

Genealogy Basic: How to find Vitals for Cape Breton Ancestors

By Joe Petrie

Background:

This document identifies sources I use for gathering vital information. At first it was oral information from family and friends. Later I used social genealogy sites like Genealogy Forum and Rootsweb. As genealogy information on the internet blossomed, I branched out to Census records on the internet. Through my mentor, Charles Buchanan and his friend, John Howie, I started reading from genealogy sites like the Lunenburg County GenWeb. Now most of my research is on the Internet.

My parents were born in Cape Breton. Mom was born in Glace Bay in 1904. She visited Boston often. In the summer of 1926, she worked in Boston. She intended to return to her teaching position at St Anne's in Glace Bay in September. She returned to Glace Bay in late September for a short period of time to dispose of her possessions. She intended to return to Boston as a student. She planned to finish college and teach in Massachusetts. On October 2, 1926 she was pre-examined in Halifax for her return by ship to Boston. She was listed as an Alien student. Her pre-examination record was filed in the US Records Office under the name of Elizabeth Loretta Tobin.

Dad was born in Bridgeport in 1906 – nearly 90 days before Dominion was officially established. Dad was a frequent visitor to Boston. He worked and went to school in Boston to become an Electrician. In 1925, nearly all members of his family migrated to Boston in 3 waves: (1) his older sister Hazel to work in Cohasset (2) my Dad and his father came later to live in Brookline and (3) the rest of the family except his oldest brother came to live in Brookline. The Border Crossings were recorded in Vanceboro, Maine.

Mom and Dad met at a skating party at the Boston Arena (now a part of Northeastern University). They married in Boston in 1931. They rented in various localities that were handy to public transportation for Mom to work; she never drove. Their children (all sons) were born in Boston. After my oldest brother was born, they rented close to where Dad worked. They rented and bought their only house in Dedham. Until my wife and I and our two sons moved to Norwood, I always lived in Dedham.

We children were raised like we were living in Cape Breton. Our visitors were all family or friends from Cape Breton. Most had migrated to Massachusetts. Beginning in 1946, every 3 years we vacationed in Cape Breton. I stopped in 1952. In the late 1970s, Starting in the 1980s, I went to Cape Breton every three years to visit Dad's sister (Dorothy Donovan) in Dominion and Mom's sister (May Tobin) in Halifax.

For over 30 years, I have been a genealogy gatherer. After retiring from my US government career and while teaching as an Adjunct Professor of Computer Science, I finally started publishing my genealogy focusing first on my Newfoundland roots. Later, I started publishing on the Cape Breton Genealogy and Historical Association web site. The Genealogy Basics Series that I started a few years ago was inspired by Norm MacDonald.

Nearly five years ago, after I retired from teaching, I volunteered to help people with their genealogy. First, it was at my local library. Later, a son volunteered me to help at the Library of the Irish Cultural Centre of New England (ICCNE) in Canton MA. Two learning experiences at ICCNE Library are worth noting: David Barrett the former Director of the library gave me a document on Irish Links. My Links documents are the result. The other volunteers especially David's sister Judy Barrett and Bernie Couming taught me most of what I currently know about researching Irish genealogy. The volunteers founded the Friends of Irish Research in Brockton.

Introduction:

For all my ancestors (and their descendants), I usually start with Census records. I collect information as much information as possible for as many censuses as possible. I try to collect at least: Surname, Given Name, Location, and Age. Next, I try to collect data from official records: Birth, Marriage, Death and Wills. Then I try to collect Church records, Obituaries, Cemetery and gravestone information. Finally, I try to collect information from published genealogies, Ancestry's Public Trees, FamilySearch Trees, directories and "oral" histories.

Cape Breton genealogy is like all localities in Canada. It is easiest for people who stayed. The difficulty is for people who moved on.

The following links may help.

