

Belfast, & Nashville

*historical and genealogical connections
a guide to researching family history in Belfast*

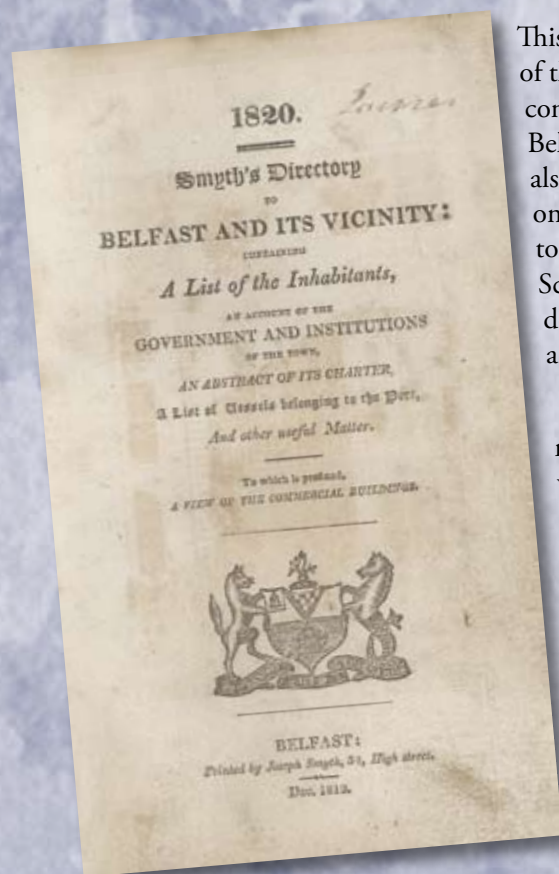


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NASHVILLE
SISTERCITIES SINCE 1994

Since Belfast and Nashville became Sister Cities in 1994, the relationship has flourished and there have been numerous cultural, tourism and business collaborations between our two cities. Highlights range from the annual Belfast Nashville Songwriters Festival which celebrates our shared musical heritage and enhances our cultural exchange, partnerships between Vanderbilt and Queen's Universities, to linkages in relation to economic and community development, cultural tourism, creative industries and genealogy.

This booklet explores some of the historical and familial connections between Belfast and Nashville. It also provides information on how anyone wishing to research their Irish and Scotch-Irish ancestors can do so in Belfast's archives and libraries.

For up to the minute information, visit our website at www.gotobelfast.com.



Nashville's connections to Ulster

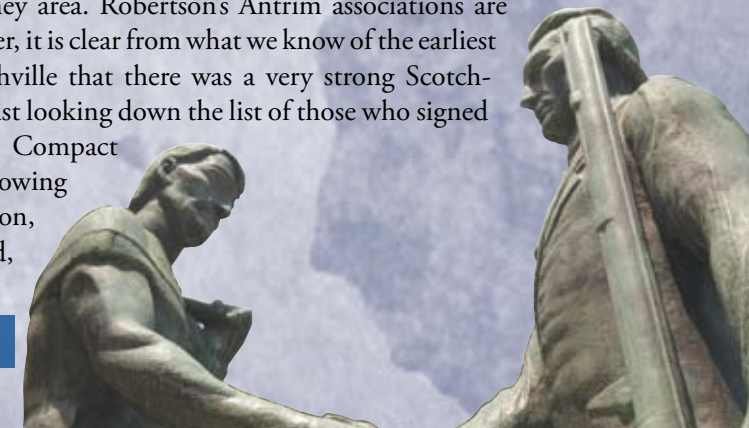
The connections between Ulster and Nashville have existed ever since the latter was founded in 1780. In the spring of 1779 Captain James Robertson led a small scouting party into the Cumberland Valley to investigate the region's potential for settlement. Robertson was impressed by what he saw and at French Lick he and his group built a number of cabins and planted a field of corn. Leaving a few men in charge of the corn, he returned east, secured the necessary title to the land, and made preparations to bring out settlers to populate the area. Robertson led the advance party overland, bringing with them cattle, sheep and horses. This group arrived at the site of what became Nashville on Christmas Day 1779. Another much larger party, led by John Donelson, travelled by river on 30 or so flatboats. This group arrived on 24 April 1780 after a particularly hazardous journey. A week later on 1 May the settlers signed the Cumberland Compact which set out the articles of self-government and provided for the election of public officials. The settlement was originally called Nashborough after Francis Nash, a Revolutionary War general. In 1784 Nashborough was renamed Nashville.



John Donelson

Both Robertson and Donelson are reputed to have sprung from families originating in east County Antrim. According to one source, Donelson was from the Carnmoney area. Robertson's Antrim associations are less certain. However, it is clear from what we know of the earliest inhabitants of Nashville that there was a very strong Scotch-Irish connection. Just looking down the list of those who signed the Cumberland Compact we find the following names: Anderson, Armstrong, Boyd, Bradley, Buchanan,

Robertson and Donelson monument, Nashville



Cameron, Campbell, Cowan, Edmonston, Gibson, Guthrie, Hamilton, Henderson, Lindsay, Maxwell, McAdam, McAdoo, McCartney, McCutcheon, McMurray, McWhirter, Mitchell, Montgomery, Patrick, Simpson, Thomson and Willson. Of course, not every Irishman who settled in Nashville was either Protestant or of Scotch-Irish descent. Among those accompanying Donelson to Nashville in the early months of 1780 was Hugh Rogan, a native of Donegal and a Catholic. Though his association with Nashville was to be brief, Rogan was to play a prominent role in the development of Middle Tennessee.

