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VOL. 2, ISSUE 5

1926 Census Special Edition

APRIL 2026

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Your TOP 10  
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ANSWERED*

LINE BY LINE, IRELAND'S 1926 CENSUS  
REVEALS A NEW DAWN

# *A NATION COUNTED*

*Women in the New State:  
Hidden Stories in the Returns*

*Eat Like Your  
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1926 Irish Stew*

**SPECIAL BRIGID'S LIBRARY: FOUR BONUS READS ABOUT 1926**

# RELATED Magazine Special Edition

*Why are you receiving this?*

Because you were clever enough to join **Irish by Ancestry**, the fastest growing, most informed Irish genealogy and culture group on Facebook. We bring you closer to your Irish roots while helping you better understand modern Ireland.

This magazine is the monthly publication offered free to our members as a thank you for being with us. Our valuable resources set us apart from other groups. We are genealogists, historians, and journalists, representing the countries our Irish ancestors claimed as home as they emigrated.

We aim to bring you the most helpful information as you navigate the difficulties of finding your Irish connections. Our monthly features include **Ask the Heritage Help Desk**, where our genealogists take your questions; the **Ancestor Memoir** contest; **Routes & Roots** where we focus on destinations your ancestors may have known well, and more. We also have a book club where we explore Irish history and literature, both classic and modern.



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# Did you know Irish by Ancestry offers CLASSES? Only \$30 each

Our knowledgeable professional genealogist Karlee Twiner hosts classes every month to help sort out your challenges

The next session starts *SATURDAY, APRIL 18 at noon EST:*

## The Long-Awaited 1926 Census Party!

This class is also a celebration. Let us walk you through the new census and celebrate what we find together. This is the newest Irish census available, the first of the Irish Free State. Learn what is and isn't included. Karlee Twiner has tricks to share for finding people, especially if the algorithm fails you. Sign up at [byancestry.com/classes](https://byancestry.com/classes)

## Schedule for this quarter at [byancestry.com/classes](https://byancestry.com/classes)

### Census and Census Substitutes (Pre-1901)

*May 9, 2026 NOON EST*

Unfortunately, most Irish census data has been lost through various accidents and oversights. However, all is not lost. There are several other records that can be used to follow your ancestors over the years. Learn how to read and use records like Griffith's Valuation.

### The Irish in Great Britain

*May 18, 2026 NOON EST*

Did your Irish ancestors first stop in England, Scotland, and/or Wales? Learn how to navigate the records of Great Britain to help you find where they came from originally in Ireland. Learn about the differences between all three coun-

tries and how these differences may affect the records that are available for you to search.

### Civil Registration

*June 5, 2026 NOON EST*

Want to find a birth, marriage, or death record? Come learn the limits to Irish Civil Registration and how to use the records properly. Learn how to bridge the gap between Civil Registration and church records.

### Catholic Church Records

*June 29, 2026 5 pm EST*

Discover your Catholic ancestors and what records are available for them. Learn the strengths and limitations of these records and how history affects your ability to find your ancestors.

### Protestant Church Records

*July 9, 2026 5 p.m. EST*

Learn about the different Protestant denominations that prevailed in Ireland and what records are available. Learn where to find records for each denomination and what kind of information each sect kept.

### The Irish in Australia

DATE: *July 23, 2026*

TIME: 5 pm EST

It is not uncommon to find Irish ancestors who were sent to Australia against their will (i.e. Transportation for criminal offenses), but the Irish also went to Australia willingly. Learn about the different records that Australia has to offer in order to trace back your family tree.

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## *1926 Unsealed: Joy, Loss, and Our Stories*



In just two days, the 1926 Census will finally be opened to us. For so long it has felt like a promise on the horizon, something we could see but not yet reach. Now it stands before us, close enough to touch, and I'm feeling that familiar blend of excitement, trepidation, and quiet remembrance that so often accompanies Irish family history.

