

Genealogy Basics: Using WikiTree to Gather Information

By Joe Petrie

Summary:

Recently I registered as a user and a volunteer for WikiTree. I registered because I am hoping eventually to add new ancestors and generations; to fill-in information on females whom I do not have a maiden name for; to add missing vital information to records that are incomplete (missing dates and places of birth or death or marriage); etc.

In addition, I hoped to share my public records with new cousins who like me are searching for information. At the moment, when I receive an Email from a new cousin, I send Register Report(s) or I point the cousin to the published Register Reports on the Cape Breton Genealogy and Historical Association (CBGHA) and the Friends of Irish Research (FIR) web sites.

Also, I volunteered because I hoped to share information on individuals that are working on lines that I have researched and proved that they were not related. For example, for people who are looking for Palantine Petrie ancestors, I refer them to publications by Hank Jones, Jr. (FASG), William Barker and Hazel Patrick. I discovered these genealogists when I researched Herkimer NY Palantine Petries as part of my 18th Century Colonial research on Petries in the colonies. One individual that I researched was Loyalist and Palantine Johan Jost Petrie.

Please note that I have no plans to share information on WikiTree from my free consultations at my local library or at the FIR facility.

About WikiTree:

WikiTree at first glance looks fairly simple. I found it to be more complex and complicated than advertised. Navigation is not easily learned. (I am learning how to get to features daily.) Initially, my methodology is to retrieve my record, click on a parent and continue until to get to the individual record that I wanted to go to.

Security is complex. From my viewpoint, the key to security is the Privacy Lock and the Trusted List features. My reading of the two features indicates that the Profile Manager manages both. Currently, I manage the 30+ “Direct Line” records that I entered in March and April 2015.

I am the only user on the Trusted List (because anyone on the Trusted List can edit a profile record). Adding another user on the Trusted List gives that user the right to add and update profile records. My preference is to do it myself with appropriate attribution.

Essentially, using both features, I think that I have each profile record setup so that I am the only one can edit any of my profile records. Only, time will tell.

Also, for my security, I only entered some profile records from published Pedigree Charts information for my direct line, i.e., me, my parents, grandparents, great grandparents and great, great grandparents (2nd gg grandparents). Please note that the latter are being entered gradually and most have not been entered yet.

Finally, I did not enter records for: my children, their spouses, and their children; uncles and aunts, their spouses and descendants; and grand uncles and grand aunts, their spouses and descendants; etc. There are 30 individuals and 15 surnames. I plan to stop there for a while.

My experience with profile record entry is that it is not friendly. For example, Middle Name, Place of Birth, Death and Marriage are really out of their logical order. Security is set separately. More later!

WiKiTree's software allowed me to send "private" messages to other WikiTree profile managers. Specifically, I have sent a few private messages to people working on Palantine Petries from New York. The latter simply identified sources for the New York Petries, German Palatines, who immigrated to New York in the early 18th Century. Specifically, I pointed to books by Henry Z. Jones, Jr. (Fellow, American Society of Genealogists and a friend of some California Petrie cousins, notably the Daniel Mannix Petrie family of TV fame), and by Hazel Patrick, a New York family genealogist who has written a wonderful book on the Mohawk Valley Petries who descended from the Palatine Petries.

I have sent "Private" messages to Nova Scotia recipients. They are likely cousins. WikiTree sent me a copy of the Emails.

As I write this, I wonder about the Email privacy. I wonder where the Emails are stored and who can read them.

Finally, I will discuss the features that I have used the most to correctly enter the 30+ records: Add, Privacy, Pedigree and Watchlist.

When, I cover Privacy Settings (Security), I will not cover different levels.

WikiTree Background:

Wikipedia describes WikiTree as follows:

"WikiTree is a free, shared social networking genealogy website that allows users to individually research and contribute to their own personal family trees, while building and collaborating on a singular worldwide family tree within the same system. The site was created in 2008 by Chris Whitten, developer of the WikiAnswers website, and is owned and hosted by

Interesting.com, Inc. The site uses a “wiki”-based markup language that offers both beginning and advanced users the ability to create and edit personal profiles, categories and “free space” pages to document their family’s history. As of March 2, 2015, the WikiTree website has over 252,000 registered members and maintains over 9.3 million ancestral profiles.