Following the establishment of Nashville, settlers poured into the area. One visitor to Nashville in the late 1790s reckoned that it contained 60-80 families living in houses that were 'chiefly of logs and frame'. These homes were somewhat scattered making the town appear larger than it was. The inhabitants were described as 'chiefly concerned in some way of business' – storekeepers was the term frequently applied to them. In many respects Nashville was the typical Scotch-Irish frontier town. By this time the surrounding countryside had been fairly well settled.

One young man of Ulster origins who arrived in the Nashville area in the mid 1780s was David McGavock. His father James had moved from the family home near Glenarm in County Antrim to America, eventually setting in Rockbridge County, Virginia, by 1757. David McGavock came to Nashville as a surveyor and is credited with producing the first map of the embryonic city. He also purchased land, building up a holding in excess of 2,000 acres of good-quality farmland. In 1795 he settled permanently in Nashville and in 1806 became the Register of the Land Office, a position he held until his death in 1838.

Another young man of Scotch-Irish background to come to Nashville in the early days of its settlement was Andrew Jackson. His parents left Boney before, near Carrickfergus, in 1765, emigrating to America. Jackson's father died



Andrew Jackson

shortly before he was born and he was raised in modest circumstances by his mother in the Waxhaws, on the border between North and South Carolina. Though his mother had hopes that he would become a Presbyterian minister, he decided in his late teens to pursue a legal career and in 1787 he was admitted to the bar. The following year he moved to Nashville as public prosecutor. Here he lodged with the widow of John Donelson; he was later to marry her daughter Rachel. Like many of the Scotch-Irish on the frontier Jackson engaged in a range of activities. Not only did he practice law, he also pursued commercial business interests and speculated in land. He also became interested in politics and when Tennessee became the sixteenth state of the Union in 1796 Jackson was its first congressman. Jackson went on to have a successful political and military career, culminating in his election as the seventh president of the United States in 1828. Today his home, The Hermitage, is one of Nashville's most popular tourist attractions (www.thehermitage.com).



Rachel Jackson



Alexander Porter

One who found his way from Ulster to Nashville by a route that was far from conventional was Alexander Porter. He was born in 1786, the son of James Porter, later a minister in the Presbyterian Church. A number of places have been suggested for his place of birth including County Donegal, where his family originated or in Drogheda where his father spent a brief period as a schoolmaster. His headstone in Nashville City Cemetery states that he

was born ‘near Armagh County Tyrone Ireland’ – Armagh should possibly read Omagh, the largest town in County Tyrone. Young Alexander is reputed to have carried a stand of colours for the rebels at the Battle of Ballynahinch on 13 June 1798, bravely holding them up even after they were riddled with bullet holes. Afterwards he escaped to Ballindrait where he lay low for a time before emigrating to America.

He made his way to Nashville where his uncle Alexander, about whom more will be said presently, had settled some years before. He studied law and was admitted to the bar in 1807. Two years later he moved to Louisiana and began a legal practice in the Attakapas region of the Territory of Orleans. Here he was drawn into the world of politics. He was a member of the Louisiana State Legislature 1816-18, a judge on the state’s Supreme Court 1821-33, and a senator in the United States Senate 1833-37. He was again elected to the Senate in 1843, but died at his plantation, Oak Lawn, less than a year after taking his seat on 13 January 1844. A newspaper obituary described him as an ‘eloquent and distinguished Irishman, upright judge, talented senator, and able statesman’. Under the terms of his will he left an annuity to the poor of the parish of Greyabbey to be distributed by his brother-in-law, the Rev. James Templeton of Ballywalter, and the minister of Greyabbey. Just six years into their marriage Judge Porter’s wife died while on a visit to their friends in Nashville. She was buried in Nashville City Cemetery. When Porter died his body was taken to Nashville for burial beside his wife’s remains.

Professions and Trades

Nashville’s Scotch-Irish inhabitants made a major contribution to the early economic development of the city. In his book *Irish immigrants in the land of Canaan* the historian Kerby Miller makes the point that by 1810-20 almost a third of Nashville’s most successful businessmen were Irish-born, as well as many of the lesser traders. He adds that ‘most were merchant middlemen, with full title to the goods they transhipped and traded both wholesale and (in general stores) retail.’ Among Nashville’s leading merchants of Irish background was George Crockett. Born in east Donegal in the 1780s, the son of William Crockett, George had settled in Nashville by 1811. He became a successful businessman and banker, establishing the Crockett Bank. By 1822 Crockett was employing David Fulton, a relative by marriage, as the treasurer of his bank. David’s brother William came to Nashville to study law, there meeting Andrew Jackson. In 1818 he was Jackson’s private secretary and in 1835 Jackson appointed him territorial governor of Arkansas. Familial relationships were of vital importance in establishing trading networks in these frontier settlements. Not far away in Gallatin George’s Crockett cousins were also making a name for themselves in commerce.

