

# IRELAND IMMIGRATION AND EMIGRATION

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## INTRODUCTION

Irish immigration to the America's has been marked by peak periods of mass migration in history. Major historical events have triggered the influx of large numbers of Irish immigrants seeking better wages, lifestyles, and political or religious freedom. Careless stereotypes have been attached to the immigrants and their methods of travel and life styles, but there were numerous ways to immigrate to the America's and each course has the potential to create the records needed to identify a home county or parish.

Ideally, this subject should be treated by time period and religion, since these variables differentiate the effectiveness a researcher will have in connecting an emigrant with his place of origin. Generally, there have been emigrants from the whole of Ireland from the early 1600's. Irish immigration paralleled emigration from the rest of the British Isles with two notable exceptions. First, the emigration of Scots-Irish into the America's in the early-to-mid-1700's and the famine-initiated emigration of mostly Catholics in the mid-1800's. This lecture focuses on the many record sources in America and Ireland which may be used to link an emigrant with their destination in the America's.

## RESEARCH IN THE AMERICA'S

The research techniques for determining the place of origin for an Irish immigrant involve many of the same methodologies which would be used to trace any immigrant. The focus of this lecture will be on sources which have proven effective in tracing Irish immigrants. The primary sources which should be examined include, but are not limited to: naturalization records, land records probate records, church records, census records, tombstone inscriptions, vital records, newspapers, military records, and most importantly—family records.

As mentioned previously, the immigrants have different lifestyle patterns based on economics, religion, and the time of immigration. Generally, the heaviest Scots-Irish immigration (Presbyterian) occurred from 1740-1780. Many of these immigrants traveled as families with known relatives or friends, sometimes immigrating with the minister and their entire congregation. The Catholic immigration which primarily started in 1820, peaked in 1853 and continued into the late 1880's was very often accomplished with family members coming one or two at a time. Often, they would find work in America, save their earnings, and send the money back to Ireland to assist additional family members to immigrate.

There are no "absolutes" when doing research on an Irish immigrant problem. It is important to know the religion of the immigrant and as much as possible about who came with them or who they contacted once they arrived in the America's.

## MIGRATION ROUTES

Once arriving in the America's, the immigrant may have arrived on a ship which placed him/her far from the intended destination. Many immigrants would seek the least expensive passage

(from the west coast of Ireland to Nova Scotia) with the intent of working their way further into Canada or into the United States.

The obvious ports of arrival, New Brunswick, Quebec, Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Charleston, are always thought of first. However, there were numerous Irish who entered the United States through points not usually considered for Irish immigration such as Ogdensburg, New York; Galveston, Texas; and the route north of the Great Lakes and dropping down into Minnesota.

## **SOURCES FOR IDENTIFYING IMMIGRANTS**

As we examine the sources leading to the discovery of the point of origin for the Irish immigrants, it would be good to consider them in two phases. It is recommended that the researcher concentrate on one phase at a time and that they be searched in the following order.

### **PHASE I – U.S. RECORD SOURCES**

First, there are sources in every community where the immigrant lived that all have the potential to provide the vital piece of information needed. The following sources are the more common used in this process:

- 1) **Naturalization records** – Especially useful for listing a place of origin is the Declaration of Intent to become a naturalized citizen.
- 2) **Land records** – In some instances, the first land record of an immigrant will list the previous place of residence. If this is out of the country, it will give the place they came from.
- 3) **Probate records** – Probably give the broadest range of possibilities in solving genealogical research problems. Always increase in complexity to use since the clue you need may be masked in the probate record of someone of a different surname than the one you are researching.
- 4) **Church records** – Many congregations would receive new members upon the recommendation of another minister or congregation. Certificates of members in good standing were often filed with the other records of the Church.
- 5) **Census records** – While census records are usually not specific in identifying an exact place of origin, they can be useful to pinpoint and create a time-line of movement from point to point.
- 6) **Tombstone inscriptions** – Contain as many variables as probate records. Names of family members may be listed far from where the immigrant may be interred. Other family tombstones may record the information you need, but may be undiscovered until you reconstruct the family.
- 7) **Vital records** – Useful source of information especially in the later years (i.e. after 1900). Be sure to identify the informant of the information and determine the credibility of what this person was likely to know. Remember that in the instance of death certificates, the information for birth is secondary.
- 8) **Newspapers** – Because of the size and scope, these remain one of the more difficult sources to use. Look for indexes and centennial issues listing biographies on early residents.
- 9) **Military records** – Difficult to use without knowing a regiment. To locate a regiment, look for family pictures in uniform, memorabilia, service records and family histories.
- 10) **Family records** – Through the years, families gather and preserve information. However, as the generations get further removed from the immigrant, the clues are lost. Trace the descendants of the oldest female lines first, then work in descending order of birth.
- 11) **Artifacts** – Is the answer to your emigration problem sitting in Grandma's attic?
- 12) **Railroad Retirement Records** – Historically a major employer for the Irish, both during construction and operation.

- 13) **School Records** – A number of the Irish became notable figures in the history of the America's. When they did, school records become a vital source of biographical information.
- 14) **Passport Records** – Many of the Irish returned to Ireland at some point. When they did, they may have applied for a passport with excellent information on their place of origin.
- 15) **Funeral Home Records** – An often-overlooked source in American research, funeral homes have a variety of content based on the needs of the business owner.
- 16) **Orphan Records** – There were thousands of orphans sent from Ireland to North America. These family lines can be some of the most challenging, yet the most rewarding when solved.
- 17) **Published Histories** – Particularly good for biographical material throughout the east and mid-west. These histories may be written by a family member with knowledge of the immigrant.