WikiTree describes the web site as follows:

“WikiTree is for family history collaboration. This happens at two levels.

‘At the modern level, the collaboration can be private and tightly-controlled. Use WikiTree to collect and organize your personal family history and privately collaborate with family members. If you invite non-genealogist family members they might not move beyond this level.

‘At a deeper level, we are connecting our personal family histories with a growing worldwide family tree. As we go back in time our collaborations become wider and more public. To keep order, we trust each other to abide by a Wiki Genealogy Honor Code.

‘It’s possible for all this to happen on one single, shared family tree because every profile has its own Trusted List and privacy setting.

‘See our Help Pages for tips on getting started, adding information, and more.’

‘Come participate in our genealogist-to-genealogist (“G2G”) Q&A forum. You can ask a question about how WikiTree works, or ask community members for help breaking through your genealogical “brick walls.”

The following describes Wiki Tree’s plans (What’s Next?):

“Have you taken a DNA test for genealogy? Our DNA test integration features are rapidly growing.

“Are you interested in particular family names? Follow all the activity related to chosen surnames with the Wiki Genealogy Feed.

“Add to your profile or your family tree. (Have you ever used other family tree sites or software? You can probably export a GEDCOM file and upload it here. (Please note that reviewers criticized the GEDCOM process.)

“Add your sibling, your spouse, or your child or add a parent, sibling, spouse, or child to someone else in your Watchlist. (Please note that I’ll cover the Watchlist and how I use it.)

“Invite a friend.

“Create a page for a place, event, pet, or anything else such as a family heirloom, vacation, school, etc. ... whatever is meaningful to you.

“Share a Wikid Shareable Family Tree on a social network.

“Search for matches to see if your tree overlaps with others. (Please note that I checked for matches before I entered each record - because some of other’s records contain only a surname, there is a chance that I may be wrong.)”

My Initial Use of WikiTree:

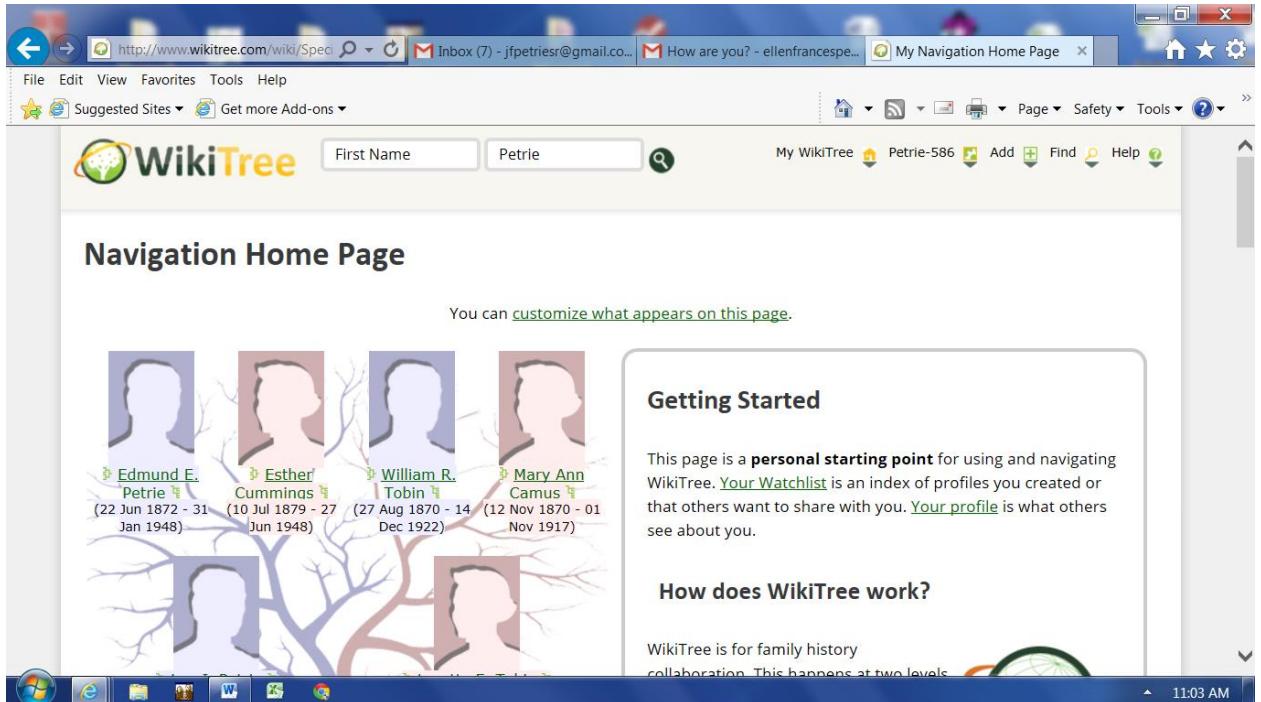
Periodically I’d look at WikiTree Profiles for my Cape Breton, Newfoundland and France surnames. Specifically, I’d look at the public information for: Boutilier, Camus, Casey, Cummings, Dooley, Hogan, Irvin, Mackey/Mackie, Maher, Martinee, Ormond, Park, Petrie, and Tobin. Frankly, based on my experience, I should have included my wife’s surnames. (I need to do that sometime!). The quest: I was hoping to identify others who were researching my families.