The fine houses built by these Scotch-Irish merchants demonstrated their success. George Crockett’s home was known simply as ‘The Mansion’. Another fine antebellum house in Nashville is the home originally called Tammany Woods that was begun by Alexander Porter around 1799. Now known as Riverwood Mansion, the house has been described as ‘one of Nashville’s historical treasures’ (www.riverwoodmansion.com).



Riverwood Mansion, Nashville.
© Tucker Photography, Nashville

Like Crockett, Porter was a native of County Donegal, growing up on the family farm near Ballindrait. He had emigrated to America in 1793, initially settling in Wilmington, Delaware, before heading west to East Tennessee and finally Nashville. He married into the influential Massengill family in Tennessee. In the early nineteenth century Porter established a successful business as a linen merchant. He also worked as a commission agent and built up an extensive property base. He is credited with having helped to build much of downtown Nashville. He died at Dresden in the Western District of Tennessee in April 1833. He had been travelling on the steamboat *Tobacco Plant*, but had left it in a forlorn attempt to escape the cholera epidemic that was sweeping the state.

Others of Irish background in Nashville were engaged in trades of various descriptions. William Keys, a native of Ireland, moved to Nashville in the early 1800s and worked as a saddler. When he died of consumption in 1834 aged 37 he was described in the *Nashville Whig* as having ‘always sustained the character of an honest and amiable man, a quiet and unpretending citizen and an excellent neighbor’. There were also a few professionals. A Dr Walsh from Dublin briefly practised as a surgeon in Nashville. He met his end in the summer of 1838 when he drowned in the Cumberland River, having been thrown from his horse. It would appear that he had ridden his horse into the river with the intention of swimming across it. He was described in the *Nashville Whig* of 2 July of that year as ‘altogether an eccentric character and though a practicing physician, but little known to our citizens.’

The Nashville City and Business Directory of 1855 shows just how much people of Ulster origins dominated the city. Names appearing in the *Directory* more than ten times include Adams, Allen, Anderson, Campbell, Hamilton, Hughes, Scott, Stewart and Wilson. There is also a fair sprinkling of ‘Mc’ names including McAlister, McAvoy, McCall, McCann, McClanahan, McGuire, McKinney and McLaughlin, as well as an O’Brien. Not every person bearing

one of these names would have been either Ulster-born or descended from immigrants from the north of Ireland, but the majority of them probably were. At No. 17 Public Square was the Irish Linen Warehouse.

It is evident that there was a strong consciousness of the links between Nashville and Ireland on the part of the citizens of Tennessee’s capital. For example, a memoir of the life of Robert M. Porter, MD, published in 1857 noted that his father Alexander was ‘of that sturdy race of people, the Scotch-Irish Presbyterians, which has furnished to our South-western cities and towns so large a number of prudent, sagacious, enterprising and honorable citizens.’ Similarly, at an event in 1914 to mark the 100th anniversary of the opening of First Presbyterian Church in Nashville, the Rev. Carey E. Morgan, minister of the Disciples of Christ congregation in the city, said, ‘We have the blood of Covenanters in our veins. I myself like to remember that the roots of my own faith, through my ancestry, were nourished in Scotch-fertilized North of Ireland soil.’

Nashville had its own Hibernian Benevolent Society. This provided an important source of fellowship and support for those of Irish background in the city. For example, on 1 May 1839 the Society met at Mr Gowdey’s premises, with H. Kirkman Esq. acting as chairman and Richard Connell Esq. as secretary. The purpose of this meeting was to show respect for two recently deceased members, Alexander King and William Livingston. King had only just died and his obituary notice in the *Nashville Whig* noted that he was a native of Ireland and a ‘zealous member’ of the Hibernian Benevolent Society. Members of the Society attended his funeral wearing ‘the appropriate mourning badge’. In the spring of 1847 the citizens of Nashville met to raise money for those starving in Ireland due to the horrendous famine conditions prevailing there. A total in excess of \$3,600 was contributed.

Many people from Nashville with Ulster roots joined the Scotch-Irish Society of the United States after it was established in 1888. The Society’s founder,

Col. Thomas T. Wright, was a resident of Nashville (though he was living in Florida when he first came up with the idea). Wright had been born in Ballymoney, County Antrim. His ancestry was English on his father's side and Scottish on his mother's. In addition to his work with the Scotch-Irish Society, Wright was the founder of the Southern States Forestry movement and the originator of the plan to bring the National Arsenal to Columbia, Tennessee. A man of considerable energy, he was the creator of various others local and national enterprises.

The Tennessee branch of the Scotch-Irish Society was dominated by people from Nashville. Among the membership from the city was John Campbell, born in Ramelton in County Donegal, who was the secretary and treasurer of the Nashville Cotton Seed Oil Company. Another Nashville member was John Hill Eakin, grandson of John Eakin from County Londonderry, who was a cashier at the Union Bank and Trust Co., as well as president of both the Bon Air Coal, Land and Lumber Co. and the Mammoth Cave Railroad Co. Among the Society's lady members from Nashville was Mrs Elizabeth Dake. She was the daughter of Dr William Church, a native of Coleraine. She married Dr Jabez P. Dake and moved to Nashville with her family in 1869 where she became the manager of the Protestant Orphan Asylum and of the Woman's Mission Home. All five of her sons became doctors and in fact the family was well known for its contribution to homeopathic medicine.

