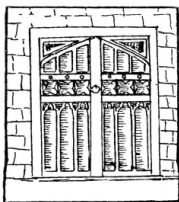


Irish Church Records—Church of Ireland, Catholic, and Presbyterian - 1

KENTUCKY GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

VIRTUAL PRESENTATION 5 MARCH 2024

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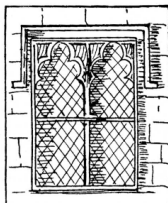
INTRODUCTION

The Church of Ireland was decreed the *State Church* in Ireland in 1536 by an Act of the Irish Parliament. While members of the Church of Ireland were very much a minority, this granted broad powers to primarily the English settlers to be the ruling class. Among this ruling class, numerous records were created to document the laws enacted and to legitimize the displacement of the Catholic citizens.

The parishes of the Church of Ireland served as governmental centers for the administration of matters of probate and matrimonial jurisdiction. Its prelates and clergy became important officers of the state and exercised a disproportionate amount of power relative to their small numbers. Membership in the Church of Ireland was fundamental to persons serving in any government position or to owning land.

The impact of key events in Irish history determined such critical records as the starting date of Irish Catholic church records. The "relief acts" of the late 1700's began to restore some of the privileges that had been taken from the Catholics.

The laws imposed on those who chose not to be affiliated with the Church of Ireland (State Church) affected the members of the Presbyterian Church and restricted their freedom to exercise their religion as they would have chosen. They were oppressed in much the same way as members of the Catholic Church. The result was that many continued their search for religious freedom by moving on to North America.



KEY HISTORICAL DATES

1534 Henry VIII of England enacts the Act of Supremacy enabling him to become the head of the Church of England.

1536 Irish Parliament declares Henry VIII head of the Church of Ireland and recognizes it as the State Church in Ireland.

1559 John Knox brings to Scotland the teachings of the Protestant Reformation started by Martin Luther and developed by John Calvin.

1609 Plantation of Ulster - Catholic landholders in Ireland are seen as a threat to England. The "Flight of the Earls" symbolizes the end of the Gaelic clan system.

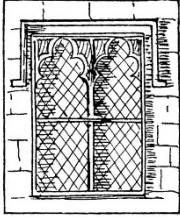
1634 46th Canon of the Irish Church required the recording of "Christenings, Weddings, and Burials." Copies of the records are to be returned to the Bishop of each Diocese.

Irish Church Records—Church of Ireland, Catholic, and Presbyterian - 2

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1643 Presbyterian Covenant to establish and defend Presbyterianism.

1649 Arrival of Cromwell - Removal of all Priests and landowners who had taken part in the recent insurrections.

1660 Restoration to the English Crown of Charles II. Conditions ease for Catholics; 100,000+ Presbyterians are in Ireland.

1660-1 Presbyterian ministers must have a degree; many are educated at Edinburgh and Glasgow.

1661 Reconstitution of Episcopal State Church - A separate commission also investigates Irish land ownership.

1665 "Act of Explanation" - Obligated Cromwellian grantees to surrender one-third of their lands to provide for innocents who had been dispossessed.

1670 Synod of Catholic Bishops again orders registers of baptisms and marriages to be kept.

1685 Accession of James II - Catholics had much hope at this time for the restitution of prior losses.

1690 Battle of the Boyne - James II is defeated by William of Orange in July, 1690 at the Boyne River.

1690's The Synod of Ulster and the Synod of Munster are formed near the end of the 17thC.

1695 Acts restricting Catholics in education, arms-bearing, horse-owning. Catholic Clergy banished.

1708 130 Presbyterian congregations are established throughout Ireland, but predominately in Counties Antrim and Down.

1719-1726 Internal disagreements lead to the establishment of the "Non-subscribing" Presbyterians. The Southern Association is formed.

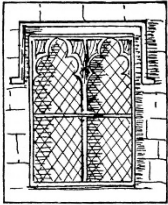
1740's Major division in the Presbyterian Church resulting in the formation of the "Seceders." They form their own ecclesiastical council - the Secession Synod.

Irish Church Records—Church of Ireland, Catholic, and Presbyterian - 3

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1750's Seceders divide into Burgers and Anti-burgers over the issue of the Burgess Oath in Scotland that would allow them to sit on town councils, but the issue has little relevance in Ireland.

1760's Reformed Presbyterians or Covenanters split off due to their strict interpretation to uphold the Covenant of 1643. Split leads to "First" and "Second" Presbyterian churches in some areas.

1772 Relief Act allows Catholics to lease bogland

1770's Another wave of Presbyterian emigration to the America's.

