



USING IRELAND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH RECORDS

Introduction

Presbyterians—

- Were Nonconformists
- Were affected by The Crown laws which restricted their religious freedoms
- Were not as affected by oppressive Penal laws (from esp. 1695) as Catholics were
- Families, individuals, and sometimes even whole congregations who left Ireland for N. America in search of greater freedoms. Learn the name of the minister and search extant *fasti* lists which give biographical info, in order to learn the origins in Ireland where they came from

The Records

Presbyterian records in Ireland present researchers with a challenge. As nonconformists, Crown law affected those citizens who were not members of the State church or the Church of Ireland and restricted their religious freedoms. These laws were oppressive in the same way as it was with members of the Catholic Church. Because of this draconian culture, many Presbyterians—families, individuals, and sometimes even whole congregations-- left Ireland for North American in search for greater freedom.

A majority of the Presbyterian Church records commence from 1830, thus rendering these records of less value to the researcher. Presbyterian records include mostly baptisms and marriages with few burial registers that were ever kept or even survive. Many Presbyterians are found in Church of Ireland registers. And thus these records may provide the critical burial sought, because just about all burials occurred in Church of Ireland churchyards. Moreover, after 1754, the Lord Hardwicke act required all nonconformist marriages to be performed in church of Ireland parishes, but only until 1782 when Presbyterian ministers could legally perform marriages thereafter. This was not always adhered to, by especially Roman Catholics and sometimes Presbyterians. Due to the laws of primogeniture, and to prove a firstborn son's right to estated heirship, occasionally the firstborn son was christened in the local Church of Ireland parish. Church of Ireland registers must be searched as well as Presbyterian Church registers in the area in which you are searching. Often, Church of Ireland church registers commence much earlier than the Presbyterian registers in a given area.

Things I need to know

- Must know the civil (or ancient) parish in which they resided
- An approximate age (at a dated event)
- Name[s] – given and surname
- Siblings names
- Birth order of siblings might help

Key Events Affecting Presbyterian Records

- 1559: John Knox brings to Scotland the teachings of the Protestant Reformation started by Martin Luther
- 1606: thousands of Presbyterian Scots settle in counties Antrim & Down
- 1608: Ulster Scots Settlement begins in earnest in six other counties: Armagh, Donegal, Tyrone, Coleraine, Fermanagh, (Londonderry)
- 1641: by this year, 100,000 Scots and 20,000 English have settled in Ulster Province
- 1708: there were 130 Presbyterian congregations in Ireland—mostly in counties Antrim & Down
- 1740's: many Scots-Irish emigrate to N. America
- 1782: Marriages in Presbyterian churches are legalized
- 1800: laws governing Presbyterians and other religions began to relax by this time
- 1814: Belfast Academical Institute created to educate Presbyterian ministers
- 1819: Presbyterian ministers required to keep registers of baptisms and marriages (note exclusion of burials)
- 1829: Emancipation Act is passed by Parliament allowing the free expression and growth of all nonconformist churches to flourish. A dramatic spike in Presbyterian chapel-building is ignited.
- Marriage Act of 1844: (effective April, 1845) legalized marriages between Presbyterians and Church of Ireland members. All such marriages were registered in the GRO along with those of the Church of Ireland

Strands of Presbyterian Church Denominations

Ireland has had the following varying strands of Presbyterian churches which have existed through time:

- Church of Scotland Presbyterians [in Ireland] – 1603 (The Plantation Settlers from Scotland)
- Reformed Presbyterian (Covenanters) Church – [at least by] 1690
- Associate Church, later, the United Secession Church – from 1733
- Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church - 1910

- Evangelical Presbyterian Church - 1927
- Free Presbyterian Church - 1951

Researching Presbyterians in Ireland Church Records

1. Many Presbyterians attended Church of Ireland due to austere laws in the 17th & 18th C.
2. Adherents were willing to traverse considerable distances to worship services in another outlying township or civil parish. Search towns all around the target township of interest, for extant Presbyterian chapel[s].
3. Where complete congregations and ministers emigrated from Scotland to Ireland (especially 17th century), search the Calendars of Patent Rolls of James I, and the Chancery Court records of Ireland, for the names of land proprietors who uprooted and left to come to Ireland. These proprietors brought with them many land tenants to Ireland, with the early migrants being Church of Scotland members (Presbyterians). They came mainly from Scotland's western counties, to settle in mostly Northern Ireland's counties Down and Antrim and surrounding counties.
4. Must know the name of the civil parish in which your ancestor resided in order to determine the Presbyterian church[es] found therein.
5. Most church register copies are housed at PRONI; those remaining—usually in local custody (i.e. the original church, or at a Presbyterian church in a township elsewhere)
6. PRONI or the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland holds the church registers of numerous Presbyterian chapels throughout Ulster Province. To determine more precisely what holdings they have in their Presbyterian Church records collections, visit the following website's pages: www.IrishTimes.com/ancestors/browse/counties; then click name of county, then civil parish to determine availability of extant Presbyterian chapel[s]. Also, an excellent publication, *Irish Church Records* by James Ryan; see Appendix 4.2--it provides a list of all Presbyterian Church records microfilmed by PRONI, and Appendix 4.3 which provides researchers with a list of church registers still held in local custody.

