

Genealogy Basics – Why I still use Personal Ancestral File (PAF) as My Genealogy Software

By Joe Petrie

INTRODUCTION:

This article was the result of an article in the Spring/Summer 2016 edition of American Ancestors magazine. It was entitled *Choosing the Right Software for you: Our Expert Advice*. I have recommended it to people who do not have genealogy software.

Wiki describes PAF as follows:

“Personal Ancestral File (PAF) was a genealogy management software product formerly provided free of charge by FamilySearch. Like other genealogy management software, PAF allowed users to enter names, dates, places, source citations and other information into a database, and to print family group records, pedigree charts, descendancy charts, and other reports. PAF also allowed users to share their genealogical files with other researchers using GEDCOM formatted files and to link image and media files to individual records in their database.

“On July 15, 2013, PAF was retired and is no longer available for download or support. Current PAF users may continue to use the software on their personal computers or they may prefer to switch to another product.”

PAF is not dead! Downloadable PAF 5.2 is available on the Internet on the Silicon Valley Computer Genealogy Group (<http://www.svpafug.org/pages/downloads.html>). Please note that FamilySearch does not provide technical support. Also please note that I never needed technical support.

BACKGROUND

In 2013, I considered using different genealogy software. I looked at a few. I owned a couple. The latter were gifts from family and friends.

In 2013, I decided to stay with PAF. Why? At the time, I had over 20 thousand records in my PAF file. I was concerned that I would have to re-write my notes. My notes contained a mix of oral history, web sites and other sources. Most genealogy software had fields for web sources. Most had standards to follow.

Also, I was concerned about the new software’s importing of a large GEDCOM file. I was especially concerned about losing text that I entered in PAF’s Notes. Some of my narratives in Notes were lengthy.

Finally, I decided that at age 74 I did not need additional workload associated with conversion. My prior conversion to PAF was extremely time-consuming. Please note that PAF was my second genealogy software. When I converted to PAF, I had to re-enter over 6000 records. The other software did not have GEDCOM Export software. When I selected the first software, I did not realize that the GEDCOM feature was necessary. I learned the hard way!

MY METHODOLOGY

I volunteer my services. Usually, when I research public records, I start with Census records. I believe that I can begin documenting a family by examining 3 Censuses and by examining Birth, Marriage and Death records. Also, I examine other records. I try to cover all sources including ones in Ancestry Public Member Trees (which I use as possible clues).

When I volunteer at the Morrill Memorial Library in Norwood MA, I start with a Pedigree Chart. When doing individual consultations at the Morrill Memorial Library and at the Irish Cultural Centre, I carry blank Pedigree Charts with me.

Over 30 years ago, I started my genealogy quest with a hand-drawn Petrie Pedigree Chart.

A SAMPLE PAF NOTE FROM MY DATABASE:

I chose Mother's record. I started collecting information over 30 years ago. I started with oral information from her sister, Mary A Tobin. In July 2016, I finally finished. I found when and how she entered the USA. Also I found three Naturalization forms (Intent, Petition and Oath) which verified the information. (Previously, I admitted that I assumed that she entered the country legally.)

The following is a copy of Mom's Notes in PAF. It contains a lot of Family History.

My mother was born in Glace Bay, Nova Scotia. Mom was christened at St. Anne's in Glace Bay. Mom's baptism record for St. Anne's was dated 1926. It was attached to an affidavit filed in 1926 as proof that she was born in Glace Bay. The birth record was eventually added into the NovaScotiaGenealogy.org web site. Please note that I expected the christening record to be in FamilySearch.org Nova Scotia Antigonish Catholic Diocese - and it was not.

Oral history: When she was very young, Mom was called Lettle by her family. Her childhood friends called her Ethel.