My Current Use of WikiTree:

In March 2015, while in Naples Florida on vacation, I decided to become an “official” user. Because all my paper records were home in Massachusetts, I decided to create a minimal profile for 5 generations and to consistently use a privacy setting for all profiles.

As of now, I have a Logon ID and Password. I have agreed to follow an Honor Code. I have volunteered. I have added over 30 profile records. (There is even one for me). The records do not identify sources.

The following Navigation screen results from the logon. Please note that before I entered my first profile record, the tree was blank.



Note the line that starts with WikiTree. On the right there are 5 Navigation Tabs: My WikiTree; Petrie-586 (the Profile Manager's Navigation Tab); Add (to add profiles); Find (to search for profiles); and Help. I'll admit that I still use Help the most. Add was used a lot because I added over 30 records.

Adding a Profile for a New Person Using Add

My profile record was the only one that I added where there were no other records to use.

WikiTree describes adding more family profile records as follows:

“Adding new profiles for family members is done step-by-step. That is, you add a parent, sibling, spouse, or child from your profile. Then you can add a parent, sibling, spouse, or child from their profile. And so on.

“For example, to add your paternal grandfather, first add your father. Click the “[father?]” link from your profile or tree page. After creating your father’s profile, create your grandfather’s profile by clicking the “[father?]” link from your father’s profile or tree page.

“To add a family member to someone other than yourself, start at your Watchlist. This brings you to a list of all the profiles you have already created.

“For trickier relationships, see the help pages on adoptions and multiple parents and on multiple marriages.”

Please note that the Watchlist is covered after the next page.

The next two screen prints show that fields to be filled-in for any new profile:

This screenshot shows the 'Add an Unrelated Person' form on the WikiTree website. The page title is 'Add New Person'. The form includes fields for basic information like First Name at Birth, Preferred First Name, Last Name at Birth, Current/Married Last Name, Birth Date, and Death Date. It also has sections for Prefix, Middle Name, and Notes. A note at the bottom says 'Suggested matches will appear after entering the basic information above.'

First Name at Birth: [Input Field]
Preferred First Name: [Input Field] (if different from First Name at Birth)
Last Name at Birth: [Input Field]
Current/Married Last Name: [Input Field] (if different from Last Name at Birth)
Birth Date: [Input Field]
uncertain/estimated certain/exact before this date after this date blank for extra privacy
Death Date: [Input Field]
uncertain/estimated certain/exact before this date after this date blank because living

Second, compare close matches that already exist on WikiTree.

Suggested matches will appear after entering the basic information above.

Third, add any additional information you have available. All this is optional, except including the source of this information. Include an e-mail address if this is a living person who you'll allow into the Trusted List of your profile. We'll send them one invitation on your behalf. The address will not be used for spam.

Prefix: [Input Field]
Middle Name: [Input Field]

This screenshot shows the 'Edit Family' form on the WikiTree website. The page title is 'Add New Person'. The form includes fields for Nicknames, Other Last Names, Suffix (e.g. Jr.), Gender, Birth Location, Death Location, E-Mail Address, and Notes. A note at the bottom says 'First-hand information as remembered by [IPetrie-586 | Joe Petrie], Friday, April 17, 2015. (Replace this citation unless you witnessed the birth or other event.)'

