

GENEALOGY POINTERS (10-16-07)

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"ONLINE RESOURCES for Finding Living Relatives, Part I: Introduction,"
by William Dollarhide

[This article is a preliminary version of Mr. Dollarhide's article, "The Best Internet Sites for Finding Living Relatives," which will appear in Everton's "Genealogical Helper," Vol. 61, Issue No. 5 (Sep-Oct 2007).]

"Finding Dead Relatives" is one way of describing what we do in genealogy because most of our ancestors are deceased, some for hundreds of years. Genealogical research involves the use of a myriad of resources to identify and record the facts of our deceased ancestors, and there is a long list of research sources available. One source is old city directories and phone books to find a person (of the past) by name and residence. (See the 01-09-07 "Genealogy Pointers" article, "The City Directory: A Genealogical Gold Mine," which gives some background on old city directories as a genealogical resource.) But for this article, the subject is "Finding Living Relatives," and, unlike dead relatives, this subject has one primary look-up resource: to find the name and address of a person living today, we need to use the current DIRECTORY listings available on the Internet.

Before diving into the websites for finding living relatives, it might be a good idea to confirm that a person is alive. Probably the best place to do this is through the Social Security Death Index (SSDI), a database of deaths reported to the Social Security Administration (SSA) since 1962, which is updated regularly. There are several websites available online with this database, but not all of them are up-to-date within the last few weeks. The latest version of the SSDI can be searched for free at <http://ssdi.genealogy.rootsweb.com/cgi-bin/ssdi.cgi>, which is updated monthly. The RootsWeb.com SSDI database has more search features than the others, and it is the same database as the one used at www.ancestry.com. Even more information is available at www.worldvitalrecords.com, where the free SSDI database is updated regularly, and every zip code for a deceased person's last residence is geo-coded to a detailed map of the area (and may pinpoint the location of any cemeteries nearby). If your lost relative's name is not on the SSDI list, the chances are great that the person is still alive.

There is another service available from SSA--again, something that might be done before using the online directory lists. SSA will forward a letter to a missing person. There is no charge for this service if the letter has a humanitarian purpose. ("Genealogy" may not be considered humanitarian, unless you are contacting the person to inform them of family matters, such as funerals, births, marriages, or matters that SSA would agree the missing person would want to be informed about). If the letter to the missing person is informing them of money or property they have coming, SSA will charge a fee of \$25.00 for the forwarding service. You will need to provide the lost relative's Social Security number, or you can provide detailed identifying information (person's date and place of birth, father's name, and mother's full maiden name). You must write a letter to the lost relative, enclosed in an unsealed, unstamped envelope with just the name of the person on the outside of the envelope. SSA will not reveal the person's address to you but will forward the letter, either to the care of the person's last reported employer or directly to the person if he/she is receiving SSA benefits. SSA will not follow up to determine if the person actually received the letter, and you are not allowed a second request. After a reasonable length of time with no response from the missing relative, assume they do not want your contact. To initiate this service, send a letter of request to: Social Security Administration, Letter Forwarding, P.O. Box 33022, Baltimore, MD 21290-3022. SSA's information webpage for the Letter Forwarding service is www.ssa.gov/foia/html/ltrfwding.htm.

Now let's discuss a search using the online directories. A directory is an alphabetized list of names of people for a certain place or group. A telephone directory may list just the person in whose name the phone is listed, while a city directory may list more people in a particular household (usually all adults, but sometimes complete lists of family members). Typically, these two general directory sources are the main lists available at the many free-access White Pages sites on the Internet. But there are more directories that may be specific to one association, trade, profession, religious group, or ethnic group.

Professionals involved in finding living people include law enforcement officials, private investigators, skip tracers, heir chasers, and professional genealogists. A few books have been published by professionals on the subject of finding living people, and in every case they report that the highest success rate for finding people comes from the name lists found in general directories. The professionals report that their success rate using just directories is about 80%. For the rest of us, we can obtain the same rate of success by using one or more of the free White Pages websites because these sites are made up mostly of general directory listings. It is that 20% remaining group that will require more work (and more money). These are the remaining people who are the hardest to find because they have no current published address or phone listing.

Many of the people within the 20% group can be found if you are willing to pay for the information. More complete name lists are available on the Internet, mostly offered by commercial people-finder sites. After an initial directory search, these sites also search expanded lists of people, such as names and addresses for unlisted phones or unpublished cell phone users (those not included in the general telephone directories); national lists showing a person's previous address and phone number; names and addresses of home

owners and personal property taxpayers, public utility company customers; lists of names compiled from legal notices published in newspapers, including bankruptcies, tax liens, court case announcements, marriages, divorces, sex offenders, drug offenders, etc. Other public records are also available for some of the states, such as real estate records, vehicle registrations, and driver's licenses. All of these compiled name lists are available through commercial websites, and all of them charge a fee for full access to their databases. Many of these sites have a free look-up in the general directory listings, but they charge a fee to access the details from the expanded name lists derived from public records.

