



Ireland Civil Registration

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Introduction

Civil registration is the government registration of births, marriages and deaths. In the United States, this same registration is often called vital records. In Ireland, the government began civil registration by registering non-Catholic marriages starting 1 April 1845. On 1 January 1864, the government began registering all births, marriages (regardless of religion) and deaths.

When setting up the civil registration system, the government decided to use a system already in place, that of Poor Law Unions. Between 1838 and 1852, 163 workhouses were built. These workhouses were at the center of a new jurisdiction called Poor Law Unions that did not follow traditional parish or county boundaries. These Poor Law Unions (PLU's) were further divided into Dispensary Districts (about 6-7 in each PLU) with a medical officer responsible for the public health. When civil registration began, these districts often became the registration districts and the medical official often became the registrar for births, marriages and deaths. They reported these events to a superintendent registrar who was appointed over each PLU. Thus it is important to know the PLU for the area in which your ancestor lived because this is the place in which his or her birth, marriage and/or death will be registered. The records for each PLU were then reported to the General Register Office, which was in Dublin for all of Ireland until 1922, when the country was divided into the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

When you know the name of a civil parish, a relatively simple way to determine what PLU a birth is registered in is to use the website www.thecore.com/seanruad. Use the second available search titled "Show me a list of the Parish in the selected County . . ." Choose your county, find your parish and a column to the right lists the PLU.

Information Contained in the Records

Birth, marriage and death records in Ireland contain a wealth of information, especially when compared to other Irish records. Because other records can be hard to come by, it is important to locate every birth, marriage and death record for your Irish ancestor and their family members. Below is are lists of information found in certificates historically. Modern certificates ask for additional information. For information contained on more recent certificates see the Republic of Ireland Health Service Executive (HSE) website: <http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/1/bdm/Certificates/> or for Northern Ireland see the "Births, Deaths, Marriages and Care website: <https://www.gov.uk/browse/births-deaths-marriages>.

Births

The persons required to register births were: the parent or parents, (if the parents were dead or unable) the occupier or tenant of the house where the child was born, the nurse, or any person present at the birth. The following information is recorded on a birth certificate:

- date and place of birth of the child (including the townland)
- name
- gender
- name, surname and residence of the father
- name, surname, maiden surname and residence of the mother
- rank, profession, or occupation of the father

The informant and register were required to sign each entry, including the date of registration and the residence of the informant, including her 'qualification' as noted above. Notice of the birth was to be given to the registrar within twenty-one days and the birth registered within three months.

Marriages

The officiating minister (i.e. Catholic Priest) was required to fill out the marriage certificate and forward it within three days to the registrar. They typically kept blank forms on hand to facilitate this. Marriage certificate details include:

- marriage date
- bride and grooms name and surname
- their ages
- their conditions (i.e. bachelor, spinster, widower, widow)
- their rank, profession or occupation
- their residences
- the name and surname of the fathers of the bride and groom
- the fathers' rank, profession or occupation

The certificate also had to state where the marriage took place and had to be signed by the clergyman. This will often also indicate the religion of the parties marrying.

Deaths

One of the following persons was required to register the death: some person present at the death, some person in attendance at the last illness, the occupier or tenant of the house where the death took place, or any person present at or having knowledge of the circumstances of the death. The details required for death registration are as follows:

- date and place of death
- name and surname of the deceased
- gender
- marital condition of the deceased
- age
- rank, profession or occupation
- cause of death and the duration of the final illness

The informant and the registrar were required to sign each entry and include the date of registration, residence of the informant and their 'qualification' as noted above. Notice of death was supposed to be given to the registrar with seven days and full details within fourteen days.

Locating the Records

Contrary to the popular belief that most Irish records burned, the civil registration birth, marriage and death certificates did not. That isn't to say that there aren't pitfalls in using them. It was the responsibility of the public to register births and deaths with heavy fines for failing to do so. Marriages to be registered by the officiating minister.

Indexes

The main major genealogical websites in Britain all have indexes to Irish civil registration. These include:

FamilySearch.org (www.familysearch.org) – The historical records collection titled “Ireland, Civil Registration Indexes, 1845-1958” boasts 23,023,320 records. There may be gaps in the index and Northern Ireland after 1921 is not included. Some of the indexes were also extracted and can be found in the “Ireland Births and Baptisms, 1620-1881”, “Ireland Marriages, 1619-1898”, and “Ireland, Deaths, 1864-1870” databases.

