

## Resources

# Replacing the Irish Census

**Diane L. Richard looks at Irish census substitutes that can benefit your research.**

UNLIKE ENGLISH, WELSH and Scottish censuses, which are available for much of the 1800s, Ireland's history is a bit different. The first full government census of Ireland was taken in 1821, with further censuses at 10 year intervals from 1831 through to 1911. No census was taken in 1921, because of the War of Independence. The first census of the population of the Irish Free State was taken in 1926. At this point, I'm sure that you are thinking that this sounds wonderful.

However, the problem is that the census returns for 1861 and 1871 were destroyed shortly after the censuses were taken, those for 1881 and 1891 were pulped during World War I and the returns for 1821, 1831, 1841 and 1851 were, apart from a few survivals, destroyed in 1922 in the fire at the Public Record Office at the beginning of the Irish Civil War. The first surviving census is for 1901.

Therefore, unlike the US and most of the UK, Ireland does not have any surviving nation-wide 19th-century census records. Fortunately, recent access has been granted to the 1901 and 1911 census records, which helps with more modern emigrants. You can access these two censuses via a dedicated webpage on the National Archives of Ireland page, [www.census.nationalarchives.ie/](http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/)

These records are available both offline, in print or on microfilm, as well as online. In some cases, guidance to online sources is provided. If you don't have Internet access and you do have a Family History Center that is local, check its holdings for Ireland or use your local library's interlibrary loan service to get access to these rich census substitutes!

## Census Records

Just because "most" of the census records for 19th century Ireland do not survive, that doesn't mean that all of them were destroyed. Do check a resource, such as census finder, [www.censusfinder.com/ireland.htm](http://www.censusfinder.com/ireland.htm), to see what census records may survive.

Some of the surviving 19th-century census fragments include:

- 1821: parts of Counties Cavan, Fermanagh, Galway, Meath and Offaly (known as King's County then)
  - 1831: a few fragments for County Derry
  - 1841: only the Killeshandra parish, County Cavan
  - 1851: some parishes in County

Ireland (PRONI) for the Northern Ireland counties.

Some family historians prior to World War I used the earlier censuses for research. Many of their transcriptions and abstracts were donated after 1922 to replace records lost in the fire. Check the holdings of the National Archives of Ireland.

There are also 17th and 18th century census-like documents that might survive; discussed towards the end of this article.

## Directories

Directories are always a good alternative to substitute for a missing census record. Unfortunately, though, most directories only listed heads of households and those who chose to be listed. This means that they have limited value with regards to children and/or wives. Although, later directories did often list the names of wives and as children aged, you might find them listed separately, at the same address as the parents. Slater's produced the Royal National Directory and also commercial directories which listed merchants and prominent private citizens for each county, plus a description and history of the area.

For example, the 1846 directory is available at [www.failteromhat.com/slater.htm](http://www.failteromhat.com/slater.htm) and the Clare County contents can be found at [www.clarelibrary.ie/eolas/coclare/genealogy/directories/slaters/slaters\\_directory\\_1846.htm](http://www.clarelibrary.ie/eolas/coclare/genealogy/directories/slaters/slaters_directory_1846.htm). Directories do survive for many other years and locations! For example, John Walker Nelson married Mary Ann Lillie in Dublin in 1875 (as reported in a Scottish newspaper, *Wigtown Free Press*) and then, through directories, was found to be living in Limerick, plying his trade as a watchmaker (haven't

### *An example of a Griffith's Valuation.*

## Antrim.

The above mentioned website also lists some of the records that one can alternately use, which will be discussed later on.

Additionally, when Great Britain instituted the Old Age Pension of 1908, some people used the 1841 and 1851 censuses as proof of age. These forms, taken from the original censuses, have survived and are available at the National Library of Ireland (NLI) for current Irish counties, and at Belfast's Public Records Office of Northern

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figured out the connection between addresses on opposite coasts, but those are for another day).

This directory information eventually led to birth records for his children and his eventual death in Inverness, Scotland, where his sister and family lived. Unfortunately, John was not a landowner and was Presbyterian, which reduced the substitute documents in which he might be listed.