Free Web Sites that include records for the 4 Cape Breton Counties

[FamilySearch](http://Familysearch.org/Search/Collection/Lists) <http://Familysearch.org/Search/Collection/Lists> - In the Collections Name, enter Canada. Exclude the 1861, 1871, 1881, 1891, 1901 and 1911 Census Files because other web sites are better. (I prefer the friendlier Automated Censuses of Canada for 1851, 1901, and 1911. I also prefer Ancestry Library Censuses for 1861, 1871, 1881, 1891, and 1921.) I use the following Historical Canadian Collections that contain Cape Breton records. Some collections were updated this year:

Canada Births and Baptisms, 1661-1959	1,523,881	26-Nov-14
Canada Census Mortality Schedules, 1871	45,371	24-Jan-13
Canada Deaths and Burials, 1664-1955	101,189	9-Apr-10
Canada Marriages, 1661-1949	225,320	26-Nov-14
Canada Passenger Lists, 1881-1922	3,874,103	6-May-15
Canada, Lower Canada Census, 1825	74,323	29-Aug-12
Canada, Lower Canada Census, 1831	91,908	17-Feb-12
Canada, Lower Canada Census, 1842	46,467	16-Feb-12

In addition, there a number of Nova Scotia Collections:

Nova Scotia Births and Baptisms, 1702-1896	130,108	15-Mar-12
Nova Scotia Births, 1864-1877	Browse	26-Jun-15
	Images	
Nova Scotia Census, 1861	57,453	24-Mar-10
Nova Scotia Church Records, 1720-2001	Browse	17-Jan-14
	Images	
Nova Scotia Deaths, 1864-1877	Browse	26-Jun-15
	Images	
Nova Scotia Deaths, 1890-1955	336,983	23-Apr-15
Nova Scotia Deaths, 1956-1957	11,869	23-Apr-15
Nova Scotia Delayed Births, 1837-1904	70,925	28-Jan-15
Nova Scotia Marriages, 1711-1909	37,261	9-Mar-12
Nova Scotia Marriages, 1864-1918	Browse	26-Jun-15
	Images	
Nova Scotia Marriages, 1907-1932	66,106	11-Mar-15
Nova Scotia Probate Records, 1760-1993	Browse	4-Nov-14
	Images	
Nova Scotia Vital Records, 1763-1957	807,577	4-Jan-13

Nova Scotia, Antigonish Catholic Diocese, 1823-1905

91,875 28-Nov-12

Please note that that the Antigonish Catholic Diocese records include records from 3 other counties: Antigonish, Guysborough and Pictou,

[Ancestry Library](#) - There is no hyperlink because I use my local library to access the database. My library is one of over 40 libraries in Eastern Massachusetts that access Ancestry Library through the Minuteman Network. In addition, I have counted over 40 other Massachusetts communities' libraries which offer Ancestry Library. Ancestry Library is free to all library users. It is not available 24/7. It is available on-site at the library during normal working hours. Join any Massachusetts library with Ancestry Library for researching its collections for \$1.

I use the following Ancestry collections:

- **Nova Scotia Census & Voter Lists**

Nova Scotia, Canada, Census, Assessment and Poll Tax Records, 1770-1795, 1827	22,268
Ontario and Nova Scotia, Census, 1800-1842	6,045
Canada, Voters Lists, 1935-1980	95,335,129
1921 Census of Canada	8,800,634
1891 Census of Canada	4,790,154
1881 Census of Canada	4,281,168
1871 Census of Canada	3,516,910
1861 Census of Canada	2,958,892
1851 Census of Canada East, Canada West, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia	1,487,802
Nova Scotia, Canada, Census, Assessment and Poll Tax Records, 1770-1795, 1827	22,268
Ontario and Nova Scotia, Census, 1800-1842	6,045

- **Nova Scotia Birth, Marriage & Death**

Acadia, Canada, Vital and Church Records (Drouin Collection), 1670-1946	921,991
Nova Scotia, Canada, Marriages, 1763-1935	445,852
Nova Scotia, Canada, Deaths, 1864-1877, 1890-1960	427,898
Nova Scotia, Canada, Births, 1836-1910	243,942
UK, RMS Titanic, Deaths at Sea, 1912	1,507
Canada, Find A Grave Index, 1600s-Current	3,544,247
JewishGen Online Worldwide Burial Registry (JOWBR)	1,195,945
Web: CanadianHeadstones.com Index	1,172,795
Canada Obituary Collection	1,144,139
Canada, Royal Canadian Mounted Police obituary card index and notices, 1876-2007	
19-Century Emigration of 'Old Lutherans' from Eastern Germany to Australia, Canada, and the United States	

