

Researching Ulster Scots Ancestors

Class 2: Determining Origins: Using American Records

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It is important to conduct a thorough search of American and Canadian records to try and locate details of your ancestor's origins in Northern Ireland before making the leap to Irish records. However, it can prove to be challenging, and one oftentimes has to dig deeper to locate lesser-utilized sources to find the answer. In this class, I will provide some tips on how to gather information from various sources to piece together the details of your Irish origins.

18th 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
- It is important to keep in mind that conducting community-focused research rather than limiting your search to one individual is oftentimes necessary

Tools for a Successful Search

- As you work your way back to earlier generations, be sure to familiarize yourself with town and county boundaries, establishment dates, and maps of the area where your ancestor settled. Keep a list of helpful websites and guidebooks handy for quick access.
- Check FamilySearch.org's research wiki for record information for a particular state, as well as Canadian provinces.

Records and Sources:

Town Records

- Available online and in various repositories
- Even if you don't find your ancestor's name in the source, but there are other details pertaining to members of the community, take the time to look over the records. You may find information about other relatives or acquaintances.

Vital/Church Records

- Contact local historical societies and libraries to ask about books or manuscript collections that include these records
- Check town and county histories for information about churches and ministers who served in the area. It may help you narrow down the scope of your search for church records.

Town and County Histories

- A number of these books are available for free online. Do not limit your search to just your family. Like town records, even if you do not locate a reference to your ancestor in these sources, take the time to read the information about the community and its inhabitants. 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. Keep in mind that some of the details in these books may be inaccurate, but they provide clues that may help you with your research.

Probate and Land Records

- FamilySearch has been digitizing a large number of microfilm, including land and probate records. Other sources such as historical and genealogical journals and newsletters may include transcriptions of these records, so be sure to check for those items.
- Pay attention to other individuals listed in these records. They may be close friends or relatives of your ancestor. Be sure to check for records related to these individuals as well.

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.
- 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.

Other Sources

- Check area archives and libraries for manuscript collections. If they have a collection of letters or diaries written by individuals who resided in the same area as your ancestor, be sure to review the contents of those documents. You may discover that they were acquainted with your ancestor and provide useful information for your research.

Tips

1. Take a fresh look at the records you've collected over the course of your research. You may discover that you overlooked a vital piece of information, or identify a new avenue of research to pursue.
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.
4. As tempting as it may be, resist the urge to research Irish records before conducting a thorough search of American and Canadian sources. It may lead you down the wrong path and waste valuable time and resources.



Resources

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