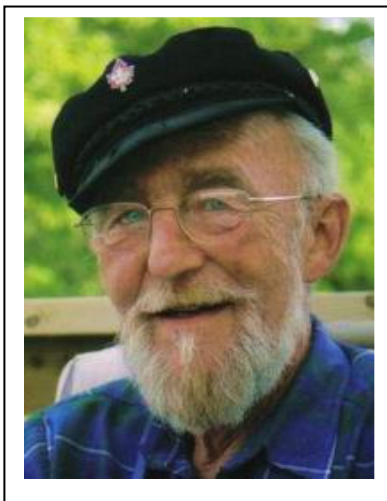


The Family Historian

Patrick Wohler

Column #13

Irish Geography



The single most important factor in tracing information about ancestors from Ireland is to identify where they came from, especially which county. Various of my ancestors claimed to be from Munster, Saintfield, Hollymount, and none of these is a county.

Ireland is divided into 4 provinces (Ulster, Connacht, Leinster, and Munster) and 32 counties. A few possible sources of confusion are that 'Derry' and 'Londonderry' are interchangeable as names of counties and after the division of Ireland in 1921, Queen's County became County Leix (or Laois) and King's County became County Offaly. Each county is divided into civil parishes, which do not necessarily have any relation to ecclesiastical parishes but are very important to know because they were the basis for taxation and land records. Usually when an ancestor said they were from a certain parish, they were referring to the civil parish. The smallest division is the townland. Just to keep things "simple" there are other divisions that are important for the researcher because some records are organized by them. There are Dioceses, Baronies, Poor Law Districts,

etc., but these will have to be a topic for a later column. Many townland names appear in several counties. I found Hollymount in five different counties.

The most important tool in identifying Irish placenames is the 1851 *General Alphabetical Index to the Townlands and Towns, parishes and Baronies of Ireland*. The 1851, 1871, and 1901 General Alphabetical Index to the Townlands and Towns, Parishes and Baronies of Ireland may be used to find the official spelling and the location of each townland in Ireland. Luckily for us, the 1871 (FHL #476999 item 2) [FHL=Family History Library, Salt Lake City] and 1901 (FHL #865092) indexes are available on microfilm and you can obtain them through your Family History Centre.

There is a searchable on-line database at: <http://www.seanruad.com/> which will also help you to find townlands, parishes, counties, etc.

For the counties comprising Northern Ireland, the "Index to Townlands (1823-1835)" was produced from the Tithe Applotment Books. The Tithe Books often list places within townlands or alternative names for a townland prior to standardization. The index names the civil parish in which the townland is located. The Townland Index is on microfilm at the FHL: #1565423 (A-D) and #1565424 (E-W).

Nicknames

Stuck with a nickname and wondering what the real name was? Some dictionaries will help but if yours does not, you can try this web site: <http://www.usgenweb.org/>. Select 'Researchers' from the top tabs and scroll down to 'Finding Names' and then "Given names and Nicknames". It lists the actual names in alphabetical order and gives nicknames that are attributed to them. This is not the most logical way to set it up but it beats what we had to start with and is more complete than a few other sites I checked out.

Possible Errors in Transcription

In reviewing the transcript of a church register I recently found a John Wiltby, son of Peter and Margaret Curran. This interested me because I already had two Margaret Currans in that church register. In reviewing the situation I found that:

1. One of the Margaret Currans was married to a Michael Lyons and was a generation older than the other who was a contemporary of John Wiltby's mother.
2. The other was married to a Peter, but it was Peter Skelly.
3. Margaret Curran and Peter Skelly had children (like many others) every two years with the exception of one four year period.
4. The birth of John Wiltby fitted perfectly into the middle of that period.
5. There were no other Wiltby references in the registers.

None of these arguments is very strong but, taken together, I feel that they make a fairly compelling argument to tentatively assume that John Wiltby may really be John Skelly. If it is important enough, it is worth checking the original register or a microfilm of it to verify if a transcriptional error was made. Have you had one of these problems recently? Please share it with us.