Mom is listed in the Census of Canada 1911 as Ether Tobon, age 7 living in Glace Bay. The Ancestry transcript follows:

Name: Ether Tobon
Gender: Female
Marital Status: Single
Age: 7
Birth Date: Mar 1904
Birth Place: Nova Scotia
Relation to Head of House: Daughter
Mother's name: Mary Kilen
Race or Tribe: Irish
Province: Nova Scotia
District: Cape Breton South
District Number: 40
Sub-district: 26 - Ward 1
Sub-District Number: 26
Place of Habitation: Maine St

Household Members:

Name	Age
William Tobon	40
Mary A Tobon	40
May Tobon	9
Ether Tobon	7

Because of her mother's illness (breast cancer), Mom was sent to Mount Saint Vincent Academy in Halifax as a teenager. She graduated in 1921 at age 17. She is not enumerated in the Census of Canada, 1921.

After Mom graduated, she attended Mount Saint Vincent College. Mom entered as a sophomore. Mom also began reading for the Bar. The game plan was to join her father's law firm when she graduated from college in 1924.

In 1922, when Mom's father passed away, Mom completed the year and returned to Glace Bay to teach at St. Anne's. Mom taught at St. Anne's until 1926. (At the time, teachers could be appointed with 2 years of college.)

During Mom's summer vacations from 1922 to 1925, she worked for the Dominion Coal Company in Glace Bay. In 1926, because of the miner's strike, Mom left Glace Bay to work in Boston for the summer-time.

Mom was supposed to return to St. Anne's in September 1926 but because of a commitment in Boston, she requested approval to have a substitute teacher fill-in for her for a few days. The school board disapproved the request.

In late September 1926, Mom returned to Glace Bay, packed her belongings etc. On October 2, 1926, Mom was pre-examined in Halifax for her return by ship to Boston. Mom was listed as an Alien student. In Ancestry, I recently found Mom's Alien Pre-examination Record. It was filed in the US Records Office under the name of Elizabeth Loretta Tobin despite the fact that the custom official recorded Mom's name as Loretta Elizabeth Tobin.

Mom arrived in Boston on the Northland on October 5, 1926.

Mom visited family in Halifax in 1931. She returned to Boston via Halifax in 1931 prior to her marriage in August 1931. Mom's return is recorded in Ancestry, Massachusetts Passenger and Crew List as follows:

Name: Ethel L Tobin
Gender: Female
Age: 27
Nationality: English
Birth Date: abt 1904
Birth Place: Glace Bay, Canada
Departure Place: Halifax, Nova Scotia
Arrival Date: 7 May 1931
Arrival Place: Boston, Massachusetts, USA
Last Residence: United States of America
Friend: Helen Seavey
Ship: Farnorth

Mom and Dad were married on August 2, 1931. Twenty-nine days later, Mom filed her Naturalization Intent Form - the first of 3 forms in the process. In 1936, the Petrie family moved to Dedham where they raised her 3 sons. Mom applied for Naturalization in US District Court in Boston on August 29, 1936. On January 16, 1939, Mom was naturalized under the name of Lorretta Elizabeth Petrie. (Mom spelled it incorrectly because the Given name was typed incorrectly.) Soon after Mom was naturalized, she changed her legal name to Ethel T. Petrie.

She had 5 pregnancies - all boys. One son died in the hospital and one died within a month of his birth.

In 1946, after I started school, Mom returned to work. Mom had a variety of jobs. Almost all were in Dedham because Mom could not drive. Mom was:

- A bookkeeper and clerk at Rosen's Hardware;
- A bookkeeper and clerk at North American Aluminum;
- A partner at Atlantic Aluminum;
- A clerk at Tobe Dutchman Electronics;
- A cashier at Stop and Shop;
- A bookkeeper at the Dedham Transcript;
- A bookkeeper at Ziegler's Market;
- A substitute teacher in the Dedham school system;
- A demonstrator of consumer products for two manufacturers at local retail grocery stores.

For a hobby, Mom taught at home - free private tutoring neighbor's children and Mom kids. It was a volunteer activity that Mom started in the early 1940s. Mom especially loved teaching and tutoring. Because Mom did not have a bachelor degree, she could not teach full-time in many Massachusetts cities and towns.

