

# Handout for: Finding the Trail of the Irish Emigrant to Canada

## Research Tips and Suggested Records for Researching Irish and Scots-Irish Ancestors

### Government in Canada

*In Canada, there are three levels of government. Federal, provincial and municipal. Federal responsibilities include banking, trade, criminal law, national defense immigration and citizenship. Provinces are responsible for education, civil registration (of births, marriages and death), business licensing, health care, major highways, provincial policing, provincial infrastructure etc. Municipal responsibilities include local services such as local policing, firefighting, local road and park maintenance.*

Head of State: King Charles III; the Governor General represents the King in Canada; the Lieutenant General represents the King at the provincial level.

### Federal

The House of Commons makes Canada's Laws. Canadians elect representatives (Members of Parliament). The political party with the largest number of MPs forms the governments and its leader becomes Prime Minister. The Prime Minister chooses MPs to serve as ministers (portfolios such as education, health, finance) in the cabinet. They make important decisions about government policy.

The Senate reviews laws that are proposed by the House of Commons. Senators are chosen from across Canada by the Prime Minister.

### Provincial

The Legislative Assembly makes law at the Provincial level. Members are elected. The party with the most elected members forms the government and the party leader becomes Premier and is head of government in the respective province.

### Municipal

A mayor and council members are elected by the residents of the municipality. The elected members are assigned to committees to discuss local budgets, services and administrative issues.

When researching in Canada like elsewhere, it is important to keep in mind what and where you are looking in order to determine the right level of government and applicable authority that would have created the records you are looking for.

## Vital Statistics

### Civil Registration

Canada formed over several centuries. As it did, the colonies and later the provinces developed many of their own record systems. Even after confederation in 1867, civil registration of births, marriages and deaths, remained a provincial responsibility. Each province has its own range of years the data was collected, privacy restrictions and rules of accessibility.

The following link for Archives Canada gives details of how to access a range of vital statistics anywhere in Canada.

<https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/vital-statistics-births-marriages-deaths/Pages/births-marriages-deaths.aspx>

## Religious Records

We are all familiar with the Birth, Marriage and Death records kept by government officials. However these were not formally kept until the mid to latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century for most countries. Before these government records were kept the churches kept records of the Baptisms, Marriages and Burials. Early on the records varied considerably as some ministers were better record keepers than others. In remote communities in Canada, ministers had several charges in their care. In areas of low population, there were itinerant ministers who would ride a circuit over several weeks, staying in settlements while providing basic pastoring. These visits would be infrequent and depend on the season. When you read these minister records you can see many children baptized the same day or for people to baptize several children at the same time. Multiple weddings would be held back to back. Various genealogical societies, historical societies and libraries have compiled publications for their area. The early 19<sup>th</sup> century records are simple records. The later 19<sup>th</sup> century documents held much more information.

**Search Tip:** *Check both bride and groom's religion before marriage to find the rest of the family. Weddings were usually in the bride's church but she often took the religion of her husband.*

There are now over 40 recognized religions in Canada, but even in the 17 – 18th century, religious freedom was recognized. Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Scottish Kirk/Presbyterian, Congregationalist, Lutheran, Quaker, Mennonite, Jewish, Amish, Moravian, Doukhobor and others appear on the Canadian census records. For Irish immigrants the following resources are helpful.

- The Presbyterian Church Archives holds the records of those congregations who did not merge with the United Church of Canada; Reading room: 50 Wynford Drive, Toronto, ON; <https://presbyterianarchives.ca/genealogy/>
- The Anglican Church Archives Genealogical enquiries requiring baptismal, marriage, or burial parish registers need to be addressed to the diocese in which the event took place. If you don't know what diocese the event took place e-mail the General Synod Archives at [archives@national.anglican.ca](mailto:archives@national.anglican.ca)
- United Church of Canada Archives holds the Methodist Records and Presbyterian Records (for those congregations who merged); Reading room: 40 Oak St., Regent Park, Toronto, ON; <https://www.unitedchurcharchives.ca/>

