

IRISH RECORDS: A VIEW FROM THEIR SIDE

by Patricia Little Taylor

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The dream of many Irish-American genealogists is to do research in Ireland and find out about the details of the family history and to locate the birthplace/home town of our ancestors and if possible meet any relations still living there. Whether you are looking for your own family or assisting a friend or client, Irish records have always appeared to be difficult. We have all heard "The Public Records Office burned in 1922 and everything was lost," or "Records for Catholic families are closed and you have to know what parish to get any help," or the misconception that "No one in Ireland cares about genealogy." I wanted to learn for myself how Irish researchers approach their own records and what hints, ideas and techniques they use in locating their ancestors. How do they overcome the difficulty of burned or missing records? What is really happening in the area of local history and genealogy? After reading most of the current literature, I decided that the only way to truly understand a different point of view was to travel to Ireland and learn to do family research their way.

This guide is based on my own experiences using the various repositories, the Irish Ancestry Research Course which was taught by Dr. James G. Ryan, and the First Irish Genealogical Congress. All of these experiences provided a blend of lectures, practical and realistic descriptions of the records, social history (putting the records into perspective) and supervised research. This approach gave me a sense of Irish history and an understanding of the development and the meanings of the records I was using. No longer was the data a flat piece of information such as a birth record but it became a part of a larger mosaic that is the life and times of our immigrant ancestors and their families.

Using my own work I will try to illustrate how to use the different types of Irish records. I am assuming that in your research you have some information about where in Ireland your ancestor came from, but even without that I will describe how the various types of records might help you.

The families for which I had the most information are the Little family from Mohill, County Leitrim, and the Peters family of Thurles, County Tipperary. I also had sketchy information on the O'Brien family in Tipperary. The families that I had the least amount of information for were the Brandons, Daley (Daly) and Toomey families. Listed below is a brief outline of what information I took with me when I went to Ireland.

I knew that William Little had come from Mohill, Co. Leitrim early in the 1900's. From his death certificate I knew that his father was Francis Little and his mother was Ann O'Rourke and that he was born in 1882. When I visited Mohill in 1982, I learned from some of my Dad's cousins that Ann O'Rourke's mother's maiden name was Ganley. I saw the family home and the graves of my great-grandparents. Unfortunately there were no grave stones with names and dates.

On the Peters side I had some luck when I located the name of the parish in Tipperary where Dennis Peters, my great grandfather, was baptized. When Dennis' sister Honoria entered a convent, she stated that she was the lawful daughter of James Peters and Honoria O'Brien and that she was baptised in Drom and Inch

parish, Co. Tipperary, in her profession of vows. Since Honoria was about two years younger than Dennis, I assumed that this was where he was baptised also. The Peters family came to America in 1865 and settled in Troy, New York. Dennis moved his family back to New York City in the early 1900's. For both families I had a list of brothers and sisters with the approximate birth dates. I should have gathered more information on the other family members such as the death certificates for the immigrant ancestors but that was hind sight.

How does one start to research a different culture and time frame? What preconceived ideas do we as twentieth century Americans bring to eighteenth and nineteenth century Irish records? In teaching Americans to work with Irish records the hardest part is to make them realize that our way of record keeping is not the "right way" to do it, and that each country, century and ethnic group keeps records in a fashion that meets **their** needs to preserve their heritage. Records were kept on a need to know basis-What did the government need to know about the individual and nothing more.

What effect does history play on all of this? As we study the history, we begin to realize the importance of the records. For example, during the Penal times the Catholic faith was forbidden but there were still masses and other church functions. However, detailed records were not kept. Obviously, a priest would not want to put the people he served in danger by creating records with names and addresses. As religious discrimination lessened and formal parishes were established, record keeping began. The manner in which these church records were kept varied. Some records are in English and while others are in Latin. Some are very detailed and others aren't. I will discuss these in greater depth later.

In Ireland the genealogical records have been centralized, meaning they are in Dublin and can be used there. Unlike the United States where the researchers must go to the town, county and state and finally to the federal level for records, in Ireland it is the opposite. Go to Dublin and do the bulk of your research there. Use the vital records, the wills, deeds, estate papers, newspapers and other records in Dublin. Then go to your family's county and town knowing that you have the data you need to make the connections.

