

Scots-Irish Workshop Part 1

Presbyterian Church Records - 1

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INTRODUCTION

Searching a Presbyterian family in Ireland can provide some interesting challenges. The laws imposed on those who chose not to be affiliated with the Church of Ireland (State Church) affected the members of the Presbyterian Church and restricted their freedom to exercise their religion as they would have chosen. They were oppressed in much the same way as members of the Catholic Church. This is ironic since they came to Ireland from Scotland to have religious freedom. The result was that many continued their search for religious freedom by moving on to North America. By the late 1700's, the laws governing the Presbyterians began to be relaxed and the ministers were able to practice more freely.

KEY HISTORICAL DATES

- 1559 John Knox brings to Scotland the teachings of the Protestant Reformation started by Martin Luther and developed by John Calvin.
- 1600 Presbyterian ministers are required to swear an oath to the Book of Common Prayer of the Church of Ireland. Refusal can result in being refused the right to minister.
- 1608-1610 Plantation of Ulster. As a result of religious persecution in Scotland, Scottish emigration to Ireland begins with the settlement of the newly planted counties in Ulster.
- 1643 Presbyterian Covenant to establish and defend Presbyterianism.
- 1691 Presbyterian ministers are to have a degree to be ordained to the ministry. Most are educated at the universities in Glasgow and Edinburgh, Scotland.
- 1660 Over 100,000 Presbyterians have settled in Ireland.
- 1690's The Synod of Ulster and the Synod of Munster are formed near the end of the 17thC.
- 1708 130 Presbyterian congregations are established throughout Ireland, but predominately in Counties Antrim and Down. Internal disagreements in the Presbyterian Church lead to the establishment of the
- 1726 "Non-subscribing" Presbyterians. The Southern Association is formed.
- 1740's Emigration to North America by Scots-Irish is significant.
- 1740's Major division in the Presbyterian Church resulting in the formation of the "Seceders." They form their own ecclesiastical council - the Secession Synod.
- 1744 First Church of Seceders opens near Templepatrick, County Down, Ire.
- 1750's Seceders divide into Burgers and Anti-burghers over the issue of the Burgess Oath in Scotland that would allow them to sit on town councils, but the issue has little relevance in Ireland.

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KEY HISTORICAL DATES CONTINUED...

- 1760's Reformed Presbyterians or Covenanters split off due to their strict interpretation to uphold the Covenant of 1643. Split leads to "First" and "Second" Presbyterian churches in some areas.
- 1770's Another wave of emigration to North America by the Scots-Irish.
- 1782 Marriages performed by Presbyterian ministers are legalized.
- 1798 Presbyterians take an active role in the rebellion to free themselves from British control.
- 1814 Establishment of the Belfast Academical Institute. Most Presbyterian ministers in Ireland are now educated here.
- 1819 Presbyterian ministers required to keep a register of baptisms and marriages.
- 1840 The Synod of Ulster, which was the main governing assembly in Ireland joins the Secession Synod. Together, they form the "General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland."
- 1844 Marriage Act of 1844 (effective April 1845) legalizes marriages between a member of the Church of Ireland and a Presbyterian. The effect is the start of a formation of a "Protestant alliance." All Presbyterian marriages are registered in the General Register Office with those of the Church of Ireland.
- 1850's Presbyterians in Ireland number 650,000 with 433 congregations.

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH RECORDS

Many researchers consider the Presbyterian Church records a total loss even though none were destroyed in the Public Record Office, Dublin in 1922. Researchers tracing Presbyterian families from North America are usually trying to use the church records as an emigration tool. Since many Presbyterian Church records begin about 1830 and the peak emigration for Presbyterian emigration to North America was in 1740 and in 1770-1780, these records do not make the critical link being sought.

Much of the published information about these records only highlights the starting dates for baptisms and marriages. The Kirk Session books may pre-date the church registers and sometimes the emigration link being sought is contained in a reference to a family moving out of the congregation. Other references to births, illegitimacy or deaths may also be contained. Sometimes relief to a widow is recorded, thus providing a reference point for the approximate death date for her husband. There is an excellent work on Presbyterianism in Ireland published in *Irish Church Records*, compiled by James Ryan, written by Dr. Christine Kinealy. Two key listings are found in Appendix 4.2 (pp. 88-101) listing all of the Presbyterian Church records microfilmed by the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI). Appendix 4.3 (pp. 101-105)

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lists the Presbyterian Church records that are still held in local custody. PRONI continues to add to its collection so use the lists accordingly. A downloadable pdf is available at: <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/publications/proni-guide-church-records> .

CONTENT OF PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH RECORDS

BAPTISM RECORDS – name of child, names of parents, usually the mother’s maiden name, date of birth, names of sponsors and the address (townland) of the parents. In the Presbyterian Church, the baptisms did not always closely follow the birth. This may have been due to a lack of diligence on the part of the minister or it may have reflected a lack of money to have the ceremony performed.

