

Top 5 Irish Genealogy Research Tips w/ Rich Venezia

Lisa Dia dhuit! (Hello!) This is Podcrawl Podchroal, the podcast from the McClelland Library. I'm your host, Lisa, the Librarian. Today's guest is Rich Venezia, a nationally-recognized genealogist and genealogical lecturer. Rich assists with dual citizenship applications for Italy and Ireland and is an expert in 20th century immigrant ancestors research. He was the lecturer at this year's West Valley Genealogical Society's annual seminar in which he spoke about digging deeper to discover your origins, researching Irish ancestors, military records and alien registrations in America. Thank you so much for joining us, Rich.

From research beginners to those who are more advanced, what are your top five tips for researching Irish genealogy?

Rich Hey, thanks so much. I'm really glad to be here. Um, okay, so I've got five tips. Uh, a couple are in-depth and a couple are pretty simple. Um, my first tip is that the Irish place of origin is almost always going to come from documents created in the United States. So lots of people ask me, you know, how do I find my Timothy Murphy amongst all the Timothy Murphys?

Or how do I know you know where in Ireland I even need to look? And the truth is that you generally can't, um, do research in Ireland unless you've got some good research done here in the United States. And so you're gonna wanna look in all sorts of different places to be able to locate the place of origin.

So more recent immigrants, it might be on the ship manifest, it might be on naturalization records. It might even be on things like vital records of the kids or baptisms at the church, but you know, older, uh, immigrants, immigrants from kind of, uh, the first half of the 1800s kind of pre-famine era and even earlier, you're gonna need to expand the search in terms of the types of documents that you're gonna look at. There might be clues in probate files, there might be clues on gravestones. Um, again, you wanna look at church or religious records. And you might even need to expand your research into who they lived near, who were the people that they were associating with.

Because folks often migrated together, and especially for earlier immigrants, there's gonna be less documents that you're able to really pinpoint that place of origin. Um, so you just really have to kind of give yourself a wide swath of records to look at, to be able to find that place of origin to then be able to go do research in Ireland or in Irish records anyway.

Lisa Oh, interesting. Okay.

Rich Um, so kind of on that note, my second tip is to always pay attention to the godparents. And this is because a lot of times the people that are, um. Acting as the godmother. The godfather of children are often related, whether they're an in-local, whether they're a cousin, whether they're a second cousin or a third cousin.

Um, very often, especially if you have kind of big communities coming over at the same time. The folks that show up in these records are often gonna be related. And if they're not related, they're likely important. Maybe they're from the same village, maybe, um. You know, they're related to one side of the family versus the other side of the family.

But it's really important to look for people like the godparents, but also who's the witness, uh, to the naturalization who is, uh, witnessing the deed, who is executing the will. All these people are potential countrymates and could very well be from the same place that your person is from. So again, if we're trying to find that place of origin, we've really got to expand our search and I think the Godparents is a good place to start.

Lisa Wow. Yeah. I, again, I wouldn't have thought of that, but yeah. That, that's, yeah. And, um, and the marriage, right. Somebody who was a witness. Marriage, that could be a key too.

Rich Sure, absolutely. And people, any, anyone that's kind of sponsoring the marriage, that's. Um, you know, acting as a guardian for kids and you know, anybody that's kind of on important paperwork because, you know, today we sign a lot of papers, right?

And it's kind of very banal. You know, we go to a notary, they don't know us, but it's fine. We show them id, and obviously 200 years ago, that was a different situation. And so, you know, when you are having to schlep somebody down to the county courthouse to do X, Y, Z or you are entrusting someone to execute your will and your esteem, that person is gonna be important to you.

Um, and or a relative. They're gonna have you know, like they're gonna be the person that's gonna take off work in the field that day to be able to go with you to accomplish the thing. You know, you're not just gonna ask anybody.

Lisa Right. Yeah. No, good point.

Rich Yeah. So then, uh, my third tip is that there are a lot of free resources available online that you can really harness the powers of to both begin your research and also expand your research. So, you know, if you don't have a place of origin, but maybe you have an uncommon surname like Spain or Izid, for instance, or even McGillicuddy. Some of these surnames are actually not very common, and so when you look at the resources available online, such as the genealogy section of the National Archives of Ireland Irishgenealogy.ie, the National Archives Catalog, the PRONI, the Public Records Office of Northern Ireland Catalog, there's a lot of records and resources that, that are available to you that don't cost anything.