Irish families of previous generations had a consistent naming pattern. The first son was named for his paternal grandfather. This pattern has carried over into Irish-American culture and the names of both grandfathers are combined for the first son. By following this pattern we can pull together threads that will weave a complete picture. This is one of the patterns which will help you identify your specific family. Try to identify the oldest son before you begin researching in Ireland.

The first place to start is at the **Office of the Registrar General** located at 8/11 Lombard Street, Dublin, Ireland. This is a busy place and is the chief source for current information as well as archival. You will see parents there ordering copies of children's birth certificates and genealogists trying to get a copy of a grandmother's death record.

The collection contains births, deaths and marriages since January 1, 1864. There are records of Church of Ireland marriages since April 1845. Unlike the United States, there are national indexes for the vital records which is helpful if you know the name but are not sure of the county. These indexes are arranged by year and divided quarterly, so for each year searched one must look in **four places**. The index lists the name, the

1875. Marriage solemnized at the Roman Catholic Chapel of *Carriekeshannon* in the Registrar's District of *Down* in the Union of *Carriekeshannon* in the County of *Down*

No.	Wife's Name	Wife's Name	Age	Condition	Rank or Profession	Residence at the Time of Marriage	Father's Name and Surname	Rank or Profession of Father
1875-	<i>Ann Rorke</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>Spinster</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>Yorktown</i>	<i>William Rorke</i>	<i>Farmer</i>
	<i>Francis Little</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>Bachelor</i>	<i>Farmer</i>	<i>Rosdoonan</i>	<i>Francis Little</i>	<i>Farmer</i>

MARRIED in the Roman Catholic Chapel of *Carriekeshannon* according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Roman Catholic Church, by me, *Thomas Fitzmaurice*

This Marriage solemnized at the presence of us, *Henry O'Connell* and *Richard Fitzmaurice*

Marriage record from the Office of the Registrar General in Dublin for Francis Little and Ann Rorke, 1 February 1875.

town and the volume and page number which you need to give the clerk. Someone else will get you a copy of the record. There are also indexes to the vital records for those who were born, married or died at sea. At the end of each index is a listing for missed or delayed notations. Be careful with the spelling of the town and the person's name.

The first person I started with was my grandfather, William Little. I located his birth record as well as his parent's marriage record. Francis Little and Ann O'Rourke were married on February 14, 1875 and the first child was born in November of 1875. I was also looking for the birth records of William's brothers and sisters and located a number of them. From the 1911 census I learned that both Francis and Ann were living in the townland of Rosdoowan, near Mohill in County Leitrim on March 31, 1911. Also listed were several of William's brothers and sisters. I assumed that his parents were not alive in 1935 when William died in New Jersey. William's obituary listed all of William's family living in New York and in Ireland, even his sisters and their married names, but no parents.

Checking from 1911 to 1936 I narrowed it down. By checking the indexes I came up with *Anne Lyttle* (notice the spelling) from Rosdoowan who died in the Mohill workhouse on July 14th, 1911. My Littles are the only Littles living in Rosdoowan according to the 1911 census. (I was shocked that Anne had died in a workhouse because the family had a little money, but I later learned that circa 1900-1905 the workhouse had become the equivalent of the county hospital/nursing home.) Then came the boring part: checking every Little/Lyttle in the registers from 1911 to 1936 looking for Francis. I missed it the first time because I was looking for Little but I finally found it. Francis, my great grandfather, died on May 6th, 1921, and the name was spelled Lyttle. Unfortunately, Irish death records don't give the parents names. But the marriage and birth records are very complete.

The hours for the Registrar General's Office are 9:30-12:30 & 2:15-4:30 Monday-Friday. No reader's card or ticket is needed but there is charge of £ 1 per day. Photocopies of the records cost £ 1.50 while a certified copy is £ 5. Requests can be made in person or by mail.

HINTS-1. Remember your manners. These people are very busy and they don't care if you ever find grandmother's death

certificate. 2. Work quietly and try to be as unobtrusive as possible. 3. I have found that the photocopy from the microfilm is better and cheaper than the official certificates because there are no copying/handwriting errors, the signature of my ancestor is there and it is the complete record. 4. On the practical side, if you are working and it is close to lunch, ask the clerk if you could pick up your copies after lunch. They are more likely to have them ready for you when the place reopens after lunch. 5. Back at home, if you are using the microfilm from the LDS Church, remember that the indexing is the same and you must look in four places/quarters of each year.