Nashville City Cemetery

Further evidence of the strength of the connections between Ireland and Nashville is revealed by the inscriptions found in Nashville City Cemetery. Opened in 1822, the cemetery is the city's most important place of interment. Located at 1001 Fourth Avenue South, at the corner of Fourth Avenue South and Oak Street, the cemetery has recently witnessed a major programme of restoration following many decades of neglect and vandalism. The website of the Nashville City Cemetery Association is a superb resource for anyone wishing to explore the city's early history (www.thenashvillecitycemetery.org).

A significant number of headstones in the cemetery record the deaths of people who had been born in Ireland and not just in the counties of Ulster, but also in southern counties including Dublin, Longford and Mayo. Some of the memorials only indicate that the deceased was a native of Ireland. Other memorials providing the name of an Ulster county as a place of birth include those to James Irwin, born in County Tyrone, who died in 1833, and Peter McQuade, born in County Monaghan, who died in 1843. Still others provide precise information on the place of origin. For example, the memorial to Thomas Gilliam (d. 1852) records that he was born in Cookstown on 24 June 1811 – a precision not commonly found on Irish gravestones – while his wife Jane (d. 1887) was born in Newry. Another native of Newry was Joseph Henning who died in 1862. The memorial to Henry Murray (d. 1872) states that he was born in Newcastle, County Down, in 1813.

In addition to the place of birth, other information on the deceased can be found on memorials to the Irish in Nashville. The inscription on the tombstone to William Cochrane, who drowned in 1830, tells us that it was erected 'As a Tribute to Departed, An Evidence of the Extent of Friends'. The memorial to Robert Porter, whom died in 1830' includes the lines, 'He had no family but left A Name Without reproach and A Memory Dear to his relatives'. On his tombstone William Gibson, who died in 1828 aged 40, is described as having been 'for many years a respectable merchant of Nashville'.

Of course, not every Irish emigrant prospered in America and there are many instances of premature deaths. For example, the handsome box tomb erected to the memory of David Jenkins, who died in May 1840 at the age of 24, records that he was a native of County Tyrone. His death was reported in the *Belfast Newsletter* on 22 May 1840, which stated that he was formerly of Strabane and had passed away following a very short illness. Possibly he was the son of Andrew Jenkins of Strabane whose name recurs in the pages of the *Strabane Morning Post* in the 1820s and 1830s. Closer to home we find in the graveyard adjoining Drumbo Presbyterian Church in County Down a headstone commemorating James Welsh who was buried at Nashville in 1866 aged just 20.



Churches and schools

One who played a prominent role in the early history of the Presbyterian Church in Nashville was Robert Smiley. Smiley, a native of Ireland according to his gravestone inscription in Nashville City Cemetery, was one of the founding members and first ruling elder of the Presbyterian Church in Nashville in 1814. He was the mainstay of the congregation in its earliest years and was took a leading role in having the meeting house constructed. Smiley died on his 40th birthday, 11 September 1823. Four days before his death he had been chosen president of the first Sunday School Society in Nashville. His obituary in *The Whig* described him as a 'good man, and a pillar in the church'. His inscription concludes with the lines:

In the full triumph of Christian faith
 In the last hour of his departure
 He offered these words
 All is peace within me
 Peace with my God & Peace with the world
 And
 Behold the upright man sees his end.

He married Araminta Eliza Gibson, who had moved with her mother to Nashville in 1804, in 1812 and they had seven children. She survived him by fully 57 years.

Another important figure in the history of Presbyterianism in Nashville was Adam Gillespie Adams who was born near Strabane in 1820. His parents were David Adams, a blacksmith, and Jane Gillespie. After leaving school at the age of 12 he worked as a clerk for a wholesale goods firm. In 1839 he left for America, accompanied by a younger brother. Arriving in New York he travelled overland to Nashville where two brothers as well as other relatives were already settled. He found employment with Eakin Bros, a wholesale house, eventually becoming a partner in the firm. When the firm divided in 1858 he took over the boot, shoe and clothing departments, operating under

the name A. G. Adams & Co. There was a short hiatus in the firm's history during the Civil War when Adams spent much of his time in New York. He was involved in other business enterprises, taking an active part, for example, in the establishment of the first cotton mill in Nashville, as well as serving as president of the Equitable Fire Insurance Company. On his retirement from business he was succeeded by his sons Adam Gillespie junior and David.

He had a lifelong commitment to the Presbyterian Church, becoming a member of the Urney congregation near Strabane at the age of 15. In 1840, shortly after arriving in Nashville, he joined the Presbyterian Church there. He was active in the congregation, organizing the Sunday School which evolved into the Second Presbyterian Church in 1842. In this congregation Adams served as an elder and superintendent of the Sunday School. When differences arose he separated from that congregation, rejoining the First Presbyterian Church in 1866 and becoming an elder in it the following year. Adams was involved in other religious and charitable activities. For over forty years he was the treasurer of the Nashville Bible Society, while he was also president of the Board of Directors of Ward's Presbyterian Seminary for Young Ladies. Such was the regard in which he was held by his fellow citizens that in 1880 he was made Chairman of the Committee of Reception and member of the Board of Directors of the Centennial Commission, the body established to mark Nashville's one hundredth anniversary. Conscious of his Ulster roots, Adams was one of the first members of the Scotch-Irish Society of America and served as vice-president of the Tennessee branch until his death on 31 March 1895.