Part II of this article will examine the top 25 People Finder websites from "Everton Publishers' Best Rated Genealogy Sites."

IRISH & OTHER NEW YORK ANCESTORS "Recovered" from 19th-Century Newspapers

Let's say that you know your Irish ancestors arrived at the port of New York in 1855 but you can't find them in U.S. Customs passenger lists. You also know that they moved to Ohio in 1857. You won't find them in the 1850 U.S. federal census, of course, nor do they show up in the federal census for New York in 1860. What should you do to pick up their trail in New York and ultimately make the connection back to the Emerald Isle?

One possibility is to consult 19th-century newspapers for New York City. Like their present-day counterparts, the "New York Herald" and other old newspapers are a great source of marriage and obituary notices. Ethnic newspapers in particular, like the weekly "Irish American," also featured a popular classified section for people seeking information on relatives and friends. Oftentimes, these ads mention places of residence in the U.S., provide names and relationships of family members, give dates of departure from Ireland and arrival in the U.S., indicate ships' names, and sometimes specify ages and occupations. Bearing this in mind, consider the following publications compiled by James P. Maher:

INDEX TO MARRIAGES AND DEATHS in the "New York Herald" [1835-1876]. In Four Volumes

The "New York Herald" commenced publication in May 1835 and ran almost continuously for the next 90 years. As a newspaper at the heart of the most vibrant metropolitan area in the U.S., its news features were of wide-ranging interest. Its announcements of marriages and deaths were equally so, for news about vital events in people's lives was a highly valued commodity in the age before advanced communications.

Recognizing that the "Herald" would be a likely source of vital records for the city's growing Irish Catholic enclave, genealogist James P. Maher set about to compile an index to the marriage and death notices from that newspaper, spanning the years 1835 to

1876. The fourth and final volume of Mr. Maher's index (1871-1876) is now available, and it brings the total number of notices abstracted in this series to 52,850 marriages and 194,325 deaths.

(Through Volume III, researchers will be interested to learn, these transcriptions contain references to the BIRTHPLACE of 15,349 individuals of Irish origin, 2,849 Englishmen, 1,113 Scots, and 833 Germans. Moreover, the transcriptions contain all of the information found in each marriage or death notice. Persons seeking a fuller description of one or more ancestors found in these indexed volumes should contact the author, whose address is given in each volume.)

VOLUME I: 1835-1855

This first volume indexes roughly 38,000 death notices and 14,000 marriage notices. The extensive notices refer to people up and down the east coast as well as to midwesterners and persons from as far west as California. The volume is divided into two sections--one for marriages and one for deaths--furnishing the names of brides and grooms (or the late deceased) and the exact date of issue of the newspaper.

http://www.genealogical.com/index.php?main_page=product_info&item_number=3670&NLC-GenPointers1

VOLUME II: 1856-1863

This second volume contains 59,000 death notices and 13,000 marriage notices. Like all volumes in this series, it is divided into two sections, one for marriages and one for deaths.

http://www.genealogical.com/index.php?main_page=product_info&item_number=9220&NLC-GenPointers1

VOLUME III: 1864-1870

Volume III contains about 15,500 marriage notices and a phenomenal 68,500 death notices! The volume is arranged in the identical manner as the other volumes in this series.

http://www.genealogical.com/index.php?main_page=product_info&item_number=9387&NLC-GenPointers1

VOLUME IV: 1871-1876

The fourth and final volume contains 28,825 death and 10,350 marriage notices. This volume also possesses a number of new or interesting features. Appended to the back of the data from the "Herald" are about 1,000 death notices from the Fenian Irish newspaper, the "Phoenix," for the period June 4, 1859, to August 10, 1861. In many cases, the death notices give, besides the decedent's name and date of death, his/her age and state of death, city and county of birth, and, sometimes, the names of his/her

survivors. Among the "Herald's" death notices from states other than New York, 6,300 notices reference New Jersey, where many New Yorkers relocated during this period. http://www.genealogical.com/index.php?main_page=product_info&item_number=9898&NLC-GenPointers1

Of Related Interest:

INDEX TO MARRIAGES AND DEATHS in the "New York World," 1860-1865

In addition to his work with the "Herald," James Maher has compiled an index to 3,500 marriages and about 8,500 obituaries for the years 1860 to 1865 from this short-lived Irish newspaper. The marriages are arranged in two alphabetical sequences: one for grooms and the other for brides. Each marriage entry gives the full names of the bride and groom and the date of the marriage. The death notices are arranged alphabetically, giving each decedent's name and date of death. Persons seeking additional information from a particular marriage or death notice (name of minister, groom's residence, age at death, place of birth, etc.) may contact Mr. Maher, who has transcribed all the genealogically significant data from the notices and stored them in a separate database. http://www.genealogical.com/index.php?main_page=product_info&item_number=9981&NLC-GenPointers1

