

FOLLOWING IN THEIR FOOTSTEPS
AN OVERVIEW OF IRISH-AMERICAN GENEALOGICAL RESEARCH
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To successfully document an Irish family we need two pieces of essential information: The name of our immigrant ancestor and the standard and variant spellings of the surname plus an exact place of birth.

NAMES

Irish surnames in their present forms were renditions in English phonetics of Irish language names. There was no standardization, resulting in several varieties of a given surname. (e.g. O Dochartaigh became Dougherty, Dorrity, Doherty, Daughtry etc.) Additionally the traditional Irish surname prefixes Mac and O' were added and subtracted over the course of history, thus when searching for individual families we need to consider possibilities other than the way we may currently spell our surnames. In some Irish vital records various spellings of first names and the use of diminutives further complicates our search (e.g. Katherine, Kathryn, Catherine, Kitty, Kate, Kathy etc.)

PLACE OF ORIGIN

The earlier your family came to the USA, the harder time you're going to have learning where your family roots originated. The place of origin most frequently must be learned from records outside of Ireland. If you are having difficulty determining a birthplace using your direct line ancestors check all documents for all siblings, cousins and other known relatives of your ancestor. The following sources may yield a birthplace:

SHIP PASSENGER LISTS Lists created in the late 19th and early 20th centuries will have the most geographical information. The farther you go back into the 19th century the less geography will appear. Check anyway. Some of the earlier lists will have geography. Your ancestor may have gone back to Ireland and returned at a later date and you might not be aware of this fact. Check for second entries to the US.

CANADIAN BORDER CROSSING RECORDS. Your ancestor may have crossed the US border from Canada. A collection of border crossing records referred to as the St Albans collection, are widely available on line.

NATURALIZATION RECORDS. The series of documents created in the naturalization process originated in the court where the applicant filed his request to be admitted to US citizenship. Naturalizations could take place in federal, state or local courts. Many have been digitized and are available on ancestry.com or on websites of individual court jurisdictions.

CHURCH RECORDS. Birthplaces can appear in baptism, matrimonial or death records kept by clergy. The amount of geography depended on the personal record keeping practices of the priest. Some priests provided detailed geographical information about their Irish born parishioners.

RECORDS OF FRATERNAL OR ETHNIC ORGANIZATIONS. Groups such as the Ancient Order of Hibernians or the Knights of Columbus may have older records listing places of origin in Ireland

US VITAL RECORDS. Depending on the record keeping practices of clerks, you may find birthplaces of Irish immigrants in birth, marriage and death records. Remember that each state has its own laws regarding access to these records.

SOCIAL SECURITY APPLICATIONS. Birthplaces can be found on original applications for social security numbers.

US PASSPORT RECORDS. If your Irish born ancestor returned to Ireland on an American passport there is a good chance you will find a birthplace on his or her application. Applications to 1925 are digitized on ancestry.com.

WWI DRAFT CARDS AND OTHER MILITARY DOCUMENTS (pension applications, discharges)

PROBATE RECORDS If there were any heirs in Ireland their addresses will be listed.

OBITUARIES Don't forget to check the ENTIRE family.

PARISH HISTORIES At times we can learn where in Ireland our families came from if they are mentioned in an anniversary booklet of their American parish

BUSINESS DIRECTORIES. These lists of merchants sometime contain biographies of prominent businessmen in the community and may mention their place of origin

CEMETERY HEADSTONES. In the 19th and early twentieth centuries many Irish immigrants had their birthplaces carved on their gravestones which can range from just a county to an exact village and townland.

EMIGRANT SAVINGS BANK NYC. Index of depositors on ancestry. Contains birthplaces.

NEWSPAPER ARTICLES Check articles on your ancestors wedding anniversaries or retirement. Sometime these articles provide a geographical link to Europe. Use digitized newspapers that have a search capacity for quick results.

CHAIN MIGRATION If all of the above have failed to give you a place in Europe, learn where the majority of Irish immigrants came from in the place where your family settled in the US and hope that your ancestor was part of this "chain". People tended to settle in places where there were other people from their home village or parish.

If you have a rare name you might be able to isolate certain places in the country where the name appears with frequency and concentrate on records from those locations. If you have a common name such as Murphy, Kelly or O'Brien this strategy will not work for you. Also John Grenham's website (see internet sources list) has a search mechanism where you can learn in what places two surnames intersect.