*Research Tip: The United Church of Canada was formed in 1925 from the unification of the Methodist Church, the Congregationalist Church and about 50% of the Presbyterian churches. If a Presbyterian Church (<1925) joined the United Church of Canada, then their older records will be found in the United Church Archives.*

## Census Records

**Search Tip:** *Looking for Ulster-Scots in Canada? Look for Scottish surnames and given names but born in Ireland. Sometimes if the census taker asked for their ethnicity they would say Scottish though they or their parent was born in Ireland.*

Library and Archives Canada

<https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/census/Pages/census.aspx>

Family Search – Canadian Census

[https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Canada\\_Census](https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Canada_Census)

Ancestry – Canadian Census

<https://www.ancestry.ca/cs/census>

Automated Genealogy

<http://automatedgenealogy.com/>

### **Ladies auxiliary minutes**

Many ladies groups formed in various churches and communities. Although their minutes may not be published, often cookbooks, and other group projects list the members and their contributions in these simple publications.

### **Milestone and Centennial Church histories**

Numerous churches compiled church histories which name the ministers and key lay people over different eras, as well as the development and activities of the church. If a church has changed location, experienced a split or a rejoining, a reunion, renovation or a new building it will have been recorded. Photos appear of members of clubs and activities and church pageants, picnics and other activities.

### **Local Histories**

Centennial editions of local histories were commissioned for the Centennial in 1967 by the Canadian government – many of these have been republished at the millennium or at the sesquicentennial celebrations in 2017. It was hoped that many who had living memory of the pioneer generation could contribute and they did. (Some of the authors and contributors may still be alive to ask questions of).

Histories are by county, and often by township, town or village. Some are by land feature such as a beach or park, some are by commerce or trade that provided a major income source for the community or by subject: pioneer trails, black settlement, religious settlement, fur trade routes, mining and mill locations to name only a few.

Local histories of municipalities cover the development of the area. What land was surveyed and made available for purchase first? When did the roads go in? Who were in the first and subsequent waves of settlement? When was the land developed and how and to whom it was made available? What factors influenced early settlement greatly?

### **Maps**

Most of us are used to travel maps and basic geographic maps. When was the last time you looked at an agricultural map? A minerals or forestry map? A soils map? A population density map? A waterways map?

There are many different kinds of maps that can provide insight into the lives of our ancestors. If you take the time to look at an early gazetteer of the area you are researching you may find not only who your ancestors' neighbors were, but where the churches, schools and cemeteries were that were nearby. It may surprise you to discover that they didn't go to the closest church, but drove miles to one that they like the preaching better even if it was over the diocesan or county border from where they lived.

Links: Atlases & Gazetteers:

**The Canadian County Atlas Digital Project (McGill University)**

<https://digital.library.mcgill.ca/countyatlas/>

**The Changing Shape of Ontario (Economic Atlas of Ontario)**

<http://www.archives.gov.on.ca/en/maps/ontario-districts.aspx>

**Historical Atlas of Canada**

<http://www.historicalatlas.ca/website/hacolp/>

**Historical Boundaries of Canada**

<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/territorial-evolution>

**National Atlas of Canada Online:**

<https://www.nrcan.gc.ca/maps-tools-and-publications/maps/atlas-canada/10784>

Collections:

**Association of Canadian Map Libraries and Archives**

<http://www.acmla-acacc.ca/>

**Library and Archives Canada –Maps, Plans and Charts**

<https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/maps-charts-plans/Pages/maps-charts-architectural-plans.aspx>

**McMaster University Library Collection of Fire Insurance Plans**

<https://library.mcmaster.ca/collections/fire-insurance-plans>

*Many Universities and Libraries now hold these plans in digital form. Check the databases in the area you are researching.*

**University of Texas – Map collection (surprisingly they have many Canadian maps!)**

<https://maps.lib.utexas.edu/maps/historical/>

**University of Toronto Fire Insurance Plans**

<https://mdl.library.utoronto.ca/collections/maps-atlases/fire-insurance-plans>

## Topographic Maps of Canada

### Natural Resources Canada

<https://www.nrcan.gc.ca/maps-tools-and-publications/maps/topographic-maps/10995>

