

## Session 2: Before You Leap: Searching American and Canadian Records for Irish Origins

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It is important to conduct a thorough search of U.S. and Canadian records to try and locate details of your ancestor's origins in Ireland before making the leap to Irish records. Using vital records and other sources such as naturalization records in your research, as well as several lesser-utilized sources such as bank records, will oftentimes prove to be useful in locating those critical details about your ancestor's Irish origins.

### 18<sup>th</sup> Century Records

- Determining when they arrived and where they settled
- Types of sources to use for research include local histories, biographical dictionaries, probate and land records, town records, archival collections

### 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Records

#### Vital Records (U.S. and Canadian)

- The start date for registration of U.S. records varies from state to state.
- Canadian records are kept at the provincial level; some records date back to the 1860s.
- Check FamilySearch.org's research wiki for vital record information for a particular state; check research wiki for links to information on Canadian provinces which include vital record details.
- Look for publications like Terrence M. Punch's *Erin's Sons: Irish Arrivals in Atlantic Canada* for transcriptions of certain records.

#### Cemetery Records (U.S. and Canadian)

- Contact the cemetery office or affiliated parish church for information on a family plot. Records may contain names and burial dates of other family members who are not listed on the headstone.
- Various cemetery records have been digitized and are available online through AmericanAncestors.org, FamilySearch.org, and Ancestry.com. Be sure to check local libraries and archives, as well as historical and genealogical societies, for published and manuscript collections that contain cemetery records.

#### Census Records (U.S. and Canadian)

- U.S. census records: **starting in 1850** all household members listed; **1870** notes whether an individual is a U.S. citizen; **1900/1910** includes a person's year of immigration and naturalization status (*AL = Alien, hasn't started naturalization process; PA = first papers filed, declaration of intent; NA = Naturalized*); **starting in 1920** the year someone was naturalized is listed.
- Canadian census records: **Pre-1871** records varied by time period and location; **1871/1881** individual's birthplace listed; **1891** birthplace of both parents; **1901** month and year of birth, year of immigration and naturalization.



## Naturalization Records

- A number of records, particularly 20<sup>th</sup> century records, provide details about birthplace.
- Make note of the witness names; they could possibly be relatives or close associates.
- Arrival details noted in these records will help identify your ancestor in other records.
- Naturalization process includes **Declaration of Intent** (1<sup>st</sup> Papers); **Application (Petition) for Naturalization** (2<sup>nd</sup> Papers); **Certificate of Naturalization**.

## ***Expanding Your Search***

### Funeral Home Records (U.S. and Canadian)

- Some funeral home records may pre-date vital record registration in some states
- Check the holdings of archives and libraries, as well as online, for these records

### Newspapers (U.S. and Canadian)

- Look beyond death notices for information in newspapers. Many newspapers published details about wedding anniversaries, visitors from another town, and anecdotal details about the residents of a community. Also check articles pertaining to the anniversary of the establishment of a town or county; they may contain details about early settlers and where they were formerly located.
- “Information Wanted” advertisements - Online database “Irish Immigrant Advertisements, 1831-1920 (Search for Missing Friends);” the book *Voices of the Irish Immigrant: Information Wanted ads in "The Truth Teller" New York City, 1825-1844*; some entries pertain to individuals who settled in Canada.
- Check contents of free and subscription websites like Chronicling America, Newspapers.com, GenealogyBank.com, PaperofRecord.com (Canadian newspapers), as well as databases available through AmericanAncestors.org, Ancestry.com, and FamilySearch.org.
- Contact local libraries and historical societies to learn about their microfilm holdings and published resources pertaining to newspaper collections.

### Town and County Histories

- These sources oftentimes include biographical sketches and information regarding the settlement of groups in a particular area. Even if your ancestor is not listed in a particular book, it is still important to review the details provided about a particular area. It may lead to a discovery about a group migration to the area that coincides with when your ancestor settled in that town or county.
- Town and county histories are available at libraries such as the New England Historic Genealogical Society; a number of these books are online through websites such as Google Books and Internet Archive.



## Fraternal Organizations

- There are a variety of religious, heritage-based, and occupational organizations, such as the Ancient Order of Hibernians, Catholic Order of Foresters, and Freemasons/Masons.
- You may discover your ancestor belonged to a fraternal organization through symbols carved on headstones, personal items like pins or photographs that belonged to your ancestor, or a reference to membership in an organization in a person's death notice or obituary.
- Check city directories to learn about organizations in the area during the time frame your ancestor resided in a particular location.
- If an organization is still active, contact them to see if they have archival material.
- Check for databases containing images of membership applications; online books and commemorative publications related to a fraternal organization; contact local libraries and archives to see if they have manuscript collections related to a particular organization.

## Employment Records

- It may take some research to locate employment records, but it is worth exploring. Consult sources like vital records, census records and city directories to learn more about an ancestor's occupation and where he or she may have been employed. City directories may be of help, since they oftentimes provide a work address which you could then research to discover the name of the employer.
- Check databases and manuscript collections for these records. If a company is still active, contact them to see if they have archived materials related to former employees.

## Bank Records

- Like employment records, it may take some research to locate these records. Do not assume that your ancestor did not have a bank account because he or she did not have a lot of money. Savings banks were established for those very people.
- Some records like Emigrant Savings Bank (New York City) and Provident Institution for Savings (Boston) are available online.
- Banks recorded details about the customer in order to identify the patron when processing transactions, including maiden name, place of birth, occupation, address, and information about relatives.
- Consult city directories to find the names of banks located in the area where your ancestor worked and lived. Note that some banks changed names over the years. If the bank is still in business, contact them to find out if they have any archived records.

## Tips

1. Take a second look at the records you've collected over the course of your research for a fresh look at them.
2. Expand your research to include relatives and close associates of your ancestor.
3. Don't be too narrow in your research – think outside the box and explore a variety of records.



## Resources

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