

March 2015 Newsletter

The original objective of the [jamescobban.net web site](http://jamescobban.net) was to create a complete family tree of every individual who ever lived in Caradoc township in south-western Middlesex County, where my paternal ancestors settled in the 19th century. This objective required a capability that did not exist in any existing genealogical software: the ability to measure progress toward the objective. In essence the problem in any serious research project is to be able to identify gaps in your knowledge. It is relatively easy to keep track of what you know, but how do you identify what you don't know?

This requirement led to the one really unique feature of my web site: That each individual item of documentation is not only cited from the family tree, but also identifies whether or not it has been cited and where. The results are conveniently displayed in terms of colour-coded charts that indicate what percentage of each class of documentary record has been connected to the family tree. For example let's look at the summary of [birth registrations in Ontario for 1894](#). This displays the number of birth registrations that have been transcribed by the project for each township in Ontario. Since my personal focus is on Middlesex county this includes essentially every birth registration in Middlesex county, except for the City of London itself. At the bottom the table indicates that almost 30% of the 1,056 birth registration transcribed on the site for this year are linked to the family tree, which implies that over 70% are not. So this table shows where the work still needs to be done. The methodology of my research is to continue adding transcriptions of vital statistics and census records for a couple of hours each day. Then I pick one of the sets of records for which the completion level is low, and check each record that has not been cited to see if I can connect it to the family tree.

When, as a registered contributor to the site, you view the transcription of a registration it will display a hyper-link to the associated individual in the family tree if the registration has been cited. If it does not show this hyper-link, then it may show a selection list of possible matches. You can confirm a match, in which case citations to the registration are added to the family tree record of the individual for those facts about the individual that are documented by the registration, in particular the date and place of the event. If the individual does not already have the fact documented, or if the fact is incomplete in the family tree, then the fact is filled out. For example linking a death registration to an individual that does not currently have a death date and/or location will fill in the death event. Also linking a birth registration to an individual will override a vague birth date, for example "About 1878" with the date from the registration, and fill in the place of birth if it is not specified. However it is still a good idea to ensure that the individual record has been appropriately updated by this automatic process. Beyond this note that the handling of a registration does not add new individuals to the tree. So even if the list of potential matches to the family tree is not present, because there were no good matches, the registration may, for example, identify a previously unrecorded child of a couple.

In case you were not aware of it the transcriptions of birth, marriage, and death registrations on the web-site can be [searched](#). Any registered contributor to the site can add to these transcriptions, or correct an existing transcription. It is desirable that every vital statistic registration that is cited from the family tree be transcribed both to track the completeness of the research, and to permit viewing the transcriptions without requiring a paid subscription to Ancestry. To facilitate this if you follow the citation link from the footnote on an individual it takes you to the transcription page regardless of whether the original registration has already been transcribed. If the registration hasn't been transcribed all of the fields whose values can be deduced from the family tree is filled in, so it looks as if the registration has been transcribed. If as a registered user you then click on the "Update" button the database is updated with the information. So you should only "Update" the transcription if you have

checked it against the image of the original registration, which can generally be found on Ancestry.ca.

Although the only registrations that have been transcribed so far are for Ontario, the software on the site is capable of transcribing vital statistics registrations for any of the provinces, states, or territories in Canada or the US. I just do not personally have convenient access to the original records for other domains, in part because of unjustifiable obstacles to access created by many state and provincial registrars. There is a certain amount of infrastructure which needs to be set up to perform transcriptions for a "state". The first step for any province, state, or territory is to define the set of administrative areas within the state. For most provinces and states these are called counties. However counties were never set up in the Prairie Provinces, so the equivalent are called Regional Municipalities or Districts. The point is they are the administrative level of the local registrars for vital statistics. These are currently defined on the site for [Ontario](#), [Manitoba](#), and [Michigan](#). If you look at the address line of your browser you will see that the structure is quite simple. Any state, province, or territory for which there is a two-character identifier within the two-character country code works. That is the only thing that currently limits the implementation to the United States and Canada. Once a "county" has been defined you can then defined the "townships" within that "county". These are the administrative areas for which a town or township clerk was assigned to record the registrations for forwarding up the line.

When you are editing an individual in the family tree you can do a quick search for matches from the birth registration transcription table, all of the census tables, or against Ancestry.ca. For Ancestry.ca you have to be a paid subscriber to Ancestry see the details of the matches.

As of today the vital statistics transcription portion of this site includes 42,979 birth registrations, 24,272 marriage registrations, and 18,774 death registrations which are free for anyone to search and examine.

As usual check out [March 2015 Updates to Website Functionality](#) for details on the changes made to the implementation of the site during the past month. Also check out [List of Recently Added Individuals](#) for information on the recent growth of the tree which currently holds 83,715 individuals, 23,777 families, 55,058 events, and 258,515 citations. I have also significantly updated the [User Guide: Features of the Page for an Individual in the Family Tree](#), and [User Guide: Getting Started with Updating the Family Tree](#).