Tracing Your Irish Ancestors:
A Step-by-Step Plan for Successful Research

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Introduction

The McClelland Irish Library
- Facts about the library
- Resources available
- Search the collection on the Phoenix Public Library website
  http://phoenixpubliclibrary.org

Facts about Ireland
- Current population of the island of Ireland is about 5.5 million
- Republic of Ireland – 3.84 million, Northern Ireland – 1.7 million
- In 2009, about 37 million U.S. residents claimed Irish ancestry.
- In the U.S., Irish is the nation's third most frequently reported ancestry.

Loss of Irish Records
- Invasions – The country has been occupied for most of its history
- 1821, 1851 census records were destroyed by fire
- 1922 Irish Civil War – Four Courts building burned

Step 1: Select Your Research Goal

- What information do you want to find?
- This determines what Irish records to search

Step 2: Start With What You Know

- Gather known family information
- Document what you know, including sources
- Work backwards to the Irish immigrant ancestor

Step 3: Search U.S. Records for the Irish Place of Origin

Success with Irish research depends on knowing the **parish** or **townland** where your ancestor came from in Ireland. Find U. S. records for everyone in your family (past or present) who was born in Ireland that might provide a clue to where they came from. Investigate allied lines, neighbors, church groups, and witnesses on documents.

- Family records
- Obituaries/death records
- Gravestones
- Birth and marriage records

- Church records – were they Catholic or Protestant?
- Land records – had to apply for citizenship to own land in U.S. (Declaration of Intent)
- Military records – pensions, draft registration cards
- Immigration records, naturalization papers, and passport applications
- Newspapers – marriage and death notices; immigrant advertisements
- Associations – clubs or societies
- Financial records – savings accounts
- Business or employment
- DNA testing

Step 4: Frame the Problem

Define what makes your ancestor unique.

- Name and nickname
- Age
- Spouse
- Children
- Parents
- Siblings
- Year of Emigration
- Occupation
- Military Service

Step 5: Determine the Irish Jurisdictions

Ireland's Territorial and Administrative Divisions

Two Independent States
- The Republic of Ireland has been self-ruled since 1922.
- Northern Ireland, by preference, is under the rule of England.
- Since 1922 each state has its own capitol, National Archives and National Library.
- Dublin is the capitol of the Republic of Ireland
- Belfast is the capitol of Northern Ireland

4 Irish Provinces
- Ulster (Includes 3 counties that are in the Republic - Donegal, Monaghan and Cavan.)
- Leinster
- Munster
- Connaught

32 Counties
- Divisions of the 4 provinces
- Have had the same boundaries and names since the early 1600's

Baronies
- Obsolete land divisions that often crossed county boundaries
- Used for early land records

Poor Law Unions (PLU)
- County divisions set up to care for the poor in 1838, with a workhouse, hospital and charity office in each PLU
- Used for tax records (Griffith's Valuation), civil registrations and administrative records

Parishes
- **Civil Parishes**
  - Government divisions of counties used for early census and tax records
- **Church of Ireland Parishes**
  - Similar boundaries to civil parishes
  - Includes Protestant baptisms, marriages, burials, and vestry minutes
  - Burial records may include other denominations
- **Roman Catholic Parishes**
  - Different boundaries from civil parishes
  - Includes Catholic baptisms, marriages and a few burial records

Townlands
- The smallest land division
- Over 62,000 in Ireland

Irish Geographic Finding Aids

- **"General Alphabetical Index to Townlands**"
  - Alphabetical list of baronies, civil parishes and poor law unions for each townland
  - Based on the 1851 Census of Ireland
  - Use when only a townland is known
- **IreAtlas Townland Database**, www.thecore.com/seanruad
  - Online search engine that gives all jurisdictions for any Irish place name
  - Allows searches on partial place names if spelling is unknown
- **"The Topographical Dictionary of Ireland"**
  - 1838 town and place descriptions
- **"A New Genealogical Atlas of Ireland"** by Brian Mitchell (2nd Edition)
  - County, barony, parish & poor law union maps
  - Use when the parish is known

Step 6: Determine What Records Are Available

Record availability varies by the time period and place of the event in Ireland.

- **"Tracing Your Irish Ancestors"** by John Grenham (4th Edition)
  - Detailed county-by county reference guide of what records are available and where to find them
- **Irish Genealogy Website** www.IrishGenealogy.ie
  - Free online search portal with links and descriptions of various record types

Major Types of Irish Records

- **Census Returns** – only 1901 & 1911 are complete; fragments for 1821 - 1851
- **Civil Registrations** (Vital Records) – marriages for non-Catholics began in 1845; all other birth, marriage and death registrations start in 1864
- **Catholic Parish Registers** – many go back to the late 1700's
- **Land Commission Records** – began in 1881
- **Griffith's Valuation** – property tax records from 1848-1864
- **Tithe Applotment Books** – Church of Ireland tax records from 1823-1837
- **Estate Records** – apply to large land owners, but tenants may be mentioned
- **Wills & Administrations** – most originals destroyed in 1922; some indexes and abstracts still exist

- **Registry of Deeds** – Protestant land owners
- **Religious Censuses** – partial lists for 1766 and 1749
- **Hearth Money Rolls** – tax on the number of chimneys in each house from 1664 to 1666
- **Gravestone Inscriptions** – published and on websites

Step 7: Identify the Location and Format of the Records

Where are the records currently held? Have they been microfilmed or digitized for online or remote access?

