

“Which Matthew O’Neill is Mine?” Approaches to Irish Genealogy

Jake Fletcher

jfletcherfamilygen@outlook.com | travelyourgenealogy.com

The notion that Irish genealogy is extremely complex is more myth than fact. There are obstacles due to significant record losses in Ireland, but with a good foundation in the methodologies and approaches to genealogical research, seemingly static brickwalls can be broken down. A foundational rule for anyone undertaking genealogical research is to work from the known to the unknown. Work in the records of your Irish ancestor’s adopted country before moving into Irish Records. This presentation focuses on techniques and technology to help pull your ancestor out of the haystack and also how to locate the exact place of origin in Ireland.

Part 1: Strategies for Separating Identities

I. Timelines

Creating a chronological timeline of your ancestor is a great tool for visualizing the information you have collected. It is useful for comparative analysis and revealing gaps in your research. Most family tree programs put our ancestor’s events chronologically, but I would suggest using MS Word or Excel to string several tables together. This is useful because you can compare the timelines of several family members or people with the same name when you are trying to prove the identity of your ancestor.

II. Evidence Analysis

When fact discrepancies arise in Irish genealogy, as may often be the case, how do discern a source with “quality” information from others? In recent years, genealogy has developed standards and definitions for classifying and analyzing evidence gathered in genealogical research.

Source	Information	Evidence
Original	Primary	Direct
Derivative	Secondary	Indirect
Authored Work	Indeterminable	Negative

Further reading on evidence analysis and genealogical research standards:

1. Devine, Donn. "Evidence Analysis," *Professional Genealogy: A Manual for Researchers, Writers, Editors, Lecturers and Librarians*. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 2001.
2. "The Genealogical Proof Standard," *Board for Certification of Genealogists* (www.bcgcertification.org/resources/standards.html: accessed 22 Sep 2016).
3. Jones, Thomas W. *Mastering Genealogical Proof*. Arlington, VA: National Genealogical Society, 2013.
4. Mills, Elizabeth Shown. "Quick Lesson 17: The Evidence Analysis Process Map," *Evidence Explained: Historical Analysis, Citation & Source Usage* (<https://www.evidenceexplained.com/content/quicklesson-17-evidence-analysis-process-map>: [22 Sep 2016])

III. The FAN Principle

Genealogy brickwalls often come crashing down because we conduct research on our ancestor's **FANs – Friends, Associates, Neighbors**. Examining our ancestor's FANs or "social network" is very important to understanding more about their lives. The Irish rarely migrated and lived in isolation; patterns of chain migration exist in all immigrant communities. Therefore, to employ the FAN principle in Irish genealogy, we examine the sources left by the people in our ancestor's social network to assist in discerning their exact Irish origin.

Further reading on the FAN principle:

1. Mills, Elizabeth Shown. "Quick Lesson 11: Identity Problems & the FAN Principle," *Evidence Explained: Historical Analysis, Citation & Source Usage* (<https://www.evidenceexplained.com/content/quicklesson-11-identity-problems-fan-principle>: [22 Sep 2016]).
2. Mills, Elizabeth Shown. *QuickSheet: The Historical Biographer's Guide to Cluster Research (the FAN Principle)*. (Baltimore: GPC, 2012).

Part 2: U.S. Records Helpful in Tracing Irish Origins

I. Census Records

1. Index and images to 1790-1940 U.S. Federal Census and State Census Schedules on FamilySearch (familysearch.org/search).

II. City Directories

1. "U.S. City Directories, 1822-1995," on Ancestry.
2. Check libraries, genealogical societies, and historical societies.

III. Church Records

1. Once the family historian has determined the location and denomination of their ancestor, they can begin to seek out baptisms, marriages, and burial records from the local churches.
2. Archives held by the church or central organization
Catholic Diocesan Locator/Directory (www.usccb.org/about/bishops-and-dioceses/diocesan-locator.cfm)
Episcopal Diocesan Library and Archives of Massachusetts (www.diomass.org/content/archives)
3. University Archives, Historical/Genealogical Societies, and Libraries
4. FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/catalog/search>)

IV. Burial Records

1. Contact the local cemetery office or check their website for an index.
2. Findagrave (www.findagrave.com)
3. Billiongraves (<https://billiongraves.com>)
4. Interment.net (<http://www.interment.net>)
5. US GenWeb (www.usgenweb.org)
6. WorldGenWeb (www.worldgenweb.org)
7. RootsWeb (www.rootsweb.ancestry.com)
8. Names In Stone (www.namesinstone.com)

V. Land Record/Probate Records

1. Use locality guides, i.e. FamilySearch Wiki (familysearch.org/Wiki/en/Main_Page) to check who has custody of land and probate records by county.
2. Some have been abstracted in genealogical journals and publications.
3. For help with understanding legal terms, see Henry Campbell Black, *A Law Dictionary: Containing Definitions of the Terms and Phrases of American and English Jurisprudence, Ancient and Modern*. 2nd ed. (St. Paul, MN: West Publishing Co., 1910.) Available on Google Books.

