

# **Genealogy Basics –Verifying Vitals using a Family Member’s Official Record**

**By Joe Petrie**

## **INTRODUCTION:**

I am a member of the Association of Professional Genealogists (APG). When I joined APG, I agreed to search for two official sources for vitals (Dates and Places of Births, Marriages, Deaths and Burials). It is really a target because often there are less than two official records. In fact, there are cases where there no official records! For Cape Breton research, for example, we must rely on oral history, secondary sources, and even official records for their children for ancestors who passed away prior to the 1800s censuses.

One focus of this article is on how I verified oral and written history for Agnes Irvin Park. Agnes supposedly died in Cape Breton. Supposedly Agnes was born in Scotland and was married to Andrew Park in Scotland. Supposedly, Agnes and Andrew migrated to Cape Breton with 7 children. They had 2 more children in Cape Breton.

Supposedly, the children born in Scotland who migrated with Agnes and Andrew were: Margaret (1817 – 1887); John (1820 – 1887); Mary Janet (1824 – 1882); Elizabeth (1828 – 1912); Edward (1832 – 1881; Agnes (1835 – 1907); and Jennette (1837). Supposedly, Agnes and Andrew had another child (Janet, 1822 – 1824) who passed away in Scotland. The children born in Cape Breton were: Ellen (1838 – 1911) and Andrew (1839).

I could not find on-line records for Agnes, Andrew and their children in Scotland. I used Ancestry, FamilySearch, and Find My Past. Remember that Scottish records can be difficult - because often the family will use the individual’s Middle Name. For example, a few months ago, a Petrie cousin told me that he did not know until he was in his 70s that his legal name was John Michael Petrie. He always thought that his legal name was Michael. His mother’s Cape Breton family was from Scotland. To my knowledge, all these Cape Breton family members were known by their middle names.

Thankfully, for Andrew Park and most of his children, there are official US Census records, a death record, burial records (including Find a Grave records). The records are principally in Illinois. For the Agnes and Andrew’s daughter Agnes Park Heyworth, there are Massachusetts records going back to 1860. For Elizabeth Park O’Brien (who remained in Cape Breton), there are census and church records.

Why take the time to validate Agnes Irvin Park’s record? There are two pieces of information (or misinformation) that complicate the search. There is interesting item from the 1847 conditional Baptism record for Elizabeth Park and for her Marriage record to Michael O’Brien. Essentially, the two records in FamilySearch.org, Nova Scotia, Antigonish Catholic Diocese, for St. Joseph’s in North Sydney identify Agnes Wilson as Andrew Park’s wife. (Because St Joseph’s was a Mission Church, there is a second set for Sacred Heart in Sydney.)

There is a related complicating factor. One time many years ago (maybe 65 years ago), my Dad told me that he descended from Agnes Wilson. He was helping me with a Pedigree Chart for his family. The memory is still vivid. Dad died 42 years ago (1974). He died about 5 years before I started my genealogy hobby. Dad was not into genealogy.

## **BACKGROUND:**

Agnes and Andrew are on my Petrie direct line. They are my 3 GG parents. Their granddaughter Agnes O’Brien, daughter of Michael O’Brien and Elizabeth Park was my father’s grandmother, my 1 GG mother.

When I was a genealogy novice, I gladly accepted all genealogy contributions and entered (or updated) the records in my database with attribution but without verification. I only verified when there was a conflict. Edna Waller originated the Park Family web site (now off-line). She contributed the Andrew Park and Agnes Irvin records. She also contributed Agnes and Andrew’s descendants’ records (except the O’Brien’s which I provided). When I was keystroking the records over 30 years ago, I noticed that Edna had identified a locality and date for the vitals of Agnes and Andrew. But there was no source. That fact was inconsistent. Edna was meticulous about documenting her sources.

Edna wrote that Agnes and Andrew were from Renfrewshire, Scotland. I asked her to provide the source information – but there was no response. I tried over a number of years to validate Edna’s birth records for Agnes and Andrew and the 7 children who were with them when they migrated to Cape Breton – without noting in my database that I could not verify the birth vitals in my records. I verified her Census records and her Passenger records. Unfortunately, I can’t verify the vitals (place and date of: birth, christening, marriage, death and burial) that Edna provided for Agnes, Andrew and family.