For many of us, this release will be a moment of recognition. We will thrill to see the names of grandparents and great-grandparents, perhaps still young and at the start of lives we think we already know. We will find them in townlands and streets that live in our stories, and sometimes, in places we did not expect at all.

The 1926 Census sits at a crossroads in Irish history; those little lines of ink will catch our families at a moment when the country itself was still finding its way.

For others, this will be a moment of absence. Our people may not appear—lost to emigration, to poverty, to illness, or simply to the quiet turning of time. Some of our relatives will be there in the records; others will have already moved on along the paths that would one day lead to us, wherever in the world we now live. The census will show us a frame from a longer film, and we will feel the presence of those who stood just outside the shot.

There is also a deeper ache for those with roots in the North. Partition drew new borders across old parishes and familiar fields. Families who once belonged to the same county or townland found themselves written into different jurisdictions, into different futures. While we celebrate the opening of the 1926 Census for what is now the Republic, we cannot ignore the sadness and, yes, the lingering bitterness that we do not yet have the same window into the lives of our people in the counties that became Northern Ireland.

That absence is a silence in the record. It speaks of all that was divided, and of the stories that are still out of reach. Acknowledging that hurt is part of honoring our ancestors, too. They did not live neatly within the borders that history later

drew around them, and our research should be allowed to follow their lives wherever they went.

And yet, if Irish genealogy has taught us anything, it is perseverance. We have learned to read between the lines, to rescue whole lives from scraps of paper, to build family from whispers and half-remembered names. The 1926 Census will not answer every question, but it will open countless doors.

So, we will do what we have always done: We will keep digging. And as we do, we also pause to celebrate. This is a rare and precious moment in our shared journey—a chance to stand together at the threshold of new discoveries.

To each of you in our ever-growing, 123,000-strong **Irish by Ancestry** community, scattered across the globe yet bound by these same names and places: Thank you. Your curiosity, your generosity in sharing stories, and your determination to keep searching have made this community what it is. As we turn the page to 1926, we do so with hope, and with the joy of knowing that we will continue to grow and learn together.

Love, your admin,

*Shelagh* 🍀

# Who Will You Find ... ?

## *Your Top Census Questions Answered*

By **SHELAGH BRALEY STARR**

RELATED  Staff

The 1926 Irish census is one of the most eagerly awaited releases in Irish family history. For descendants in the United States, Canada, Australia, UK, and beyond, it promises to reconnect scattered families and confirm long suspected links. But will it hold answers for you—and how can you prepare to use it?

Below are 10 key questions family historians ask, with practical guidance you can act on now.

**How do I know the 1926 Irish census will have information for me?**

The 1926 census covers the 26 counties of the Irish Free State—today’s Republic of Ireland. It does not include the six counties of Northern Ireland (Antrim, Armagh, Derry/Londonderry, Down, Fermanagh and Tyrone).

Start by asking:

*Did my family come from the area that became the Free State?*



Your ancestors' ancestors are waiting in the pages of the 1926 Census. Even if the ancestors you know left before the census, you can still find traces of them that will be useful. Credit: Shutterstock

## *Were close relatives still in Ireland in 1926?*

If your emigrant ancestor left long before 1926, they won't appear personally. But parents, siblings, cousins or in laws may still be in the home place. The census can show who stayed behind, who inherited the farm or shop, and whether the family remained in the same townland.

The 1926 census is especially valuable if you already know a likely county or parish and want to confirm you have the right family in the right place.

### **I don't know where in Ireland my ancestor came from. What should I do first?**

Before diving into Irish records, work from the country where your ancestor settled. The goal is to move from "Ireland" to a specific county, and ideally a parish or townland.