FamilySearch online Catalog

Searches include—

- 1) Places, i.e.
 - a. Antrim, Belfast – Church records
 - b. Antrim, Belfast – Church records – Indexes
 - c. Antrim, Belfast – Church History [look for Presbyterian]
 - d. Antrim, Belfast – Cemetery records [look for Presbyterian]
- 2) Keyword: use such “search” terms as “Presbyterian”, “baptisms”, [name of] “place”, (i.e. county, or town or parish, or under “Ireland”

- 3) Author
- 4) Title

Websites for Irish Presbyterian

- PRONI's Guide to Church Records (http://www.proni.gov.uk/guide_to_church_records.pdf)
- Presbyterian Church Directories – FHL catalog: “Ireland – Church Directory”
- Roots Ireland at: www.rootsireland.ie - the most powerful and helpful site, currently
- Google!-ing: search all three or more following terms: i.e. “ baptisms”, [name of] “town/parish”, “Presbyterian”
- Irish Genealogy at: www.irishgenealogy.ie (Lucan Parish, only, Co. Dublin as of Mar '14)
- FindMyPast at: www.findmypast.ie
- Irishtimes: see www.irishtimes.com/ancestor/browse/#counties (try clicking on “Gravestones”; town name)
- John Grenham's website at: www.johngrenham.com/#links/ - this is John Grenham's website
- NIFHS – North of Ireland Family History Society – email for lookups to 50-70 chapels
- Ireland Genealogical Project (IGP) – www.igp-web.com
- Family History Library's “Favorites” posted online at: www.fhlfavorites.info - see several hundreds of Irish website links with online data
- www.presbyterianhistoryireland.com
- Emerald Ancestors at: www.emeraldancestors.com – 1m Ulster names
- Ulster Historical Foundation at: <http://www.ancestryireland.com/> - 2m names online

Countering Under-Registration in Presbyterian Church Registers

Alternatives to counter this issue of under-registration in parishes, i.e. baptisms, marriages and especially deaths—no matter the reason whether due to the clerk's neglect, or your ancestors' nonconformist religious persuasions, always be certain to search in the following records (after, of course, searching the Church of Ireland parish vestry registers first) at the local level:

1. Kirk session records
2. Nonconformist registers in the target civil parish
3. Nonconformist registers in parishes surrounding target civil parish
4. Marriage registers of surrounding parishes
5. Marriage registers of the Presbyterians in Church of Ireland parishes in a large city
6. Church burial registers (where extant)
7. Monumental inscriptions (MI's) where they exist
8. 19th Century: Civil registration records of death and marriage

9. Marriage Contracts: from Register of Deeds (sometimes given after husband's death)
10. Follow these steps for known siblings

Other Resources

- FHLC or Family History Library Catalog (online at FamilySearch.org; click “Search”; then “Catalog”; search under the name of the civil parish) – holds some transcribed registers
- *Fasti* lists provide names and biographical info for many Presbyterian ministers. Consider the following publications available at the FHL:
 1. *Fasti of the Irish Presbyterian Church, 1613-1840*. Authors: McConnell, James; McConnell, Samuel; Presbyterian Church (Ireland)
 2. *Fasti of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland*. Authors: Barkley, John M. (John Monteith); Presbyterian Church (Ireland)
 3. *Fasti of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland*. Author: Loughridge, Adam
 4. *Fasti of seceder ministers ordained or installed in Ireland 1746-1948*. Authors: Bailie, W. D.; Kirkpatrick, L. S.
 5. *Fasti Ecclesiae scoticanae : the succession of ministers in the Church of Scotland from the reformation*. Author: Scott, Hew, 1791-1872
- For early 17th Century Ireland Presbyterian research: Find Land proprietors' names in the Calendar of Patent Rolls, James I —who brought many land tenants from Scotland, with them to Ireland-- and which give Scotland place of origin, and their Irish place of settlement, see the following FHL books (and film)—
 - 942 B4pro v. 97
 - 942 B4pro v. 98
 - 942 B4pro v. 109
 - 942 B4pro v. 133
 - 942 B4pro v. 134
 - 942 B4pro v. 157
 - 942 B4pro v. 164
 - County Armagh: Calendar of patent rolls James I see FHL Film #1279356 Item 21
- An historical account of the plantation in Ulster at the commencement of the seventeenth century, 1608-1620. Author: Hill, George, 1810-1900. See FHL film #1426119, item 2. Note: This contains numerous notes about families of the founding “undertakers” of the early Ulster Settlements in the original six counties' plantations.