



# Irish Roots

**Researching Your  
Scots-Irish  
Ancestors**

**How Comprehensive  
Are Irish Civil  
Records?**



*Celebrating Irish Ancestry*

**Using DNA To Help You Find The Cousins Who Were Left Behind.  
Clan Callaghan; The O Callaghan Family Of County Cork.  
Motherhood And Ambiguous Grief In The First World War.  
Keep Up To Date With The Latest Irish Genealogical Record Releases.  
News From The World Of Irish Genealogy, And Lots Lots More!**



By Donna Moughty

Do you have a brick wall? If you're like me, you probably have a number of them. If you've gotten as far back as records exist where your ancestors lived, read more about the history of the area. You may not find your specific ancestor by name, but you'll be able to understand life in that time and place. Clearly brick walls are an individual issue depending on your personal research, but before you give up, I'd like you to think about it as a process, rather than a dead end.

When you have a brick wall it's time to step back and think about your research process. It begins with your research plan. Do you have one? What is the specific research question you are trying to answer? Is it the names of the parents, the siblings, or the place in Ireland? Be specific! Finding everything about Patrick Sullivan may be your ultimate goal but it is not a research question. I'm currently working on my Scots-Irish lines that were in the US before 1800. Most of my ancestors (and all of my husband's) arrived in the early part of the 20th Century and the only lines I have here earlier are in Western Pennsylvania.

As my research started when I lived in Connecticut (where vital records date into the 1600s) I was surprised to learn

that vital records for Pennsylvania don't start until 1906! Perhaps the first item in your research plan is to discover what records are available for the time and place where your ancestors lived. Two great resources for this are the *Red Book, American State, County and Town Sources* (currently online at <https://wiki.rootsweb.com/wiki>) and the Research Wiki at FamilySearch ([https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Main\\_Page](https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Main_Page)). I have the families traced back to about 1800 but haven't taken them back any further. I haven't really worked on these families in many years, however five years ago when driving west from Connecticut, I was able to stop in Fayette County, Pennsylvania for a day and a half of research.

I called ahead to the Librarian to let her know when I would be there and what families I was researching. This is always a good idea when you are travelling to

a repository. Although the Librarian was not going to be there that day, she arranged for a co-worker to open the Pennsylvania Room and left out files for me to review. Librarians are a wonderful resource of local knowledge. In one of the vertical files she left for me was a clipping titled the *Record of the Shaw Family*<sup>1</sup> by John S. Ritenour, which included my ancestor, Robert Shaw! One question I had to answer was, "who was John S. Ritenour?" Research confirmed that he was the great grandson of Robert Shaw and Jane Downey, descended from David D Shaw. He was also a newspaper editor for a number of different newspapers, however like so many newspaper clippings, this was cleanly cut from a paper with no name or date. Since the clipping indicates that the information was taken from a Family Bible, it is likely it passed down in this line.

# How Comprehensive Are Irish Civil Records?

Registration of Irish births, deaths and marriages started in 1864 except for non-Catholic marriages which started in 1845. The 15.5 million records available on-line are a major resource for family history. However, a question often asked is whether the early records are fully comprehensive, i.e. were all relevant events captured by the registration process or are there records missing; and if so, what is the scale of missing records? This article reviews the evidence.



By James G. Ryan

**A** historical context is useful in understanding what might have caused gaps in the civil records. The registration process was built around the existing Poor Law infrastructure. Officers were appointed. The core staff included 163 Superintendent Registrars and 770 District Registrars. They were respectively responsible for areas called Superintendent Registrar's Districts (effectively the same as Poor Law unions) and their sub-divisions called Registrar's Districts. All these staff reported to the Registrar General in Dublin who collated the information and compiled annual reports.

These staff were appointed by Poor Law boards of guardians, who administered the Poor Law in their area, and managed the local workhouse. Their members were land-owners and other local dignitaries. The clerks of the Poor Law Unions, by virtue of their office, had an entitlement to be appointed as Superintendent Registrar (as part of their job as clerks). Similarly, local Medical Officers of Dispensary Districts were entitled to be appointed as District Registrar.