In the **United States**, concentrate on:

- Death certificates and obituaries
- Naturalization papers and passenger lists
- Church registers and marriage records
- Gravestones and local histories

In **Canada**:

- Provincial civil registrations of births, marriages and deaths
- Church records and cemetery registers
- Passenger lists and border crossings
- County histories and land records

In **Australia**:

- Civil registrations (often very detailed)
- Immigration, assisted passages and, where relevant, convict records
- Inquests, newspapers (via Trove), and burial records

In the **UK**:

- Census returns, especially 1851–1911
- Birth, marriage, and death certificates
- Parish and Catholic registers

Every clue (a county name on a death certificate, a town mentioned in an obituary) helps to narrow down where you should be looking in Irish sources, including the 1926 census.



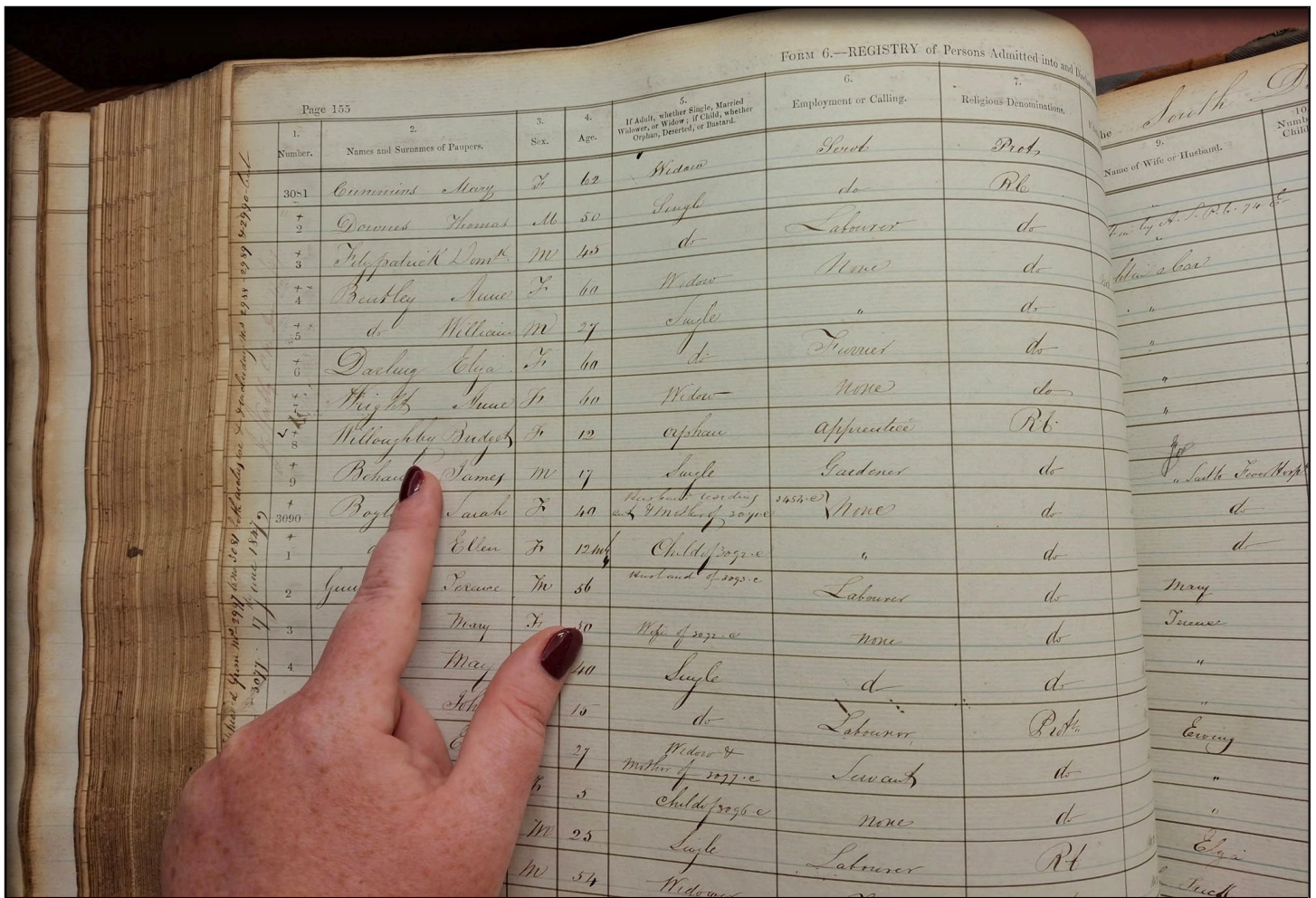
Man loading punch cards into tabulating machine used in the 1920s. Credit: Shutterstock

