

# Researching the New York City Irish

By Kerri Tannenbaum  
Family Dot Connector LLC

[kerri@familydotconnector.com](mailto:kerri@familydotconnector.com) | [www.familydotconnector.com](http://www.familydotconnector.com)

There are a wide variety of records that can be used to research your Irish ancestors in New York City. This presentation focuses specifically on passenger manifests, census records, city directories, newspapers, and some lesser-known resources to help find the often-elusive Irish.

About 4.4 million Irish immigrants arrived in the United States between 1820 and 1923. In the early 1800s, it was expensive to cross the Atlantic Ocean from Ireland to North America predominantly due to British laws in place to prevent the departure of skilled workers. After the War of 1812 was over, the first Irish immigrants were largely linen producers from Ulster province who travelled as families and had the financial means to travel. Then, with improved transportation and more relaxed laws, more people immigrated in the 1830s to mid-1840s – many to Canada initially before making their way to New York. By the late 1840s and early 1850s, the Great Famine created a mass exodus of Irish – many travelling to the United States, especially New York. By the end of the 19th century, many young and unskilled men and women arrived from Ireland. [Source: Anne Sibert Buitter, *Tracing Immigrants through the Port of New York: Early National Period to 1924* (New York : New York Genealogical & Biographical Society, 2020), 185-189.]

## **IMMIGRATION RECORDS: PASSENGER MANIFESTS**

A passenger manifest marks the arrival of your ancestors to North America – many coming directly to Castle Garden or Ellis Island in New York. Some may have travelled first to Canada then crossed the border to New York. Others may have come through other ports like Boston or Philadelphia and travelled to New York.

**Here are some sites where you can search for passenger manifests:**

- **Ancestry.com** - Immigration & Travel collection
- **FamilySearch.org**
  - “New York, New York, Index to Passenger Lists, 1820-1846” searchable and browsable card index
  - “United States Famine Irish Passenger Index, 1846-1851” searchable index [no images]
  - “New York Passenger Lists, 1820-1891” searchable and browsable database [Castle Garden]

- “New York Passenger Arrival Lists (Ellis Island), 1892-1924” searchable and browsable database
- **FindMyPast.com**
  - “Passenger Lists Leaving UK 1890-1960” searchable database with images [great for Liverpool to New York!]
- **Nara.gov** [<https://www.archives.gov/digitization/digitized-by-partners>]  
Provides links to digitized collections of microfilm and original records:
- **StatueofLiberty.org**
- **SteveMorse.org** - Ellis Island and Castle Garden Search Forms and Ship Arrivals section

## **CENSUS RECORDS**

Census records allow the individuals and families to be tracked over time. Federal censuses were taken every 10 years from 1790 to the present. Due to the 72-year privacy rule, the most recent census available is 1950. Each census provides different levels of information.

New York State censuses were taken every 10 years from 1825 to 1925, except in 1885 and 1895. Only an 1892 census was conducted between 1875 and 1905.

### **Extant New York State Censuses for New York City**

County (Borough)	1825	1835	1845	1855	1865	1875	1892	1905	1915	1925
Bronx* (Bronx)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	X	X
Kings (Brooklyn)			Flatbush only	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
New York (Manhattan)				X				X	X	X
Richmond (Staten Island)		X		X	X	X			X	X
Queens (Queens)							X		X	X

**X = censuses survived**

\*Bronx County established in 1914 as separate from parent New York County (areas previously part of Westchester County before ceded to New York County in 1874 and 1895)

[Source: *New York Family History Research Guide and Gazetteer, Revised Edition, Part One* (New York : New York Genealogical & Biographical Society, 2017), 36-37.]

The 1890 New York City Police Census took place because city officials believe the federal census underestimated the population. The final count was over 1.7 million, 13% higher than the federal enumeration. It produced 1,008 volumes, of which 894 volumes exist today. New York City at the time was comprised of Manhattan and the western part of the Bronx that was annexed in 1874 from Westchester County. The 1890 New York City Police Census is available at the Municipal Archives in person, or on FamilySearch.org (full image can only be accessed at a FamilySearch Library, FamilySearch Center, or affiliate location).

## **CITY DIRECTORIES**

As a precursor to phone books, city directories provide listings of inhabitants (name, occupation, address). Its yearly publication provides a great way to track ancestors, especially between census years.

Irish ancestors may be hard to find in city directories given their regular moves to find jobs, especially when faced with poor working conditions and low wages. Plus, there were so many people with the same names.