In advance of the launch, a registration office was also built in each Poor Law Union; public notices were posted locally; and local organisations were notified of the process. In summary, an infrastructure was set up and everything was in place to administer the new law. Although staff were ready to register, the onus to report was on the public. There was no fee to register but non-compliance involved significant fines. The process was:-

Missing Births		
RC Parish	County	No. missing
Sneem	Kerry	4
Clonmel	Tipperary	2
Inver	Donegal	8
Gortnahoe	Tipperary	4
Casteletara	Cavan	0
Ballycastle	Mayo	0
St Nicholas E.	Galway	1
Baltinglass	Wicklow	1
St Mary's, Cork	Cork	5
Clonmany	Donegal	1
Inagh	Clare	1
Navan	Meath	4
St Catherine's Dublin	Dublin	1
Ballymacnab	Armagh	3
Wexford town	Wexford	1
Manister	Limerick	2
Borrisoleigh	Tipperary	1
Lettermullin	Galway	0
Tibohine	Roscommon	1
Leckpatrick	Down	1
Kilmelchidar	Kerry	2

**Birth:-** A birth had to be reported within 21 days by the parent(s); or (if they are unable) the nurse; or occupiers of the house where the birth occurred. Penalty for failure to register was £1. This may have caused parents to report a birth date which is later than the actual date so as avoid the fine. A check of the baptismal date may be useful. A change of family history relevance was made in 1881. Until this date mothers of illegitimate children could indicate the name of the father in the registration of birth. From 1881 this could only be done with the agreement, and signature, of the father.

**Marriage:-** 'The husband' must obtain a blank certificate from the registrar, bring it to the clergyman for completion; and return it to the Registrar within 3 days. Penalty for failure to register was £10.

**Death:-** A death must be reported (within 7 days) by a person present at the death or 'last illness'; or the occupier of the house where it took place; or 'Any person present at, or having a knowledge of, the circumstances...'. Penalty for failure was £1. Most registrars were medical professionals, so the cause of death was also recorded according to medical knowledge of the time.

Despite all these preparations, not all events were registered in the early years. The Registrar General's Annual Report (1864) states "... many births, deaths, and marriages have not been registered... prosecutions have been resorted to ... but notwithstanding the exertions made ... numerous cases of neglect to register births and deaths have been reported to me".

On marriages, the Registrar notes that "registration ... is not at all satisfactory in some districts, owing to the clergy .. having declined to sign the necessary certificates". The reason for this non-cooperation is not clear. By 1881 the Catholic clergy seem to have been cooperating. The Registrar General's 1881 report states that recording of Catholic marriages was "still of a cumbrous and unsatisfactory character. While the Roman Catholic clergy.... and Registrars do their best .. so much depends upon the manner in which the husband discharges his duty ..". As a result, he suggests "many marriages are



## Society Notes



### ULSTER HISTORICAL FOUNDATION

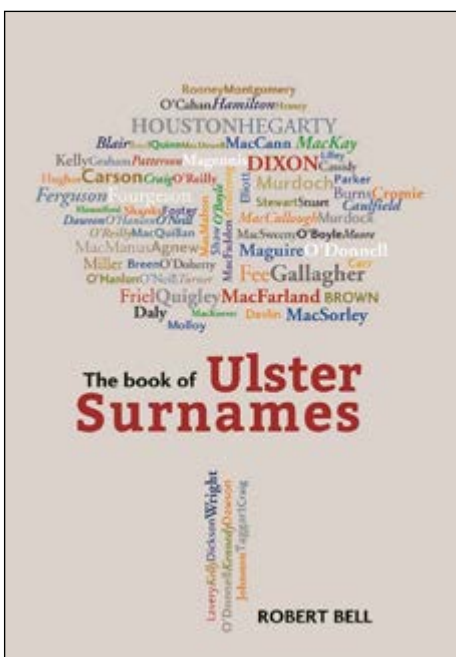
Established in 1956, the Foundation is a registered charity and self-sustaining not-for-profit organisation. It offers its extensive knowledge to help people around the world trace and share their Irish and Scots-Irish history and to broaden their understanding of and interest in the rich history of the province of Ulster. In pursuit of this goal UHF provides a range of activities, including: genealogical and historical research services and book publishing.