Nicknames:
Other Last Names:
Suffix (e.g. Jr.):
Gender: [Dropdown]
Birth Location:
Death Location:
E-Mail Address:
Notes:
Sources:
First-hand information as remembered by [IPetrie-586 | Joe Petrie], Friday, April 17, 2015. (Replace this citation unless you witnessed the birth or other event.)

ADD NEW PERSON

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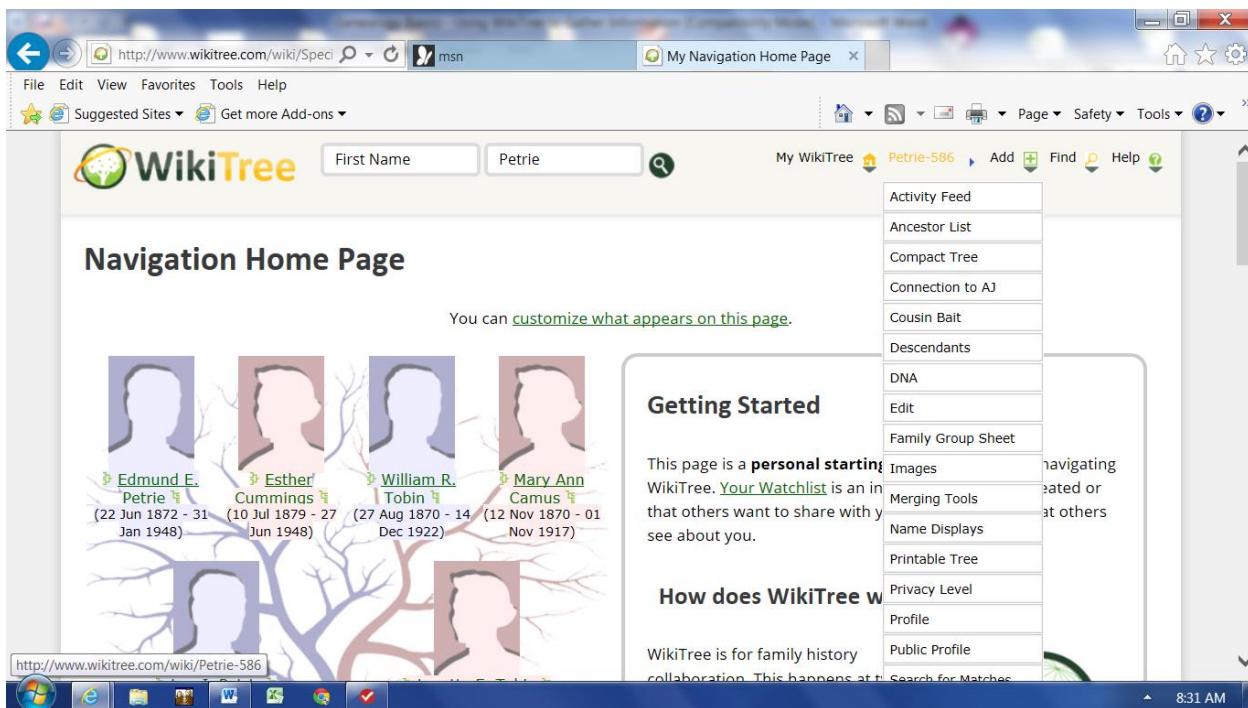
Please note that if I did not know a date or place, I left the field blank.

Profile Manager's Navigation Tab Drop Down List

The privacy setting is re-set from “Open” using the Profile Manager’s Navigation Tab Drop Down List.

I review my tree using the Profile Manager’s Navigation Tab Drop Down List.

The screen print is on the next page.



I entered the profile records for my ancestors a marriage at a time. Specifically I added the husband and the wife that TI descended from.

I reviewed the marriage using the printable Tree. Then, I changed the Privacy Setting (Privacy Level) for each profile record.

Finally, I use the Watchlist to double check the records.

My WikiTree Navigation Tab Drop Down List

The following screen print shows the drop down list.

I use the My WikiTree Tab to retrieve and review the Watchlist.

The Watchlist is a list of all my WikiTree records. Married Females are listed by their Husband’s surnames (with the Maiden Name in parentheses). Please note that two of my direct ancestors were married three times and 1 was married twice. For all three I entered only information for my direct line ancestor; i.e., the one marriage on my direct line.