- **Immigration and Travel**

U.S., Records of Aliens Pre-Examined in Canada, 1904-1954	139,190
U.S., Passenger and Crew Lists for U.S.-Bound Vessels Arriving in Canada, 1912-1939 and 1953-1962	93,258
Canadian Passenger Lists, 1865-1935	7,286,089
U.S., Border Crossings from Canada to U.S., 1895-1956	5,057,039
Border Crossings: From U.S. to Canada, 1908-1935	1,640,346
Canada, Ocean Arrivals (Form 30A), 1919-1924	752,596
Canada, Seafarers of the Atlantic Provinces, 1789-1935	283,032

Canadian Immigrant Records, Part One	271,918
U.S., Passenger and Crew Lists for U.S.-Bound Vessels Arriving in Canada, 1912-1939 and 1953-1962	93,258
Canadian Immigrant Records, Part Two	24,811
Canada, British Vessel Crew Lists, 1881	23,439
Canada, Immigration and Settlement Correspondence and Lists, 1817-1896	21,158
Old United Empire Loyalists List	6,353
Canada, Canadian National Railway Immigrant Records, 1937-1961	4,158
Ship Passengers Arriving in Canada (Letter A): 1919-1924	2,348
Irish Canadian Emigration Records, 1823-1849	2,219
Canada, Canadian National Railway Immigrant Records, 1937-1961	4,158
Canada, British Vessel Crew Lists, 1881	23,439
Newfoundland & Labrador, Canada, Crew Lists, 1864-1942	40,879
Canada, St. Lawrence Steamboat Company Passenger Lists, 1819-1838	187,465
British Columbia, Canada, Border Entries and Passenger Lists, 1894-1905	42,740
Canada, Ocean Arrivals (Form 30A), 1919-1924	752,596
Irish Emigration to New England through the Port of Saint John, New Brunswick, Canada, 1841 to 1849	289
New Brunswick, Canada, Passenger Lists: 1834	2,487
19-Century Emigration of 'Old Lutherans' from Eastern Germany to Australia, Canada, and the United States	96

- **Nova Scotia Tax, Criminal, Land & Wills**

Nova Scotia, Canada, Land Petitions, 1765-1800 11,354

[Automated Census of Canada](http://automatedgenealogy.com/) <http://automatedgenealogy.com/> - The Automated Genealogy site hosts several projects to index Canadian censuses. Over the last several years Library and Archives Canada has digitized their microfilms of the original census forms for several of the Canadian censuses. The Automated Genealogy project group has organized volunteers to produce indices to the people enumerated in these censuses. Each project uses simple web forms to allow volunteers to transcribe census data from the images into a database, with the entered data being immediately available on the site. Following transcription, volunteers proofread and make corrections. Anyone with an internet connection can participate as a transcriber, proofreader, or just by submitting corrections as they use the site. The status of each census project varies depending on how long it has been active. There is a link to the LAC image of the original census page at the top of each transcribed census page.

1901 Census

The 1901 Census was the first census that LAC released images for and the first one we indexed. Transcription has been completed and we are almost 70% through proofreading.

1911 Census

Transcription is now complete, proofreading is in progress.

1851 Census

Censuses were planned for 1851 for the then separate colonies of Canada (current day Ontario and Quebec), New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia. The census of Canada was delayed until early 1852 so it is variously referred to as the 1851 or 1852 Census. Indexing of the 1852 census was started in August 2007. Indexing of the 1851 Census of New Brunswick was started in June 2007 and has been completed. Indexing of the 1851 Census of Nova Scotia, which is a head-of-household-only census, has not yet begun.

[Nova Scotia Historical Vital Statistics](https://www.novascotiagenealogy.com/) <https://www.novascotiagenealogy.com/> - These records include registered births from 1864-1877 with some birth entries as early as 1810, delayed births 1836-1907, marriages 1763-1932, and deaths 1864-1877, 1908-1957. In 1864, an attempt was made to register vital statistics in Nova Scotia. These records are fairly complete from 1867 to 1874. In 1877, birth and death registration was discontinued, but it began again in 1908.

