Genealogy and Irish History

Genealogy—tracing one’s family history—personalizes the past. It provides insights into family stories and traditions and, occasionally, helps unite relatives. Today, the field of genealogy is expanding rapidly as people throughout the world turn to the Internet to examine documents and local records that are newly available online.

More than 34 million Americans, approximately 12 percent of the U.S. population, trace all or part of their ancestry to Ireland. In Northern Ireland, many historical organizations and archives assist people of Irish and Scots-Irish descent with genealogical research. Key organizations include:

Centre for Migration Studies at Ulster American Folk Park, Omagh, County Tyrone:  www.qub.ac.uk/cms
Public Records Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI), Belfast:  www.proni.gov.uk
Ulster Historical Foundation, Belfast:  www.ancestryireland.com

A single document rarely contains a family’s entire history. Often, it must be pieced together using different sources. In Ireland, genealogists find valuable information in a wide variety of different documents including:

- Census Records
- Church Records
- Property Valuation Records
- Wills and Testamentary Records
- Landed Estate Records
- Street Directories
- Voters’, Poll, and Freeholders’ Records
- Emigration Records
- Militia, Yeomanry Lists, and Muster Rolls
- Poor Law Records
- Pedigrees and Genealogical Papers
- Encumbered Estates
- Registry of Deeds
- Business Records
- Grand Jury Records
- Gravestone Inscriptions
- Tithe Records

Immigrant ships brought hundreds of thousands of Irish and Scots-Irish immigrants to North America. Artist James Glen Wilson documented this vessel leaving Belfast in 1852.

Image courtesy Trustees of the Ulster Museum