### **Weren't most Irish records destroyed? Is it worth the effort?**

The story that "all the Irish records burned" is only partly true. It is harder to research some periods, but far more survives than many people realize.

Among the **most important surviving records** are:

- Civil registration of non Catholic marriages from 1845, and all births, marriages and deaths from 1864
- Complete censuses for 1901 and 1911, covering all 32 counties
- Many Catholic and Protestant parish registers from the early 1800s
- Griffith's Valuation (1847–64) and later land revision books



The census will reveal all household member names, relationships to head of household, age, sex, marital status, religion, occupation, sometimes even employer, literacy, language, address, and place of birth. Credit: Karlee Twiner

Wills, land and court records in scattered but useful collections

Local newspapers, directories, and estate papers

The 1926 census will sit alongside these, filling a crucial post independence gap and offering a fresh snapshot of families on the ground.

### What kind of information will the 1926 census give?

While the exact online presentation remains to be seen, it is expected to mirror earlier censuses in providing:

- Names of all household members
- Relationship to the head of household
- Age, sex and marital status

### Religion

Occupation and sometimes employment status

Literacy and language (Irish, English or both)

Full address down to the townland or street

Place of birth

For family historians, that means:

- Confirming the right household in the right locality
- Discovering previously unknown children, widows or remarriages

Tracking movement within Ireland through changing birthplaces of younger children

It transforms an abstract “family line” into a real household in a real community.

### My ancestors left long before 1926. Can this



Native woman of Keel, an impoverished village of Achill Island, West coast of Ireland, circa 1923. Credit: Shutterstock

## How do Irish naming and place terms affect my search?

Irish research is easier when you understand two things: naming customs and geography.

Traditional naming patterns often ran like this:

1st son after the paternal grandfather, 2nd son after the maternal grandfather, 1st daughter after the maternal grandmother, 2nd daughter after the paternal grandmother

These patterns are not universal, but they can hint at grandparents' names when records are thin.

On the geography side, be aware that a rural Irish address may include:

A townland (the key small land unit)  
A civil parish  
Possibly a Catholic parish, which may differ  
A registration district and county

Spelling is flexible in both surnames and place names. Expect variation and use wildcard searching where possible.

## How do I cope with very common Irish surnames?

Surnames such as Murphy, Kelly, O'Brien, or Ryan appear in almost every county. To cut through the noise:

Combine surname with precise locality, given names, religion and occupation  
Study the entire household and neighbourhood, not just one person  
Use rarer associated names—maiden names, distinctive first names—as anchors  
Track witnesses to baptisms and marriages, who often belong to the same extended family

With the 1926 census, you are looking for the right cluster of people, ages, and occupations in the right

## census still help me?

Yes. Even if your great grandparents departed in the 1870s, the 1926 census can:

Locate collateral lines: siblings and cousins who remained in Ireland  
Confirm continuity: showing your surname still in the ancestral townland decades later  
Reveal married daughters: sisters whose new surnames you might otherwise never identify  
Point to living cousins: families who continued there into the later 20th century

By linking those 1926 households back to earlier censuses, parish registers and valuation records, you can rebuild the wider family your emigrant ancestor left behind.



County Clare, Ireland: Corcomroe Abbey ruins (St. Mary of the Fertile Rock) Credit: Shutterstock

place, not just a matching surname.