Images for the following records can be viewed at www.novascotiagenealogy.com.

Birth records may contain the following information:

- Name of child
- Date of birth and place of child
- Gender
- Names of parents
- Birthplace of parents
- Registration date and number
- Names of witnesses

Marriage records may contain the following information:

- Name of groom
- Name and maiden name of bride
- Grooms father's occupation
- Bride's father's occupation
- Names of parents for both bride and groom
- Place of birth for parents
- Place and date of marriage
- Names of witnesses
- Age at marriage

Death records may contain the following information:

- Name of deceased
- Date and place of burial
- Date and place of death
- Occupation
- Gender
- Cause of death
- Date and place of birth
- Age at death
- Marital status
- Name of spouse
- Name of parents

[Nova Scotia Genealogy Records Online](http://www.genealogysearch.org/canada/novascotia.html) www.genealogysearch.org/canada/novascotia.html - This portal contains a list of free web sites for the Province. Among the linked sites is the List of Loyalists compiled by the late Robert J. Morgan PhD, the late Director of the Beaton Institute. It also includes Paul Landry's: Census Returns for L'Ardoise, Richmond County, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, Canada 1752-1901; Holy Guardian Angels Birth, Marriage & Death Records from 1821-1876, L'Ardoise, Richmond Co., Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, Canada; Obituaries from the L'Ardoise Area, Nova Scotia, Canada; River Bourgeois, Richmond County, Nova Scotia, Canada 1891; Census 1901 Census of River Bourgeois, Richmond County, Nova Scotia, Canada and 1901 Census of L'Ardoise, Richmond County, Nova Scotia, Canada. In addition, it includes Jeanne Joyce Stone's Notre Dame de l'Assomption, Arichat, Richmond County, Nova Scotia Vital Records

[Miners Memorial Database \(Nova Scotia, Canada\)](http://www.genealogysearch.org/canada/novascotia.html)

<http://www.genealogysearch.org/canada/novascotia.html> - The Miners Memorial Database contains the names of coal miners who were killed in or about the coal mines of Nova Scotia. At present it contains a total of 2,275 names. The database covers the period of time between November 28th, 1866 to November 17th, 1967 Search by surname or by date. This is an archived website, may be incomplete, unavailable or slow to respond.

[McAlpine's Maritime Provinces Directory for 1870-71](http://www.ourroots.ca/e/toc.asp?id=1278) www.ourroots.ca/e/toc.asp?id=1278 – The directory covers Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland, and Prince Edward Island. Search is by community and by page.

[McAlpine's Nova Scotia Directory 1907-08](http://novascotia.ca/archives/virtual/directory/) <http://novascotia.ca/archives/virtual/directory/> - This census substitute allows the user to select by community and by first initial of the surname.

[Mi'kmaq Census 1871, 1881, 1891, Nova Scotia, Canada](http://www.acadian-home.org/Census-Mikmaq.html) <http://www.acadian-home.org/Census-Mikmaq.html> - Census material was taken from the Ph.D thesis, "Change in the Real Property Law of a Cape Breton Island Micmac Band, Volume 2" by Daniel P. Strouthes. Note that like any census, there are inaccuracies.

[Nova Scotia Land Petitions](http://novascotia.ca/archives/virtual/land/) novascotia.ca/archives/virtual/land/- Search is by surname. Personal names and information contained in 3,338 petitions from Cape Breton Island (1787-1843) and 839 petitions from mainland Nova Scotia (1769-1799).

Free Web Sites for the 4 Counties on Cape Breton Island

▪ Cape Breton County

[Fortress of Louisbourg Parish Records \(1713 - 1758\)](http://epe.lac-bac.gc.ca/100/205/301/ic/cdc/louisbourg/genealogy/index.html) <http://epe.lac-bac.gc.ca/100/205/301/ic/cdc/louisbourg/genealogy/index.html> - This is the Eric Krause search software for the database. Search baptisms, marriages, and deaths. Louisbourg was a French colonial seaport in Nova Scotia. (This is an archived website, may be incomplete, unavailable or slow to respond.)