VI. Naturalization Records and Passenger Lists

1. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) holds custody of naturalization petitions filed in Federal Courts (and some state courts), as well as passenger lists for ships arriving in U.S. Ports. Original records are in the custody of NARA's regional branches and many have been microfilmed. Contact info for all NARA facilities can be found at www.archives.gov/locations.
2. Entries for series of immigration records can be found in NARA's online catalog (www.archives.gov/research/catalog)
3. Through partnerships with NARA, Ancestry and FamilySearch have a significant holding of these records and related indices.

4. For naturalization records in courts below the federal level, check state court archives and county record offices.
5. Ellis Island (libertyellisfoundation.org)
6. Castle Garden (www.castlegarden.org)
7. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) Genealogy Services – www.uscis.gov/genealogy

VII. Newspapers

1. The Search for Missing Friends, Irish Immigrant Advertisements Placed in the Boston Pilot, 1831 – 1920 (infowanted.bc.edu)
2. Voices of the Irish immigrant: information wanted ads in “The truth teller: New York City, 1825-1844” (catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/008452754)
3. Library of Congress *Chronicling America* (chroniclingamerica.loc.gov)
4. Old Fulton – New York Post Cards (fultonhistory.com)
5. The Ancestor Hunt (theancestorhunt.com)
6. Boston Public Library E-Resources (www.bpl.org/electronic)

VIII. Military Records

1. To find service records, you must know your ancestor’s name, unit, rank and/or designation before searching military records.
2. Many of NARA’s collections are digitized on their partner websites - Ancestry, FamilySearch, and Fold3.com.
3. Visit my website (travelyourgenealogy.com) and click on the pages “Research Toolbox”, “Genealogy Tips and Tricks”, and “U.S. World War II Genealogy” to go deeper into military records.

IX. Special Collections

1. Conduct keyword searches in manuscript search engines such as ArchiveGrid (<https://beta.worldcat.org/archivegrid>) and Library of Congress’ NUCMC (<https://www.loc.gov/coll/nucmc>)
2. Look through the websites of repositories such as genealogical societies, historical societies, libraries, and museums to find guides and finding aids for their collections.
3. Some manuscript sources that may help with tracing Irish origins are:
 - a. Newspapers
 - b. Almshouse/Hospital Records
 - c. Bank Records
 - d. Military Records
 - e. Occupational Records
 - f. Records of Fraternal Organizations

Online links for some special collections:

1. Tewksbury Almshouse Intake Records (www.digitalcommonwealth.org/collections/commonwealth-oai:v405sk05p)
2. Massachusetts State Hospital Records (travelyourgenealogy.com/researchtoolbox)
3. New York Almshouse Intake Records (olivetreegenealogy.com/almshouse)
4. Ancient Order of Hibernians (<http://www.aoh.com/archive-sites/>)
5. Catholic Order of Foresters (tiara.ie/forest.php)
6. Knights of Columbus (www.kofcmuseum.org)
7. John J. Burns Library, Boston College (libguides.bc.edu/burns)

Part 3: Researching Irish Place Names

I. Historical Maps/Gazetteers/Place Name Directories

Reference List for Irish Place Names

1. *General Alphabetical Index to the Townlands and Towns, Parishes and Baronies of Ireland: Based on the Census of Ireland for the Year 1851*. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 2000. Available at the The IreAtlas Townland Database (see below).
2. Lewis, Samuel. *Topographical Dictionary of Ireland*. London, 1837. Available at LibraryIreland (see below).
3. Mitchell, Brian. *A New Genealogical Atlas of Ireland*. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 2002, 2nd edition.

Online resources for researching Irish place Names

1. John Grenham's Website (johngrenham.com/places/)
2. Townlands in Ireland (townlands.ie)
3. The IreAtlas Townland Database (thecore.com/seanruad)
4. Ordinance Survey of Ireland Maps (maps.osi.ie/publicviewer)
5. LibraryIreland (libraryireland.com/Places.php)
6. Logainm.ie
7. Google Maps and Streetview (maps.google.com)

IV. Further Reading for Irish Genealogy

1. Daly, Marie E. & Lucey, Judith. *Genealogist's Handbook for Irish Research*. Boston: Newbury Street Press, 2016.
2. Grenham, John. *Clans and Families of Ireland: The Heritage and Heraldry of Irish Clans and Families*. New York: Chartwell Books, 2014, 2nd edition.
3. Grenham, John. *Tracing Your Irish Ancestors*. Dublin: Gill & Macmillan Ltd., 2012, 4th edition.

4. Ryan, James G. *Irish Records: Sources for Family and Local History*. Salt Lake City: Ancestry, 1997.
5. Various Authors. *A Guide To Tracing Your [County] Ancestor Series*. Dublin: Flyleaf Press. See www.flyleaf.ie