. For Petrie records that were documented by Francis Xavier MacGillivray and provided to me by Daniel Mannix Petrie, there is no attribution. Xavier's work is amazing and monumental. But except for me Xavier does not receive the due credit.

I really believe that these Petrie cousins simply do not know better!

The Message: Attribution is important. It should be required.

#

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)