



Steps to Take to Find Your Elusive Irish Ancestor Presentation to GenealogyKC 2022 Presenter: John Manning

Background

- Irish genealogical research is often complex because of the lack of available records. Many researchers with Irish ancestry often become frustrated as they encounter brick walls. Brick walls should be recognized as part of Irish genealogy research. The Irish were meticulous about keeping records, and the Irish were careful about keeping records. Some that you may wish to review include General Register and Civil Office records; civil and religious parish records; land and tax records; etc.
- However, many critical records needed by genealogists have been destroyed over the years. Ireland has had its share of wars, famine, natural disasters, fires, and even the deliberate destruction of records, which impact our research. Let's examine some research techniques that can be used to help break through your brick walls.

Know the Difference Between Researching and Searching

- Both skills are necessary to help develop your family tree and start with a concise statement of your goals. Develop the research question, state the existing hypothesis, and understand the fidelity of the information you have to begin with.
- Research Steps:
 - Define the question.
 - It should be a straightforward directional question.
 - Assess your existing information.
 - Identify the gaps in your background information that must be filled in before working on the main problem. The work on these gaps becomes part of your methodology.
 - Analyze the information that you have.
 - Appraise your sources (e.g., how good is your evidence; does it come from viable sources; is there any bias or discrepancies in the information; does it require corroboration).
 - Develop your research strategy.
 - Identify specific records needed to investigate the research question.
 - Collect data.
 - Record each source you use with complete documentation. Add relevant observations about the source's quality, extent, etc. If the data source yields nothing, note that fact. If your findings are positive, read every word of the record you have found. Create an abstract of the information before moving on, as those details could significantly change the direction of your research.
 - Evaluate the information that you find.

- Results of each record should be recorded and analyzed. The searches that produced negative results should be interpreted just as thoroughly as those that yielded positive ones.
 - Report/write down the results of your findings.
 - Identify new gaps as a result of your analysis.
 - Change your research plan as needed.
- Searching for Information:
 - Decide what records to use.
 - Evaluate what records are most likely to help answer your research questions.
 - Assess your priority of the records needed, availability, and ease of use (indexed or not).
 - Consider the accessibility of the records needed.
 - Not everything is online. You may have to include a mix of online and on-site sources to answer your question.
 - Evaluate the information in the records found.
 - Do the records suggest other records that should be sought out?

Additional Tips for Finding an Elusive Ancestor:

Note: All of these hints assume that you have a well-thought-out and written research plan.

- Write down everything you know about the person.
 - Don't presume birth dates are correct. Expand the range of years in which the individual could have been born. Ages can vary dramatically from source documents, and this simple strategy will often yield dividends. If you have too many invalid results, you can expand or contract the number of years.
 - Location, location, location – Be less specific on the place. Remove the town, the county, or even the state, if necessary.
- Trace the siblings of your ancestor and their descendants.
 - Collateral relatives are those you are related to by blood but are not your direct-line ancestors (e.g., cousins, nieces, nephews, aunts, uncles, siblings, etc.).
 - Families living next to your ancestors, which might be relatives, such as in-laws or siblings, can lead to essential clues for research.
- Names – Pronunciation, Nicknames, and Spelling can be crucial.
 - "Standardized" spelling, particularly with family names, wasn't common until late in the 19th century.
 - Remove middle names, initials, etc. If you know that ancestor used their middle name instead of their first name, then remove the first name.
 - Try spelling variants or even a wildcard. Some names have multiple spellings, even within the same family.
 - Understand that transcription errors will be found in online sources. Always try to look for the original documents.
 - For females, try replacing the maiden name with the married name. You may have more luck finding her as a married woman rather than as a child.

- Look for location-specific documents to find your elusive ancestors.
 - Examine city, county, and state collections, which will help you discover the local history where your ancestor lived. These records come in many forms.
 - Examples include centennial histories celebrating town, county, and church histories. A caution here is that these documents were often derivative because the contributor may have used "inaccurate" (e.g., family lore) information when writing them.
 - Search for printed resources, including printed genealogies, local histories, record transcriptions and abstracts, and other materials. Compiled local records may contain your ancestor's information. These resources were generally written before 1925. Some online books and compiled local records resources can be found at:
 - The *FamilySearch Catalog* (<https://www.familysearch.org/en/>) (Some of these books are only available at the library in Salt Lake City)
 - *HathiTrust Digital Library* Digital Preservation Repository (<https://www.hathitrust.org/>)
 - *Google Books* (<https://books.google.com/>)
 - *Internet Archive* (<https://archive.org/>)
 - *WorldCat* (<https://www.worldcat.org/>)

Recommended Reading:

- Rising, Marsha Hoffman. *The Family Tree Problem Solver: Tried-And-True Tactics for Tracing Elusive Ancestors*, (Family Tree Books, 2011), ISBN-13: 978-1440311932.

Other Resources:

- Cowan, Crista. "Crafting a Genealogy Research Plan." Ancestry Channel, *YouTube*, 26 June 2012 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iZEJC7oruT0> : accessed 16 February 2021).
- Devine, Donn. "Plan the Attack." *Ancestry* 24, no.1 (January-February 2006): 51-53; *Google Books* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=MDgEAAAAMBAJ> : accessed 16 February 2021).
- Devine, Donn. "Use a Research Plan." *Ancestry* 14, no.3 (May-June 1996): 18-19; *Google Books* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=tCA0iOTHR1IC> : accessed 16 February 2021).