## What if my ancestors came from Northern Ireland?

Northern Ireland has its own censuses, and the 1926 Irish Free State census does not cover it. For Northern roots, rely mainly on:

- The all Ireland 1901 and 1911 censuses
- Civil registration and parish registers
- Valuation and land records
- Local newspapers and court records

The 1926 census may still be relevant if branches of your Northern born family crossed the new border into the Free State, but it will not be the primary source for most Northern lines.

## Can DNA testing help with 1926 census research?

DNA is particularly useful in Irish research, where record gaps and name patterns can be confusing. It can highlight clusters of matches linked to specific Irish counties or even townlands and point you toward living cousins whose ancestors appear in 1926 house-

holds. It can also help you choose between two or three possibly-related families in the same parish.

Used alongside documentary research, DNA can strengthen the case that a particular 1926 household belongs to “your” wider family.

## What should I do now to be ready?

Wherever you live, you can prepare for the 1926 census by:

- Pinpointing your Irish place of origin using records in your own country
- Finding your families and their neighbors in the 1901 and 1911 censuses
- Tracing collateral lines of siblings and cousins who might appear in 1926
- Learning the townlands and parishes relevant to your ancestral county
- Organizing your notes so you can quickly test any 1926 candidate household

When the 1926 census is at your fingertips, those preparations will help you move beyond names and dates, and back into the Irish townlands where your family story began.

Family historians, start your engines.

# Humble Stew as Good as Ever

Here's a traditional Irish stew, close to how it would have been made in the 1920s: simple ingredients, no fancy stock, long slow cooking.

## Traditional Irish Stew (c. 1920s)

Serves: 4–6

Time: 2–3 hours (most unattended)

### Ingredients

2–2½ lb (900–1100 g) mutton or lamb (neck, shoulder, or shank), cut into large chunks

2–2½ lb (about 1 kg) floury potatoes, peeled and thickly sliced or chunked

2–3 large onions, peeled and thickly sliced

2–3 carrots, peeled and cut into chunks (optional but historically common)

A small piece of suet or dripping

(beef or mutton fat) OR a table-spoon or two of lard

Cold water, enough to just cover the ingredients

Salt (coarse if you have it)

Black pepper (if available; some households used it sparingly)

A sprig or two of parsley (if you want a touch of what would have been a “Sunday” version; plain was more common)

No stock cubes, no wine, no flour thickening – just meat, vegetables, water, and time.

### Directions

Render the fat (optional but authentic):

Put a heavy pot on low heat.

Add the suet/dripping and let it melt slowly.

If there are any solid bits, remove them once the fat is rendered. (If you prefer, you can skip this and start with a bare pot.)

Layer the ingredients (classic way): Sprinkle a little salt in the bottom of the pot.

Lay down a layer of potatoes.

Add a layer of onions and a few carrot pieces.

Place a layer of meat on top.

Season lightly with salt (and a little pepper if using).

Repeat layers—potato, onion/carrot, meat, seasoning—finishing with a good layer of potatoes on top. (This layering was very typical for one-pot cooking then.)

Add water to cover.

Bring to a gentle simmer:

Cover the pot and bring it slowly to a simmer over medium heat.

As soon as it starts to bubble, reduce the heat to low so it just barely simmers.

Simmer gently for about 2–3 hours. Check occasionally to be sure it isn't boiling hard (which would toughen the meat).

If liquid gets too low, top up with a little hot water.

The stew is ready when the meat is very tender and some of the potatoes have broken down to make the broth cloudy and slightly thick.

Taste and add more salt (and pepper) if needed. If using parsley, chop it and stir in or sprinkle over the top at the end. Let the stew sit off the heat, covered, for 10–15 minutes before serving.

--RELATED STAFF



Nothing is quite as satisfying on a damp evening as a bowl of Irish stew, and that is as true today as it was for the Irish who ate it in 1926. This recipe is adapted from Clodagh McKenna's book *Clodagh's Irish Kitchen*, Irish Lamb Stew, shown with Pearl Barley.



Preparing ahead of time before the release of the 1926 Irish Census can help you focus on those elusive women in your family tree. CREDIT: Shutterstock.