[Surnames of people in the Louisbourg region, Acadia](http://www.genealogysearch.org/canada/novascotia.html)

<http://www.genealogysearch.org/canada/novascotia.html> - This data was collected from administrative registers (parish registers and census) before the deportation of 1755-1763. Click on the Details link to see the complete record. (This is an archived website, may be incomplete, unavailable or slow to respond.) The search software is faster when the user changes the last letter in the URL to the first letter in the Surname that the user wants to search – for example the letter b, if the user wants to search for a surname starting with the letter B.

[Cape Breton Counties GenWeb Project](http://www.capebretongenweb.com/) <http://www.capebretongenweb.com/> -

This site provides links to primary and secondary sources the four counties on Cape Breton Island: Richmond, Inverness, Victoria, and Cape Breton. I use their censuses, obituaries, family genealogies and Loyalist list. (The latter when I am helping people research their roots.)

[Cape Breton Cemetery Transcriptions](http://www.capebretongenweb.com/Cemeteries/cemindx.html) - <http://www.capebretongenweb.com/Cemeteries/cemindx.html> - This contains cemetery transcriptions from the 1990s from various cemeteries.

[Assorted Census Materials for the Town of Louisbourg, Cape Breton County, Nova Scotia Canada 1861-1954](http://archiver.rootsweb.ancestry.com/th/read/ACADIAN-FRENCH-CANADIAN/2008-01/1200327520) <http://archiver.rootsweb.ancestry.com/th/read/ACADIAN-FRENCH-CANADIAN/2008-01/1200327520> - There are Censuses and Directories for 1851 through the early 1900s.

[Cape Bretoners in World War Two](http://genealogycanada.blogspot.com/2013/11/veterans-week-cape-bretoners-in-world.html) <http://genealogycanada.blogspot.com/2013/11/veterans-week-cape-bretoners-in-world.html> – This is from Wayne MacVicar’s blog. It covers about 16,000 individuals from Cape Breton who served in World War Two.

[Grave Stones of the Cemeteries of six RC Parishes in the New Waterford area.](http://www.parishofsaintleonard.com/cemetery_mapping/cemetery_home.html)

http://www.parishofsaintleonard.com/cemetery_mapping/cemetery_home.html - This lists vital information collected by the New Waterford and Area Cemetery Society from grave stones in six RC Churches. The Victoria Mines site is where many Petries are buried. Also, the Lingan cemetery is of special interest because descendants of my Cummings, Laffan, and Laffin Ancestors are buried there.

[Peach Genealogy](http://www.thepeaches.com/genealogy/CapeBreton.htm) www.thepeaches.com/genealogy/CapeBreton.htm - This is a modified Register Report for the Peach family who were early settlers of South Head and of Sydney.

▪ **Inverness County**

[Acadian Census of Margaree in Cape Breton](http://www.acadian.org/census1809b.html) www.acadian.org/census1809b.html - By Father Lejamtel, Missionary; dated August 1809.

[Excerpts from Chéticamp, Inverness County, Nova Scotia, Canada Catholic Parish Records](http://www.reocities.com/Heartland/Pointe/6654/marr2.html)

<http://www.reocities.com/Heartland/Pointe/6654/marr2.html> - Scroll down to read the records.

▪ **Richmond County**

[Ed Galvin](http://elgalvin.mysite.syr.edu/gen/) <http://elgalvin.mysite.syr.edu/gen/> - This site contains D'Escousse, Richmond County, Nova Scotia, Canada 1811-1901 Census Records and D'Escousse, Richmond County, Nova Scotia, Canada: St. Hyacinth's Catholic Church Records 1831-1904, the first parish on Isle Madame; and Register of Fr. Bailly : Isle Madame, Nova Scotia, Canada Entries July to November 1771. Fr. Bailly was a missionary priest who travelled eastern Canada ministering to the French and the native Canadians. In addition, it contains a Register report for the author’s McDonald family from Richmond County.