Ancestry.com (www.ancestry.com) – Ancestry has divided their Ireland civil registration indexes into three separate databases as follows:

- Ireland, Civil Registration Births Index, 1864-1958 with 9,461,858 records
- Ireland, Civil Registration Marriages Index, 1845-1958 with 4,568,834 records
- Ireland, Civil Registration Deaths Index, 1864-1958 with 6,662,503 records

for a total of 20,693,195 records.

FindMyPast (www.findmypast.ie) – FindMyPast has an index for the same years although the number of records is unstated.

RootsIreland (www.rootsireland.ie) – The civil registration indexes available depend on the county. To see what is available for your county, click on “Online Sources” in the column on the left then select “List of Sources” also in the column on the left. Then select your county from the drop down menu in the middle of the screen. Next, scroll down to the table titled “Civil Records”. If it isn’t there, then they do not have an index. Many pre-1921 birth, marriage and death records have been indexed with additional information.

Republic of Ireland General Register Office (www.groireland.ie) – There is a small box in the upper right with a link titled “Search GRO indexes online”. Click on the link and you’ll be directed to the website www.irishgenealogy.ie. In the bar across the top of the page, select “Civil Records”. Before being able to search, you’ll have to type in your name and agree to their terms. Their indexes start in 1845 and continue as late as 2010. To the right of the screen is a link to what information is contained in the online indexes. Be sure to check this as the information varies depending on the year. Also note the link to the right for how to order certificates.

Northern Ireland General Register Office of Northern Ireland (www.groni.gov.uk or www.nidirect.gov.uk/gro) – They have an index to births over 100 years ago, marriages over 75 years ago, and deaths over 50 years ago. Finding the index isn’t easy through the homepages above so go to <https://geni.nidirect.gov.uk/>. You can perform a search but to see the results of the search will cost credits and you can only search five years at a time. Five credits cost £2.

Family History Library – The Family History Library has indexes on microfilm from 1845 to 1958 for the Republic of Ireland and 1845 to 1959 for Northern Ireland. See the Family Search Catalog at www.familysearch.org, search for the place “Ireland” then the topic of “Ireland - Civil registration – Indexes” for microfilm numbers. If you’re at the library there is also a book in the reference area titled *Register of Ireland* (call number British Ref Area 941.5 V2vr) to allow you to find the call numbers more quickly.

Original Records

Republic of Ireland

Certificates can be obtained online or in the mail. For details, go to the HSE website www.certificates.ie and click on "Order a Certificate online" then click on "Apply Online" in the column on the left or in the left column of the table in the middle of the page. It will be stated that the cost for a certificate is €20 (Euros). However, it will cost only €4 if you choose to order an uncertified copy of an entry in the register.

Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland has digitized their birth, marriage and death records with privacy windows for births (100 years), marriages (75 years), and deaths (50 years). Go to <http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/gro> and look for the links in the lower right of the screen labeled "Order a [birth, marriage, death] certificate". There are links to the paper order form or to order online, click on the bright green link with an arrow labeled "Order a birth certificate and follow the steps. The cost £15 pounds a certificate. They can also be obtained through the mail.

Family History Library

The Family History Library has microfilm copies of the original birth, marriage and death registers for the following events and years:

- Births: All from 1864 to March 1881; 1900-1913. The Republic of Ireland from 1930-1955 Northern Ireland from 1922-1959.
- Marriages and Deaths: 1864 to 1870 and Northern Ireland from 1922 to 1959.

See the Family Search Catalog at www.familysearch.org, search for the place "Ireland" then the topic of "Ireland - Civil registration" for microfilm numbers.

If you're at the library there is also a book in the reference area titled *Register of Ireland* (call number British Ref Area 941.5 V2vr) to allow you to find the call numbers more quickly.

Things to Remember

- Never trust the birth date. It is estimated that 1/3rd of parents lied about the child's birth date to avoid paying a late fee. It is even possible that baptism dates may pre-date the birth date! John Grenham, in his book *Tracing Your Irish Ancestors* (FHL Book# 941.5 D27gj) states that the birth can be reported as many as 15 years late.
- It is estimated that about 15% of events, particularly births, were not registered in early years.
- The film numbers listed as a source for records at FamilySearch.org and Ancestry.com are often for the civil registration index to births, marriages, and deaths. Always check the film number in the FamilySearch Catalog. If it is to an index film, follow the steps above for locating microfilm copies of original records at the Family History Library.
- Be very careful to search all variant spellings of a surname.
- "Mc" and "O" may be dropped off surname. Search with/without & try interchanging them.
- More help: www.familysearch.org > Search > Wiki > type "Ireland Civil Registration"
- When civil registration fails to have the record you are looking for, try church records, newspapers, probate, and census records. These can help you locate information of those not listed in civil registration.