For example, Mary Ann Boutilier, my Dad's maternal Boutilier grandmother was married three times: John Neville, John Cummings and Richard Rockett. The only husband currently in the Watchlist is John Cummings – Dad's grandfather. Dad's paternal grandfather, Richard Petrie was married twice to Mary Martin and Agnes O'Brien. Because I descended from Agnes, currently her record is the only WikiTree record for her marriage to Richard Petrie.

The screenshot shows the WikiTree Navigation Home Page. At the top, there is a search bar with 'Petrie' entered. On the left, a family tree diagram is displayed, showing four individuals: Edmund E. Petrie (22 Jun 1872 - 31 Jan 1948), Esther Cummings (10 Jul 1879 - 27 Jun 1948), William R. Tobin (27 Aug 1870 - 14 Dec 1922), and Mary Ann Camus (12 Nov 1870 - 01 Nov 1917). Below the tree, a link to the Special:Home page is visible. On the right, a sidebar titled 'Getting Started' provides information about the page, mentioning it is a profile for using and navigating WikiTree. It also lists various features like Anniversaries, Badges, Contributions, DNA Confirmation, Family Activity Feed, G2G Feed, G2G Profile, Images, Profile, Requests, Settings, Surnames, Thank-Yous, Tree & Tools, Watchlist, and Wiki Genealogy Feed. The sidebar also notes that the user has 2 badges and 112 contributions. The bottom right corner of the screen shows the time as 10:41 AM.

On the next print screen, you'll see a part of my Watchlist.

The first individual on the list is for Anna Catherine Elizabeth Boutilier who married John Boutilier (a relative). For consistency, her full name on the Watchlist should have been: Anna Catherine Elizabeth (Boutilier) Boutilier.

Please note that I completed her record so that the (Boutilier) item should have appeared. As a retired computer programmer, analyst and designer, I assume that the Watchlist specification or the software is incorrect.

This is your [Watchlist](#). You can create a [create a custom to-do list](#) with a subset of these names. Switch to your [Free-Space Watchlist](#) for profiles of places, events, and things.

Display density: grid icon

Alphabetical	Birth	Status/ID	Edit Date	Lock
Anna Catherine Elizabeth Boutilier		M Boutilier-426	Apr 5, 2015	yellow
Frederick Edward Boutilier	April 2, 1824	M Boutilier-423	Mar 28, 2015	yellow
Hester (Mackie) Boutilier	May 1822	M Mackie-553	Apr 5, 2015	yellow
John Boutilier		M Boutilier-425	Apr 4, 2015	yellow
Catherine (Martinee) Camus		M Martinee-1	Apr 5, 2015	yellow
Lucy (Boutilier) Camus	January 26, 1827 Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, Canada - December 26, 1895	M Boutilier-424	Apr 5, 2015	yellow
Martin Adolphe Camus	March 18, 1838 St Malo, Brittany, France - March 27, 1919	M Camus-15	Apr 5, 2015	yellow
Peter Camus		M Camus-16	Apr 4, 2015	yellow

As I indicated earlier, the screen print shows a few fields on the records on my Watchlist. When I did not know an exact Birth, Marriage, Death or Burial Date (at least month and year), I left the field blank. Also, there are blank Places of Birth, Marriage, Death and Burial. As I indicated previously, like all genealogists, I hope to fill-in the blanks eventually.

To see the entire profile record for the individual, the user simply clicks on the hyperlinked name in the first column.

Please note that I use the last column to ensure that the Privacy settings are correct. I quickly got into the habit of changing the default Privacy Setting after I saved the profile. I find it a little upsetting that the Privacy Setting sometimes is displayed with the default “Open” setting even after I changed it. There are a few profiles that I have had to re-set hours later from the default open setting.

I wonder if when I update a profile record, the privacy setting is reset by the software to the default “Open”.

What Profiles will I add next?

I plan to add profile records for another generation. My direct line profile records will be added for my great, great, great grandparents. One record has been added for Andrew Park of Scotland, Cape Breton Island, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania and Illinois.

I am considering adding my wife's direct line. She is a dual citizen of the USA and Ireland. She is also Pedigree Irish. Her mother was born in Cork. Her roots are in Cork, Galway and Waterford Counties. (Researching her families is why I volunteered at the Irish Cultural Center of New England and at the Friends of Irish Research.)

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