



RESEARCH GUIDE

Finding your UK and Ireland ancestors on Ancestry

It's no secret that the U.S. has close ties to England—just check any history book. Genealogically speaking, descendants of immigrants from the British Isles, including Ireland, make up a significant portion of the U.S. population today.



ENGLISH IMMIGRATION

English immigration to the U.S. began in the 1600s, but particularly large waves came around 1870 and from 1881 to 1890 when difficult living conditions in the UK during the Second Industrial Revolution motivated people to leave their mother country.

IRISH IMMIGRATION

Irish immigration began a bit later, with one of the most significant waves occurring between 1847 and 1860, spurred by the Irish potato famine. By its end, hundreds of thousands of Irish had escaped to America in overcrowded ships. Immigration rose again between 1881 and 1890, as crop failures and religious and political strife rocked Ireland.

Tip: Create timelines for families to help you quickly view the key events in the family tree. Include migration, key life moments, and local events that may have affected your ancestor.



Settlers from England helped found the New World, and emigration from the British Isles has continued ever since.



Locating Their Arrival

While Ancestry provides a huge collection of U.S. passenger arrival lists, finding details about your British ancestor's trip can hinge on when they arrived in the New World.

KEY DATES	WHAT YOU'LL FIND
Colonial period through 1819	Passenger lists weren't required, but some ship captains retained lists of all aboard. Search the Passenger and Immigration Lists Index to see if a record of your ancestor's arrival exists. Records in this collection date back to the 1500s.
1820-1893	U.S. began requiring passenger lists be kept; however, details on these lists are somewhat limited. To successfully identify an ancestor in a less-detailed list, look for the full family unit. Compare names, location information, dates, and any other available details to facts you've discovered in later U.S. records about the family to determine if the person could really be your ancestor.
1893-1906	Sixteen new fields added to passenger lists, including marital status, last residence, final destination, literacy, and financial status. Use each of these to help you determine if you're looking at the correct person.
1906-Onward	Manifests required to include a physical description of the passenger and place of birth; shortly thereafter, name and address of the closest living relative in the country of origin were added, too. Use the latter to help you locate the family in the homeland.





Steps to Discovering Your British Roots

STEP 1: BEGIN WITH RECORDS CREATED BY THE FAMILY IN THE U.S.

Start with the most recent records, including the 1940 and 1930 U.S. censuses, military draft registration cards, yearbooks, obituaries, and other records at Ancestry.

How: Click on the Search tab at Ancestry to get started. Input the name of an ancestor who would have been living during the 20th century. Include other details—birth year, residence or birthplace, and names of other relatives—if available.

What to look for: Click on the results returned and inspect the details. Family names, ages and relationships, birthplaces, occupations, and addresses can help you determine if you've found the correct family. Scan horizontally across the page to see all of the information.

Where next: Use the information you discover to search for the same family moving back in time. Census records are full of details, and 20th-century censuses include information about immigration and/or naturalization, so try to find each one your family appears in.

Tip: *Your British family line may run very deep, but you'll still want to start your search in records created most recently and march back step by step until you find the ancestor who was born on foreign soil. That way you'll know you're researching the right family and the right immigrant.*

Kitchen Samuel E. Head	R 45	W 5	M	W	46	M
Louise wife H			F	W	44	M
Frank R. Son			M	W	18	S
Sherman James R. Roomer			M	W	32	M
Grace Roomer			F	W	26	M
June Roomer			F	W	5	S
Kitchen George S. Son			M	W	44	S

Use the information you discover in a census record to populate your searches for earlier records.

First & Middle Name(s) Last Name
 Exact... Exact...

Place your ancestor might have lived Birth Year
 Exact to... Exact +/-...

SEARCH Show fewer options Match all terms exactly

Add event: Birth Marriage Death Lived In Any Event More ▾

Year Location

Exact +/-... Exact to...

Any Event

Exact to...

Add family member: Father Mother Sibling Spouse Child

Spouse First & Middle Name(s) Last Name

Exact Exact to...

Child

Keyword

Gender Race/Nationality

Collection Focus

Historical Records Family Trees
 Stories & Publications Photos & Maps

SEARCH Clear search

STEP 2: FIND THE IMMIGRANT IN THE IMMIGRATION AND TRAVEL COLLECTION AT ANCESTRY

Once you know who the immigrant was—and have their name, approximate birth year, and other identifying details from census and other records—search for records directly related to their immigration.

How: Click on the Search tab at Ancestry. From the Special Collections list on the right side of the page, select Immigration & Travel to limit your search to records from this collection. Fill in the search form with details you've discovered about your family's immigrant—name, birth year, year of arrival—and search.