Settlers from Ireland were also involved in educational institutions in Nashville. The importance attached to education can be seen in the will of Alexander Porter senior in which the testator specified that his sons Alexander, William and Robert were 'if possible to get a first rate education'. He also made suggestions as to the career each of his sons could pursue –

Alexander might consider becoming a merchant or lawyer, William a lawyer and Robert a doctor. He also suggested that if they were in need of advice on this matter they should turn to their cousin Alexander Porter. In the 1820s Mrs James Scott, from Ireland, moved to Nashville and established a school for girls, what became the Female Academy. She began in a rented room in High Street and then built a house and schoolroom on Vine Street opposite the Episcopal Church. She was considered 'one of the finest lady teachers that ever taught here.' She died in February 1841 in her 51st year.

The foregoing narrative is really only an introduction to the historical and genealogical connections that link Ulster and Nashville. Many others exist and there is no doubt that the familial tie is the strongest connection that links the two. There are a number of institutions in Nashville and online resources where further research can be carried out that will bring out the Ulster dimension to the city's history, including the Tennessee State Library and Archives (www.tennessee.gov/tsla) and Nashville Public Library (www.library.nashville.org). A division within the Library is the Metropolitan Government Archives (www.nashville.org/metro_archives). The website of the Friends of Metropolitan Archives of Nashville and Davidson County (<http://freepages.history.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~nashvillearchives/index.html>) contains a great deal of information of use to researchers. The Tennessee Historical Society, formed in 1849, is based in Nashville (www.tennesseehistory.org). In association with the University of Tennessee Press it has made available online the Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture (<http://tennesseencyclopedia.net>). The First Families of Tennessee Project by the East Tennessee Historical Society (www.east-tennessee-history.org) is also worth mentioning in the context of Ulster-Nashville genealogical links.

The excellent online resource that has been created by the Nashville City Cemetery Association has already been mentioned. Other information on gravestones in the Nashville area can be found on the Davidson County

Cemetery Survey website (<http://davidsoncocemeterysurvey.com>). Here too tombstones with an Irish connection can be found. In Spring Hill Cemetery there is an inscription to Margaret Brown who died in 1801 aged 100 years, 5 months and 17 days. Born in north Antrim, she had emigrated with her husband and family to America around 1745. Having lived in Pennsylvania, Virginia and North Carolina, she moved to Tennessee in her eighties. There are many websites that include information on Nashville families over the last 230 years. For information on James Robertson as well as a great deal of other information on Nashville and its environs see <http://jrshelby.com/rftw/genjames.htm>. A discussion on Robertson's family background can be read at <http://robertson-ancestry.com/data/robertson.pdf>. Those interested in their Nashville roots might also wish to join the Middle Tennessee Genealogical Society (www.mtgs.org).

Exploring family history in Belfast

Having discovered that you have ancestors from Ulster, what resources are there in Belfast that can help you discover more? A visitor to Belfast intent on learning about their Irish and Scotch-Irish ancestors in the north of Ireland is fortunate in that most of the archives and libraries that they need to visit are within the city's limits – in fact, many of them are within walking distance of each other. It is also true that with regard to the extent and coverage of their holdings that these institutions often have province-wide, and in some cases island-wide, relevance.

To begin with it is important to explode one of the frequently met with myths concerning Irish family history. Many people interested in exploring their Irish ancestry are put off by the claim that there is little point in attempting this as 'all the records were destroyed'. There is no denying that the loss of so many records in the destruction of the Public Record Office, Dublin, in 1922 was a catastrophe as far as historical and genealogical research is concerned. Of the many records destroyed at this time, among the greatest losses were census returns 1821-51, and the registers from over 1,000 Church of Ireland parishes. However, not destroyed in 1922 were the registers from some 600 Church of Ireland parishes as well as church records for all the other denominations in Ireland. Neither were official records of births, deaths and marriages destroyed. Since 1922 the work of archivists to gather records of historical importance has resulted in a vast amount of material being available for the genealogical researcher to peruse. Much of this good work has taken place in Belfast.

In the **Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI)** Belfast has one of the best – possibly even the best – regional archives in the UK. Here there are centuries of records relating to Belfast and Ulster. These include thousands of documents relating to the management of the estate owned by the earls and later marquesses of Donegall, the leading landed family in the Belfast for much of its history who have left an indelible mark on its





Harland and Wolff, Belfast

streetscape. Here too are records of many of the important businesses in the city – Harland and Wolff, several of the great flax spinning and weaving companies. PRONI also has a vast collection of church records covering all major denominations and all nine counties of Ulster. Cultural and intellectual records in PRONI include those for the

Belfast Natural History and Philosophical Society founded in 1821. Records relating to Belfast's governance can be found in PRONI and range from indoor registers of the workhouse to wage books of those employed by the Corporation. All these are useful tools in recovering what life was like in the city in past times and exploring the social worlds of our forebears.