Our house was always full of relatives and friends. Often, we would go to bed and wake up the next day on couches because our parents needed beds for guests to sleep in. My Mom's sister (Aunt May) stayed with us every third summer. Aunt May tutored me in French. Molly Petrie (the mother of Emmy winning director Daniel M. Petrie) stayed with us every January and April! Many of Mom's Cape Breton Dooley and Tobin cousins often visited. Many stayed for a few days.

Around 1950, Mom became very active in the local chapter of the Mount Saint Vincent's Alumnae Association. For over two decades Mom served as President or as another officer in the chapter. After the Halifax Motherhouse burned in 1951, Mom became a fund raiser.

In the 1950s, Mom even took in a young widow (Janie Morton McGee) who stayed with us for months after the death of her first husband, Huck MacGee. Mom called Janie: "Mom's Girl". My parents loved Janie as if she were kin. Janie eventually moved to San Diego, California where she wed John Boyd. She had 9 children and named a son after me. In California, she converted to Catholicism. She died in Georgia. I visited her, a daughter and 2 sons in Georgia a couple of times. After she moved to Georgia, I visited most of her children that remained in California on my annual trips to San Diego.

Mom's Hobbies: Playing cards, teaching her 10 grandchildren (9 boys and a girl) to play cards, ironing, crossword puzzles, reading novels, visiting family, entertaining family and friends, writing poetry etc.

Mom died in her sleep of a stroke. Mom is buried with Dad and son William Edmund in St Benedict's in West Roxbury.

Sources: Mary A Tobin and Joe Petrie

Web Sites: Ancestry, Census of Canada, 1911 (Given name incorrectly transcribed as Ether and Surname incorrectly spelled by the census taker as Tobon); Ancestry, Alien Pre-examination records for Halifax; Ancestry, Massachusetts, Passenger and Crew Lists; Ancestry, Massachusetts, State and Federal Naturalization Records, 1798-1950, and NovaScotiaGenealogy.org

SUMMARY

For Mom's Notes, my Aunt May and I are listed as sources. We were the oral sources. Aunt May was really the family historian and the genealogist.

For the web sites, Ancestry Library was the major source. (I abbreviated it to Ancestry.) There were other web sites that I could have included in sources. I try to find at least 2 sources for each fact. (The Association of Professional Genealogists recommends 2 sources.) Also, the above Note identifies sources where I expected to find records but did not.

There is more family history that is not genealogy. What family history did I leave out of my notes?

- My parents were terrific role models. They were devout Catholics. They believed that all individuals were God's Children. They prayed together daily. They practiced what they believed. Dad always prayed the Rosary before Mass for his parents (Ned and Hester Petrie of Dominion, Cape Breton) until he died. He was a volunteer at our St. Mary's Parish in Dedham. He often volunteered his sons to work with him to help the priests and the Parish.
- My parents provided a home for Freddie Lane and his mother Marguerite Lane from Glace Bay. They were not relatives. They were a mother and a sick baby that my parents never knew before my parents met the flight from Cape Breton. When they took his mother to her hotel, Dad would not let her stay there. Freddie was hospitalized in Boston many times to rebuild a leg damaged by an infection. Freddie's mother lived with us when Freddie was hospitalized. Sometimes Freddie and his mother stayed with us when he was recovering from surgery. My parents raised funds for his family. Freddie came to my wedding from Glace Bay and to Mom's Funeral from his home in Alberta. Fred is a retired Minister. He and his wife Joyce have 6 children and 10 grandchildren.
- My parents were especially proud that all of their sons graduated from college. They attended all of our graduations – their last was my graduation from Boston College.
- The Dedham Petrie first cousins had a Petrie Cousins Club. They and their spouses played cards almost every Saturday night. Dad's cousins who lived in Dedham were siblings from Dominion, Cape Breton. Will, Gwen and John's parents were Dad's uncle Michael Petrie and his wife Kate Young. All but John's spouse were from Cape Breton. (John's wife was from Harbour Grace, Newfoundland. They met and married in Dedham. They eventually lived in Dedham.)

Your corrections, comments and suggestions are appreciated. Please Email me at joe-apg@norwoodlight.com.

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