

Genealogy Basics – How I Found my Dad’s First Cousin that Almost No-one Seemed to Know About

By Joe Petrie

BACKGROUND:

Dad loved to see his relatives. At times, Dad seemed to go out of his way to drop-in on relatives. (Mom never approved – but she lived with it.) That’s one way that we met so many of his relatives. I believed that we met all of his living aunts and uncles. We met many of their children and grandchildren. We also met a lot of distant cousins.

When Dad died, Mom gave me a list of his cousins to contact. She called Dad’s sister. Also she called Dad’s two aunts who were local and their children. In addition, she called the first cousins that they socialized with. She called her families.

The Petrie Cousins list was incomplete. We did not call one family in Cape Breton. Dad’s sister helped with that Aunt Veronica’s family. At that time, I never knew or knew of Aunt Veronica and her family.

I did not call Pearle, a first cousin, who lived in Connecticut because she was not on the cousin list and because I did not know that Dad had an Aunt Margaret who had a daughter named Pearle. (I had a lot of company who did not know or know of them.)

Previously, Dad and one aunt in Springfield Massachusetts kept in touch with her but everyone lost touch with Pearle when she moved to Connecticut. Pearle probably lost touch with her Massachusetts aunt and with my parents because of all parties’ address changes.

This article is an account of how I found Pearle.

FINDING OUT ABOUT PEARLE:

One Friday evening, I was returning to Boston from a business trip to New Jersey. My flight was from Philadelphia. The flight had originated in Tampa, Florida and had one stop in Philadelphia.

I was the first new passenger to board. I was carrying a duffel bag in one hand and my briefcase in the other. The duffel bag blocked my view of the aisle. I tripped over a lady’s foot that was in the aisle. I stopped and apologized. Then I moved on to my seat in the back of the plane.

At that time, I always used a van service to commute from Logan airport to a hotel near home. That evening, there were only two passengers: the lady that I tripped over and me. During that trip to Norwood, I remarked that Boston was cold that night. Her reply was that she did not mind the cold because she was from Cape Breton and was visiting a friend from Cape Breton.

I remarked that my parents were from Cape Breton. She asked me where they were from in Cape Breton. I replied that they were from Glace Bay and Bridgeport (now Dominion). Her response was that she was originally from the North Sydney area. I told her about my North Sydney Dooley; Ormond and Tobin roots. She asked me if my surname was one of those names. I told her that my Dad was a Petrie from Dominion. Her reply was that she was visiting the daughter of Margaret Petrie. She asked me if I knew of Margaret who married Peter Lewis from Coxheath. I told her that I had thousands of Petries in my genealogy database but no Margaret Petrie and no Peter Lewis.

I asked her if I wrote a Pedigree Chart on a post-it with my address and phone number would she give it to Margaret’s daughter. I listed all of my father’s Petrie direct line to George Petrie who settled in Sydney in 1785. (I used a few post-its.)

PEARLE CONTACTED ME:

Nearly a month later, on Thanksgiving Eve, I opened a letter from Pearle telling me that Dad’s grandfather Richard Petrie was married twice: Mary Martin who died in childbirth (Margaret was the daughter) and Agnes O’Brien with whom he had 10 children. My grandfather Edmund was the oldest child of the second family. That was new to me.

Pearle told me that her mother Margaret was raised by her Martin grandparents. She told me that her mother often visited her father before she married Peter Singleton Lewis and moved to Coxheath.

I called Pearle and we talked.

I called Dad's sister Dorothy and asked her about Aunt Margaret. She did not know her or of her. Aunt Dorothy called her Aunt Veronica who validated Pearle's relationship. Aunt Dorothy called back and repeated Aunt Veronica's validation. One Saturday, I went to the local Family History Library and validated Richard and Mary's marriage, Mary's death, and Margaret's birth.

My wife and I visited Pearle in Connecticut. She visited us in Norwood.

She told us about her nurse's graduation from the New England Baptist Hospital School of Nursing in Boston in May, 1939. She told us about Mom having her hands full with their 2 boys. She told us that Mom was very pregnant. (I told her that I was born in May 1939.) Her graduation day was the last time that she saw and talked to any Petries (other than her Lewis siblings and her nephew).

A few years later, I had the good fortune to meet General Donald Lewis, an author and a genealogist, at the Public Archives of Nova Scotia. He wrote a book on Mabou families. He was writing a book on the Lewis family. He knew about Pearle and me. He asked me to contact Pearle because he needed help with the Peter Singleton Lewis line. Later he wrote me to thank me and told me that Pearle was very helpful.

SUMMARY:

If I did not trip over the lady's foot and find myself sharing a van with her to Norwood, I may never have known about Dad's Aunt Margaret and her family. Also, if I did not have post-its and a pen in my pocket to document my Dad's Petrie line back to Captain George Petrie, we may have never met Pearle. The hand-written direct line Petrie Pedigree Chart played a vital role.

I call it serendipity; i.e., good fortune! Both Donald Lewis and I had the good fortune of talking and corresponding with Pearle.

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Your corrections, comments and suggestions are appreciated. Please Email me at:

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Please note that Friends of Irish Research is the repository for my published genealogy articles in the *Newfoundland Ancestor*; and in *EZINE*, the electronic magazine of the Cape Breton Genealogy and Historical Association. (See friendsofirishresearch.org; specifically the Tabs for Publications and Joe's Free Web Sites. I am the author of the Genealogy Basics Series.)