### Toponymy:

**Search Tip:** *Early settlers showed ties to former communities in their choice of place names, many reminiscent of their old homes.*

### Canadian Geographical Names Database

<https://www.nrcan.gc.ca/earth-sciences/geography/querying-canadian-geographical-names-database/canadian-geographical-names-database/19870>

Ontario Locator – an excellent tool for finding names of places in Ontario, both past and present

*(Tip: spelling must be exact; there is no soundex. There is a full index to scroll through but there is no search).*

<http://www.geneofun.on.ca/db.php>

### Other Websites:

#### Canada At Scale

[https://epe.lac-bac.gc.ca/100/206/301/lac-bac/canada\\_at\\_scale-ef/www.lac-bac.gc.ca/maps/index-e.html](https://epe.lac-bac.gc.ca/100/206/301/lac-bac/canada_at_scale-ef/www.lac-bac.gc.ca/maps/index-e.html)

#### CanGenealogy - Resources compiled by author Dave Obee and others

<https://www.cangenealogy.com/index.html> [Genealogy.com](https://www.cangenealogy.com) Family History -some early pages were developed (2006) by Hugh L Armstrong that remains useful, especially for maps and info of Ontario.

<https://www.cangenealogy.com/armstrong/censusmain.htm>

#### Global Genealogy – map of southern Ontario including counties and townships

<https://globalgenealogy.com/countries/canada/ontario/resources-ontario-map-of-counties.htm>

#### Photo collections at Libraries, Museums and Archives

Check into what may be available in photo collections in the area you are researching. You may find a photo of the bakery wagon used in the family business, or a group photo at a celebration honouring a family or business. Architecture and streetscapes are popular. Public events, school events and class pictures are another way to trace a family name. Your relative may have won best in class at the local fair for their vegetables or pie! The type of wagon or car used at the time and the attire (hairstyles, jewelry and clothing) of people in the photos may help you to date your own photos.

#### City and Rural Directories

These are not only interesting for your ancestors from the last two centuries but can also be useful for tracing modern day descendants. They are public documents and they allow for name and location,

even addresses and phone numbers of people. Directories can also give you a clue as to when street names changed, split to east and west, north and south, or when they was a continuation or when it was demolished. Older directories listed occupations, related business addresses or telephone numbers. You can also use them to locate a specific house, especially if the house number changed.

In the older directories, occupations were listed as well as municipal and rural addresses. It will list if the property was held by freehold or by tenancy which is very helpful in determining who to look for in land records. Business listings, owners and locations are given. Once again, pay close attention to who the neighbors were.

The older directories were published every two or three years allowing us to determine whether a family stayed in one place or follow them if they moved. Always look at the person taking over the property and check to see if they may be a relation such as a married daughter or nephew.

An example of Directories can be found at <https://theancestorhunt.com/blog/free-online-ontario-city-directories/#.X8e7yrM1hpg>

### **Voter's Lists**

Again, these are available publicly and many are on-line through Ancestry and others sites. The wonderful thing about voters' lists is that they group the eligible voters by household if you look past the individual name search. Occupation is sometimes given as well as address.

<https://www.canadiana.ca/>

### **Tax Records**

If you find where your people were living and have an address, then a good place to look next is for the property tax records. Each householder was evaluated. Information on the family size and composition, the house-holders occupation and the valuation of the home is recorded. Township offices or city halls usually have this information in their archives, though it not likely they will be indexed or digitized.

### **Funeral Home Records**

Many funeral homes have passed into succession. Sometimes their records are kept by the new owners, other times the older records are donated to a museum, library or archive. The funeral directors notes are often very useful when used in conjunction with the cemetery records. Small details like who has paid for the cemetery plot, which John or James in the family is the father of the deceased, or if the interred was a relation (don't presume they always are!) or other acquaintance.

The funeral home also takes care of helping the family write and publish the obituary and funeral cards, notices etc. These are kept in the files and may define the relationships within the family as well as give you clues as to other relationships, affiliations or memberships that can provide useful leads for further research. In more recent years, funeral homes have provided online obituaries and information.

