

Genealogy Basics – Using Ancestry’s Naturalization Records

By Joe Petrie

BACKGROUND:

Last year, I wrote an article that covered the navigation. This article is really a companion piece. Why? In the individual consultations since my last article, I have used the database constantly. More than I ever expected. Especially, for US immigrants, I search Ancestry’s Naturalization records because the records contain a wealth of information; especially the Declaration and Petition forms for 20th Century applicants.

Ancestry describes the Naturalization database as follows:

“Before 1906, an alien could be naturalized in any court of record. Many immigrants, anxious to become citizens, began the citizenship process by taking out papers in the county where they first arrived in the United States. One might have started the process somewhere on the East Coast, for example, and then completed the requirements in the county or state when final residency was established somewhere else. This presents a challenge for family historians seeking the naturalization records of their ancestors. Fortunately, as more and more of these records are being made available online through collections like those on Ancestry, that search is getting easier. Even where the actual records are not available, indexes can lead us to the actual records. Naturalization records can be rich in detail, providing the date of immigration and the ship, names, ages, and addresses of family members, birth information, current and past residences, signatures, and affidavits from witnesses.”

“The collection of naturalization and citizenship records on Ancestry includes indexes, and some indexes are linked to images of the actual records.”

INTRODUCTION:

Ancestry provides the following search tips.

- The U.S. Census records for 1900-1930 included questions about citizenship status. Entries in the "Naturalized" column can indicate a person’s progress toward citizenship. "NA" was written for naturalized citizens, while the entry "PA" might indicate that first papers (also called a "declaration of intent") had been filed. "AL" indicates the immigrant had not yet begun the naturalization process. Additionally, the 1920 census asked the year of naturalization for immigrants who had naturalized. **(Please note that the 1940 Census had the same questions about citizenship.)**
- Naturalization records may include more than one page. If you find a record, view the original image and use the arrow keys to scroll to the next page to make sure you’ve seen all the pages.
- Be sure to note and research the names of witnesses on naturalization records. They were often relatives, employers, or friends from the immigrant’s previous home. Tracing these individuals in censuses etc. may help you learn about your ancestor’s life before and after they arrived in their new country.
- Keep in mind that your immigrant ancestor may not have used the English version of his or her given name and that the surname may also have ethnic variants. Learn the ethnic equivalents and try searches in the immigrant’s native language.
- Try searching for other variations of your ancestor’s name in case it was spelled incorrectly. Wildcards can be used to search for name variants
- Learn about pronunciation in your immigrant ancestor’s native language. In some cases clerks may have recorded the name as they heard it.

- When searching the Native American collections within this category, you'll have better luck if you know the name of the person and the tribe.

FAST WAY TO SEARCH ANCESTRY NATURALIZATION RECORDS:

I start with Census records.

The screenshot shows the AncestryLibrary website interface. The navigation menu includes HOME, SEARCH, MESSAGE BOARDS, LEARNING CENTER, CHARTS AND FORMS, NEW COLLECTIONS, and MORRILL MEMO... A dropdown menu is open under SEARCH, listing categories: All Categories, Census & Voter Lists, Birth, Marriage & Death, Military, Immigration & Travel, and Card Catalog. A 'Send Your Find Home!' form is visible on the right, with a 'Send document' button. The page also features a 'Receive Records at Home' section and a 'Five Minute Find: Sending Documents Home From the Library' link.

I searched the 1940 US Census Collection for my mother who was naturalized in 1939. I found the census record for Mom. The following is a downloaded 1940 Census record for Mom from Ancestry:



1940 United States Federal Census

Name:	Ethel Petris
Age:	38
Estimated Birth Year:	1902
Gender:	Female
Race:	White
Birthplace:	Canada English
Marital Status:	Married
Relation to Head of House:	Wife
Map of Home in 1940:	Dedham, Norfolk, Massachusetts
Street:	Codboum Street
House Number:	299
Inferred Residence in 1935:	Dedham, Norfolk, Massachusetts
Residence in 1935:	Same Place
Citizenship:	Naturalized

