



## Seeking Your Scots-Irish Ancestors

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Scots-Irish, Scotch-Irish or Ulster Scots are all names referring to a group of people who initially came from Scotland into Northern Ireland, and then to America. Scots-Irish (and its variations) is an American term, used as early as the late 1600s in Colonial documents, primarily as Scotch-Irish—a term which, according to the Scots, should be applied only to whiskey. The Irish also disliked the term, as they believed they should be referred to simply as Irish. Some also comment that the terms became more widely used after the mass migration at the time of the famine when the Protestant Irish wanted to distance themselves from the Roman Catholic immigrants.

The key to success in any Irish research is identifying the location in Ireland where your ancestor lived. This can be difficult for anyone doing Irish research, but for those whose ancestors emigrated in the 17th, 18th or early 19th centuries, the problem becomes even more difficult. Your initial research must focus in the United States (or other country of immigration) looking at migration patterns here, as well as the communities in which your ancestors lived. These may provide the clues you need to continue your research in Ireland.

Knowing when, and why your ancestor emigrated may be helpful in identifying the area from which they emigrated. Although your Scots-Irish ancestor could have emigrated at any time, we frequently think of those emigrating during the early Colonial period (1717 - 1775) who were leaving drought, famine and rent racking. Also, like many of the earlier settlers, they were searching for religious freedom. Once in North America, there were also specific migration paths taken depending on their original locality. The earliest immigrants who came into Boston moved into other parts of New England and then west through New York. Those that came a little later came into Pennsylvania, moving west, then south through the Shenandoah Valley into West Virginia and the Carolinas. If you had early ancestors, an excellent resource to understand their emigration is R. J. Dickson's [\*Ulster Emigration to Colonial America 1718-1775\*](#).

Emigration stopped during the Revolutionary War, but started up again in 1783 with Northern Irish emigrants traveling mostly to the mid-Atlantic states and some directly to the Carolinas. Migration continued to push west into Tennessee, Kentucky and Ohio. There was also emigration to Upper Canada during this time.

One key difference between the early Irish settlers and the later famine era emigrants is that the earlier Scots-Irish tended to travel in groups. To be successful in researching these people it's important to research the entire community. As you move back through your research, make note of those individuals who appear around your ancestor—what Elizabeth Shown Mills refers to as their FAN club (Friends, Associates, Neighbors). Are you finding the same surnames as witnesses on deeds, naturalizations or church records? Do the same names appear on census and tax lists in the neighborhood? Did a group sign a petition for bounty land? Once you have collected a list of names, you can look at surname distributions for Ireland to see where the names appear. I use the [\*Irish Ancestors\*](#) site to do this, and although the information was taken from Griffith's Valuation which was likely done after your ancestors emigrated, it is the most complete census substitute for Ireland. Even though your ancestor left, family members may have remained in Ireland. You may find that all of the

names only appear in a certain area of Ireland which would provide a hypothesis to an Irish location. Also watch for any reference to the minister of the Presbyterian Church, close to the time of arrival. Typically information is more readily available for the minister, and since the minister sometimes emigrated with his church, this might lead you to a location in Ireland.

Many of these immigrants were Presbyterian, so don't neglect researching the records of the Presbyterian church in every location where your ancestor settled. Presbyterians had a process where they required a certificate of transfer from one church to another, stating that an individual was a member in good standing. These records may help you trace your ancestor back through their migrations in America to their initial arrival. In addition to records of baptisms and marriages, the church typically kept Session Minutes (sometimes referred to as Kirk Sessions) which may mention your ancestor. Check the Family History Library catalog for listings of records. If there were no Presbyterian churches, be open to other denominations. In New England you may find them in Congregational church records and in the South, in Baptist records.

Once you do identify a location in Ireland there are limited resources available for research in the eighteenth century (and earlier). None of these record sets are complete, so your success in Ireland will be dependent on many factors, not the least of which will be the locality and social status of your family.

### Strategy

- Understand the basics of good genealogical research and cite sources for all information.
- Begin with yourself and work back, one generation at a time to make sure you've collected all of the important information and have made the correct connections.
- Write an analysis for each source of information listing evidence found, an analysis of the evidence, the next steps based on the document, and the source citation.
- Create a timeline for your ancestor.
- Look for census, probate, land and naturalization records for your ancestor as well as their family, associates and neighbors. Make notes of witnesses, associates and neighbors. Look for families that traveled together since they likely were from the same place in Ireland. Research those individuals.
- Note the name of the localities where your ancestors settled. It may provide a clue to their home in Ireland (e.g., Londonderry, New Hampshire, or Donegal, Pennsylvania)
- Read the history of the locality where your ancestors settled, checking for previous research on the names.
- Utilize specific records for the locality and time when your ancestor lived.
- You cannot do all of your research on the Internet. Contact local libraries and historical societies. Utilize the records of the Family History Library.
- Once you identify your ancestors' townland in Ireland, use [Researching Scots-Irish Ancestors](#), or [Tracing Your Irish Ancestor](#) to identify the specific resources available for the locality in Ireland. Also Google the name of the locality with the word "genealogy" to see what local resources are available.
- Consider DNA testing.

### Bibliography

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### Web Sites

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| 24. AmericanAncestors*                        | <a href="http://www.americanancestors.org/index.aspx">http://www.americanancestors.org/index.aspx</a>  |
| 25. Ancestry *                                | <a href="http://www.ancestry.com/">http://www.ancestry.com/</a>  |
| 26. Cyndi's List                              | <a href="https://www.cyndislist.com/uk/irl/">https://www.cyndislist.com/uk/irl/</a>  |
| 27. Ulster Scots on Facebook                  | <a href="http://tinyurl.com/hjma7fp">http://tinyurl.com/hjma7fp</a>  |
| 28. FamilySearch<br>Scots-Irish Wiki          | <a href="http://www.familysearch.org/">http://www.familysearch.org/</a><br><a href="https://tinyurl.com/y8ojc5xk">https://tinyurl.com/y8ojc5xk</a> |
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| 30. GENUKI                                    | <a href="http://www.genuki.org.uk/big/irl/">http://www.genuki.org.uk/big/irl/</a>  |
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| 38. Presbyterian Historical Society (US)      | <a href="http://www.history.pcusa.org/collections">http://www.history.pcusa.org/collections</a>  |
| 39. Public Records Office Northern Ireland    | <a href="http://www.proni.gov.uk/">http://www.proni.gov.uk/</a>  |
| 40. Registry of Deeds Index Project           | <a href="https://irishdeedsindex.net/search/index.php">https://irishdeedsindex.net/search/index.php</a>  |
| 41. The Scotch-Irish Society                  | <a href="http://www.scotch-irishsocietyusa.org">http://www.scotch-irishsocietyusa.org</a>  |
| 42. Townland Index                            | <a href="http://tinyurl.com/okh734f">http://tinyurl.com/okh734f</a>  |
| 43. Ulster Historical Foundation              | <a href="http://www.ancestryireland.com/">http://www.ancestryireland.com/</a>  |
| 44. WorldCat (library catalog)                | <a href="http://www.worldcat.org">http://www.worldcat.org</a>  |

\*Databases require a subscription or Pay-Per-View. Some articles and general information are free.

For a list of resources by Irish County visit <https://www.irishfamilyroots.com/links-and-resources>

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