[Jeanne Joyce Stone](http://www.jeannejoycestone.com/) <http://www.jeannejoycestone.com/> - There is a link to Church records. In addition to Church records, this site’s Family Trees link takes the user to 9 Register Reports:

- Descendants of Francois Josse
- Descendants of Captain Jonas Stone
- Descendants of Louis Bonnain De La Chaume(Bonin - Bona)
- Descendants of Joseph David
- Descendants of Claude De Le Fleur Petitpas
- Descendants of Pierre Petitpas
- Descendants of Toussaint Samson
- Descendants of Jehran (Jean) Poirier
- Descendants of William Burke

▪ **Victoria County**

[Victoria County Cemetery Transcriptions](http://www.telusplanet.net/public/mtoll/ns.htm) <http://www.telusplanet.net/public/mtoll/ns.htm> - This is Mary Tollestrup’s Portal. There are 3 links to Victoria County cemetery transcriptions.

List of Subscription Cape Breton Genealogy Web Sites

[Cape Breton Genealogy and Historical Association http://www.cbgen.org/](http://www.cbgen.org/) - The CBGHA Home Page indicates that: “Our member's web site that started in 2003 consists of over 600,000 pages of material transcribed from original documents and other types of material useful to researchers; over 25 GB of information related to Cape Breton. This site has the largest collection of Cape Breton genealogy information available anywhere. Our collection is large and varied.

“Our records include an ever increasing collection of Cape Breton related material. No site can have every record for an area, however, our records are vast and increase each month. **We have the following types of records - books, cemetery records, census records, monthly magazine the Ezine, family trees, historical records, land grants, maps, helpful links to other sites, military records, newspaper items, obits, parish records, school records and more.**

“We think of our website as a digital Cape Breton genealogy research library. We assemble Cape Breton genealogy research material, from many sources, in one easy to access site so our members can do their research from the comfort of their homes.”

Please note that I am a Research Correspondent for CBGHA. I write research articles and especially the Genealogy Basics series. Also, cbgen.org has my family trees and my Register Reports for my Cape Breton Ancestors. In addition, I gather information for my Cape Breton Ancestors from the cemetery records, family register reports, family trees, historical records, land grants, military records, newspaper items, obituaries, parish records, and school records.

Annual membership fee: \$25.

[Ancestry.com http://www.Ancestry.com/](http://www.Ancestry.com/) – Wiki describes Ancestry as the largest online subscription-based genealogy database service. Two of the databases that are interesting to Newfoundland and Labrador researchers are: Newfoundland & Labrador, Canada, Crew Lists, 1864-1942 with over 41000 records and Newfoundland, Canada, Index of Birth, Marriage & Death Notices from Newspapers, 1810–1890 with 42,000 records. The latter Index of Birth, Marriage and Death Notices appears to be a subset of the Maritime Archive History collection compiled by Gertrude Crosbie that is available from Memorial University Library's Maritime Archive for about \$50.

The following are the approximate cost per annum for the US, International and World: \$120, \$300, and \$480.

Most of the genealogy volunteers at the Friends of Irish Research have subscriptions and use the software when they consult with clients at our Friday evening meetings. All of the consultations are free. Free consultations can be arranged at the following web site: <http://www.friendsofirishresearch.org/>

[Ancestry.ca http://home.Ancestry.ca/](http://home.Ancestry.ca/) – LivingSocial describes Ancestry.ca as the leading family history website available in Canada. Partnered with Ancestry's global network of family history services, with countries like Australia, Germany, Sweden, France, and the United Kingdom, Ancestry.ca offers users unprecedented access to multicultural heritage documents. Ranging from censuses (including English, Scottish, and Welsh data) and passenger lists, to death and marriage records, Ancestry.ca has it all. Ancestry.ca helps customers find their own discoveries and family trees by providing these high-quality services at reasonable prices. The per annum cost is approximately \$120 for Canada and \$300 for the World.

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

Joseph F. Petrie, AB (Economics and Business – St. Anselm College)
MA (Economics – Boston College)

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)

Research Correspondent, Cape Breton Genealogy and Historical Association (CBGHA)