**VERIFICATION:**

Andrew Jr.’s Illinois death record identified his mother as Agnes Irvin. (See Family Search.org, Illinois Deaths and Stillbirths 1916 – 1947 data base.) The transcript follows:

Andrew Park Illinois Deaths and Stillbirths

Name	<b>Andrew Park</b>
Event Date	13 Oct 1925
Event Place	Greens, Mercer, Illinois
Gender	Male
Race	white
Age	86
Birth Year (Estimated)	1839
Birth Date	03 Oct 1839
Birthplace	Nova Scotia
Father's Name	<u><a href="#">Andrew Park</a></u>
Mother's Name	<u><a href="#">Agnes Irvin</a></u>
Occupation	Retired
Burial Date	15 Oct 1925
Cemetery	Moline Cemetery

In addition, a biography of Agnes and Andrew’s son John in "Portrait and Biographical Album, Rock Island County, 1885", pp 502 also identified Agnes Irvin as his mother. It states that:

"Among the numerous and respected citizens of Coal Valley Township, who are of foreign birth, is Mr. John Park, a farmer on section 23. He is the son of Andrew and Agnes (Irvin) Park, natives of Scotland."

The entire article is on John’s grave stone. (See Find a Grave.)

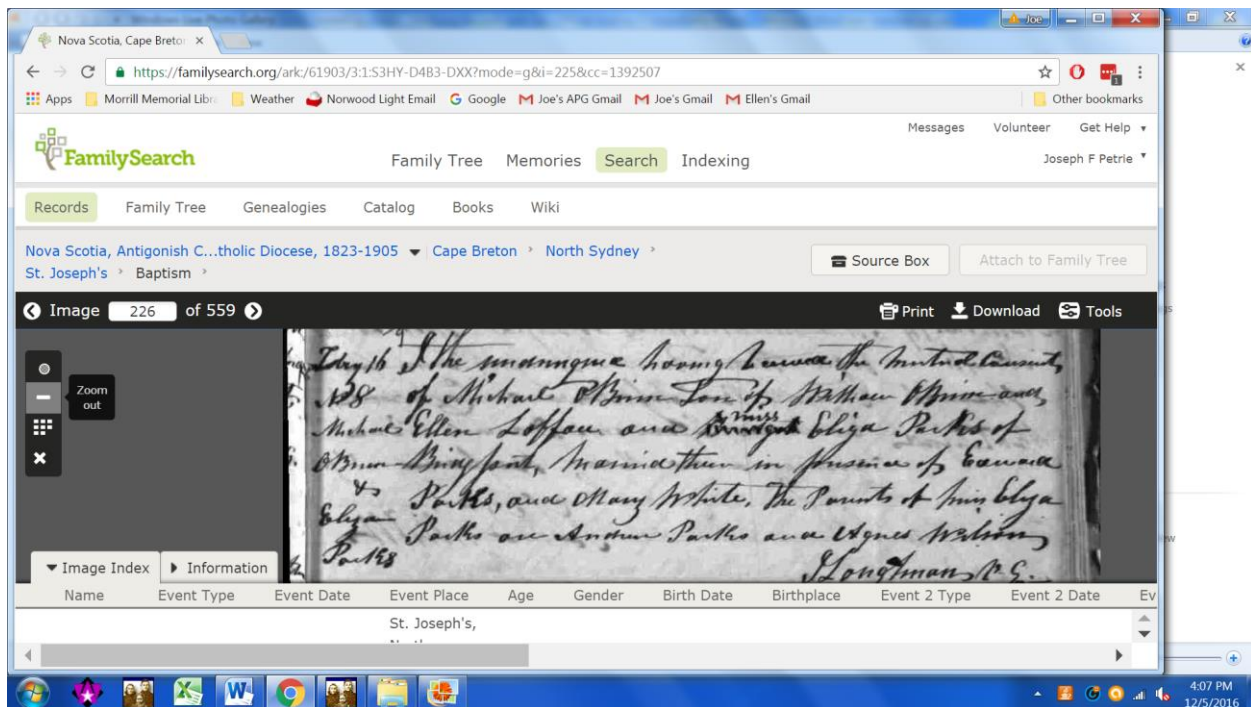
From US Census records of Andrew and of his children, I was able to record that Agnes, Andrew and 7 children were born in Scotland.

## THE INTERESTING ITEM (PROBABLY MISINFORMATION):

Michael O'Brien and Elizabeth Park were married in St. Joseph's North Sydney. Elizabeth's conditional Baptism transcript follows:

Eliza Parks  
Nova Scotia, Antigonish Catholic Diocese  
Name Eliza Parks  
Event Type Baptism  
Event Date 16 Feb 1847  
Event Place St. Joseph's, North Sydney, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, Canada  
Gender Female  
Birth Date 1828  
Father's Name Andrew Parks  
Mother's Name Agnes Wilson

A screen print of the 1847 Marriage record follows:



For a long time, I explored different scenarios to explain why Elizabeth's mother was recorded as Agnes Wilson.

