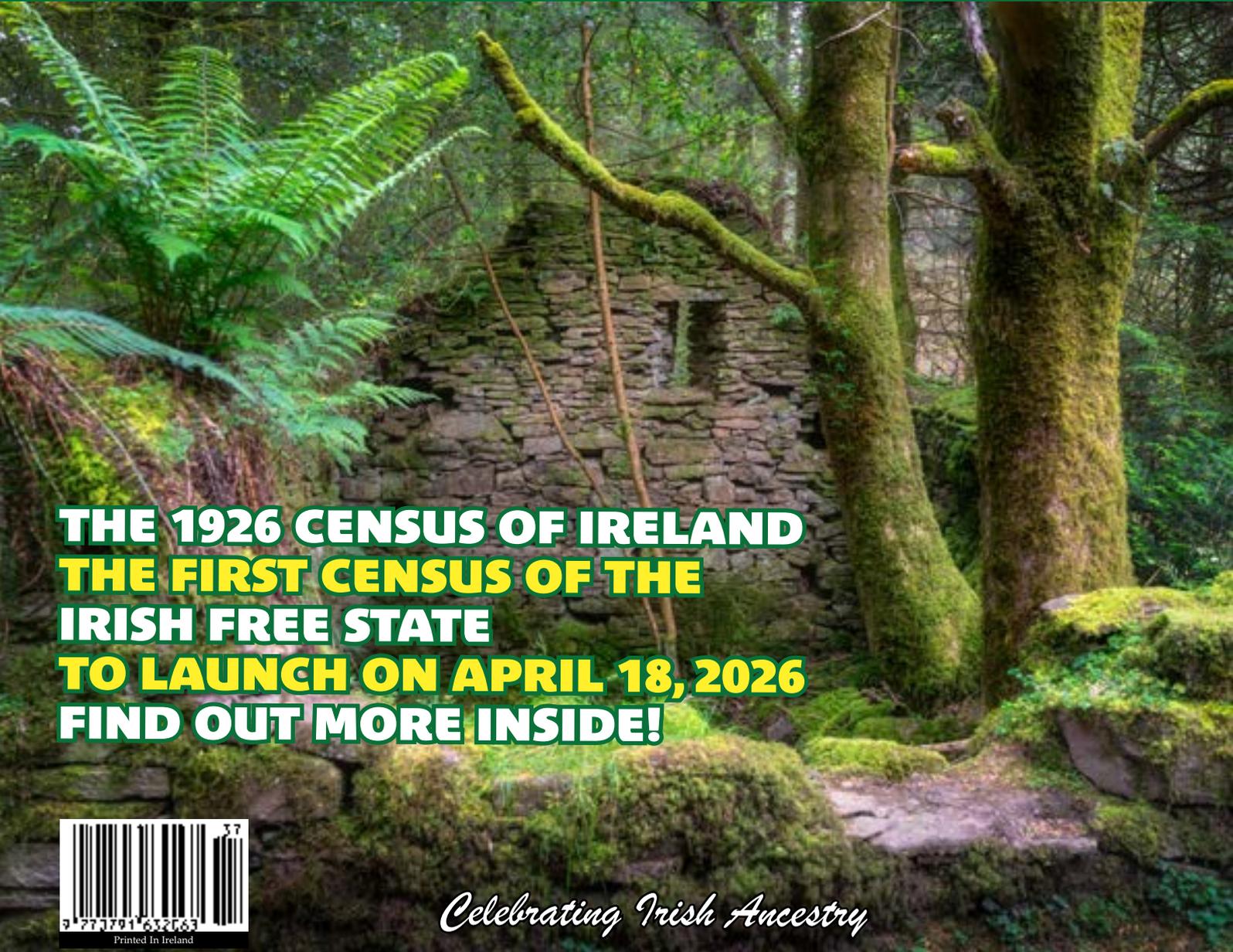




Irish Roots



THE 1926 CENSUS OF IRELAND
THE FIRST CENSUS OF THE
IRISH FREE STATE
TO LAUNCH ON APRIL 18, 2026
FIND OUT MORE INSIDE!