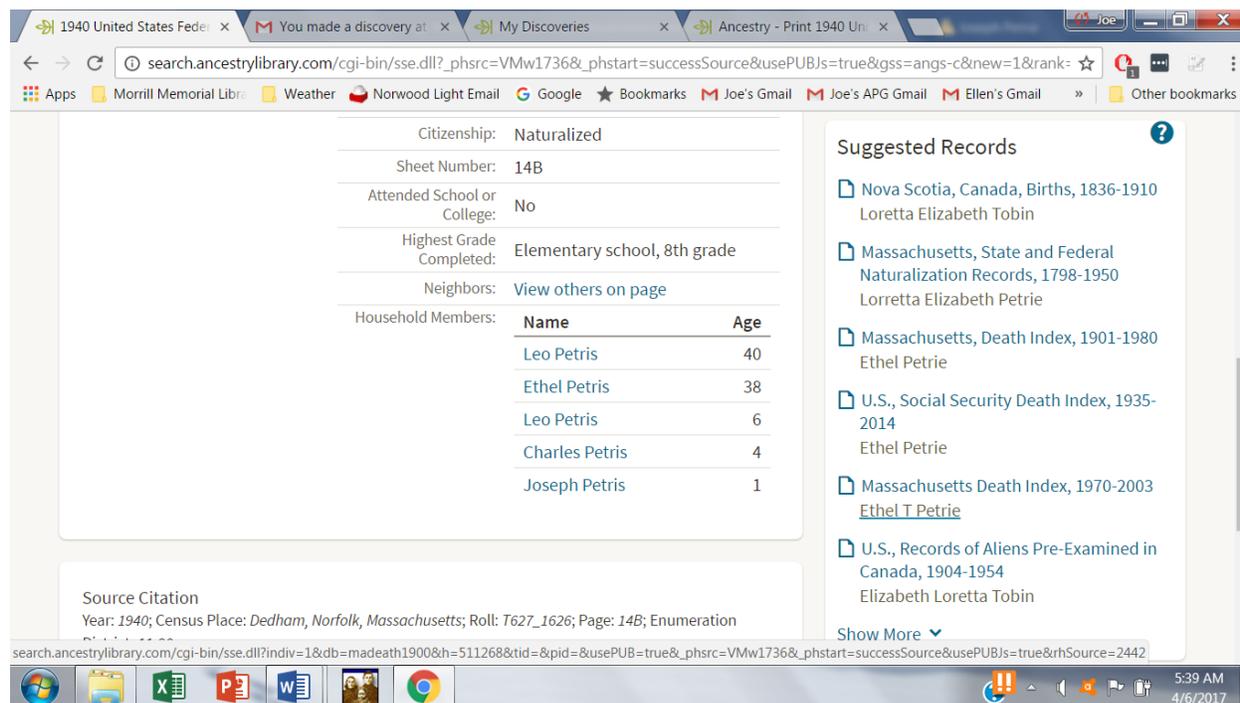
Sheet Number:	14B	
Attended School or College:	No	
Highest Grade Completed:	Elementary school, 8th grade	
Household Members:	Name	Age
	Leo Petris	40
	Ethel Petris	38
	Leo Petris	6
	Charles Petris	4
	Joseph Petris	1

The record showed that she was naturalized.

Let's digress for some corrective inputs from Mom's youngest son. There are a few items that were incorrect. I assume that the Census taker erred. The Surname was Petrie. Mom was born in 1904. She was 36. (Dad was born in 1906. He was 34.) We lived at 299 Colburn St. Mom attended College. She had completed her Sophomore Year at Mount St. Vincent in Halifax. (Please note that she was employed as a teacher in her home town of Glace Bay, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia from 1922 to 1926.)

Also, Mom legally changed her name after she was Naturalized. Her legal name was Ethel Tobin Petrie. A great grandson is named Tobin Petrie.

The following screen print contains links to other Ancestry databases where there are records for Mom. The second link is to the Naturalization Declaration document.

