

Irish Made Easy: The Irish Family History Foundation



TO SAY THAT Irish research can be challenging would be an understatement. The lost census records and the difficulties gaining access to vital and church records — kept by local research centers or parish churches, with few records available online — have meant that only the brave have delved into in-depth Irish research. It was necessary to have some idea of where in Ireland your ancestor came from. Often, you could only communicate with the organization that held records in writing. Fees had to be paid by check to the appropriate government approved research center in the Republic of Ireland (Eire), Northern Ireland or the local parish church. It was a time-consuming, and sometimes expensive, endeavor.

I researched one family in County Clare who weren't found in the records of the expected parish. At the time, County Clare had some good records online, though no parish or vital records information. They didn't appear in the expected parish and did not own land (so *Griffith's Valuations* were no help), and

According to Diane L. Richard, now is the time to dig into your Irish roots!

there were no surviving census records. Continuing the research would have required systematically contacting the various local



parishes. At the time, it was decided to wait and see what the

future would bring. Well, the future is now here and well worth the wait!

IRISH FAMILY HISTORY FOUNDATION

The new online record system of The Irish Family History Foundation (IFHF), <http://www.irish-roots.ie>, will eventually contain almost 40 million Irish ancestral records (currently, more than 16 million are available). It's an incredible boon to anyone researching their Irish ancestry. The ability to search country-wide into Irish birth and baptism, marriage, death, census or *Griffith's Valuation* records is invaluable. And, if you already know which county your ancestors came from, you can specify which county record databases you want to search.

To access the information, you must register to use the website. Then, you can search the indexes for free. The indexes list surname, first name, year and county. To view a detailed record, you can purchase credit online for instant access at a cost of €5.00 per record.

A great feature is that the

available records are not limited to only Roman Catholic parishes. For example, for Limerick, there are Roman Catholic, Church of Ireland, Methodist, Presbyterian, Quaker and Baptist records. For many of the denominations, only marriage records are available. If you want to learn what records are available for any particular county/research center, go to <http://ifhf.brsgenealogy.com/generic.php?filename=sources.tpl&selectedMenu=showdatabase>.

THE NELSON FAMILY IN LIMERICK

My own family has one proven Irish connection (related to my Scottish branch). John Walker Nelson (born in Scotland) married Mary Ann Lillie (born in Ireland), worked as a watchmaker in Limerick and died in Scotland in 1887 (possibly while visiting his sister and her family in Inverness). The couple married 8 June 1875 at Gloucester Street Presbyterian Church in Dublin and had at least two daughters, Mary Anne in 1876 and Joan Cameron in 1879, both born in Limerick. Since the records for Dublin City are currently not included, my focus will be the daughters' births in Limerick.

I chose Limerick from the map on the home page, and then entered the surname, Nelson, and year, 1880, I wanted to search. This gave me a listing of 24 Nelson children born in Limerick between 1876-84 (the default is +/- four years for whatever year you enter).

Below the results list, there is a more detailed search option where you can specify the father's name. I entered in John Nelson and found the records I was looking for. Interestingly, besides the two daughters I was aware of, Maryann and Joan, there is also a son named John Lillie (It's likely that this was my

John Nelson's son, as Lillie was his wife's maiden name.). The names of the other girls, Margaret and Jessie, are interesting since John had sisters with both of those names.

When I searched on the 1901 census for Limerick, I found many of these same names — Jessie, Joan and Mary Ann. This suggests that the family remained in Limerick after John died. However, John is a very

11 matches for the search criteria: Nelson (see record) 1876-1884

Action	Source	Surname	First Name	Year	County
VIEW	D	Civil Birth	Nelson	Maryann F.	1876 Co. Limerick
VIEW	D	Civil Birth	Nelson	Margaret M.	1879 Co. Limerick
VIEW	D	Church Baptism	Nelson	Margaret M.	1879 Co. Limerick
VIEW	D	Church Baptism	Nelson	Joan Cameron	1879 Co. Limerick
VIEW	D	Civil Birth	Nelson	Joan Cameron	1879 Co. Limerick
VIEW	D	Church Baptism	Nelson	James Lillie	1880 Co. Limerick
VIEW	D	Civil Birth	Nelson	James Lillie	1880 Co. Limerick
VIEW	D	Church Baptism	Nelson	Jessie	1882 Co. Limerick
VIEW	D	Civil Birth	Nelson	Jessie	1882 Co. Limerick
VIEW	D	Church Baptism	Nelson	Alice	1884 Co. Limerick

Free Index Search for Co. Limerick

Full: Both Records for Co. Limerick

Surname: Nelson

Year: 1880 +/- 4 years

New Surname: Nelson

First Name: John

Search: SEARCH



Left: A list of Nelson births/baptisms in Limerick, Ireland that occurred 1876 - 84 and for whom the father was John. Right: Map showing counties with records available, in green, and counties that have yet to be digitized.

common first name, so my next step would be to obtain these certificates, which will verify his occupation and their mother's maiden name.

Another interesting tidbit about this family is that John's father, also named John, was a journeyman weaver/lace maker. He was never with his family in the Scottish censuses of 1840-70, yet, children kept being born and attributed to him in the non-conformist church baptism registers. I have often wondered if he was actually from Ireland (hence his son John's move to Ireland), considering that the family lived on the western coast of southern Scotland with easy access to Ireland. Maybe with this

become available.

Based on the research I did on John Nelson and his family, I am excited to revisit this family. Perhaps I can determine what happened to John Nelson, Sr., and discover if he originally came from Ireland.



Diane L. Richard is a frequent contributor to Family Chronicle, Internet Genealogy and Discovering Family History.