Special Collections + CARD CATALOG

Historical Records

Birth, Marriage & Death

Birth, Bapti
Marriage &
Death, Buri

Immigration & Travel

Passenger Lists

Citizenship & Naturalization Records

Border Crossings & Passports

More...

Immigration & Travel

Passenger Lists

Citizenship & Naturalization Records



Note that the form contains fields for names of other family members, locations where they may have lived, where they arrived in America, and more. You can fill these details in later if you get too many results, but be careful: immigration details reported years later on a census may not be entirely accurate.

What to look for: The Immigration & Travel collection includes passenger arrival lists, naturalization (citizenship) documents, passport applications, and other records that link to a person’s international travel. Compare dates, family members, and other details you find on an Immigration & Travel record to the information you’ve already collected about your ancestor to see if you’ve found a match.

Family name	Given name	Tr.	St.	Sex	Age
Ventura	Frank	7/11	W		
—	Anna	7/11	W		
—	Peter	7/11	W		
—	Thomas	7/11	W		
—	John	7/11	W		
—	Charles	7/11	W		

Census record with Teresa Ventura’s family

Family name	Given name	Tr.	St.	Sex	Age
Ventura	Teresa	7/11	W		
son	Francesco	1.5			
"	Luigi	1.3			
"	Esquale	10.0			

Passenger list with the right Teresa shows the same family members and age ranges but with ethnic-equivalent given names.

Family name	Given name	Tr.	St.	Sex	Age
Ventura	Teresa	25			
son Verghetti	Giuseppe	4			
daug.	Angelina	2			
son	Geno	8			

Passenger list for a different Teresa Ventura can be ruled out because children’s names and ages don’t match the later U.S. census record.

Tip: Discrepancies exist. Details in immigration and naturalization records may not mirror what you’ve found elsewhere. Census immigration dates may be off by a few years, and even first and last names can differ slightly (even English-speaking immigrants sometimes changed names or their spelling after arrival). Carefully analyze all finds and assess them against known facts to be sure you have the right person.

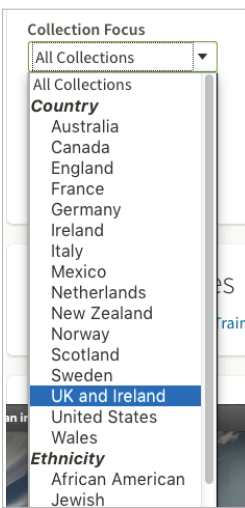
Where next: With any research, it helps to know where your ancestors lived before immigrating to the U.S. to find them in records created in the homeland. But even without a specific hometown, you may be able to locate later immigrating British ancestors in census records at Ancestry by focusing on the full family. Learn as much as you can about children, parents, and siblings after immigration through U.S. census records, passenger lists, and naturalization documents first. Then compare this information to UK census records; birth, marriage, and death records; and more to see if you’ve found the right family. Remember, though, once you trace the family back before civil registration and the 1841 census, you’ll need the hometown name so you can search church records there.





STEP 3: USE NAME, BIRTH DETAILS, AND PLACE INFORMATION TO LOCATE YOUR ANCESTOR IN RECORDS CREATED IN THEIR HOME COUNTRY.

Use the same steps you use for U.S. research on your ancestors from Britain. Start with the most recent records you're likely to find them in—remember that census records are key resources abroad, too. Make special note of the entire family. You can use these details to help you follow them back through time.



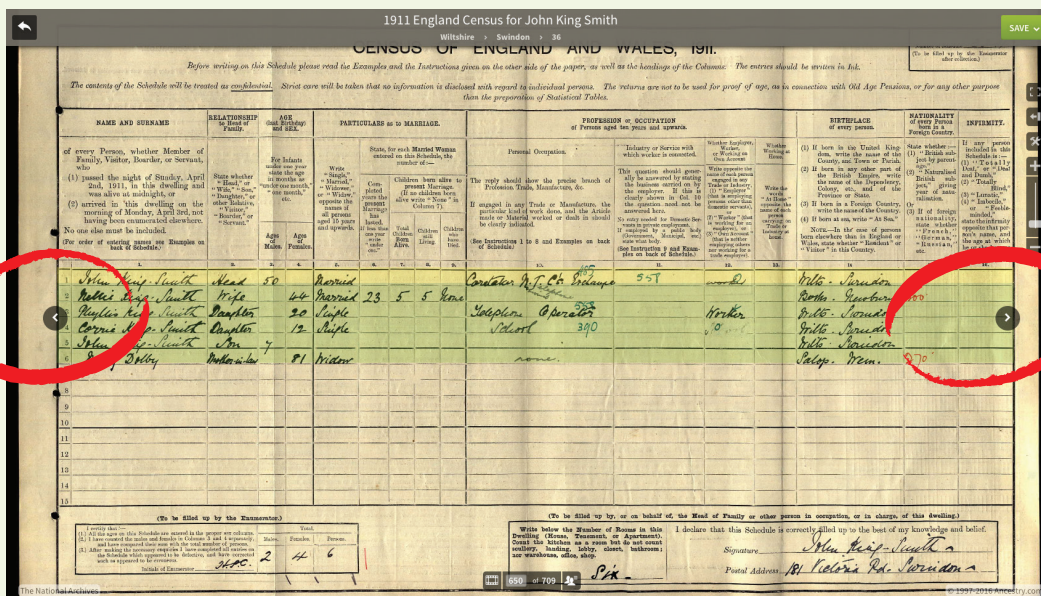
How: Click on the Search tab at Ancestry and choose Show more options. At the bottom of the form is a Collection Focus option. Select “UK and Ireland” to focus your search on records created there. (Be sure to clear these settings before your next search of all records.)