The next stop for research is the **National Library of Ireland** located at Kildare St., Dublin 2, Ireland. The Library contains an extensive collection of printed materials and manuscripts on the history, culture and development of Ireland. There is an open access reading room as well as a rare books collection. The reading room contains general indexes, catalogs and other reference materials. This is a closed stack library which means that you need to fill out a call slip for each item (book, microfilm, microfiche, or newspaper) you want. Then a clerk will retrieve the item for you.

One of the first resources that you will be directed to look at is *Griffith's Valuation*. This is a listing of heads of house/land holders which was done in 1851-1852 and it provides a house by house listing of land holder, the immediate lessor, the type of house and number of other buildings (offices, sheds, barns, etc.) the type of land, the acreage, separate listings for the value of the house and land, and the amount of tax that was owed. The subtenants and itinerant workers will probably not be listed. Copies of the *Griffith's Valuation* are available on microfiche and can be requested at the desk. There is an index which is divided by County, and lists all the baronies in which a specific surname is listed, then the baronies are divided into the civil parish and then into the townlands. Copies of *Griffith's* are also available at the New York Public Library, Library of Congress, the LDS Church and most major research libraries.

When using the index you will note G5 or T3. The G5 means that in *Griffith's Valuation* that surname such as Kelly or O'Brien, was listed 5 times for that barony or parish. The T3 refers to 3 listings of a specific surname in the *Tithe Applotment* books. The *Tithe Applotment* books were compiled in 1834-35 and are a

list of heads of household who had to pay tithes to the Church of Ireland. This was a national or state church so everyone, regardless of the religion of the individual, was assessed these tithes. Presbyterians, Quakers, Baptists, Roman Catholics as well as members of the Church of Ireland had to pay for the support of the Church of Ireland. The value of the *Tithe Applotment* books, in addition to serving as a census substitute, is that if your ancestor was listed in 1834 in the *Tithe Applotment* books but was not listed in Griffith's in 1851-52, then he/she may have left Ireland and you need to search elsewhere.

One of the best collections at the National Library is the collection of Roman Catholic Parish registers. These are a substitute for the lack of vital records. They vary in terms of their coverage, quality and information but for the most part they start around 1820. As we go further to the West of Ireland the registers start later and are poorer in quality than those from the Dublin area. But something is better than nothing. There is a listing for the Roman Catholic Parish records at the main desk and the *Catholic Almanac* so if you know the townland, then you can locate the exact parish.

What can you expect from these Catholic registers? We could expect more but these registers are unindexed at this time. For religious reasons children were baptized as quickly as possible after they were born, usually within a week to a month. Often the first place the child went was to the church for baptism. These records include the name of the child, the father's name, the mother's maiden name, the date of the baptism, and the witnesses or godparents. The godparents serve as a link to the community at large and to the specific families. Usually the godparents were the brothers, sisters or in-laws of the new parents. It is unusual for a married couple to serve as the godparents of a child. In a culture conditioned to early deaths, the responsibility for the children could not be left to just one family, so the godparents of a child would seldom be a husband and wife. Kinship played one part by using the baptism to connect different families and reality played another to protect the child in the event of the death of its parents.

If you are lucky, the priest recorded the townland as well as the other information. My Peters family lived in County Tipperary, Drom and Inch parish, and in the townland of Annefield. Not all records contain such detailed information. The baptismal and marriage records for Drom and Inch are excellent but I wasn't able to locate any death records for this parish. When searching both the baptismal and marriage records, women are usually listed by their birth names. So a woman could have five husbands and still be Mary Murphy when she is serving as a godmother. Spelling can be haphazard. Remember these are records kept by people who knew the families. So nicknames rather than the formal name may be listed. In Drom and Inch my great grandmother Honoria O'Brien Peters is listed on her children's baptismal records as Nano Brien, Nano O'Brien, Honoria O'Brian, Honoria Bryan and Honoria O'Brien. She was always married to Jas. Peters so I knew it was the right person. However, if I had not been aware of this tradition, I might have missed this information.

Death Registers can be as varied as the Baptismal and Marriage registers. If you are searching in the vital records and do not locate a death record for the 1870's and early 1880's, make sure you also check the parish record. The family might not register the death with the civil authorities but would have had an appropriate funeral and burial, so the local church record is the only existing one. My great great grandfather Francis Little died in 1870 and is not listed in the General Registrar Death Registers

but is in the parish record.