Printed in Ireland

Celebrating Irish Ancestry

Unlocking The 1926 Census Of Ireland - Making The Most Of Its Release.
How To Handle Unexpected DNA Results And The Best Way To Proceed.
Distinguishing Between Families With The Same Surname In Local Areas.
On What Ship And When Did Your Irish Forebears Arrive In Australia?
News From The World Of Genealogy, Keep Up To Date With The Latest Irish
Genealogical Record Releases, Books Selections, Letters To The Editor,
Ancestral Research Tips And Lots Lots More!

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CONTENTS

- 4 News
- 5 And Another Thing
- 6 An Ode To Ballyphehane, Co. Cork
- 7 Helpful IGRS Genealogical Tips
- 8 How To Handle Unexpected DNA Results
- 10 Local Resources For Family History Research; County LAOIS
- 13 Books Ireland
- 14 Society Notes
- 16 Unlocking The 1926 Census of Ireland
- 18 Kilmacurragh, Co. Wicklow And The Great War:1914-1918
- 20 What's New? - Review Keep Up To Date With The Latest Irish Genealogical Record Releases
- 22 Surnames Of County Laois
- 24 Letters; Home From Home
- 26 Australian Irish Connections; On What Ship And When Did Your Irish Forebears Arrive?
- 28 The 1926 Census Of Ireland: The First Census Of The Irish Free State
- 30 A Question Of Genealogy
- 31 Facebook Friends

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A few words from the editor

Welcome to our Spring edition of Irish Roots magazine, 2026. We are all looking forward with great anticipation to the release of the Census of Ireland 1926 on the 18th of April next, exactly one hundred years since the day it was first enumerated. It will give us greater insight and pause for reflection on the lives our ancestors lived at that time when the Irish Free State was practically just beginning.



I am mindful of the sad passing of one of my neighbours from the next townland to where I grew up in Co. Cork. Tessie (Teresa) Kelleher nee Murphy of Lisnaboy. Tessie would have remembered the time of the Census been taken. She passed away recently in her 108th year. She had a strong memory and imagine what a wealth of fascinating stories she could recall. Her birth year, 1918, signalled the end of the First World War, 1914-1918. Among other milestone events of that year, was the ability for women over the age of 30, who owned property, being granted the vote for the first time in December 2018. The year of the Census enumeration, 1926, was notable for many events also. On the 1st January, of that year, Douglas Hyde, the first President of Ireland, launched the Irish Free State broadcasting service. On Sunday, 5th September 1926, a fire broke out in a cinema at Dromcollogher, Co. Limerick in which forty-eight people tragically lost their lives, most likely they had been recorded in the Census earlier in April of that year, just a few short months prior to their deaths.

In this issue, as well as a mixture of items heralding the good news of the 1926 Census, we also have an interesting mix of articles including *Handling Unexpected DNA Results*, contributed by Donna Rutherford, pages 8/9. County Laois features in this issue with *Local Resources For Family History Research*, contributed by James G. Ryan, pages 10/11 and *Surnames of County Laois* by Seán Ó Murchadha features on pages 22/23. Reporting from Australia our esteemed and long-time contributor, Jennifer Harrison, brings us another informative article on pages 26/27 posing the question; *On what ship and when did your Irish forebears arrive?* Finally, we are sad to say that one of our most outstanding contributors who has tirelessly kept us up to date and greatly informed of record releases and genealogical news, Claire Santry bids us adieu in her final *What's New Review?* Column on pages 20/21. We are so grateful to Claire for all her work over the past 14 years, (where on earth did all that time go to) but we wish her all the very best for her future endeavours and she might very well treat us to an occasional article from time to time going forward.

The great feast of our very dear Patron Saint of Ireland, Saint Patrick is fast approaching, and we wish all our readers at home and overseas, all the joy and blessings of this sacred day on March 17. Lá Fhéila Pádraig Sona daoibh agus Beannachtaí Naomh Pádraig oraibh go léir.

Maureen



Stone ruins nestled among the Slieve Bloom mountains which link between counties Laois and Offaly. Image by Dawid K Photography.