The Public Record Office of Northern Ireland has a number of electronic resources. One of these is its eCatalogue which contains the information from the hundreds of very detailed paper catalogues – the product of the excellent work of archivists, such as Brian Trainor, Bill Crawford and Anthony Malcomson – that can be searched manually in its Public Search Room. A search of the eCatalogue reveals some two dozen references to Nashville, Tennessee. Several of these relate to members of the Bell family who emigrated from Ballygortgarve, near Crumlin in County Antrim, to Nashville. One of the items, for example, dated the last day of 1859, is a power of attorney with affidavits attached by the Secretary of State, the Governor of Tennessee, and the Clerk of the County Court. It involves Robert and Eliza Bell of Nashville and Thomasine Molyneux and concerns property in Belfast (D639/171).

The eCatalogue also reveals several letters from people in Nashville for family and friends back home. Around 1818 James Jackson wrote a letter to Dr Robert Tennent in Belfast and enclosed with it a small hand-drawn plan of Nashville and its environs along with a description about the local population – nationalities, employment, trading activities, etc. (D1748/C/1/90; sadly not presently to be found). In January 1856 Rosetta Kearney wrote from Nashville to Robert Moore in Carndonagh, County Donegal with news of how she was getting on in her adopted city. She was able to tell him that she was teaching in Nashville High School and earning \$40 a month – far more than she would have been earning through teaching in Ireland (T2799/1/3). A letter showing how family members could lose contact with each other is one written by Phoebe Quin from her home on the Shankill Road in Belfast to her son Alexander who was then living in Sydney, Australia, lamenting the fact that she had lost touch with her other son Thomas. 'The last letter I got from Thomas,' she wrote, 'was dated December 11th 1864, Nashville, Tennessee. He was working for the Government at the time of the war.' Thomas had in fact gone to America to look for his brother Alexander, but while the latter had managed to stay in touch with his family back in Belfast, despite his travels between continents, Thomas had not (T3848/8).

Among PRONI's other online databases is an index to entries in the will calendars relating to the three district registries of Armagh, Belfast and Londonderry covering the period 1858-1919. Here too it is possible to find out about family members who emigrated overseas. For example, the entry in the printed will calendar for 1883 informs us that Margaret King, who died at Omagh, County Tyrone in September 1882, was formerly of Nashville, Tennessee. Letters of administration relating to her modest estate, valued at only £90, were issued at Londonderry on 9 July 1883 to William Houston of Omagh, merchant, the attorney of William F. Orr of Nashville, one of the executors.

Other resources that can be consulted on the website of PRONI include the databases of registers of freeholders (naming those qualified to vote), nineteenth-century street directories (particularly useful if looking for a Belfast ancestor) and the Ulster Covenant of 1912 (naming those who were opposed to Home Rule for Ireland). Researchers should note that PRONI intends to close from September 2010 to May 2011 (inclusive) to facilitate its move to new premises in Titanic Quarter. The move is an exciting one for archivists and researchers and we look forward to seeing and using the new offices.



Artist's impression of the new
Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Belfast

The official keeping of all births, deaths and marriages began in Ireland in 1864. Prior to this non-Catholic marriages had been officially recorded, but only since 1 April 1845. The **General Register Office of Northern Ireland** (GRONI) is located in Chichester Street in Belfast and has records of births and deaths for the six counties that now make up Northern Ireland from 1864 onwards and marriages from 1922. (Civil records of marriage for Northern Ireland 1845-1921 are held by district registry offices.) At GRONI it is possible for members of the public to book an index search (with verification of entries by staff) or an assisted search which allows for a general search of records for any period of years and any number of entries. It is essential to book visits to GRONI well in advance as there is a lengthy waiting list.

Belfast also has several excellent libraries. The **Linen Hall Library** in Donegall Square North was founded in 1788 as the Belfast Reading Society and is the oldest library in Belfast. The Irish and Local Studies Collection is particularly

strong on published material for Belfast and Counties Antrim and Down. Its Genealogical Collection is unsurpassed in Northern Ireland for the sheer numbers of published family histories on its open shelves. In all the Library houses more than 250,000 volumes, 75,000 pamphlets, plus significant holdings of periodicals, newspapers, manuscripts, maps, microforms, photographs, films and recordings. Among its useful resources for genealogists is the card index to birth, marriage and death notices in the *Belfast Newsletter* covering the period from 1800 to 1864. A number of these relate to Nashville. For example, the *Belfast Newsletter* of 30 July 1833 announced the death at Nashville of James Falls, son of the late Alexander Falls of Newry. Falls senior was a successful businessman in Newry and prominent figure in the town.

Opened in 1888 **Belfast Central Library** in Royal Avenue is the city's principal library and houses some 1,000,000 volumes. Special collections include the 10,000 volume Natural History Collection; a rare book collection, and the Irish Collection. The last of these is the largest in Northern Ireland, and includes the 4,000 volume Francis Joseph Bigger Collection. The Bigger Collection is complemented by the Bigger Archive, with 10,000 items of archaeological, historical and biographical interest. Bigger (1863-1926), the grandson of United Irishman David Bigger, was a successful lawyer and member of the Gaelic League who assembled an impressive collection of books,



Linen Hall Library, Belfast



Belfast Central Library, Belfast



pamphlets and bound manuscripts of Irish historical, archaeological and antiquarian interest. A section within Central Library is the **Belfast Newspaper Library** which has almost complete runs of the *Belfast Telegraph*, *Newsletter*, *Irish News* and *Northern Whig*.