1778 Relief Act allows Catholics leasehold and inheritance rights.

1782 Marriages performed by Presbyterian ministers legalized.

1807 *pro forma* registers instituted. The first are published by William Watson of Capel Street, Dublin. Registers were further improved in the 1820's. These standardized the recording of the information for births, marriages, and deaths.

1819 Presbyterian ministers required to keep registers of baptisms and marriages.

1840 The Synod of Ulster, which was the main governing assembly in Ireland, joins the Secession Synod. Together, they form the "General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland."

1844 Marriage Act of 1844 (effective April 1845) legalizes marriages between a member of the Church of Ireland and a Presbyterian. The effect is the start of a formation of a "Protestant alliance." All Presbyterian marriages are registered in the General Register Office with those of the Church of Ireland.

1845 Potato blight (September)

1850's Presbyterians in Ireland number 650,000 with 433 congregations.

1869 Disestablishment of the Church of Ireland as the State Church. All churches are to be equally recognized by the government.

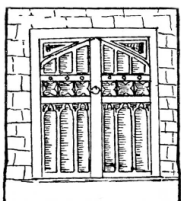
1875 Act of Parliament proclaiming that the Church of Ireland parish registers are "public records" and as such must be deposited in the Public Records Office, Dublin. Parochial returns sent to the Bishops of each Diocese are also required to be deposited in the PRO, Dublin.

Irish Church Records—Church of Ireland, Catholic, and Presbyterian - 4

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1922 Public Records Office burned by fire and explosion 21 June. Registers of 1,006 parishes are destroyed; surviving number 637; copies of destroyed registers, 124 and the PRO holding additional 23; three parochial returns survive.

CHURCH RECORDS

CHURCH OF IRELAND

PRE-1870 REGISTERS - for baptisms and burials and pre-1845 marriages are classed as public records (or property of the state) and are therefore deposited in the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Belfast and the National Archives, Dublin.

POST-APRIL 1845 - marriage records that were created as a result of the Marriage Act of 1844 and consequently provided for the civil registration of protestant marriages.

POST-1871 - registers detailing baptisms and burials after this date are the property and responsibility of the Church of Ireland.

Sources for research for members of the Church of Ireland are many. Researchers will often promote the myth that all of the records for this group have been destroyed. While there certainly were losses (two thirds of the parish registers), there are still many records left for examination and some substitutes.

Church records in the Church of Ireland were called into the Public Record Office, Dublin by an 1875 Act of Parliament. Unfortunately, there were many parish registers deposited when the record office was destroyed in 1922. There are numerous records that overlapped the parish registers and created a record of events which were recorded in these records. All of the following sources should be used for substitutes for parish registers: Marriage Licenses; Newspapers; Civil Registration of Marriages 1845+; extracts; Registry of Deeds; estate records; tombstone inscriptions; and transcripts

Of the 1600+ parish registers of the Church of Ireland, 1,006 were destroyed in 1922 in the PRO, Dublin. The records that survive are mainly for the North of Ireland (a point that should also be remembered for Presbyterian research since many burials were made in Church of Ireland cemeteries).

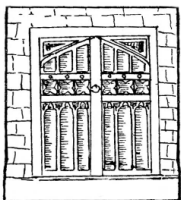
Many of the surviving records are deposited at the Representative Church Body Library, Dublin (RCBL). These are available for searches in person or through an agent. For a complete list of what is deposited as of 1 June 1992, see Appendix 3.1 in Irish Church Records, edited by James Ryan pp. 60-68. This list was created by Dr.

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Raymond Refaussé and is also available as a separate list from the RCBL. It is updated as they obtain additional registers and other parish chest material. Many of the registers for the North of Ireland are on microfilm at the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI). Recently the RCBL has initiated a project to begin publishing all of the existing Church of Ireland parish registers, but the work is progressing at a very slow rate.

After the destruction of the PRO, Dublin, the Deputy Keeper queried the various ministers about transcripts and copies of the registers made prior to the originals being deposited in the record office. For a list of the many copies which had been made, see the 56th *Report of the Deputy Keeper*, Appendix VIII pp. 416-420. There is always some question as to whether the copies of the registers sent to the diocesan offices were destroyed. The answer is yes. For a list, see the 41st *Report of the Deputy Keeper*, 1909 Appendix II, pp. 26-33.

CATHOLIC CHURCH RECORDS

The Catholic Church records were not destroyed in 1922. The Parochial Records Acts of 1875 and 1876 declared the *Church of Ireland* parish registers as "public records." The Catholic parish registers were not called in and were not deposited in the Public Record Office.