HINTS-1. Remember in the U.S. when we say parish we mean the church such as St. Brendan's, St. Raymond's or Blessed Sacrament. This is not true in Ireland; the name of the building might be St. Patrick but the parish is Mohill. The name of the church is not necessarily the name of the parish. 2. When using the microfilm readers I suggest that you get one of the smaller readers if you are working with the Catholic parish records because the smaller ones concentrate the light and make it easier to read the handwriting. 3. The parish records can be in English or Latin. Brush up on your Latin. 4. When searching the baptism and marriage records look for the godparents and the witnesses because this reveals family relationships that other records do not contain. 5. By looking for connections to the family/clan, your family tree will begin to include more people than just your immediate family.

The National Library is in the process of collecting all Irish newspapers and microfilming them. There is an index to all the newspapers which the Library owns and notations as to those on microfilm and those in hardcopy. There is also an excellent collection of city and trade directories as well as maps. There is a book catalog which is divided by author and subject for all acquisitions prior to 1969. There is a card catalog for 1969 to the present. Unlike an American library, there is no title catalog. All of the entries to the catalog are brief and the items must be requested at the desk. The National Library wants to create a computerized catalog for easy access to all information but this is a slow process.

So far I have discussed only the published or microfilmed collections at the Library. They also are in charge of the Manuscript collection. Many different types of original records are in this collection, from personal letters and correspondence, and genealogies to estate papers which include records of property, leases, business records, rent rolls, maps, farm account books, valuation rolls or books, and correspondence to and from the landlord. These estates were often run by an agent or manager and he needed to keep accurate lists for his employer. If your ancestor didn't own land, what good are these records? While your ancestor didn't own the land, he worked it. Problems with tenants, epidemics, famines and the usual disasters both big and small had to be reported to the owner. It is possible that your ancestors may show up in the estate records. While the *Hayes Index* will describe in general the contents of the Manuscript Collection, the collection is largely unindexed. Many of these records are available on microfilm from the LDS church so you can start your research at home.

The hours are Monday 10-9, Tuesday 2-9, Wednesday 2-9, Thursday 10-5, Friday 10-5, Saturday 10-1. You will need a reader's ticket and will have to check all briefcases, purses, coats, umbrellas, and other stuff at the desk. It is guarded and you will have the key. It helps to wear a jacket or sweater with pockets for tissues, pencils and the like. You may bring your notes into the reading room and materials needed for your research. Don't plan to go in November or in early December when the library is closed for stock taking and preservation.

Once you have begun your research using the National Library and the General Register Office, you will also need to go to the **National Archives of Ireland** (formerly the Public Record Office of Ireland), Four Courts Inn, Dublin 7, Ireland. Like most major repositories it contains court records, probate records and other state papers including some vital records dating 1750-1845. While this office suffered terrible damage in 1922 as a result of an explosion,

there are many early records or their substitutes here. Especially important are the 1901 and 1911 census returns, the original Primary Valuation (Griffith's) and the Tithe Applotment books.

The census returns for 1901 and 1911 may be too recent for many Americans. But if your family came here in the late 1880's it is possible that not every one left Ireland. When searching the 1911 census don't be surprised if people jump 15 to 20 years in age. There is a very simple reason—an old age pension. In 1908 Ireland established a pension system and granted pensions to everyone over 75 years old. Since the Vital records were established in 1864, many people did not have a birth or baptismal certificate. Census searches were done for anyone who requested an official verification of his/her age. While the earlier census records did not survive, these records did. These were also done before 1922 and the destruction of the Public Records Office. The record of what census records were searched is listed on the request and uses the same system as the census records. There are other fragmentary census records. Check Jim Ryan's *Irish Records* or Donal Begley's *Irish Genealogy: A Record Finder* for exact listings.

All the wills and administrations for Ireland will also be found at the National Archives. There is a card index to wills probated prior to 1922 and also printed indexes which were published at the turn of the century. If your family did not own property, these sources may have little value. There are also indexes to marriage licence bonds and genealogical abstracts.

Other resources here would include court records, Catholic Qualification Rolls, and all other types of records involving a person's legal relationship with the government. Deeds are located in the King's Inn and will be discussed next.