The **Presbyterian Historical Society** was created in 1906 to promote public awareness of the history of the various strands of Presbyterianism in Ireland. Once described as a ‘Treasure House of Ulster’s History’, the Library of the Presbyterian Historical Society contains some 12,000 books and pamphlets. These are mainly concerned with ecclesiastical history and in particular Presbyterian history. The collection includes a large number of congregational histories. A set of *The Witness*, a Presbyterian newspaper covering the period 1874–1941, is also available for consultation, as are the printed minutes of the General Assembly beginning in 1840. Manuscript materials include session minutes, baptisms and marriages from individual churches as well as some presbytery minutes, some of which date from the seventeenth century. The *Guide to Church Records* published by the Ulster Historical Foundation (Belfast, 1994) indicates which congregational records are available at the Presbyterian Historical Society. The society also has a duplicate set of the microfilm copies of Presbyterian Church registers held by PRONI covering the vast majority of Presbyterian congregations in Ireland.

If looking for Methodist ancestors, researchers might wish to contact the **Wesley Historical Society** at Edgehill Theological College. Elsewhere in the city we have the **LDS Family History Centre** on the Holywood Road and exclusively for members of the North of Ireland Family History Society the **Research Centre** in Park Avenue (www.nifhs.org). Though not located in Belfast, anyone wishing to find out more about the processes of immigration

and emigration should contact the **Centre for Migration Studies** at the Ulster American Folk Park, Omagh, County Tyrone (www.qub.ac.uk/cms). The CMS has been responsible for creating the Irish Emigration Database, which contains some 32,500 primary source documents on all aspects of Irish emigration from the early 1700s to the 1900s. Types of documents include ship passenger lists, emigrant letters, family papers and diaries of emigrants, shipping advertisements, newspaper reports, death and marriage notices of former emigrants, birth notices of children of Irish parentage, government reports and statistics of Irish emigration to North America. The Irish Emigration Database is accessible in all Northern Ireland public libraries and at PRONI.

The **Ulster Historical Foundation** has recently moved to new premises at 49 Malone Road which it hopes to make its long-term home. Here in a dedicated space there will be a library and resource centre. The Foundation is a not-for-profit educational charity which was founded in 1956. For over half a century the Ulster Historical Foundation has been conducting genealogical research on behalf of clients and to date has completed some 13,000 ancestral reports. The Foundation has also published a broad range of books looking at different aspects of Irish history and genealogy, and organises conferences, family history workshops and lectures tours. Among the Foundation’s electronic resources is a large database of civil and church records mainly relating to counties Antrim and Down, including the city of Belfast.

One interesting record with a Nashville association is the marriage that took place on 10 December 1872 in St James’ Church of Ireland church in Belfast between John Nashville Villers Ryan and Charlotte Savage. The groom was a medical doctor and the son of William Villers Ryan. The question that naturally arises is how the groom acquired Nashville as one of his middle names. The answer possibly lies within a high-railed enclosure in the burial ground attached to Killyleagh Presbyterian Church in County Down. Here

are two marble memorials to the Ryan family, now sadly weathered and broken. The inscriptions provide a fascinating snapshot of the Ryan family history and commemorate several family members who died in America and elsewhere. One of them, William, was 'killed whilst trying to save life at a fire in New Orleans'. Another, John, died at Nashville, Tennessee, in 1862. A more detailed account of sources that can be used to study Belfast's families consult is *'My Roots': Tracing your Belfast Ancestors* which can be downloaded for free from the homepage of the Ulster Historical Foundation's website (www.ancestryireland.com).

Just as the City Cemetery and other burial grounds in Nashville can tell us so much about the inhabitants of that city so Belfast's burial grounds reveal its past. There are more than a dozen graveyards in the city of Belfast or in its immediate environs. All of these burial grounds are extremely important places for discovering more about Belfast's social, economic and genealogical history. The oldest graveyards in the Belfast area are Shankill, Friar's Bush and Knock, all of which date from the medieval period. There was once a graveyard on the site of what is now St George's Church in High Street, but it was removed in the early nineteenth century and virtually all of the gravestones were lost. Belfast City Cemetery and Milltown Cemetery were both opened in 1869. In more recent times, burial grounds have been opened at Dundonald (1905) and Roselawn (1954). You can read about the history of these graveyards online (www.belfastcity.gov.uk/cemeteries). The inscriptions from most of Belfast's burial grounds have been published by the Ulster Historical Foundation. Burial records for the graveyards of Friar's Bush, the New Burying Ground at Clifton Street, Milltown, and Balmoral are available in the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland.

Useful Books on Ulster Genealogy

Numerous books on Irish genealogy have been written. Probably the best general guide is John Grenham's *Tracing your Irish Ancestors* (2006), now in its third edition. Grenham discusses the principal sources available for those wishing to find out more about their family history. Other volumes deal more closely with a specific area, period or theme. Ian Maxwell's *Tracing your ancestors in Northern Ireland* (1997) is primarily concerned with records in the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland. He is also the author of two county guides published by the Ulster Historical Foundation: *Researching Armagh Ancestors* (2000) and *Researching Down Ancestors* (2004). Genealogical guides for counties Cork, Donegal, Dublin, Kerry, Limerick and Mayo have been published by Flyleaf Press.