Sometimes you might need to sign up for an account or something like that, but there are a lot of free resources available. And so, especially like I was saying, if you've got an uncommon name and you're unsure on where your family's from and you've looked in all the things and you've, you know, combed through all the records in the United States that you can find.

Especially these free resources might be able to help you pinpoint a location in Ireland. Not if you're looking for Bridget Murphy, right. But if you're looking for someone with an uncommon name and you can look through all of the birth records from 1864 to 1923, or all of the marriage records from 1845 or 1864 up to whatever, seventy-five years ago from this year.

You know, like, yeah, there's, there's a lot of good resources that, that you can use that don't cost anything except your time, right? And so those might be able to help both beginners as well as folks that have been researching for a long time and are feeling stuck. These may help you kind of break down a brick wall or get to the next step that you wanna be at.

My fourth tip is about the valuation cancel books or the revision books. So these are extremely valuable records that I think are often overlooked. So these are, um, many people are familiar with the Griffith's Valuation which was enumerated between 1848 and 1864, and all of the counties of the island of Ireland.

And um, that's the first surviving kind of island wide census that we have, except of course, like the pre 1850 US censuses it's only generally the head of the household or whoever's occupying the land. And so what they did is they continued to revise that original list, but those records, at least for the Republic, are not readily available online.

The ones for the six counties of the North are on Proni's website. But what you can do is you can trace a family and also see what happens when people are crossed off, when they wind up being able to to buy the property.. Um, or who their landlord is to see if there might be estate records. There might be hints about when people died or emigrated.

You even sometimes actually get notes. Someone has crossed off and it says deceased, or it says. You know the trustees of so-and-SO'S estate is now the occupier of this land, and you have these books that sometimes cover 10, 20, 30 years. On, you know, one page, but it will, you know, tell you the different dates that it relates to.

And, uh, it can be really helpful to find things like deeds, to find things like clues about immigration or death, um, to find, you know, the families that were living together or if they moved too close to each other or away from each other. So there's a lot of wide-ranging uses for this resource. So, like I said, unfortunately the ones that are public are not very readily available. They are on, uh, microfilm if anyone is going to the Family History Library, or, which I think is now a family search library in Salt Lake City. Um, so they are available on film there. Um, unfortunately they're only on black and white, obviously because they're on film. The original records are in color and they're really useful to see in color because every time they did a revision, it was a different color pen.

Lisa Oh.

Rich So the digitized version is on Proni. You'll see that it's a red pen and you see that that relates to this year, and then it's a green pen, and that relates to this year. So you could really

accurately track the years that different changes are happening. But the Republic has digitized most, if not all, I believe it's most at this point of the valuation books, and they are available to research on the computers at the valuation office in Dublin.

Okay. So if anyone is doing an Irish, uh, or an Ireland research trip, they might be able to stop there. I think the hope is that eventually one day they'll be digitized. Maybe. I mean, the, the Irish government has done such a great job of putting up a lot of resources for free, so I think the hope is that maybe once the digitization is finished, they'll find a way to put it online. I don't know that for sure.

Lisa Yeah. Yeah.

Rich Just based upon kind of how things have gone over the past few decades, I would imagine that's their. Their intent. Um, but for now, you know, you've either gotta go to Salt Lake or to Dublin to do the work. I, I'd probably go to Dublin.

Lisa Yeah, I think I'd rather go there too.

Rich They can be, they can be really useful. They can be really useful records and I think that a lot of people don't know about them or kind of overlook them. Yeah. Um, you know, of course they're not gonna be helpful for you if your ancestors came in the 1700s. But if you're researching kind of mid to late 19th century immigrants. These could be really helpful.

Um, and that leads me to my last tip. Which is to think outside the box. You know, there's a lot of weird and interesting records that are made available for use for Irish research because of the record loss, because of the 1922 fire. Um, and you never know in which of these random records sets you're gonna find somebody.

Right. So there's, you know, vaccination records of, of students available. There's national school records sometimes available on places like FamilySearch. There's dog licenses and, and all sorts of other things that I think people would easily overlook because they say, well, I'm looking for people, not their dog or whatever.