### Griffith's Valuation

This was the first full scale valuation of property in Ireland and is a primary substitute for the lost censuses for landed individuals in the mid-19th century (though it does list anyone leasing land from the owner). It was overseen by Richard Griffith (hence its name) and was published between 1847 and 1864. It is available in various forms (e.g., index to and/or full details of), at a multitude of websites, both subscription and free, including and not limited to:

- Ask About Ireland, [www.askaboutireland.ie/](http://www.askaboutireland.ie/)
- Fáilte Romhat, [www.failteromhat.com/](http://www.failteromhat.com/)
- Irish Family History Foundation, [www.RootsIreland.ie](http://www.RootsIreland.ie)
- Ancestry.com, [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com).

For a nice discussion of how to use the Griffith's Valuation as a census substitute and also some information on offline sources, check out this article on the Irish Genealogical Society International website at [www.irishgenealogical.org/extras\\_griffiths.asp](http://www.irishgenealogical.org/extras_griffiths.asp).

### Tithe Applotment Books and Tithe Defaulters Lists

As described by the Irish Origins website, [www.originsnetwork.com/help/aboutio-tithe.aspx](http://www.originsnetwork.com/help/aboutio-tithe.aspx), "all occupants of land were required to pay an annual tithe (or religious tax) of 10 percent of the agricultural produce generated by that holding. This money was demanded by landholders, irrespective of their religion, and was paid directly to the official state church, the Anglican (Episcopalian) Church of Ireland".

Because of this, Tithe Applotment books were compiled

between 1823 and 1837 in order to determine the amount which occupiers of agricultural holdings should pay in tithes. There is a manuscript book for almost every parish, giving the names of occupiers, the amount of land held and the sums to be paid in tithes.

These books can be accessed at several websites in addition to Irish Origins, including Ancestry.com, as well as locale sites, such as the County Clare Library site, [www.clarelibrary.ie/eolas/coclare/genealogy/genealog.htm](http://www.clarelibrary.ie/eolas/coclare/genealogy/genealog.htm), and in many other places.

According to Irish Origins, "in 1830 and 1831, many people refused to pay this tithe, and so started the Tithe War. The names in these records are those recorded by the Church of Ireland clergy who refused to pay their tithe."

The surviving Tithe Defaulters database contains almost 29,000 names from 232 parishes in 12 counties. Almost 20,000 of these names are from two counties; about 10,000 each from Kilkenny and Tipperary. There are nearly 3,000 names from Wexford and about 2,000 each from Cork and Waterford. Seven other counties have fewer names; Kerry, Meath and Offaly have just two or three dozen. This information is not just available through Irish Origins. If you do a Google search on the Internet, you will find where projects for several counties at least make an index available of those who defaulted.

### National School Records (1831-1921)

In 1831, a countrywide system of primary education was established which resulted in the creation of school registers that record the age of the pupil, religion, father's address and occupation and general observations. Unfortunately, these are not centralized in the Republic of Ireland, though PRONI (the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland) has a collection of over 1,500 registers for schools in the six counties of Northern Ireland, [www.proni.gov.uk/local\\_history\\_series\\_-05\\_-nation](http://www.proni.gov.uk/local_history_series_-05_-nation).

### Landowners in Ireland (1876)

In 1876, a list was compiled of those who owned one acre, or more, of land. The full title is *Land Owners in Ireland: Return of Owners of Land of One Acre and Upwards in the several Counties, Counties of Cities and Counties of Towns in Ireland* and was published in Dublin, 1876. This provides an alphabetical list of landowners in each county, with their residence and the size and value of their landholdings and includes the records of 32,614 owners of land in Ireland. The entries record the address of the owner, along with the extent and valuation of the property. Only a minority of the population actually owned the land they occupied, and, if you don't look, you won't know whether your ancestors are listed. Two of many online versions are available at Fáilte Romhat, [www.failteromhat.com/lo1876.htm](http://www.failteromhat.com/lo1876.htm), and Digital Irish Genealogy Data, [www.ajmorris.com/dig/toc/\\_01irlo.htm](http://www.ajmorris.com/dig/toc/_01irlo.htm).

### Freeholders, Voters Lists, Poll Books, Electoral Records

Freehold property is held either by fee simple, with absolute freedom to dispose of it, by fee tail, in which the disposition is restricted to a particular line of heirs, or simply by life tenure. Freeholders lists were drawn up regularly because the right to vote was, for the most part, based on being a freeholder with property of or above a certain value. As with the 1876 Landowners lists, only a small percentage of the population will be included in Freeholder lists. Learn more about Freeholders on the PRONI website, [www.proni.gov.uk/index/search\\_the\\_archives/freeholders\\_records.htm](http://www.proni.gov.uk/index/search_the_archives/freeholders_records.htm) or at ProGenealogists "Irish Freeholders, Freemen and Voting Registers", [www.progenealogists.com/ireland/freeholders.htm](http://www.progenealogists.com/ireland/freeholders.htm).