### **Cemetery Indexes and Notes**

The cemetery indexes and the side notes in their files offer further secondary evidence of family relationships, financial assets, medical information and cause of death. Not all graves have headstones or ones that have survived. Listed in the plot notes are the names of others buried in the same plot that you may not even know were there. Cemeteries have been the topic of hot discussion this past forty

years and many new ones have been documented, restored and caretaking has been undertaken. Old stones have been found under decades of sod and broken stones salvaged. It's worth another look. Older editions of these are often donated to the local library or archive for public access. Some larger cemeteries like Beechwood in Ottawa have digitized their older records. They are searchable on-line.

### **Headstones**

In Canada cemeteries and graveyards can be large near a city or very small and in a corner of a farmer's field. There is on-going work to record these in every province. Some cemeteries have gone to the trouble of digitizing records and making them available on-line, others you have to contact the church office and ask for a transcription of family names you are interested in. Depending on the denomination and their rules access can be easy or challenging. Contact a local library or archives to see what is readily available already in their collection. They will likely save you considerable time.

[https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Canadian\\_Headstones\\_-\\_FamilySearch\\_Historical\\_Records](https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Canadian_Headstones_-_FamilySearch_Historical_Records)

<https://canadianheadstones.ca/wp/>

### **Newspapers**

We think of newspapers for obituaries, birth and marriage announcements. Did you ever think of looking for your family's business ads? Think about your own life. Were you ever in the paper? For what reasons? School or sports coverage, graduation, engagement, anniversaries, promotion, retirement, volunteer groups and activities, legal notices, business and military accomplishments may have been covered in articles and photos. Tragic stories as well as happy ones are all covered. Many newspapers today have digitized their collections. They may not be on-line on Ancestry or Newspapers.com but it doesn't mean you can't look something up.

### **Court Records (Provincial level)**

Many court records are public documents even to current day. Wills, probates, land records, insolvencies, bankruptcies, divorce, civil court cases etc. This collection is huge and requires a much larger summary but bears mentioning. Court records are Provincial in jurisdiction except for the federal court (Supreme Court). Civil and Criminal Cases are handled by different courts. Search the province of interest for research guides specific to their collections.

*Research Tip: Wills and probate are handled by courts. Depending on the value of the estate, not all wills were probated. In earlier times a farmer's main asset was his farm and improvements. If passed on to a family member, the will likely won't have been probated. Instead you may find the will attached to the land records for the property. A search of the land registry index can be worthwhile for documents like wills, but also mortgages, quit claims and sales (called barter and sale) where property was transferred to or between family members.*

### **Land Records**

Early land records in Canada included information on petitions, settlement duties, land grants and sales. Often a will was attached to a land record as if only the land and its improvements was being willed. This was cheaper in cost than probate.

Using census records to identify where a family was living is a good start. Ancestry.ca is an easy to use tool for navigating this, though the records are on Library and Archives Canada and Family Search etc.

Only four census of Canada have surviving schedules which include detailed information beyond the enumeration sub-district of where the family was located.

- 1851 of Canada West started on 12 Jan 1852
- 1861 of Canada West started on 13 Jan 1861
- 1871 of Canada started on 2 Apr 1871
- 1901 of Canada started on 31 Mar 1901

The 1851 and 1861 censuses of Canada West are generally easier to use, as they are name indexed. Township, Lot and Concession are given for residents as well as the size of the property and how it was utilized for farming. One advantage is being able to see who the neighbours were in the immediate farming community. Keep notes and include information about the property description. Many 200 acres lots were split into halves or quarters. East, West, North or South half is important when searching in the Abstract Index books for documents. The number of acres in the description will help discern whether it was the whole lot or a portion.

<https://library-archives.canada.ca/eng/collection/research-help/genealogy-family-history/Pages/land-records.aspx>

### **Military Records**

Military records are held by Archives Canada and can offer a great deal of information. Following the activities of a campaign may not give much in the way of detail on your ancestor, but adds background for place and time. Early militias were comprised of those in one's community. Fathers, brothers, uncles, cousins, served side by side in protecting their community. Pensions and land entitlements are often recorded giving a lead to further research in Land Records.

<https://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/how-to-find-service-records>



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