



# Irish Roots

**Discover Family History Resources  
For Tracing Your  
County Kerry Ancestors!**



*Celebrating Irish Ancestry*



Printed In Ireland

**100 Years, One Wedding And A Census Mystery - Read More Inside!**

**How To Access, Research And Use The 1926 Census Of Ireland.**

**Irish Surnames And DNA: Rethinking What We Thought We Knew.**

**The Prendergast Letters: An Insightful Look Into One Family's Life In The Famine Era.**

**Discover A Brief History And Background To The Many 'Surnames Of County Kerry'.**

**Keep Up To Date With Irish Genealogy; News, Books Selections, Letters To The Editor,  
Research Tips And Tools And Lots Lots More!**

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## A few words from the editor

Welcome to the summer edition of Irish Roots magazine. In this issue Steven Smyrl takes us back to 1908 when the Old Age Pension was introduced in Ireland. Applicants had to have reached 70 years of age in order to claim and many would be claimants had to resort to Census Returns to establish their age. Their applications in turn have created a valuable genealogical resource for today's researchers, see page 5.



Donna Rutherford gets us *Rethinking What We Thought We Knew* when it comes to Irish Surnames and DNA, see pages 8 and 9. James G. Ryan takes us to County Kerry this quarter where more wonderful resources for family history research are waiting for you to tap into on pages 10 and 11. One resource that James G. Ryan references in his article is an impressive collection titled *O'Kief, Coshe Mange, Slieve Lougher, and Upper Blackwater in Ireland*. The collection was diligently compiled by Dr Albert E. Casey (1903-1982), Professor of Pathology, Medical College of Alabama, U.S.A. Casey published 16 tomes of this rare and magnificent accumulation of local and Irish history and genealogy between 1952 and 1961. A visit in 1950 to his ancestral locale in Co. Cork sparked his interest in recording the genealogical and historical records of the general area of the upper Blackwater river which straddles the county bounds between north west Cork and east Kerry. Dr. Casey's father, Eugene Joseph Casey was born in Knocknagree, Co. Cork in 1868. He became a National School teacher and taught for one year at Gneeveguilla National School, (1885-1886). He emigrated to find work in the USA. As a child, Dr. Casey often heard his father recount stories of his beloved Ireland inspiring Dr. Casey to visit his ancestral homeland and hence the collection commenced.

Dr. Casey engaged researchers in Ireland to compile various aspects of historical information for him which he kept adding to his *O'Kief, Coshe Mange, Slieve Lougher, and Upper Blackwater in Ireland* collection. The full collection is held in various libraries worldwide and [Ancestry.com](http://Ancestry.com) has indexed part of the work. It is estimated that approximately 3 million individuals are listed across the full series, a truly impressive body of work to say the least!

Hilary McDonagh presents us with '100 Years, One Wedding And A Census Mystery' on pages 16 and 17. Kay Caball posts details of 'The Prendergast Letters' on pages 18 and 19, and staying in County Kerry, Seán Ó Murchadha shares details of history and folklore of Surnames from the County on pages 22 and 23. These are just some of the articles on offer in this issue, the full listing is available opposite in the contents section. Wherever your research takes you this summer, we hope that you enjoy the journey! Have a wonderful summer!

Maureen



100 Years, One Wedding And A Census Mystery - see pages 16 - 17. Image courtesy of the McDonagh Family Collection.

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IRISH ROOTS  
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**From 1909 Until 1922, A Complex Internal Administration Evolved In The Public Record Office Of Ireland (PRO) To Facilitate Thousands Of Applications Seeking To Provide Evidence Of Their Age From Original Census Returns Which Would Often Then Be Used To Apply For The Old Age Pension. Steven Smyrl Has The Details Of This Delightful Genealogical Resource!**

Recently, I got thinking again about Irish census returns, and not because of the recent online launch of the Irish Free State's 1926 Census, but because I had to check my annual Pay Related Social Insurance (PRSI) contributions which ensure that in due course I will receive my state pension. I turned 60 late last year, so thought I ought to ensure I had all my I's dotted and T's crossed. And now you're wondering just how I made the leap from PRSI to census returns.

Ireland was still a part of the United Kingdom when the Old Age Pension (OAP) was first introduced under the Old Age Pensions Act 1908, championed by the social reformer David Lloyd George, who was Chancellor of the Exchequer in Herbert Asquith's Liberal government. The Act introduced a non-contributory scheme funded directly from taxation, which officially began 1st January 1909. It provided a small, weekly, means-tested payment of 5 shillings to successful claimants aged 70 or over who met specific criteria. Incrementally, this eventually led to the establishment of a contributions-based scheme providing a pension for all in retirement – including me in six years' time.

But returning to the beginning, in 1909 in order to secure a pension, claimants had to prove that they were aged 70 or more. Therefore, to qualify any claimant would have to have been born no later than 1839, and in Ireland this immediately raised problems about how to obtain reliable evidence. Civil registration of births in Ireland only began on 1st January 1864, 25 years too late. In addition, in some parts of Ireland the baptismal registers in many parishes and congregations, irrespective of religious denomination, only commenced in the 1840s and 1850s. For instance, in Co. Mayo the baptismal registers of 37 of its 50 catholic parishes commence later than 1840.

What was the answer? The 1851 census returns (and to a lesser degree, those for 1841) which by then were held by the Public Record Office of Ireland (PRO). From 1909 onwards, until the destruction in 1922, a complex internal administration evolved in the PRO to facilitate the thousands of applications which over the next number of years were submitted by those seeking evidence of their age from original census returns, which many went on to use in an application for the old age pension.