1. The priest messed up!
2. Agnes Irvin Park had passed away before 1847 and Andrew Park remarried.

Because there were no official records, I settled for the first. I believed that the priest messed up. (Remember: Priests are human.)

The following is an added factor from another web site that is also off-line:

Modified Register for Andrew Parks

First Generation

1. Andrew Parks was christened in 1847 in Bridgeport, CB.

Andrew was married to Agnes Wilson. (Please note that there are no records to support this.)

They had the following children:

+2. F i. Elizabeth Parks.

Second Generation

2. Elizabeth Parks (Andrew).

Elizabeth married Michael O'Brien son of William O'Brien and Ellen Laffin on 16 Feb 1847 in St Josephs in North Sydney and was recorded there as well as at Sacred Heart Church, Sydney, CB. Michael was conditionally christened in Bridgeport, CB in 1857.

Michael and Elizabeth had the following children:

3. M i. Patrick O'Brien was born in 1847.

Patrick was baptized on 12 Sep 1847 in Sacred Heart Church, Sydney, CB.

4. M ii. William Brian was born on 25 Mar 1857 in Bridgeport, CB. He was christened in Bridgeport, CB. William was baptized on 20 Apr 1857 in Bridgeport, CB.

Clergy: Rev. J. Quinan, PP Baptismal Sponsors: Catherine O'Neal and Patrick Young

5. F iii. Mary Brian was born in May 1859 in Bridgeport, CB. She was christened in Bridgeport, CB.

Mary was baptized on 2 Jun 1859 in Bridgeport, CB.

Clergy: Rev. J. Quinan, PP Baptismal Sponsors: Ann Cooney and Richd Petre

6. M iv. Michael Brien was born on 18 Jun 1861 in Bridgeport, CB.

Michael was baptized on 10 Jul 1861 in Bridgeport, CB. Clergy: Rev. J. Quinan, PP Baptismal Sponsors: Anastatia Cooney and Michl Young, all of Bridgeport, CB

My notes on the above Modified Register Report:

1. Andrew was not christened. His daughter Elizabeth was conditionally christened.
2. There is no proof that Agnes Wilson was Andrew's wife.
3. A modified register report for Andrew would have enumerated all the children.
4. Only Elizabeth was enumerated.
5. Parents are typically recorded in a marriage record. Andrew Park and Agnes Wilson were recorded. I concluded that the priest made an error when he recorded Agnes Irvin as Agnes Wilson. (The proof is in Illinois Death record for Agnes and Andrew's son John's biography.)
6. Elizabeth Park's Christening was a conditional christening, leading me to believe that Agnes and Andrew Park may have been members of St George Church of England in Sydney. (I browsed the records in FamilySearch without success – but there are gaps.)
7. The report focused on Elizabeth Park and Elizabeth's husband Michael O'Brien's family.
8. Not all of Michael and Elizabeth's children were enumerated – probably because their parish was no longer a mission parish when the younger children were baptized.
9. Obviously, the report was compiled from the Sacred Heart's records.
10. Ellen Laffan, who I believe was born in Nova Scotia, may have been Michael O'Brien's step-mother.
11. Years ago, long before he died in 1974, my Dad stated that he descended from Agnes Wilson. I have often wondered if Agnes Irvin Park died in the early 1840s and that Andrew married Agnes Wilson. I probably thought that Agnes Wilson may have been Elizabeth Park's step-mother. Technically, she would be a collateral person. (And Dad could have been given incorrect information.)

## SUMMARY:

Once again, I'll admit that I never verified nor validated Edna Waller's records.

The validated vital was that Agnes Irvin was the mother of all the children. John was the oldest son. Andrew was the youngest child.

Elizabeth's baptism and marriage records probably are incorrect. There are no records to verify that Agnes Wilson was Elizabeth's mother.

My Dad's input is not verifiable. Let's face it, Dad was not into genealogy.

The records that I received from Edna are probably dated and some vitals are simply not verifiable. The complication: Edna has passed away. We stopped corresponding about 15 years ago when it occurred to me that she would never be forthcoming.

I found Edna Waller's records for Agnes, Andrew and family on the Clan Douglas web site (<http://clandougllassociety.org/>). I was surprised because neither Irvin nor Park is a Sept of Clan Douglas. Years ago, I volunteered to update the records.

I presume that Edna Waller incorrectly concluded that Park or Irvin were Douglas Septs. Irvine is a Clan. Park is not a Sept in any Clan.

Finally, I plan to produce a new Park Modified Register Report by April 2017.

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

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