

# Using US Records to Find Irish Immigrant Origins

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Discovering an Irish ancestor's place of origin in Ireland is a much sought-after goal. Successful research in Irish records first starts with thorough research in US records. Learn what sources to examine, identify overlooked records, and explore strategies to locate that elusive Irish location for your ancestor.

Types of sources to examine:

- Vital records: birth, marriage, and death
- Obituaries
- Funeral home records
- Cemetery burials and plot information
- Headstone inscriptions
- Probate
- Church records: baptism, marriage, burial
- Passenger lists
- Naturalizations, Voter lists
- Passport applications
- Military: Draft, Pensions, Veterans' Organization, etc.
- Census: Federal and state
- Land: deeds and mortgages
- Newspaper and "missing friends" ads
- Fraternal organizations
- Banking records and business agents who helped send money back to Ireland.
- Home sources and artifacts: bibles, diaries, letters, and oral histories, etc.
- Books: biographical histories and mug books, published family histories, local and migration histories. Mine for all possible clues.
- Local sources: genealogical societies, historical groups, libraries, archives, etc.
- DNA

Strategies to find information naming a place of origin in Ireland:

- Thoroughly research every family member as a different relative may have generated more records than your ancestor. You won't know until you look.
- Find all vital records, when extant, for your immigrant **and** all their children.
- Research baptism sponsors and marriage witnesses. They may be relatives or former neighbors in Ireland.
- Research your ancestor's FAN Club (see below). One of these people may have generated the record containing the information you need. Go back through the list of sources for these people.

- Investigate Chain Migration (see below). If you suspect this was a possibility, determine who was involved, and add them to your FAN Club research.
- Search dates broadly as many Irish guessed at their birth and immigration dates.
- Be aware of first name variations. See the links in Resources below.
- Remember surnames were often spelled differently, phonetically, or at the whim of the clerk. There was no one right way to spell a surname.

Do FAN (Family/Friends, Associates, and Neighbors) Club research:

- Look at all Family members who were in the US (parents, brothers, sisters, brothers-in-law, sisters-in-law, children, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins)
- Look at Friends, Associates, and Neighbors.
- Look at others with the same surname living nearby.
- When you hit a brickwall, it is important to research each of these people thoroughly. You don't know who will have the breakthrough record.
- Analyze and correlate information found in FAN Club research:
  - Do others in the community appear similar? They may need to be researched too.
  - Build up a thorough knowledge base about the community.

Chain Migration

- Practice of Irish immigrants following in the footsteps of others to a specific destination in another country.
- The “others” were members of the FAN Club.
- The FAN Club provided information about the destination, instructions on how to travel, help upon arrival, leads to employment, and were a safety-net.
- Family members in the US often sent money (remittances and the “American Letter”) back to Ireland and encouraged those left behind to make the trip.
- The next to leave did the same.
- Each person was a link in a chain connecting North America and Ireland.

DNA

- Your ethnicity estimates sometimes will specify a location within Ireland where your DNA is found. However, if you have multiple Irish ancestors, it may be difficult to determine which ancestral DNA is being referenced.
- Use ethnicity estimate locations as possible clues but always combine with other records to verify.
- Look at your DNA matches and determine who shares DNA on the ancestral line in question. Add the matches' ancestors to your FAN Club research and build out their tree if necessary.
- Test at, or transfer your raw results to, other companies to locate more matches.

## Deciphering Irish Placenames

- When you find a placename, it can sometimes be hard to locate it in Ireland.
- Try googling the information and check the Irish Placename Resources below.
- Check if the name is a civil or Catholic parish or variant Catholic parish name.
- Check if the name is a townland. There can be many spelling variations.
- Think phonetically as the name may be garbled, have been misheard by US ears, or written down by someone unfamiliar with Irish sounding words.
- If you have a county and can't decipher the placename, use John Grenham's placename search to find all places in a county and then scan through the list.
- Use maps if you suspect the name might be a local placename not found above.