# Tracing the Hidden Daughters of Ireland

*She's There Somewhere, You Just Need to Know Where to Look*

By **SHELAGH BRALEY STARR**  
RELATED  Staff

Tracing Irish women in the records can feel like chasing shadows. Surnames change at marriage, many documents center men, and some sources are fragmentary or lost. It's a specific challenge to find our female forebears with any detail. With the upcoming release of the 1926 Irish Census containing more detail than previous records, and with patience and a structured approach, we can possibly reconstruct

remarkably full lives—especially if you understand where women are most likely to appear, and how this differs between town and countryside.

Focusing on key record types—marriage, dowry, church, school, and workhouse—you can track Irish women in both urban and rural settings.

Melanie Howse, chairperson of the Irish Family History Society, has been counting down to the release of the 1926 Census and helping

family historians and genealogy enthusiasts around the world get ready.

“We’re very much set up to try to help people research themselves,” she said in a recent interview from Dublin, “to understand more about what the records mean.” She recommended having an idea of who you want to find, with the loose expectation that they should be in the census for 1926. “Have you made your list of who you want to look for? We are all showing up to this (census release) like a kid in a

candy shop, but it's better to narrow it down to a grandmother or a great-aunt."

Searching for corroborating data in other sources before the census release might focus the search even more specifically.

For most Irish women, marriage is the point at which they "disappear" under a husband's surname, making it difficult to follow her trail. Treat this not as a dead end, but as a bridge between her maiden identity and her married life.

Civil registration of Catholic marriages began in 1864 (non-Catholic marriages from 1845). These records can be used free on [IrishGenealogy.ie](http://IrishGenealogy.ie) and often include the bride's maiden name, age (sometimes "full age" instead of a specific age), townland or street address, her father's name and occupation, and witnesses.

If your Irish women lived in towns and cities, street addresses are key. A bride at "12 North King Street" may be found with parents at the same or nearby address in earlier census fragments, city directories, or valuation revision books. Witnesses often lived close by; cross-check them in street directories to piece together kinship networks.

If they were countryside women, townlands are critical. If your bride is from "Ballymore," your best path is to map all families of that surname in the townland (using Griffith's Valuation and parish registers) and work out likely relationships. Rural marriages also often took place in the bride's parish, even if she later lived in another.

Formal dowry and marriage settlement documents survive mostly for landholding or middle-class families, especially in urban and "big house" contexts. Look for deeds in the Registry of Deeds (from 1708), marriage settlements naming a bride's portion, trustees, and land, as well as references to jointures and dower rights.

Merchant and professional families



sometimes used marriage settlements to transfer property, shops, or leases. A woman can appear as a party to a deed, or as the person for whom property is being settled, naming her father, sometimes her mother, and often siblings.

Among farming families, "dowry" was often informal: a few cows, a feather bed, or money. This rarely appears in formal documents, but you may see the consequences in land records—for example, a father dividing a holding between sons-in-law, or leases naming married daughters. Estate papers (rent rolls, tenant lists, correspondence) some-

times refer to daughters marrying into neighboring farms.

Church records can be very helpful, triangulating baptisms, marriages, and even burials. Before civil registration began, parish records are often the only direct evidence of a woman's key life events.

Catholic registers (some on the National Library of Ireland's website, and many indexed on Ancestry,

Findmypast, and RootsIreland) typically show the mother's maiden name on baptisms, sponsors (godparents), who were often close relatives, and the residence or townland. For marriages, witnesses and sometimes both parties' addresses are listed.

In cities, parishes were dense and mobile. Women may appear in multiple parishes as domestic servants, lodgers, or factory workers. Search broadly across neighboring parishes. The pattern of godparents—cousins, siblings, in-laws—can reveal maiden names even when later records don't.

In rural parishes, families often stayed rooted. Over decades, the same female names recur as sponsors across related households. Chart every baptism where your surnames appear; sponsors with the same surname as the mother are prime candidates for her siblings. This can be more revealing than any single record.

