

Tracing Your West Cork Family Tree.

The motivations to trace your family tree are many. For some it is the desire to know where you came from. Others are primarily motivated by a desire to learn how their ancestors lived through the great events of history. Whatever your reason for tracing your family tree, to be successful you must know how to go about this task and the difficulties you will inevitably meet.

So where do you start? The best place to start looking for your ancestors is among the living. Interview and record the older members of your family. Go through memorabilia and bric-a-brac. Old Mass cards, photographs, newspaper clippings etc. may contain vital clues though they may not be immediately obvious. Once you have gathered this information the next step is to confirm what you have found and to expand your tree. There are a number of records available to you for this purpose. These include:

Census Records: These contain a wealth of information about your ancestors including ages and occupation. Unfortunately all of Ireland's 19th century census records were destroyed either deliberately, or during the destruction of the Four Courts in 1922. However the 1901 and 1911 census returns are available to the public.

Census Substitutes: The main substitute for the loss of the 19th century census records is Griffith's Valuation. This mid 19th century document lists of all the property occupiers in the country and was used to levy rates. Griffith's also links the name to a plot of land or house which can be identified in the Ordinance Survey maps of the time. Therefore not only can you identify your ancestor but you can also identify where they lived.

Another census substitute is the Tithe Applotment books. These were an earlier tax list but contain less information and are less consistent than Griffith's. Other sources of information are town directories and newspapers. These are mainly of use if your ancestors followed a trade or were of the middle or upper classes.

Vital Records: Civil records of birth, marriage and death commenced in 1864. Records were kept locally and also compiled centrally in Dublin. Unfortunately there is no means to search these records locally so a trip to Dublin to the General Registrar's Office in the Irish Life Centre is required for extensive searching.

Church Records: Most parish records begin around 1820 and record birth and marriages. However these are normally not indexed. Also these are the private property of the church and are not generally available to the public. However in recent years these records are slowly being computerised and are being made available through heritage centres. Unfortunately many Church of Ireland records were destroyed in the Four Courts.

A number of problems now face the family historian. The first is where to find records. The main source of information for today's researcher is the internet. There are many sites available to help. See below for a list of common sites. For anyone in the Skibbereen/Schull area they are lucky to have the resources at the Skibbereen Heritage Centre where they have the 1901 & 1911 census, Griffiths, Tithe Applotment and other records for the area. Their records have largely been computerised and therefore are easy to search. The centre has also begun computerising the local church records and currently have records for Aughadown, Castlehaven, Skibbereen, Rath, Caheragh, Schull, Goleen, Drimoleague and Drinagh parishes. The researcher is charged a fee for searches.

Another problem facing the researcher is to untangle the web of names and make sense of them. This is made more difficult in West Cork because of the predominance of a small number of surnames and the small pool of christian names used. However our ancestors developed methods to overcome these problems. These include the use of a secondary surname such as McCarthy Bhan etc. Try and find out if your family had such a secondary name as they were often recorded in 19th century records. Christian names often followed a pattern, first son named after the paternal grandfather etc. Knowing this pattern is often a very useful guide to determining which family is yours.

Other problems include difference in spelling of names and places between the 19th century and now and the lack of any records before the 1820s. Some difficulties the researcher will learn to overcome others, such as the lack of records, we must just accept.

Tracing your family tree can be difficult and frustrating, however the rewards far outweigh the problems encountered. While this article is in no way a complete guide, hopefully it will start you along the way.

Happy hunting!

Tracing Your Family Tree Useful Websites

Census

<http://census.nationalarchives.ie> Currently 1911 only, 1901 to follow.

<http://www.askaboutireland.com> Griffiths Valuation including maps.

<http://www.failteromhat.com/> John Hayes site. Griffiths, Directories etc.

<http://www.ancestry.com> USA, British and Canadian census returns (pay site)

Vital Records

<https://www.familysearch.org/> a lode of databases including the index of Irish civil records from 1864 to 1958. (C of I marriages from 1845)

<http://www.groireland.ie/> General Register Office, includes information on ordering certificates.

<http://freebmd.rootsweb.com> vital record index for England and Wales

Emigration Records

<http://www.ellisland.org> New York 1892-1923 & <http://www.castlegarden.org> New York pre 1892

<http://www.ancestry.com> New York, Boston and other US ports, also loads of other databases (pay site)

<http://www.findmypast.co.uk/> A wealth of British records. Emigration , including Ireland to 1922 (pay site)

Church Records

<http://www.rootsireland.ie/> Irish Family History Foundation records. Search free, pay for details.

<http://www.irishgenealogy.ie/> Kerry and some Dublin records.

Other Sites

<http://www.irishnewsarchive.com> Historical Newspapers including "The Southern Star" (pay site)

<http://www.southernstar.ie/> has free access to their on archives.

<http://www.movinghere.org.uk> Immigration into UK. Many Irish records including Loan Funds.

<http://www.eppi.ac.uk> Irish Parliamentary Papers from 1801-1922.

<http://www.nationalarchives.ie> National Archives included searchable databases.

<http://www.rootsweb.com> Free information and databases, mainly American.

<http://www.skibbheritage.com> Skibbereen Heritage Centre.

<http://www.bookfinder.com> Second hand books.

<http://www.igp-web.com/cork/Naming.html> Naming Patterns.

<http://www.rootschat.com/forum/index.php/board,56.0.html> Rootschat's Cork message board.

<http://www.osi.ie> Ordinance Survey Ireland. Includes 1842 and 1903 maps.

Local Family Websites

<http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~colin/DriscollOfCork> O'Driscolls

<http://www.omahonysociety.org/> O'Mahonys

<http://www.ginnisw.com> Swanton family

<http://www.westcorkgenealogy.com/> Fahy Family and many others

<http://www.fastnetweb.ie/wmcasey/> Casey, Finn families

<http://www.iolfree.ie/~whooley/> Whooley family

<http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~becher/> Becher family