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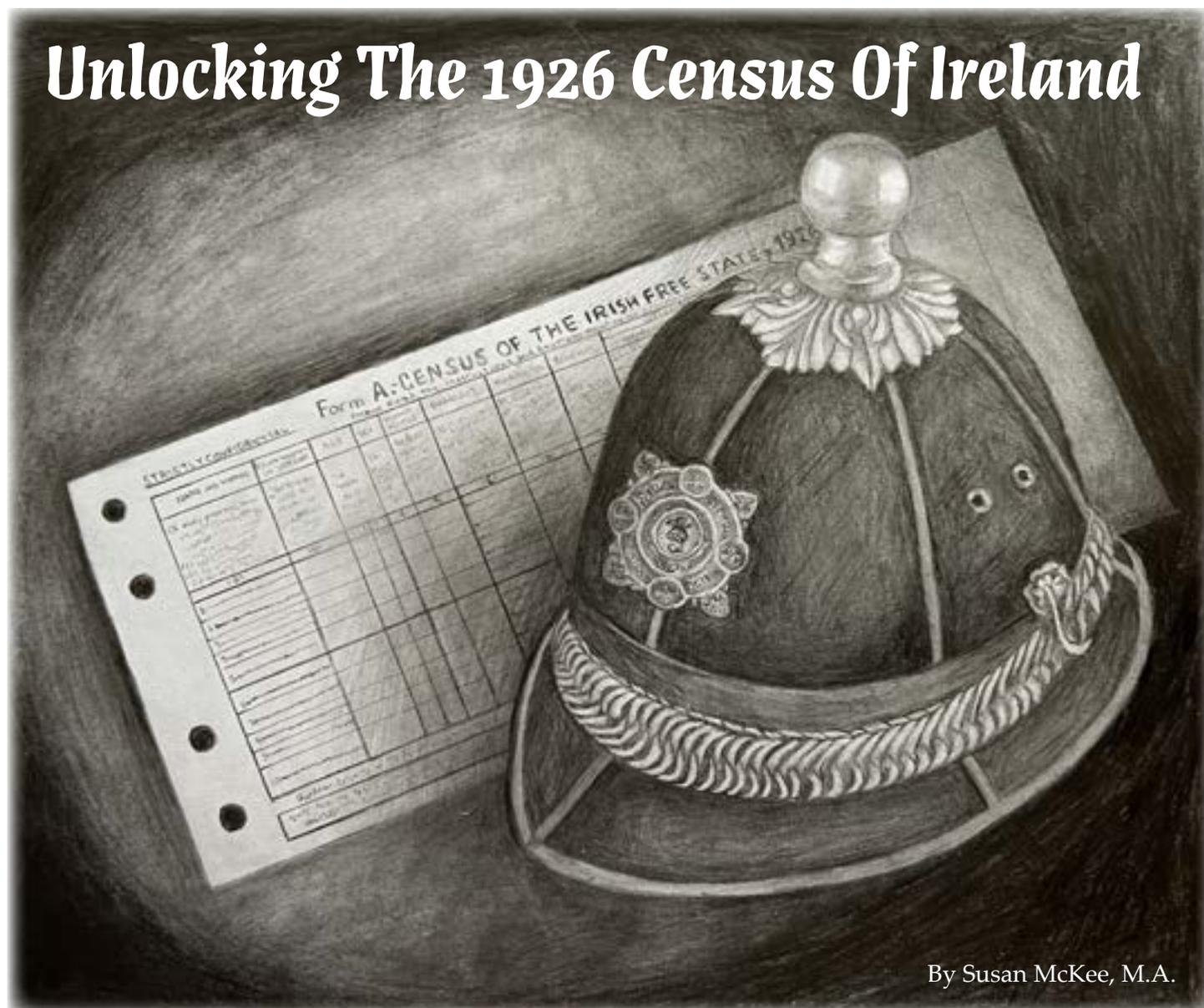
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Unlocking The 1926 Census Of Ireland



By Susan McKee, M.A.

The digitized 1926 Census of Ireland will be released on 18 April 2026 by the National Archives of Ireland (NAI), exactly one hundred years after it was administered. For family historians, the census is distinctive for the range of personal, family, and occupational information it recorded at a pivotal moment in Ireland's history. This article outlines how the census was organized and what was asked, preparing genealogists to make the most of it upon its release. The census will be freely accessible at: <https://nationalarchives.ie/collections/search-the-census/>

Background

Historic First Census of the Irish Free State

Carried out following the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922, the census recorded the population at 2,971,992 on 18 April 1926, a decrease of 5.3% from 1911. The fifteen years between the two censuses were marked by political and social upheaval resulting from war, pandemic, revolution, and civil conflict. As one of the first routine acts of government, this census demonstrated that the Free State had moved from revolution to governance.