Voters' lists cover a slightly larger proportion of the population than Freeholders lists, since freehold property was the most common method of achieving voting rights and freemen of the various corporation towns and cities had a right to vote in some elections at least. Membership of a

trade guild carried with it admission as a freeman, and this right was hereditary, a wider range of social classes is covered. Poll books are the record of who actually voted in an election.

You can find a county-by-county inventory of Freemen and voters lists (called Irish Freeholders, Freemen and Voters by County, City and Borough, 1234-1978) on the ProGenealogists site, [www.progenealogists.com/ireland/freeholdersdata.asp](http://www.progenealogists.com/ireland/freeholdersdata.asp).

#### Parish Lists and Censuses

Many Irish counties have a few parishes, whether Protestant and/or Roman Catholic, which took censuses of their members during the late-1800s. These are not centralized and are generally held by the individual churches.

#### 18th-Century Census Substitutes

Since most of us struggle to locate our 19th-century Irish ancestors, the suggestions above are most applicable to that century. And, if you are fortunate enough to have identified 18th-century Irish-born ancestors, some of these census substitutes, as suggested by Irish Ancestors, [www.irishtimes.com/ancestor/browse/records/census/eight.htm](http://www.irishtimes.com/ancestor/browse/records/census/eight.htm), might be relevant for you:

1. 1703-1838: The Convert Rolls. A list of those converting from Catholicism to the Church of Ireland. The bulk of the entries date from 1760 to 1790.
2. 1740: Protestant householders. This applies to parts of counties Antrim, Armagh, Derry, Donegal and Tyrone. Arranged by barony and parish, it gives names only. These records are stored at various repositories.
3. 1749: Elphin Diocesan Census. Arranged by townland and parish, and listing householders, their religion, the numbers, sex and religion of their children, and the numbers, sex and religion of their servants.
4. 1766: Religious Survey. In March and April of this year, Church of Ireland rectors (on the instructions of the government) were to compile complete returns of all householders in their parishes, showing their religion

and giving an account of any Catholic clergy active in their area; some rectors produced only totals, while others created partial lists, and a few detailed all householders and their addresses individually (similar to what we often find in surviving 18th-century US tax records). All of the original returns were lost, but extensive transcripts survive for some areas.

[methods.suite101.com/article.cfm/burned-1821-1831-1841-1851-irish-census-records--substitutes](http://genealogical-researchmethods.suite101.com/article.cfm/burned-1821-1831-1841-1851-irish-census-records--substitutes).

3. Fianna Article on Census Substitutes, [www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~fianna/guide/cen2.html](http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~fianna/guide/cen2.html).

4. Northern Ireland Online Genealogy Centre (Census and Substitutes), [www.nireland.com/genealogy/census.html](http://www.nireland.com/genealogy/census.html).

An example of a tithe appplotment, c. 1825.

5. 1796: Spinning Wheel Premium Entitlement Lists (often referred to as the Flax Growers list or similar, and readily available on the Internet) to encourage the linen trade, free spinning wheels or looms were granted to individuals planting a certain area of land with flax. The lists of those entitled to the awards, covering almost 60,000 individuals, were published in 1796, and record only the names of the individuals and the civil parish in which they lived.

To learn more about using substitute records in place of destroyed Irish Census records, check out these additional articles:

1. Destroyed Irish Census Records and Substitutes, 1861, 1871, 1881, 1891 Use School, Voter Lists, Directories, <http://genealogical-researchmethods.suite101.com/article.cfm/destroyed-irish-census-records-and-substitutes>.
2. Burned 1821, 1831, 1841, 1851 Irish Census Records and Substitutes, <http://genealogical-researchmethods.suite101.com/article.cfm/burned-1821-1831-1841-1851-irish-census-records--substitutes>.

#### Conclusion

Although missing census records can frustrate our research for Irish ancestors, they don't have to defeat us in achieving our objective. A good genealogist always tries to learn as much as we can about those we are researching. Sometimes, not having what many consider the easy records to look at, might actually benefit our research in that we are forced to look at these other records!

Maybe, those are the records we should start our journey with. So, for your Irish ancestors, check to make sure that they are not listed in a census record and also look into all the other Irish records at your disposal.

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