- Online, remote or on-site access
- Dublin or Belfast
- General Register Office of Ireland (GRO) – www.welfare.ie/en/pages/general-register-office.aspx
- National Archives of Ireland – www.nationalarchives.ie
- National Library of Ireland – www.nli.ie
- Registry of Deeds (Property Registration Authority) – www.prai.ie
- General Register Office of Northern Ireland (GRONI) – www.nidirect.gov.uk/general-register-office-for-northern-ireland
- Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) – www.proni.gov.uk
- Irish County Heritage Centres – www.rootsireland.ie
- National Archives of England – www.nationalarchives.gov.uk
- Searching the collection at McClelland Irish Library - http://azirishlibrary.org

Step 8: Search the Records for Your Irish Ancestor

Subscription Websites at McClelland Irish Library

Ancestry.com
- Search card catalog for individual Irish databases by entering either "Ireland" or "Irish" in the Title search box, or a portion of the database title
- About 200 Irish databases, including:
    - Indexes for Civil Registrations of Births, Marriage and Deaths
    - Griffith's Valuation, 1848-1864
    - Tithe Applotments, 1823-1837
    - Royal Irish Constabulary Record Index, 1816-1921

FindMyPast.ie
- Free searches; pay for credits to view transcripts and original records
- Over 120 Irish databases, including:
    - Index to Civil Registrations – births, marriage and deaths
    - Griffith's Valuation
    - Will indexes
    - Military records
    - Court and land records

HeritageQuestOnline.com
- Site of American genealogical sources, including U.S. Census records, Revolutionary War records, genealogy and local history books, and PERSI

AmericanAncestors.org - New England Historic Genealogical Society
- Over 500 databases of early New England records
- Emphasis on Boston and Massachusetts records where many Irish immigrants lived
- Includes access to early American newspapers and biographies databases

RootsIreland.ie
- Irish Family History Foundation
- Pay-per-view access to indexes created by Irish County Heritage Centres
- Largest online index of Irish parish registers for all 32 counties

AncestryIreland.com
- Ulster Historical Foundation
- Many Irish and Scots-Irish databases for counties in the northern province of Ulster

Additional Websites for Irish Research

FamilySearch.org
- Has many microfilms, CD's and microfiche of Irish records
- MIL is an affiliate library – films can be ordered online from the Family Search Library and sent to our library to be viewed on our microfilm readers
- Use a "Place" search in the card catalog to find Irish films and fiche

IrishGenealogy.ie
- Online search portal with links and descriptions of various record types
- Online indexes to church parish records and civil registers of births, marriages and deaths

AskAboutIreland.ie
- Government-sponsored site with historical material about Irish culture
- Free access to Griffith's Valuation and corresponding maps

Maps.Osi.ie
- Online interactive maps by Ordnance Survey Ireland
- Searchable by county, parish and townland

IrishTimes.com/ancestor
- Created by author John Grenham
- Interactive Roman Catholic and civil parish maps, and surname distribution maps

GENUKI.org.uk
- UK and Ireland genealogy
- Contains instructional material and many links to the best sites for genealogy in Ireland, England, Scotland, Wales, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man

IrelandGenWeb.com
- Part of WorldGenWeb
- Links to websites for all 32 Irish counties that include many indexes and research guides

IrelandXO.com
- Ireland Reaching Out - "reverse genealogy" program
- Volunteer effort to identify the Irish people who left Ireland and trace them and their descendants worldwide

Additional Sources

- **"Manuscript Sources for the History of Irish Civilisation"**
  - Compiled by Richard J. Hayes
  - Online at the National Library of Ireland as "Sources Database"
- **"The Search for Missing Friends: Irish immigrant Advertisements Placed in the Boston Pilot" – 1831-1921**
  - Seven-volume book set at McClelland Irish Library
  - Boston College website, http://infowanted.bc.edu/
  - New England Historic Genealogical Society website, www.americanancestors.org

- **Irish Origenes** – www.irishorigenes.com
  - Website of Dr. Tyrone Bowes
  - Uses your existing Y-DNA (and sometimes autosomal) DNA test results to locate your Irish genetic homeland

- **"Great Book of Irish Genealogies"**
  - Compiled 1645 to 1666 by Connacht scholar Dubhaltach Mac Fhirbhisigh at the height of the Cromwellian Wars

- **"Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland"** also known as **"Annals of the Four Masters"**
  - Chronicles of medieval Irish history, including the various clans and their disputes
  - From the Deluge, dated as 2,242 years after creation, to AD 1616.
  - Wikipedia has links to all seven volumes; Volume 7 is the index http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Annals_of_the_Four_Masters