10 PLACES TO FIND YOUR IRISH ANCESTOR IN AMERICA

1. 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.

2. 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 same records. Can’t find the immigrant? Keep working backwards and follow siblings as well. One of them may lead you directly to the immigrant.

3. 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 Member Connect to see who’s researching the neighbors. They may have some details you’re looking for, too.

4. 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, 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.

5. 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.
6. **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 and Wills collection at Ancestry.com, 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.

7. **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 census, enlistments and others – may be even more revealing.

8. **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.

9. **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. And if your family is full of city dwellers, ask the local library if there were smaller, neighborhood or Irish-specific publications.

10. **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.

5 Tips for Discovering Your Ancestors in Ireland

Following your Irish ancestors back to the records they created in Ireland seems like a natural next step, but if you're not armed with just the right information, the search can be slow-going. Use the following tips to help make your journey through Irish property records, including Griffith’s Valuation at Ancestry.ca, as simple as possible.

Get the Real Name. You want the true Irish name, the one your ancestor was born with here. Search passenger arrival lists in Canada for the name of an immigrant ancestor used back in Ireland — these may have been Canadianized after only a short time in Canada. Look for church records and consider family naming patterns as well. Also check websites that include Irish equivalents to common Canadian names.

Birth Dates Are Important. A relative who was a child between 1848 and 1864 likely won’t be listed in this collection of landowners and tenants, but his or her parent might be.

Cast Wide — at First. Start your search with the county and narrow to parish or townland if necessary.

Browse Around. Once you know where your ancestor hailed from, look at landowners and tenants nearby. You may discover other names that sound familiar to you — possibly friends and relatives who later immigrated to the Canada, too.

Go Beyond Your Ancestor. Search for other family members, too. Find clues to the extended family on passenger lists, in obituaries, and birth announcements, in family trees and in correspondence and other family mementos.