A Reader's ticket is needed and your passport is sufficient identification. There are no fees for using these records. Photocopies are available at a reasonable fee for the copies but they tend to be fairly slow. The hours are 10-5 Monday-Friday. The National Archives will be moving to Bishop Street. This move will greatly improve service by increasing the availability of records, adding ten new microfilm readers, and providing uncramped space for over sixty researchers. (For more details on the move, please see "The National Archives" in the Summer 1992 issue of *Irish Roots*, pp. 7-10.)

Registry of Deeds, King's Inn, Henrietta Street, Dublin, Ireland, contains extant records from 1708. The collection has deeds, leases, business transactions, and other records showing the transfer of property. There are some wills and marriage articles in this collection but these records usually show the giving of land to an heir or as a marriage settlement or dowry. Unfortunately, many of the earliest deeds were not recorded and those that were often did not give the exact location of the property which was involved.

These records have an index by year, by county, and by the Grantor, the seller, but not a Grantee, the buyer, so you must know who sold the property or transferred it to use the index effectively. With the Land Reforms Acts of the 1870's many small farmers purchased their land from the Irish Land Commission but that agency's records are not yet available.

The hours are 10:30-4 Monday-Friday. There is £ 1 fee per day. Photocopying services are available at £ 3 per memorial (deed). They are very slow.

A word to the wise—please wear old clothes and sneakers as the rooms could use a good dusting and ladies please wear slacks because you will have to climb up the ladders to get the materials on the top shelves. There is no sign on the building or directions

in the lobby to tell you where the research area is.

Genealogical Office, Kildare Street, Dublin, Ireland, contains the Office of Arms, printed family histories and manuscripts. While it is not open to the public for research, there are consultants available for a fee and this may help you organize your search and allow you to more efficiently use the various repositories.

The **Public Record Office of Northern Ireland**, Balmoral Avenue, Belfast, N.I. is the major repository for the six counties which make up Northern Ireland. Contained are the records for the counties of Armagh, Antrim, Down, Derry, Tyrone and Fermanagh. All the wills, deeds, and other vital records are located in one office. Remember that for birth records after 1922 in Northern Ireland you must go to Belfast but for the records prior to 1922 Dublin has copies.

This is a well organized and indexed archive and the Ulster Historical Foundation can provide help in doing genealogical research using all the records of Northern Ireland.

There are many smaller and less well-known places that might have information to help you bridge the gaps in your research.

Representative Church Body Library, Braemor Park, Rathgar, Dublin 14, contains materials related to the operation of the Church of Ireland. Vestry books, registers of parish organizations and activities are being gathered here. Also the diaries, correspondence and letters, the account books for their estates, biographical and genealogical notes about the Church of Ireland Ministers are being collected. Since there is a decline in the membership of the Church of Ireland, many churches are closing and sending their records here. The indexing is limited but the archivist is very knowledgeable. There is limited access so please contact the library before you go.

The Religious Society of Friends Historical Library, Swanbrook, Morehampton Road, Donnybrook, Dublin 4, collects the pedigrees and papers of many Quaker families. They are responsible for the Birth, Death and Marriage Records for all the Irish Quaker Meetings.

For Presbyterian church records contact the **Presbyterian Historical Society**, c/o Belfast Central Library, Royal Avenue, Belfast BT1 1EA, N.I. Some of the church registers and many of the minute books are kept in this repository as well as the history of the Presbyterian church and its ministers.

This is a brief overview of the major record centers in Ireland. Many of the local Heritage Centers are beginning to index cemeteries and parish registers from 1880 to the present but these are projects which vary in depth and quality. A list of the Heritage Centers is available from the Irish Tourist Board.

How far can we go back? Realistically if you can get to 1800-1820 with solid details and facts, you will be very lucky. The records were destroyed and once gone they can never be replaced. You must remember that most of the immigrants to America were poor tenant farmers who had few possessions and left few records. Good luck with your research and enjoy learning about the lives and times of your ancestors, not just the facts.

Irish Genealogy Books

Baxter, Angus, *In search of your British and Irish roots: a complete guide to tracing your English, Welsh, and Scottish and Irish ancestors*. Morrow, 1982.

Begley, Donal, ed. *Handbook of Irish genealogy*. Rev. ed. Heraldic Artists, 1984.

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Clare, Wallace, *Simple guide to Irish genealogy*. Irish Genealogical Society of London, 1966.