## **PHASE II – U.S. RECORD SOURCES**

Second, there are sources created that identify the ancestor as they migrate to their destination, but which are usually located far from where the person may have settled and raised a family. These are more difficult to identify since you may not know the route the immigrant took to get to their destination. This would include the following types of sources:

- 1) **Ship Passenger Lists** – Primarily a source from which to learn additional information about the other ship passengers, the shipping line, and any hint of assisted passage by an estate owner or poor law union.
- 2) **Quarantine Hospital Records in Canada** – Particularly Nova Scotia and Grosse Ile in the St. Lawrence River.
- 3) **Church records in Canada** – The marriages often list the place of nativity/origin for those who were born in the British Isles. It is also common for this information to be listed in the christening of a first child where the parents were foreign born.
- 4) **Newspaper Ads** – looking for lost relatives, especially the *Boston Pilot*, *Boston* and the *Truth Teller*, *New York* in the United States and the *Toronto Mirror* in Canada.

## **IMMIGRATION AND EMIGRATION ROUTES**

There are several aspects of migration and emigration that are often overlooked. An immigrant's journey from place of origin to ultimate destination may be divided into the following phases.

- 1) The migration from their home to a port city, unless the emigrant resides in a port community. There were no regular schedules of vessels sailing, thus the immigrant may reside for a time in the port city awaiting passage. Ireland's elaborate canal system may have been the vehicle to migrate. There were also stage lines and later railways connecting all the major cities. Ultimately, many would have walked.
- 2) The journey by ship may have taken a number of irregular paths. People leaving the eastern coast of Ireland (ports of Dublin, Drogheda, Dundalk, Waterford, and Belfast) often found it better to take passage to Liverpool, England where there were vessels more frequently headed for North America. Again, they may have stayed in Liverpool for some period of time. Whatever route was used, the ship passage would take from a month and a half up to three months depending on weather conditions and their destination.

These two phases of the emigrants' journey all provide potential clues to determine the place of origin. Each (or both) may have created records about the immigrant and/or his family. The following lists provide a few examples of the records available in each of the phases:

## **PHASE I – IRELAND RECORD SOURCES**

- 1) **Church Records in Port Cities** – Particularly the larger ports of Cork, Tralee, Limerick, Galway, Sligo, Donegal, Londonderry (Derry), Belfast, Newry, Drogheda, Dublin, Waterford, and Wexford.
- 2) **1841 and 1851 Census Fragments in Ireland** – Schedules detailing the whereabouts of

family members who were not home on the night the census was taken

3) **School Records** – Details in the notes column regarding the migration or emigration of students, occasionally giving details about their parents to distinguish children of the same name.

4) **Estate Papers** – Numerous copies of tenants who emigrated with the assistance of the landowner.

5) **Newspapers** – Lists of passengers thanking their ship captain and crew for a safe journey.

6) **Ordinance Survey Lists for 1834** – Primarily for the County of Londonderry (Derry).

7) **Poor Law Records** – Prior to the establishment of the Poor Law system in 1838, these were to be found in the other records housed in the church of Ireland parishes.

8) **Church Fasti for the Presbyterian Church** – A detailed list of the ministers of the Presbyterian Church and Seceder Ministers.

9) **Tombstone Inscriptions** – Often erected by children who emigrated to the memory of their parents, often giving details of where the children are now living.

10) **Post-1858 Wills and Administrations** – Detailed summaries of the wills in the existing indexes often give information regarding estates still unsettled after several years.

11) **Bibliographic Sources** – Hayes Manuscript Sources for the History of the Irish Civilisation – Pay attention not only to the heading "Emigration", but also "Irish-Abroad U.S.A." and "Irish-Abroad Canada."

## **PHASE II – IRELAND RECORD SOURCES**

1) **Census Records in Port Cities Out of Ireland** – Primarily in England and Wales where there are surviving census records for 1841 – 1901.

2) **Church Records in Port Cities Out of Ireland** – For example, Liverpool, Lancashire, England has eighteen Catholic Churches with parish registers.

3) **Poor Law Records in the Port Cities Out of Ireland** – The overseers of the poor were directed to take an examination of any persons entering the parish who looked like they were destitute and may fall in need of assistance from the poor relief.

4) **Civil Registration, England, Scotland and Wales** – Registration of births, marriages, and deaths in England and Wales began in July 1837 – present, and Scotland from 1855 to the present.

## **CONCLUSION**

Irish immigrants to the America's came by the thousands. Often, they did not know where they would ultimately end up as they boarded vessels in their native land. During the process of immigrating, situations changed, and routes were redirected. Even today this happens on a regular basis – ask anyone who has had their airline reservations re-routed from coast-to-coast. The amount of time searching the records discussed in part one of this lecture will always have priority over the approaches discussed in part two. The odds of solving the problems are significantly higher when you search the areas where the persons are known to have lived and interacted with others.

The diversity of causes of immigration from Ireland caused a number of records to be created which the Irish researcher rarely discovers. Records of immigrants are buried in Estate Records, Poor Law Union books, even School Records. However, until a general idea of the area from which an immigrant came from is determined, the wealth of records in Ireland remains a formidable task to examine. There are no exhaustive efforts underway to extract all of the immigrant names from these records and compile them into a useable tool. Rather, as with most other countries, random lists are printed in numerous scattered periodicals, books, and articles.

If the Irish researcher is to successfully discover the link between the America's and Ireland, then all possible records must be examined in the county the immigrant settled in. This point cannot be overstated and those of us who constantly deal with immigration problems have seen the rate of success of those who ignore this strategy. Time and again, researchers fail

and become discouraged when adherence to some simple techniques and perseverance would better serve the immigration problem. Rarely did the immigrant come alone, there were always friends or relatives to pave the way and offer advice on employment and migration.