William Roulston's *Researching Scots-Irish Ancestors: the essential genealogical guide to early modern Ulster, 1600-1800* (2005), also by the Ulster Historical Foundation, provides a comprehensive overview of sources for studying family history in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, including a summary listing of sources for virtually every parish in Ulster. An indispensable book is *Guide to Irish Libraries, Archives and Genealogical Centres* by Robert K. O'Neill (2nd edition, Belfast, 2007) which provides contact details, as well as summary information on collections held by the main archives in Ireland.



Lagan Weir, Belfast

Archives and Libraries in Belfast

The following is a list of the most important archives and libraries in Belfast. Note: it is vitally important that you make contact prior to your visit to ensure that the institution in question is open. Some of the archives and libraries listed here are only open at certain times or have restrictions on who can access them.

BELFAST CENTRAL LIBRARY *(including NEWSPAPER LIBRARY)*

Royal Avenue
Belfast, BT1 1EA
Telephone: (028) 9050 9150
E-mail: info@libraries.belfast-elb.gov.uk
Website: www.belb.org.uk

EDGEHILL THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE WESLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY IN IRELAND

Edgehill College,
9 Lennoxvale
Belfast, BT9 5BY
Telephone: (028) 9068 6935
E-mail: librarian@edgehillcollege.org
Website: www.edgehillcollege.org

FAMILY HISTORY CENTRE *(LDS)*

403 Holywood Road
Belfast, BT4 2GU
Telephone: (028) 9076 8250
Website: www.familysearch.org

GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE

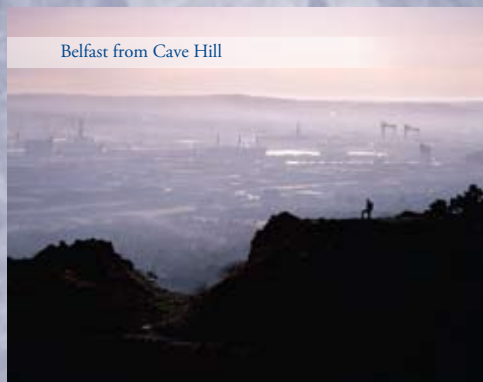
Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency
Oxford House
49/55 Chichester Street
Belfast, BT1 4HL
Telephone: (028) 9025 2000
Email: gro.nisra@dfpni.gov.uk
(Birth, Death and Marriage Certificate Enquiries)
Website: www.groni.gov.uk

LINEN HALL LIBRARY

17 Donegall Square North
Belfast, BT1 5GD
Telephone: (028) 9032 1707
Email: info@linenhall.com
Website: www.linenhall.com/Home/home.html

PRESBYTERIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Room 218, Church House,
Fisherwick Place
Belfast, BT1 6DW
Telephone: (028) 9032 2284
Email: pshlibrarian@pcinet.org
Website: www.presbyterianhistoryireland.com



Belfast from Cave Hill



City Hall, Belfast

PUBLIC RECORD OFFICE OF NORTHERN IRELAND

66 Balmoral Avenue
 Belfast, BT9 6NY
 Telephone: (028) 9025 1318
 Email: proni@gov.uk
 Website: www.proni.gov.uk

ULSTER HISTORICAL FOUNDATION

49 Malone Road
 Belfast, BT9 6RY
 Telephone: (028) 9066 1988
 Email: enquiry@uhf.org.uk
 Website: www.ancestryireland.com

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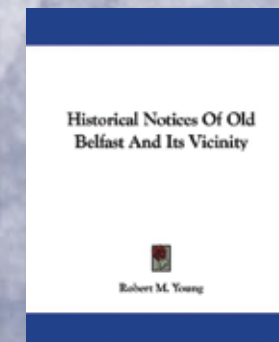
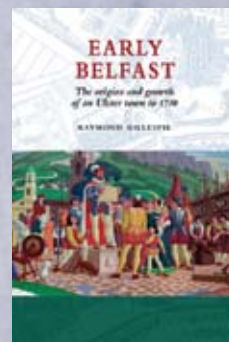
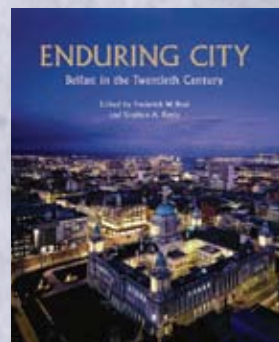
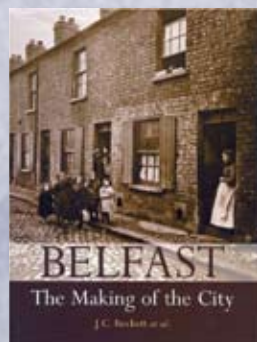
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www.ancestryireland.com





**For up to the minute information on Belfast,
visit our website at www.gotobelfast.com.**

Here you will find great offers on travel, accommodation, restaurants, events, places to visit and things to do to suit every taste and budget. With legendary hospitality, fascinating visitor attractions, stunning cityscapes and definitely the best 'craic' around, it's the ideal location for a holiday and is why Belfast is fast becoming established as one of Europe's most captivating city destinations.

Belfast City Council
www.belfastcity.gov.uk