Where next: UK records at Ancestry are vast. Birth, marriage, and death records for some locations in England date back to the 15th century, and UK and Wales census records go back to the middle of the 19th century.

Immigration records, too, are extensive. Family members may have migrated to North America, Australia, or any of a number of other locations. Use details you discover in UK census records to explore all of these possibilities.

Irish records at Ancestry include key collections centered around land ownership, making the discovery of a hometown that much more important. Learn more about finding your family in these records in the appendix at the end of this guide.

England began sending settlers to the U.S. in the 17th century. Fortunately many of those early colonists were great record keepers—a boon for family historians.



Tip: Go forward and backward. Often records at Ancestry are more than just a single page long. Be sure to click on the document image and use the arrows to page forward and backward to see if there's more information about your ancestor.



Helpful Information

Good To Know:

English colonists may not appear on traditional passenger lists, but they may show up in books and stories related to America's early history. Search these local histories directly by selecting Stories, Memories & Histories from the Special Collections box on the Ancestry search page.

Inspect smaller collections, too. You may find details about a family member in something like Irish Relatives and Friends, a collection of information-wanted classifieds from a New York City weekly, or records from the New York Emigrant Savings Bank, which was set up to assist Irish immigrants after the potato famine.

Your ancestors may not have been married when they came over. Try searching for female ancestors using a maiden name.

Special Collections + CARD CATALOG

Historical Records

- Birth, Marriage & Death**
- Birth, Baptism & Christening
- Marriage & Divorce
- Death, Burial, Cemetery & Obituaries

Census & Voter Lists

- U.S. Federal Census Collection
- UK Census Collection

- Stories & Publications
- Stories, Memories & Histories**
- Newspapers
- Periodicals & Magazines

- Photos & Maps
- Pictures

Tip: Directly search a single record type, such as Social & Place Histories, by clicking on it from the Special Collections box, accessed via the Search tab.

5 Tips For Tricky Names

What's in a name? A lot when an ancestor is using it to play hide-and-seek. These five tricks, however, may help you beat them at their own game.

Trick 1

Lengthen and shorten names. And remember that more than one ancestor may have changed a surname. Search the Internet for variations and also check Ancestry message boards.

Trick 2

Try a wildcard search using asterisks to replace some of the letters in a name. For example, if the surname was Berlengauem, B*rl*g*m* would produce it as well as Burlingame and other variants.

Trick 3

Search by criteria. Forego the surname and search using birthplace, age, gender, occupation, and other details to find people who match the ancestor you're seeking. Pay special attention to the names in your search results. Do any of them seem to be reflected in your family?

Trick 4

Follow your ancestor back in time by address in a city directory. You may get lucky and discover that, while the name changed, the residence remained the same.

Trick 5

Listen for stories. There may be more truth in those tales than you realize, including a clue about a person's birth name, a maiden name, or a previous spelling.





Appendix: Irish Research

Once you find an Irish immigrant in U.S. records, you need to discover where he or she was from—either a county in Ireland or, better still, a hometown. Search the following U.S. records for mentions of the Irish home.

AT HOME

Search attics for mementos, including wedding announcements, postcards, and letters sent from Ireland, any of which could give you names of relatives who remained back home, other family members, and addresses that point you to a hometown in Ireland.

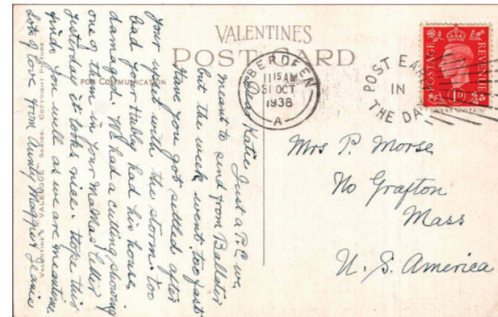
IN THE CENSUS

Check birthplaces listed on census records. You may discover that the ancestor you thought was your family’s first immigrant was actually the immigrant’s child, cousin, or in-law. Begin with 20th-century records and search for the whole family—parents, siblings, and grandparents, too—and look for year of immigration in those records. Can’t find the immigrant? Keep working back and follow siblings as well. One of them may lead you directly to the immigrant.