MARRIAGE RECORDS – name of bride and groom, usually at least the father of the bride and sometimes the groom, date of marriage. After 1819, the names of two witnesses and the congregation of residence for the bride and groom were also required. The Presbyterian Church required prior notice of the intended marriage, so some record of the event may appear in the Kirk Session Minute book even though the marriage registers may not exist. Although all marriages were to be performed in the church, it was common practice among the Presbyterians to marry in the bride’s home with the payment of a fee to the minister. Marriage in the home may have also generated a Marriage License Bond, the indexes of which still exist. Researchers should also check the Church of Ireland registers prior to 1782 on in instances where a Presbyterian married a member of the Church of Ireland prior to 1845. After the Marriage Act of 1844, marriages were to be performed with “open doors” before a district registrar. The completeness of the marriage records greatly increases.

BURIAL RECORDS – usually only the name of the deceased and sometimes an age are recorded. In the more complete registers you may find the names of parents for a child and/or a townland of residence and occupation. Many Presbyterians are buried in Church of Ireland graveyards since the laws prevented non-Church of Ireland congregations from maintaining their own graveyards. Prior to the 19th century, dissenting ministers were not allowed to perform burials unless a C of I rector was present.

OTHER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH RECORDS

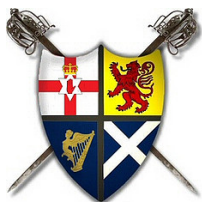
There are other church records in existence for the Presbyterian church that are often overlooked by researchers once they discover that the birth, marriage and death records do not exist for their time period.

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OTHER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH RECORDS CONTINUED...

SESSION MINUTE BOOKS OR KIRK SESSION MINUTES – often contain records of individuals arriving from another parish, comments about baptisms and/or marriages and the names of persons who may have been summoned before the Session.

CERTIFICATES OF TRANSFERENCE – this was a testament of the good standing of the person within their community. Often these ended up in the possession of the family and can sometimes be found among family papers in North America.

COMMUNICANTS' ROLL BOOK (SUBSTITUTE CENSUS) – give lists of individuals who received communion at each Sabbath meeting. In some instances, remarks about births, marriages, or deaths may be included.

SCOTLAND/IRELAND CONNECTIONS

Until a few years ago, there was little hope of being able to trace a Presbyterian family from Northern Ireland back into Scotland. The sources were poorly identified and there was no overall source that could be used in a way that made the research productive.

In a joint agreement between the Genealogical Society of Utah and the General Register Office, Edinburgh to index the Old Parochial Registers, researchers now have a complete index (on compact disc) arranged by county listing all of the christenings and marriages for the Church of Scotland. Many of the settlers in Northern Ireland migrated from the western shores of Scotland and these counties should be noted first.

Studies conducted by Bill and Mary Durning and published in their book entitled *The Scotch-Irish* also illuminate the names of key settlers and the areas of Scotland from which they came. Their work contains information on approximately 2,000 Scottish surnames. Work is continuing on additional Scottish surnames in the North of Ireland.

The Ulster Historical Foundation has just published a new book on this important topic that may provide valuable clues to making the connection. From their pre-publication order form: “This book is the first comprehensive guide for family historians searching for ancestors in seventeenth and eighteenth-century Ulster.” Roulston, William. *Researching Scots-Irish Ancestors – The essential genealogical guide to early modern Ulster*. Belfast: Ulster Historical Foundation, 2005.

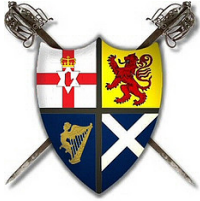
The publication entitled *Tracing Your Scottish Ancestors, A Guide to Ancestry Research in the Scottish Record Office* by Cecil Sinclair, should also be noted. It was published by Her Majesty's Stationary Office (HMSO), 1990.

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CONGREGATIONAL HISTORIES

The Presbyterian Historical Society published a major compilation of congregational histories in the work entitled *A History of Congregations in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland 1610-1982* and an accompanying supplement. One of the major differences for Presbyterian immigration was the fact that they emigrated as complete families, groups of families, or congregations. The *Fasti* of the Presbyterian Church should also be consulted to determine instances where the minister emigrated. Always look for the place of origin for the minister in North America to determine if members of his congregation emigrated with him.

In addition to the compilation mentioned, there are numerous individual congregational histories. These are sometimes difficult to identify. Inquiries may be made to the Presbyterian Historical Society and to the Linen Hall Library, Belfast. In some instances, the Library of Congress, Washington, DC has copies and is often overlooked. A good list is also to be found in volume 2 of Margaret Dickson Falley's *Irish and Scotch-Irish Ancestral Research*, pp.222-5.

PRESBYTERIAN NAMING PATTERNS

Questions regarding naming patterns are often asked about the Presbyterian settlers in Northern Ireland. They followed the naming patterns established in Scotland to varying degrees. As this question is studied, it becomes more obvious that this tended to be stronger in some families than in others. Evaluate your pedigree and determine the strength of the naming patterns to see if it may be used with any degree of success. Remember that this may vary from generation to generation depending on the family traditions of the spouse as well.