The Foundation's latest publication is 'The Book Of Ulster Surnames' authored by Robert Bell was originally published by Blackstaff Press in 1988. This thoroughly researched book quickly became a key resource for researchers interested in finding out more about their family history. Now, after being out of print for a number of years the Foundation are delighted to have printed this latest edition. The book provides the meaning and history of over 500 different family names that are common in the nine county province of Ulster, offers insight into the original form of the name, where it came from – Ireland, Scotland, England, Wales or France – and why it changed to what it is today. The book also includes notes on some famous bearers of the name and where in Ulster the name is now most common.

In addition to the 500 different family names, The Book of Ulster Surnames also includes references to thousands more. This new edition includes a revised and updated index - an essential asset to the publication – which provides nearly 3,000 surnames and variant spellings that are all cross-referenced to the main listing.

This edition published in December last includes an article by the author on the Riding Clans of the Scottish Borders, many members of which came to Ulster during the Plantation. The Book of Ulster Surnames is a reference book which details much about the history of the Ulster Irish as well as the Scottish and English who arrived from the seventeenth century onwards, and is packed with surprising insights into the origins of a complex, turbulent people.

This beautifully produced paperback book is priced at just £9.99. For more details, visit [www.booksireland.org.uk/store/all-departments/ulster-surnames](http://www.booksireland.org.uk/store/all-departments/ulster-surnames)



### CORK GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

Our 2020 conference was cancelled due to the pandemic and our 2021 AGM has been postponed for the time being. We are still very actively sending regular updates and information online to our members which is receiving very good feedback from members. The society has some school records starting 1865 and has access to various records you may not find elsewhere which we check for members of the society.

Our members only page on our website [www.corkgenealogicalsociety.com](http://www.corkgenealogicalsociety.com) is a great help to researchers. The society facebook page has over six thousand members, see [www.facebook.com/groups/corkgenealogicalsociety](https://www.facebook.com/groups/corkgenealogicalsociety) and our DNA CORCAIGH Cork Project is building a nice database of people with cork dna. We also host Ireland Genealogy Projects at [igp-web.com](http://igp-web.com). You can also follow us on [twitter.com/corkgensoc2020](https://twitter.com/corkgensoc2020)

### IRISH GENEALOGICAL RESEARCH SOCIETY (IGRS)

In December 2020 the Society became a Participating Institution with the Beyond 2022 Project, which aims to recreate online the Public Record Office of Ireland, destroyed by fire in 1922, restoring much

of its holdings using transcripts and abstracts of the otherwise lost records. The invitation to the IGRS was extended in recognition of the important sets of transcripts and abstracts we hold of records that were destroyed in the 1922 fire. Perhaps the most important of these is the twelve volume set of transcripts which once belonged to Valentine John Hussey-Walsh (1862-1925) of Mulhussey, Co Roscommon, two volumes of which are attributed to the renowned transcriber, Tenison Groves. They contain a total of 2,883 handwritten pages, noting details taken from chancery and exchequer bills, parish registers, convert rolls, ancient pleadings, inquisitions post mortem, wills, marriage licence bonds, hearth money rolls etc. Follow this link to see a detailed list of the contents of the twelve Hussey-Walsh volumes on the Society's website: <https://bit.ly/3a0tXLI>

In November, we added a further 10,000 records to the Society's Early Irish Birth, Death and Marriage Indexes, bringing the total number of names across the three databases to 384,000. One particularly unusual source in this update was a list of 41 girls who had been apprenticed out from the Celbridge Charter School, Co. Kildare, in the period 1810 to 1818.

Keep checking the Society's website for details of upcoming online lectures and talks held via Zoom.

To keep up to date with the rest of our Society's activities or contact us on social media visit us at:-

Website: [www.IrishAncestors.ie](http://www.IrishAncestors.ie)

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