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MORE OCTOBER BOOKS from Clearfield Company

You won't find the following six titles advertised on our website's "Featured Genealogy Books & CDs" page at www.genealogical.com, but you will be pleased to know that we have brought them back into print in October as well. Do you have Irish (in particular Potato Famine era) ancestors? Are you familiar with the Scottish surnames that predominate among Americans of Scottish descent? Did your forebears settle in the American South, or in North Carolina in particular? Are you on the trail of a Revolutionary War ancestor, particularly one who contributed to U.S. success at the Battle of King's Mountain? If one or more of these circumstances applies to you, be sure to consider the books described immediately below.

THE FAMINE IMMIGRANTS. Lists of Irish Immigrants Arriving at the Port of New York, 1846-1851. Volume VII: April 1851-December 1851

The blight that struck the Irish potato crop in the winter of 1845-46 brought ruin to tens of thousands of tenant farmers and laborers, reducing almost all of Ireland to poverty. As a result, between 1846 and 1851 more than a million Irish men, women, and children emigrated to the U.S. and Canada, mostly through the port of New York. Information on these people exists in an invaluable series of port arrival records, the Customs Passenger Lists. To bring those records dealing with Irish immigrants within the range of the researcher, The FAMINE IMMIGRANTS series was conceived for the purpose of

enumerating all Irish passengers who entered the port of New York between 1846 and 1851.

Volume VII, the concluding book in the series, spans the period from April through December 1851, touching on 120,000 Irish men, women, and children. The passenger lists are arranged by ship and date of arrival in New York. Each person is identified with respect to age, sex, occupation, and family relationships where such was indicated in the original manifests. The extensive index names every passenger found in the text. (By the way, the first six volumes of THE FAMINE IMMIGRANTS series--two of which are out of print--are also available from Clearfield Company, three of them in hardcover editions.)

http://www.genealogical.com/index.php?main_page=product_info&item_number=2217&NLC-GenPointers1

RICHARD GRIFFITH AND HIS VALUATIONS OF IRELAND. With an Inventory of the Books of the General Valuation of Rateable Property in Ireland

Although not a census, Griffith's Primary Valuation--or simply Griffith's Valuation, as it has come to be known--provides the following information for each tenement in each Irish townland: names of townland and occupiers, names of immediate lessors, description of tenement, acreage, valuation of land and buildings, and reference to the corresponding map from the Ordnance Survey. Given its content and its proximity to the Great Famine of the late 1840s, Griffith's Valuation has taken on major importance for genealogists.

The first half of the late James Reilly's book treats the history and method used by Griffith and his colleagues in producing the valuations. Here Reilly explains how the three surveys were conducted, how standard Irish forms of townland names were assigned, how the descriptive Ordnance Survey Memoirs were compiled, and what one can expect to find within their rich contents. In the genealogical section of his treatise, Mr. Reilly burrows into the intricacies of the valuations, showing how an understanding of the abbreviations and shorthand used by the valuers can lead the researcher from the valuation to other Irish records and additional discoveries concerning one's ancestors. In short, thanks to Mr. Reilly's prodigious effort, no one who has ever operated in the dark with respect to Griffith's Valuation need do so again.

http://www.genealogical.com/index.php?main_page=product_info&item_number=9371&NLC-GenPointers1

THE SCOTTISH SURNAMES of Colonial America

Genealogist David Dobson has compiled a list of Scottish surnames of the estimated 150,000 Scots who settled in the American colonies. Many of the same surnames, of course, apply to the even greater number of Scots-Irish colonists whose forebears had originated in Scotland before re-settling in the province of Ulster. Mr. Dobson identifies

Scottish names, provides explanations of their meaning and significance, gives examples, and, where applicable, names the clan to which the family is linked. In all, Mr. Dobson identifies about 1,000 Scottish surnames and their derivatives and also mentions one or more actual Scottish North Americans who bore that name before 1776.

http://www.genealogical.com/index.php?main_page=product_info&item_number=9790&NLC-GenPointers1

COLONIAL FAMILIES OF THE SOUTHERN STATES OF AMERICA. A History and Genealogy of Colonial Families Who Settled in the Colonies Prior to the Revolution

This classic work on colonial Southern families contains hundreds of genealogies, giving names; dates of birth, marriage, and death; names of children and their offspring, with dates and places of birth, marriage, and death; names of collateral connections; places of residence; biographical highlights; and war records. More than 12,000 individuals are referenced in the text, all of them easily located in the index. This work deals strictly with the genealogical history of Southern families whose forebears were established in the colonies prior to the Revolution.