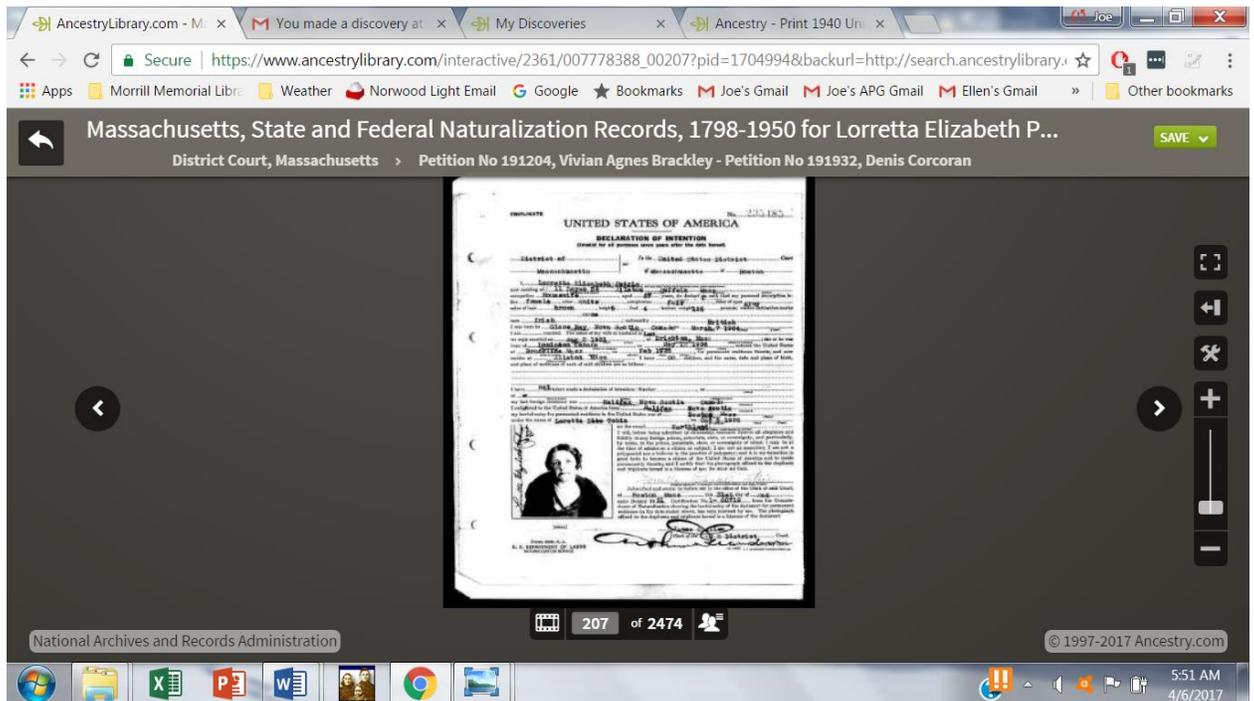


Please note that the last link is important. It indicated that she was pre-examined in Canada. There were 3 Ports where Pre-Examinations were authorized, Mom was pre-examined in Halifax.

The following screen print is a copy of the Declaration form. She submitted the form on August 31, 1931 – 29 days after she married Dad.

The form contained the following genealogy facts: Place and Date of Birth; Place and Date of Marriage; Date and Place of Arrival; and the Name of the Ship that she arrived on.

The copy of the following image of Mom's Declaration is on last year's article. A screen print works.



Please note that Ancestry now provides the option to save the record on the device or to send the document to a registered Ancestry Account linked to an Email Address.

Also, please note that Ancestry tries to have all forms for all States in their Naturalization databases. The most informative forms are the Declarations and Petition. For some States, neither form is available

SUMMARY:

I focused on Mom because she was from Cape Breton who became a citizen prior to the 1940 US Census.

I have had the same success for people who came to Massachusetts from other countries; notably Ireland and Italy.

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

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Genealogy Volunteer, Irish Cultural Centre of New England for the Friends of Irish Research,
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