Searches were undertaken on foot of information supplied by applicants which was then entered up on to forms, nicknamed Green Forms (though sometimes they were an off-orange colour). An applicant supplied their name and current address, their approximate date of birth, their

parents' names, and an idea where the family lived at the time of the 1851 census. This wasn't a free service; it attracted a fee of at least two shillings and six pence.

Despite the destruction of the original census returns in 1922, the Green Forms survive from about 1915 and run up to just before the destruction of the PRO. As an alternative to the original returns, they are invaluable. Not just because of the information noted on them supplied by the applicant, but because the staff in the PRO had in most cases, after successfully identifying the family, meticulously transcribed the census data for the whole household on to the form.

The application, for example, of Rebecca Smith demonstrates how useful these forms are, even when they result in a partial 'no trace'. She applied under her married name, Mrs Rebecca Duncombe, 8 Ballard's Lane, Cork, aged about 72 (thus born about 1849). Her parents were George and Elizabeth Smith, with a note that Elizabeth's maiden surname was either Reynolds or Renahan. George was a tinplate worker.

An 1851 census return was found for a Smith family, which matched most of the information supplied, but which failed to record anything about a daughter called Rebecca. Returned were George Smith, tinplate worker, aged 34, married in 1838; his wife, Hannah, aged 30; and a son, William, aged 8. Also noted on the form were two family members who had died in the preceding decade, and who were presumably children to George and Hannah: Joseph Smith, died in 1842 aged 1 month, and Harriett Smith, died 1844 aged 5.

Was this the correct Smith family, suggesting that as Rebecca was not recorded, she was younger than she thought? Or was it simply another Smith family entirely, with similar names? Either way, the clerk scribbled a note at the foot of the form stating that "...a further search here would be useless. Returned [the fee of] 2/6."

Several thousand of these forms have survived and are now available to search for free on the website of the National Archives of Ireland. In light of the destruction of the original census returns in 1922, maybe we genealogists can be thankful for those zealous PRO clerks whose work a century ago, checking for evidence of age, is still paying dividends to this day.

Steven Smyrl is former President of Accredited Genealogists Ireland. [www.accreditedgenealogists.ie](http://www.accreditedgenealogists.ie) and chairman of the Irish Genealogical Research Society. [www.irishancestors.ie](http://www.irishancestors.ie)



# Surnames of

## County Kerry

By Seán Ó Murchadha

The County of Kerry in the original Irish is Ciarraí or Ciarraige and means the 'people of Ciar' which was the name of the Gaelic tribe who lived in part of the present county. Ciar in Irish means black or dark brown while the raighe suffix means 'people or tribe'. County Kerry first appeared as a separate shire in 1232, and was at that time part of a royal grant given to the Earls of Desmond. The county was once divided between the territory ruled by the Gaelic Mac Cárthaigh sept in the west of the modern county and that ruled by the Anglo-Norman Fitzgeralds. The Geraldines controlled the wider territory of Deasmhumhain ('south Munster', anglicised as Desmond). 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 Kerry that they are associated with or originate in.

**O'Sullivan. Ó Suilleabháin.** The root word of this surname is súil, 'an eye' with some suggestions that the name was originally Súilidhubhán- a rare personal name meant 'dark-eyed'. The surname is the most common name in Munster. They originated in South Tipperary but the sept was forced westward by the Norman invaders into Cork and Kerry. They were divided into several sub-septs: O'Sullivan Mór and O'Sullivan Beare were the chiefs of the two most important septs. The former were based near Kenmare in Kerry while Ó Súilleabháin Béarra were based in County Cork.

**O'Connor.** The name relates to several distinct septs. The name in the original Irish is Ó Conchobhair, from a popular personal name meaning 'lover of hounds'. Con is the genitive of cú 'hound'. Cú often relates to a wolf or sometimes is a metaphor for a warrior while *Cobhar* signifies affection. Cobhar is related

to the word Cara 'friend'. The most powerful of the O'Connor septs emerged in Connacht while in Munster the O'Connor sept was known as O'Connor Kerry. Prior to the Norman invasion they were Lords of an area of Kerry lying between Tralee and the Shannon. With the encroachment of the Fitzmaurice and others their territory was scaled back to a district on the Limerick border.

**MacCarthy. Mac Cárthaigh.** From the word Cárthach 'loving'. One of the leading septs of Munster. They were exiled from Tipperary but became the dominant force in Desmond. For almost five centuries they dominated Munster with four distinct branches with the MacCarthy Mór the leading branch. They were strong in their resistance to English rule until the destruction of the Gaelic rule in the early seventeenth century.

**Fitzgerald. Mac Gearailt.** Fitz is Norman-French for 'son of and Gerald is Germanic in origin meaning 'spear-rule'.

One of the most powerful families to settle in Ireland as part of the Anglo-Norman invasion and became known as the Geraldines. The family had two main divisions when they established themselves here. Those of Desmond controlled large sections of south Munster. One of the titles given to them was the Knight of Glin, a title still in existence today. The second family was based in Kildare. Their title was the Duke of Leinster and included the famous Silken Thomas who rebelled and was executed by Henry VIII.

**O'Donoghue. Ó Donnchadha.** From a personal name meaning 'brown warrior'. While the name is also found in Galway and Cavan, the most important sept was based in Desmond. Originating in Cork they were driven from their homeland by the MacCarthys. They settled in southwest Kerry, splitting into two major groupings- Ó Donnchadha Mór based near Killarney and O'Donoghue of the Glen, based in Glenflesk.