CONCLUSION

Researching Presbyterian families in the eighteenth century can be particularly challenging for a variety of reasons. Obviously, the foremost obstacle to researchers from North America is the fact that there will likely not be a christening entry to match the immigrant. At this prospect, many researchers believe that the task of extending a line or identifying an exact parish in Ireland may not be doable. However, experience has shown that there are a variety of records that may assist the researcher in building a reasonable case for the place of origin for a Presbyterian ancestor or ancestress and perhaps extend the line a generation.

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3. Falley, Margaret Dickson. *Irish and Scotch-Irish Ancestral Research*, 2 volumes, Evanston, Illinois: privately printed, 1962. [Presbyterian Records, Volume 1: 377-411; Presbyterian Congregational Histories, Volume 2: 222-25.]
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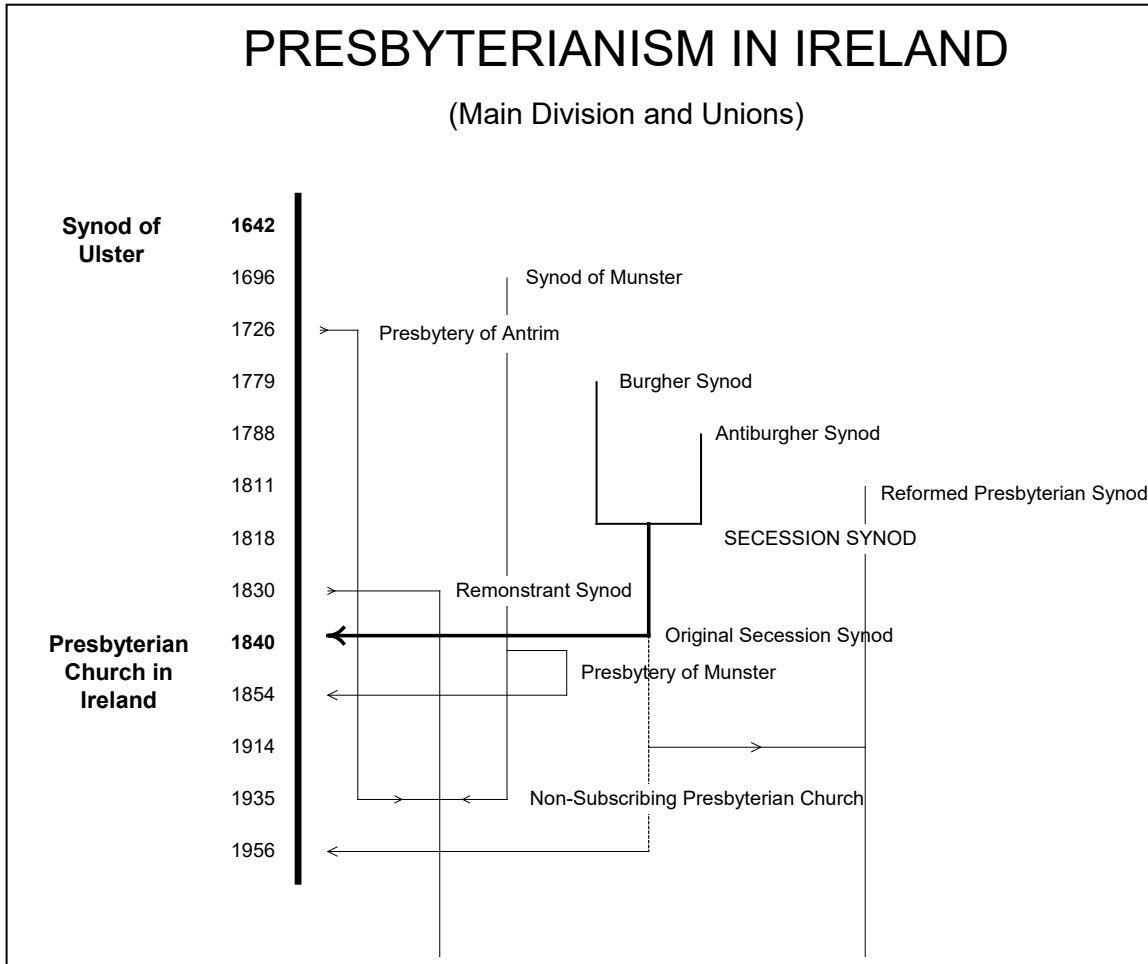
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SELECTED WEBSITES

- 16. Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) <http://proni.nics.gov.uk/records/private/presindx.htm>
- 17. Presbyterian Historical Association <http://presbyterianireland.org/home>
- 18. Presbyterian Church Registers www.local.ie/content/25648.shtml/genealogy

CHRONOLOGY OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN IRELAND



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PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH CONGREGATIONS IN IRELAND