**Here are some places to locate city directories:**

**New York Public Library** – in person or online at the digital collections at <http://digitalcollections.nypl.org>, particularly for Manhattan and Bronx directories

**Internet Archive** at <http://archive.org> – hundreds of New York City directories, especially Brooklyn directories under the “Brooklyn Public Library Collection”

**Ancestry.com** – “U.S., City Directories, 1822-1995” database

Note: Be sure to manually browse individual directories to ensure you find every year for your research subject due to errors in optical character recognition (OCR).

## **NEWSPAPERS**

Newspapers can provide rich information about your ancestors beyond names and dates. It can provide historical context of news events that impacted your family, as well as social events, birth/marriage/death announcements, human interest stories, and even crimes committed. Be sure also to look for information on the business they worked or owned, including articles and advertisements.

**Here are some sites to search newspapers:**

By paid subscription (or possibly free through your local library)

- **Newspapers.com** (can be part of an Ancestry.com subscription)

- **NewspaperArchive.com** (now free with National Genealogical Society subscription)
- **GenealogyBank.com**

Free sites:

- **NYShistoricnewspapers.org** (New York State Historic Newspapers)
- **FultonSearch.org** (often not working due to technical issues)
- **ChroniclingAmerica.loc.gov** (Library of Congress's site)

There are Irish-American newspapers specific to New York that may also provide helpful information about your New York City Irish for different time periods.

In the 1810s, *The Shamrock* and *The Western Star* and *Harp of Erin* may have published lists of passengers who arrived from Ireland. GenealogyBank.com has many issues available for both newspapers: *Shamrock* from 12/15/1810 to 8/16/1817 (246 issues) and *The Western Star* and *Harp of Erin* from 5/16/1812 to 5/1/1813 (51 issues).

“Information Wanted” ads were placed in newspapers when immigrants and families tried to find each other. They can be rich with information about place of origin or residence in Ireland, family names, last known address in New York, and other relatives. The following Irish-American newspapers published in New York may have “Information Wanted” ads, along with other articles:

- *The Truth Teller* published from 1825 to 1855.  
[GenealogyBank.com has from 4/2/1825 – 6/26/1847]
- *Irish American* published from 1849 to 1915.  
[GenealogyBank.com has from 8/12/1849 – 7/4/1914]
- *Irish Citizen* published from 1867 to 1872.  
[GenealogyBank.com has from 10/19/1867 – 10/10/1868]
- *Irish World* published from 1870 to 1878, then as *Irish World and The American Industrial Liberator* from 1878 to 1951. [GenealogyBank.com has from 5/25/1872 – 4/8/1905; copies also available at the New York Public Library on microfilm, and number of university library collections.]

## **LESSER-KNOWN RESOURCES**

### **EMIGRANT SAVINGS BANK RECORDS**

The Irish Emigrant Aid Society founded the Emigrant Savings Bank in 1850 to offer a place for Irish immigrants to deposit money and send remittances home to Ireland. A new account meant that the depositor's information was recorded in an index book, a deposit-account ledger, and a test book. The test book essentially served to verify the depositor's identity, much along the lines of security questions that we must answer today to access an account online. In turn, they contained valuable genealogical information, including date, name, occupation, residence, and a host of other details in the Remarks section. This section may mention place of origin, arrival date and ship, family names, and so much more.

#### **Best places to find Emigrant Savings Bank records:**

**New York Public Library** – houses original records as well as 59 reels of microfilm for 1841-1945. Reels 1-20 cover 1850-1883. In-person research is limited to microfilm and digital copy access only for these reels.

**Ancestry.com** – “New York, U.S., Emigrant Savings Bank Records, 1850-1883” database with images

### **MISSION OF OUR LADY OF THE ROSARY RECORDS**

Established in 1883 to provide counsel and shelter to young Irish women who arrived at the port of New York, they purchased Watson House in 1886 as a place for these women to stay. Over 33,000 Irish immigrants passed through the mission from 1885-1903. Records starting 1897 through 1954 are digitized and available for free at the Irish Mission at Watson House website at <http://irishmissionatwatsonhouse.org>.

## **RECOMMENDED BOOKS:**

*Tracing Immigrants through the Port of New York: Early National Period to 1924* by Anne Sibert Buiter

*New York City Municipal Archives – An Authorized Guide for Family Historians* by Aaron Goodwin

*Finding Your Irish Ancestors in New York City* by Joseph Buggy

*New York Family History Research Guide and Gazetteer (Parts One and Two)* by New York Genealogical and Biographical Society