The Catholic Church records generally begin in the 1830's although some of the larger cities have records dating to the mid - 1700's. Many are in Latin and at first glance appear difficult to read. However, spending some time learning some very basic principles of the Latin used in genealogical records should provide you with enough information to begin transcribing the surnames of interest to you. The key terms are "filia" = daughter of, "filius" = son of, "conjunxi" = married, "Ws. = Witness and "Ss." or "Sps." = Sponsors. See [Appendix B] for examples of Latin handwriting.

The sponsors or godparents were usually very closely related. They were named to honor the child and the family and the intent was to strengthen the family. In the event of the death of both parents, they were often called upon to raise the child.

The most useful information on understanding the Catholic Church records was published in a work entitled *Irish Church Records, Their history, availability and use in family and local history research*, compiled by James G. Ryan. The chapter on Catholic records was written by Mr. Ryan and provides a good basic understanding.

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH RECORDS

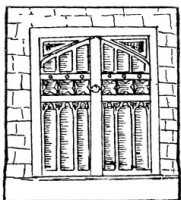
Many researchers consider the Presbyterian Church records a total loss even though none were destroyed in the Public Record Office, Dublin in 1922.
Researchers

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tracing Presbyterian families from North America are usually trying to use the church records as an emigration tool. Since the Presbyterian Church records generally begin about 1830 and the peak emigration for Presbyterian emigration to North America was in two waves, one in 1740 and another in 1770-1780, these records do not make the critical link being sought.

Much of the published information about these records only highlights the starting dates for baptisms and marriages. The Kirk Session books may pre-date the church registers and sometimes the emigration link being sought is contained in a reference to a family moving out of the congregation. Other references to births, illegitimacy or deaths may also be contained. Sometimes relief to a widow is recorded, thus providing a reference point for the approximate death date for her husband. There is an excellent work on Presbyterianism in Ireland published in *Irish Church Records*, compiled by James Ryan, written by Dr. Christine Kinealy. Two key listings are found in Appendix 4.2 (pp. 88-101) listing all of the Presbyterian Church records microfilmed by the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI). Appendix 4.3 (pp. 101-105) lists the Presbyterian Church records that are still held in local custody. PRONI continues to add to its collection so use the lists accordingly.

CLUES TO THE LAND RECORDS

Embedded in the church records of Ireland are clues to your ancestor's land holdings and/or tenure of leases. Subtle as these clues are, they deserve to be specifically called out and examined. They are to be observed along the social spectrum of Irish society and exist in at least three distinct areas:

1. They appear as witnesses or sponsors in Catholic and Presbyterian records.
2. They can be sorted as forty-shilling freeholders among the members of the Church of Ireland and Protestant dissenters—both of whom could vote.
3. Annotations to their social stature appear in the terms “esquire, alderman, and mayor,” etc.

METHODOLOGY

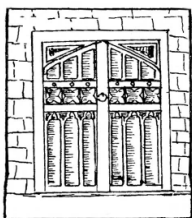
Re-examine the church records looking for these embedded clues—the existing church records must be exhausted for all relevant information about your family and the community in which they lived. Now, in addition to the names that directly relate to your family names and pedigree, you are seeking the additional names of landowners, lessee's, or middle tenants that may have had some influence over the land on which your ancestors lived.

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If your ancestors are protestant, begin with these names and conduct another search of the indexes to the Registry of Deeds ‘Grantor’ and ‘County’ indexes. Examine all deeds for that area and reconstruct the neighborhood of your ancestors.

If your ancestors were poorer, start with the estate records for that area and examine the leases of the associated names in your pedigree. Look for family connections in the ‘lives named’ and reconstruct the web of family relationships between in-laws and cousins that existed within the townlands and parishes.

CONCLUSION

The Church of Ireland should not be ignored when pursuing church records in Ireland. As the Established Church, it has jurisdiction over all religions and valuable clues may be found in the records of both the ecclesiastical and governing manuscripts.

Research in Catholic parish registers can be both rewarding and frustrating. Carefully crafting your objectives and knowing the limitations of the registers ahead of time can help reduce the frustrations. Be prepared for the difficult handwriting and the use of improper Latin and you should do fine.

Presbyterian Church records should be used for their strengths. The obvious weakness is that they are probably not going to provide the emigrant connection you may be seeking. However, they may be extremely valuable in tracing the descendants and or related generations.

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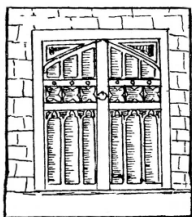
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