Continuity of the Census, Division of the Country

Despite the preceding revolutionary decade, the 1926 census closely

resembled the 1901 and 1911 censuses carried out under British rule. This administrative continuity occurred in the structure of the household form, the core questions asked, and the use of existing local enumerators.

A major difference was the exclusion of the six counties of Northern Ireland due to partition in 1921. These were enumerated by the government of Northern Ireland on the same day as the Free State census, but the returns were later lost. Published census reports survive and are available through the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA): <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/1926-census-reports>

Who Supplied the Census Information

The Statistics (Census of Population)

Order, 1926, legally prescribed how the census was to be conducted, what information was to be collected, who was required to provide it, and the forms to be used. It contained sample forms, detailed examples, and instructions for enumerators on how the forms were to be filled out. The Order is available at: <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1926/sro/76/made/en/print>

Responsibility for supplying census information rested primarily with the head of household, or an equivalent person acting in that role. Similar responsibility was placed on those in charge of institutions and vessels within the jurisdiction of the Irish Free State. Heavy fines awaited anyone who did not comply, up to twenty pounds and/or up to three months in prison. Census distribution and collection was carried



By Seán Ó Murchadha

Laois derives from Loígis, the name of a tribe that was based in the general area of what is now the modern county. Initially the area was part of the medieval Irish kingdom of Osraige (anglicised as Ossory). The kingdom covered most of what is now most of modern County Kilkenny, parts of Laois, and Tipperary. The area of modern Laois that was not part of Ossory was divided amongst who we now call the Seven Septs of Laois- Moore, Lalor, Doran, Dowling, Devoy, Kelly and McEvoy. These prominent families, as well as other Gaelic families in the area, suffered under the control of initially the Normans and later the Tudors. In 1548, the English confiscated the lands of the O'Moores, the most prominent Gaelic family of the area. On their lands they built what was initially known as Campa or the Fort of Leix and then Maryborough. The area was shired in 1556 by Queen Mary and in her honour it was named Queen's County

The English administration attempted a plantation in the county in 1557 but such attempts didn't succeed until the defeat of Gaelic Ireland at the Battle of Kinsale and the Flight of the Earls. The varieties of surnames in the county was further enriched with the establishment of a settlement of Quakers in 1659 while in 1696 a number of Huguenot families settled in Portarlinton. With the establishment of Irish independence in the 1920s,

Queen's County was renamed Laois while the county town of Maryborough became Port Laoise. Whilst the names listed here are not a comprehensive of those in the county they do give a sense of the surnames found there. Some minor names have been included as it is mainly in County Laois that they are associated with. Even though some of the names listed here are also found in other parts of Ireland, they have specific links to County Laois.

Moore

Ó Mórdha. From a personal name meaning 'great, proud, stately'. A chieftain family in Laoise, their chief fortress was the still magnificent fortress of Dunamase. After being defeated by the English in 1609, the Moores and many of the most prominent septs were transplanted to Kerry, where they settled in the area of Tarbert. However many returned to their native territory. In Ulster the name may be of English origin signifying someone who lived near a moore.

Kelly

Ó Ceallaigh. A name meaning 'bright-headed'. From this originated the surname Ó Ceallaigh which is the name of at least seven to ten distinct septs of Kelly in Ireland. The most important and numerous sept is that of Uí Máine (Hy Many), an area covering east Co. Galway and the southern part of Roscommon. In

Laois, there were two Kelly septs - one controlled a territory on the modern border of Laois and Kildare while the second sept was based in Maigh Drúchtain, now the modern barony of Strabally in Laois.

Lalor

Ó Leathlobhair, descendant of Leathlobhar', a personal name from leath 'half' (ie 'somewhat') and lobhar 'leprous, sick, unhealthy'. They were located near the famous 'Rock of Dunamase'. Some of the main leaders of the sept were transplanted to Kerry where Lawlor is the usual anglicisation of the name.

Dowling

Ó Dúnlaing - a north Leinster name meaning 'descendant of Dunlaing, an early personal name which may mean 'fort-jumping' (or 'fort-attacking'). The 'n' in the name is softened in pronunciation. Sometimes the name is anglicised as Doolan. Their territory lay