PLACE OF BIRTH		
Place of birth of each person enumerated and of his or her parents. If born in the United States, give State or Territory. If of foreign birth, give country in which birthplace is now situated. (See Instructions.) Distinguish Canada-French from Canada-English, and Irish Free State from Northern Ireland		
PERSON	FATHER	MOTHER
18	19	20
New York	Northern Ireland	Pennsylvania
Massachusetts	Wisconsin	Massachusetts
Austria	Austria	Austria

WITH FRIENDS AND RELATIVES

Ever notice how many people on a single page of a census seem to be born in the same country? It could be the result of chain migration. Often a single immigrant would arrive in America, land a job, and send word of opportunity back home. Soon more family and friends would immigrate and send for their family and friends. For researchers, these ethnic enclaves can provide all manner of clues: maiden names, hometowns, extended family lines. Do a little digging and also check message boards to see who’s researching the neighbors. They may have some details you’re looking for, too.



ABOARD A SHIP OR CROSSING A BORDER

Irish immigration to America peaked around the time of the Great Famine; unfortunately, passenger lists were notoriously stingy with details then. But those mid-19th-century lists do hold the names of other passengers who may have been your ancestor’s friends or relatives and fantastic record keepers. Snoop around their family lines to see where they went and if their paths crossed your ancestor’s again. If you can’t find a passenger list for your ancestor, consider that at times it was cheaper and simpler to travel to the U.S. via Canada. Your Irish ancestor may have crossed the border immediately or even a generation or two later.

IN CHURCH

Baptisms, weddings, funerals, and more took place in churches. Use census records and city directories to find your ancestor’s address; then search for surviving churches near the family home. Contact the church to inquire about records created when your ancestor lived in the neighborhood. Also call the local library, which may know of other resources you haven’t yet considered.



Appendix: Irish Research

27	813	Mary x Barrett	381 1 st Ave Harlem, NY	Minor Domestic	1861 Brooklyn NY Limerick, Co Galway, 1850
30	847	Mary x Conlan	285 Ave B	None	Prussia, 1871, Rhein Co Monaghan, 1848, Slane
19	894	Patrick x [unclear]	21 Laurent St Nicholas White Water	Domestic	

Emigrant Savings Bank entry

ON A DOCKET

Court records aren't just for the criminally inclined (although those records are full of detail you won't find elsewhere). In the Tax, Criminal, Land & Wills collection at Ancestry, you'll also discover real estate transactions, small business dealings, records from the Emigrant Savings Bank, probates, and more. Search for all members of the family, read records carefully, and check to see if the names of witnesses sound familiar, too. They may also be family.

IN THE MILITARY

Draft registration cards from World War I and World War II can be brimming with family details, including hometown, occupation, and name of nearest kin. For earlier arrivals to the U.S., Civil War-era records—pensions, muster rolls, the 1890 Veterans Schedule, enlistments, and others—may be even more revealing.

3	Date of birth	Nov 17, 1896
4	Where born	Ireland Irish
5	<input type="checkbox"/> I am <input type="checkbox"/> I have declared my intention <input type="checkbox"/> I have declared my intention	
6	Place of birth of father	Ireland Irish
7	Father's language	Ireland Irish

BETWEEN THE LINES

Family stories may not always be entirely accurate, but they're often full of names, places, and relationships and can help you figure out when your ancestor was where. Use them to build a timeline that you populate with details from the records you find. And enjoy the tales, which give you a better idea of the characters in your family tree.

MAKING HEADLINES

A graduation, engagement, or even a visitor from out of town—any of these might have been big news at the time. Look in local newspapers for daily comings and goings as well as bigger events. If your family is full of city dwellers, ask the local library if there were smaller, neighborhood or Irish-specific publications.

Frank Knox.
 Frank Knox of Cambridge, a salesman of the J. B. Wright Seed Co., died suddenly in Cambridge yesterday from a heart attack. Mr. Knox was born in Belfast, Northern Ireland, the son of Mary

AT THE CEMETERY

A simple tombstone may hold the birthplace or middle name you've been trying to locate for years. The one next to it could offer an elusive maiden name. Families often stayed together, even in death, so a trip to the cemetery could introduce you to distant family lines you may not have heard of and other details your ancestor surely wanted you to know.