But if you're looking to find when somebody was in a place or confirming that somebody was from this townland. You know, you know, you have a specific area that you're looking in, there might be all sorts of different records that are available to you. Uh, and likewise, you know, there's a lot of locality-based records or archives that might be available.

So of course there's a, a county family history center in, in every county in Ireland. Um, but a lot of counties also have their own archives and their own archivists. Sometimes their, their resources are not very well cataloged or very well inventoried, but you better believe the people that are working there as archivists know their stuff.

Right? And so if you're looking for a super specific area or what types of records are available for you know, for this county in this timeframe, you, there's probably a number of different places that you can reach out to that might be able to, to be helpful. Mm-Hmm. Um, so you just kind of have to expand your thoughts on, on where you wanna look for records.

You know, good Irish research is not gonna be confined to Ancestry and Family Search. You know, you're gonna need to include Find My Past, you're gonna need to include, um, the National Archives website, irishgenealogy.ie, all sorts of these other kind of one-off and random databases, or seemingly random databases to be able to kind of put together the full story of, of your Irish ancestors and, and really get a good, uh breadth.

Lisa If somebody is just starting out, what, what would you tell them? Like, because it may, for me at least, it seems like there's just so much information out there.

Rich Yeah.

Lisa That it could seem a bit daunting to just to...

Rich Sure. I'd say the, the first thing that you want to do is try and figure out where your family's from, um, using U.S records, or maybe your family knows that already, you know?

Lisa Okay.

Rich Um, you're usually not gonna be able to do the research in Irish records with just a county. You're almost always gonna need, uh, a civil parish. Um, even better yet as a, a Townland, which is kind of the smallest administrative division of land in Ireland. If you have a parish that they're from, the town that they're from, that should be able to help you pinpoint some of these records.

Lisa Okay.

Rich Um, and then once you have an idea of that, then probably you wanna start looking into kind of dipping your toes into Griffith's valuation if your family was still there in the 1840s, 1850s. Um. And, and you could see, okay, like who is the head of this household? Does this surname match my surname?

Does this person match my person? Or maybe this is my person's father or uncle, for instance. Um, and then you can kind of go from there. But if you can use your US research to confirm a place of origin, and then again, if you're researching folks that were still there in the 1850s. To pinpoint where they are on that Griffiths valuation.

Um, that can then help you, you know, reconfirm that location in Ireland and then you can see, okay, it's in this parish, in this town, um, in this county. Right. And then you can look at, okay, where are the closest Roman Catholic parishes, if they were Catholic or, or established church.

Um. Churches, if they were a church of Ireland, um, you can then start to learn the other divisions of land.

You know, one of the most difficult things about Irish research is that there's so many different ways that they divided land. And so you need to know the townland, but then as soon as it gets any bigger, you know, there's civil parish, there's barony, there's county, there's pro um, provinces, and so. It can get a little scary and feel a little daunting, but if you're able to kind of first try and confirm the place of origin in U.S records and then locate a family that you think is yours on Griffiths, I think that's a good starting point.

Uh, if you're researching pre-eighteen fifties, there is a lot less record availability. There are some records, but it's really gonna depend upon. The county. Um, and so that's a much kind of harder and longer answer to, to provide because yes, it's gonna depend on if they were wealthy, if they weren't, if they had land, if they didn't, if they were in this county versus that county.

Um, so hopefully that's, that's at least helpful for kind of slightly more recent immigrants. Yeah. Um, and then, um.

For folks that are researching, you know, early immigrants, you're just really gonna have to do some digging into determining what records are available for, for those specific counties. And sometimes researching early Irish immigrants is just extremely difficult. If not. And I don't wanna say impossible, but you know, depending on when they left, there may just be, no, there may just be no records in that place at that time.

You know, so, so hopefully you are researching slightly more recent evidence and are able to kind of utilize some of these great resources that are available, um, online through, you know, family search, through National Archives of Ireland, through Irish genealogy.ie, et cetera.

Lisa If you want to learn about your Irish roots, come to the Library's Genealogy Research Center, and our volunteers will assist whether you're just starting or you've hit a brick wall. Thank you so much for listening. We hope to see you soon at McClellan Library. Slán.