http://www.genealogical.com/index.php?main_page=product_info&item_number=2550&NLC-GenPointers1

THE KING'S MOUNTAIN MEN. The Story of the Battle, with Sketches of the American Soldiers Who Took Part

This important work is drawn from contemporary records of southwest Virginia, the Carolinas, Georgia, and Tennessee. The first section of the book is a miscellany of court records of Watauga, Washington County, North Carolina (later Tennessee), 1778 to 1782; it contains, in addition, militia rosters for the years 1777 and 1779 and pension declarations filed by King's Mountain participants and their heirs. Section Two contains biographical sketches of the soldiers, numbering close to 1,000 and arranged in alphabetical order.

http://www.genealogical.com/index.php?main_page=product_info&item_number=6310&NLC-GenPointers1

FAMILIES OF CABARRUS COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA, 1792-1815

This book is a systematic presentation of all known information on Cabarrus County, North Carolina, families from its inception until the end of the War of 1812. The author extracted her findings from the 1790 Mecklenburg County census, the 1800 Cabarrus census, court records, Mecklenburg County deed records, marriage records, wills, and newspaper obituaries. The volume identifies 2,000 early families in Cabarrus County and perhaps five times as many persons overall.

http://www.genealogical.com/index.php?main_page=product_info&item_number=9824&NLC-GenPointers1

MICHAEL TEPPER ON THE PITFALLS OF PASSENGER RECORDS

Michael Tepper is probably the leading authority on passenger and immigration lists in the U.S. He is the author of *AMERICAN PASSENGER ARRIVAL RECORDS*, which is a road map through the tens of millions of records and resources documenting immigrant arrivals from the time of the earliest settlements to the passage of the Quota Acts of the 1920s. We recently talked with him about a few of the problems researchers run into when they are on the trail of an immigrant ancestor. Here is a portion of that interview:

Genealogy Pointers (GP): What would you say is the most common misconception about passenger lists?

Michael Tepper (MT): Almost certainly it is the belief that people had their names changed when they got to Ellis Island. In fact, immigrants did not change their names unless they applied for a change of name by deed poll at a courthouse or when they were naturalized. During processing at Ellis Island, officials had the actual ships' manifests in front of them. They called each immigrant by name, according to the manifests, and often put a check next to the name after it had been called. So the passenger records are an exact reflection of the immigrants' identities **BEFORE** they crossed the Atlantic, not after.

GP: Are there other false assumptions about passenger lists?

MT: Among Americans of relatively recent ancestry, say researchers whose immigrant forebears arrived after 1850, there is the belief that official passenger lists must also exist for the colonial and early national periods of our history. The fact is they don't. No colony-wide or U.S. law requiring the compiling of immigration records was enacted before 1820. The only immigration records prior to 1820 to have survived are really kind of quirky. For instance, we have lists of German immigrants who immigrated to colonies like Pennsylvania because the authorities, intent on keeping tabs on these non-British newcomers, required them to take a loyalty oath. Also, some of the most important published immigration records are not immigration records at all, but land records, such as Nugent's "Cavaliers and Pioneers" and Skordas' "Early Settlers of Maryland," which identify early immigrants who took up land grants.

GP: Let's turn that situation around. Can you think of an instance when surviving records are frequently overlooked?

MT: Yes. Here's a common mistake that's made by researchers hoping to find an ancestor during the 1840s. Let's say the genealogist is looking for a Sean O'Shaunessey, who is supposed to have come from Dublin to New York in June of 1849. The researcher finds a Sean in the official U.S. Customs Passenger Lists; however, because the record indicates that his country of origin is Great Britain, not Ireland, the genealogist concludes,

mistakenly, that this Sean is not his relative. This is an error that could have been avoided had the researcher known that shipping agents, or bursars, or others who were responsible for compiling the ships' manifests were far more likely to write "Great Britain" and not "Ireland" as Sean's country of origin during the 1840s because Ireland was, in fact, officially part of Great Britain. [End of interview]

To learn more about the history, contents, repositories, and accessibility of U.S. passenger records, readers of "Genealogy Pointers" should consult Michael Tepper's unrivalled book on this subject, AMERICAN PASSENGER ARRIVAL RECORDS. For more information about this title, please access the following:

http://www.genealogical.com/index.php?main_page=product_info&item_number=8700&NLC-GenPointers1

On the other hand, if you believe you're ready to embark on your search for a particular passenger record, you would do well to begin with our excellent collection, which you can browse at the following link:

<http://www.genealogical.com/categories/Immigration/11.html&NLC-GenPointers1>

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3. Call toll-free to our sales department at 1-800-296-6687