## Resources

- "Missing Friends" ads in newspapers – most circulated nationally ○ Irish Immigrant Advertisements Placed in "The Boston Pilot," 1831-1920. On Ancestry at <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/5060/> Also, free with guest account at American Ancestors at <https://www.americanancestors.org/search/databasesearch/510/bostonpilot-irish-immigrant-advertisements-search-for-missing-friends-18311920>. ○  
Voices of the Irish Immigrant: Information Wanted Ads in the Truth Teller, 1825 – 1844 at the NYG&B at <https://www.newyorkfamilyhistory.org/online-records/collection/new-york-county-newspaper-abstracts-1825-1870>. ○  
Missing Friends in the 'Irish World' Newspaper at GenealogyBank: <https://blog.genealogybank.com/missing-friends-in-the-irish-worldnewspaper.html>.
- Fraternal organization example ○ Massachusetts Catholic Order of Foresters. More information can be found at <https://tiara.ie/projects/foresters-project/>
- Banking records ○ Boston, MA: Provident Institution for Savings, 1817-1882 on American Ancestors at <https://blog.genealogybank.com/missing-friends-in-theirish-world-newspaper.html>.
  - New York, U.S., Emigrant Savings Bank Records, 1850-1883
    - On Ancestry - <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/8760/>
    - Find information on using the records at [https://static.libnet.info/images/pdfs/acpl/Genealogy/Emigrant Savings Bank.pdf](https://static.libnet.info/images/pdfs/acpl/Genealogy/Emigrant_Savings_Bank.pdf) and <https://www.nypl.org/sites/default/files/emigrant.pdf>.

- Finding books with chain migration information
  - John Grenham's "The Irish Abroad" can be searched by Continent, Country, and Region for published works at <https://www.johngrenham.com/records/irishabroad.php>.
- Irish name variations
  - See first name variations at <https://www.rootsireland.ie/help/first-names/> and <https://www.familysearch.org/library/books/records/item/264994redirection> and <https://archive.org/details/varietiessynonym00math/page/n5/mode/2up>.
  - Find surname variations at <https://www.johngrenham.com/surnames/>
- Marie E. Daly with Judith Lucey, *Genealogist's Handbook for Irish Research* (New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2016).
- David Ouimette and David Rencher, *Irish Emigration and Immigration to North America* (BYU Family Historian, Vol. 6 (Fall 2007)), p. 20-30. See <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1031&context=byufamilyhistorian>
- Frederick Wertz, *Researching Irish ancestors in New York State: What you need to know* at <https://www.newyorkfamilyhistory.org/blog/researching-irishancestors-new-york-state-what-you-need-know>.
- John Grenham's website *Irish Ancestors* – <https://www.johngrenham.com/>

### Irish Placename Resources

- Parishes
  - For information on what are and locating parishes in Ireland, search for "How to locate parish of origin" at <https://irelandxo.com/ireland-xo/news>.
- Civil Parishes
  - [https://www.johngrenham.com/places/civil\\_index.php](https://www.johngrenham.com/places/civil_index.php) is an interactive map of Civil Parishes by County. Click on a parish to see a list of all placenames in the parish and resources available.
- Catholic Parishes
  - [https://www.johngrenham.com/places/rcmap\\_index.php](https://www.johngrenham.com/places/rcmap_index.php) is an interactive map of Roman Catholic Parishes by County. Click on a parish to see all known records and find a link to the civil parish(es).
  - <http://registers.nli.ie/> provides a search interface and an interactive map of Roman Catholic Parishes and their **variant names**. Click or Zoom in to find a Catholic parish within a county.
- Townlands and Placenames
  - For information on what a townland is, search for "What is a townland" at <https://irelandxo.com/ireland-xo/news>.
  - <https://www.johngrenham.com/places/> is an Irish placename search but very literal and does not include parish names. Use \* wildcard when searching for best results.
    - <https://www.townlands.ie/> shows the boundary of a townland and provides links to surrounding townlands. Can search by county or civil parish for all townland names to check for alternate spellings.
    - <http://www.logainm.ie/en/> is a placename database. It plots a townland on a map and provides information about the name of a townland in Irish and

- sometimes has links to archival material. The archival material sometimes has alternate placename information.
- A placename database for what is now Northern Ireland is at <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/9b31e0501b744154b4584b1dc e1f859b>. ○ Contact an Irish Family History Foundation Centre to inquire about local knowledge of hard-to-find placenames. See a list at <https://www.rootsireland.ie/contact-irish-family-history-foundationcentres/>.
  - Placename meanings
    - Info on deciphering placenames and finding their Irish parts at <https://www.dochara.com/the-irish/place-names/diciphering-irishplacenames/>. ○ Sources for learning more about placenames and other jurisdictions: <https://web.archive.org/web/20220527180201/https://www.ancestornetwark.ie/know-your-place/>.
  - Map resources ○ See the GeoHive Map Viewer at <https://www.geohive.ie/>. It provides various historic Ordnance Survey maps. Zoom in very close on an area. In the **Basemap Gallery (see upper left icon)** go to bottom of list and select 6inch historic map overlays or zoom in more and select 25-inch map.
    - <http://maps.nls.uk/geo/explore/#zoom=6&lat=53.3993&lon=-7.9500&layers=13&b=1> provides historic Bartholomew and British War Office GSGS Maps from the 1940s. Zoom in very close on an area and select different maps from **historic map overlay**.