RESOURCES IN IRELAND

The main archives in Ireland are the National Archives of Ireland (Cartlann Naisiunta na h Eireann) in Dublin (NAI) and the Public Records Office of Northern Ireland in Belfast (PRONI).

Many records have been digitized by these and other institutions such as the National Library of Ireland. A number of pay sites have sprung up in recent years that have materials that these public institutions have not made available on their websites. Once you have identified your ancestral place of origin you can begin using various record groups available on these sites. Because of political policies restricting Roman Catholics and the destruction of a large number of records in the 1922 war of Independence, the amount of genealogically relevant material may be less than in other European countries but there are numerous sources that survived that will enable you to accumulate a good amount of information on your family. Some of the main groups of records are as follows:

CENSUS RECORDS. Census records image and their indexes are available for the 1901 and 1911 censuses on line at the national archives (NAI) site. Earlier censuses were either destroyed by the government or lost in the 1922 fire. Only fragments remain. If you are lucky you will find a pension application filed prior to 1922 which used the census to establish age. However the collection of pension applications covers a very small percentage of the population. There is an on line index to these files at familysearch.org

CHURCH REGISTERS. Many church registers of baptism, matrimony and death have been filmed by the Mormons and digitized images of a large number of them are available on the website of the National Library of Ireland. The Mormon microfilms however cover a larger range of years. Note that many Church of Ireland (Protestant) registers were burned in the 1922 fire.

CIVIL REGISTRATION began in Ireland for Catholics in 1864 and for non-Catholics in 1845. Digitized images of some segments of the records can be found at www.irishgenealogy.ie. familysearch.org has a searchable index to 1958 while the aforementioned site has fewer years due to privacy restrictions.

NATIONAL SCHOOL REGISTERS. Some have been centralized at the National Archives but many if they survived remain in their place of origin. They provide personal data on students and can be used as census substitutes.

GRIFFITHS VALUATION was a valuation of land and buildings published between 1847 and 1864. Its name index contains landlords, landowners and renters,

PROBATE RECORDS can contain wills, lists of heirs. At NAI in Dublin to 1982.
COURT AND PRISON RECORDS. Available on findmypast.com.

ESTATE RECORDS may contain information on the peasants who worked the land and may have maps, rent rolls, leases, eviction records. Some of these have been assembled by NAI, PRONI and the National Library in Dublin. However others may be in England, in private hands or did not survive. You will need to know the name of the landowner in order to locate them. Keep in mind that parts of a collection of estate records could be scattered in several repositories.

COUNTY HERITAGE CENTERS can be found in nearly every county. Some counties have multiple centers. They provide fee based genealogical research services and have extensive indexes of collections of local church registers, gravestone inscriptions, tax records etc. The types of records indexed in each center are not uniform nor is the completeness of the indexes.

LANGUAGE

Much of the material you encounter in your quest to document your family's past will be in English. However Roman Catholic Church registers will be in Latin. You will need to familiarize yourself with Latin first names, many of which are easily recognizable, and learn some basic vocabulary. Because a significant portion of English vocabulary derives from Latin you will be able to master this limited vocabulary in a short time. Also note that some gravestone inscriptions, including surnames, will be in Irish.

WEBSITES

www.logainm.ie Place names database. Shows the searched for place on a map and provides the barony, civil parish and townland. You can also enter the parish name and get a list of townlands in that parish. Note: the locally named sections of townlands that are not officially recognized are not found in this database.

www.askaboutireland.ie has images of Griffiths Evaluation, a searchable database of names and detailed maps to see the plot of land referred to in the entry

www.irishgenealogy.ie has images of civil registration registers. Available are births more than 100 years old, marriages over 75 years old and deaths over 50 years old. www.familysearch.org has indexes up to 1958.

www.registers.nli.ie has images of Roman Catholic Church registers housed at the National Library of Ireland. No searchable index. The index is on ancestry.com and has numerous incorrect renditions of

the Latin versions of first names.

Commercial websites

www.johngrenham.com

www.eneclann.ie

www.findmypast.ie

www.rootsireland.ie

REFERENCE BOOKS AND ARTICLES

Grenham, John, Tracing Your Irish Ancestors, 4th ed. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 2012

Radford, Dwight A. and Betit, Kyle J. A Genealogists Guide to Discovering Your Irish Ancestors.

Cincinnati: Betterwaybooks

www.homepage.eirecom.net/~seanjmurphy/ Introductory 56 page booklet on Irish research in pdf format.