Burial records are patchy, but gravestones can be rich sources for clues. Married women are listed by married name, often an “alias” maiden name. The stones may hold “erected by” inscriptions, naming daughters and daughters-in-law, and you can deduce who belongs to whom by looking at the multi-generational plots linking kin over time.

Urban graveyards can reflect parish affiliations rather than residence. Women who moved into the city may still be buried in the family plot back home. Look for inscriptions like “native of Co. Clare” or “late of ...” that connect a city burial to a rural origin.

Rural churchyards often commemorate extended kin. A headstone erected in the 1920s might name a woman who died in the 1850s. Later memorials can recover earlier female relatives whose deaths were never registered. School records can provide a trove to trace girlhood and track mobility. Education left a paper trail, especially from the mid-19th century.

National school registers (many held by local archives or the National Archives) may include a student’s name and age, religion,



Melanie Howse, chairperson of Irish Family History Society and professional genealogist in Dublin.  
CREDIT: Provided by IFHS

her father’s occupation, residence (townland or street), and later remarks may reveal surprises such as “gone to America,” or “to service in Dublin.” Girls from working-class families often attended school briefly before going into domestic service or factory work. A school remark might show the moment a girl left home for employment in another part of the city—or another country. Use the address to link the family to census households, tenement records, or poor law relief.

Rural attendance patterns can reveal seasonal work and family movement between small holdings. Sisters often appear in the same register over many years. When marriage records are scarce, the combined evidence of age, townland, and father’s name can help distinguish between women of the same name.

Workhouse and Poor Law sources

show women at their most visible. Workhouse records can be particularly revealing for women, precisely because they recorded people at times of crisis. The admission and discharge registers often list name, age, marital status, occupation (or “housewife”), previous address or at least a townland, the names and ages of any accompanying minors, and the reason for admission.

In city unions, patterns of repeat admission are common. A widow may enter with young children, leave to service or factory work, and reappear years later. Workhouse births and deaths can supply missing civil registrations, especially for illegitimate children whose mothers are otherwise barely documented.

In rural unions, admission could coincide with eviction, crop failure, or loss of a breadwinner. A married woman’s entry listing a husband “in America” offers a vital migration clue. Sometimes siblings entered together; cross-reference these with parish baptisms to reassemble fragmented families.

To maximize your chances of success, adapt your methods to where your ancestor lived, so you can focus on the right records to prepare.

If your Irish women were urban, start with civil records and city directories; use street addresses to connect marriage, baptism, and school records. Expect movement between parishes and across the city. Search broadly and track the same women through addresses and occupations (servant, factory hand, seamstress). Use workhouse

and hospital records for critical moments: childbirth, widowhood, illness, and poverty.

If they lived rural, treat the townland as your anchor. Map all families of relevant surnames within it. Explore parish registers and sponsor networks to uncover maiden names and sibling groups. Combine Griffith's Valuation, estate papers, and later land commission records to understand marriage patterns and dowry arrangements—especially when land passed to sons-in-law.

In both settings, remember that a single record rarely tells the whole story. Women's lives emerge from clusters of evidence: a sponsor's name here, a workhouse admission there, a school remark, a marriage occupation. By weaving these together, you can give Irish women their rightful place at the heart of your family history, rather than in the margins of someone else's record. Preparing information from these other sources will help you work more quickly with the new census data, hopefully revealing much more than you expected.

"There are many centenarians who were alive when the census was taken and whose names appear in the original records," Howse said. "The archives of Ireland have been reaching out looking for them, asking, 'Can we interview you,' videoing them, these centenarian ambassadors." Most of the 48 are women, nine of them are retired nuns. "Their recollections of life in Ireland will form part of the historic collection in the archives. It will be very interesting to read all their recollections," she said.

If you find a great story for one of your Irish women ancestors, write it in narrative form. Future generations will be so grateful for any detail, but they will cherish a story told that makes the people come to life.

If you are interested in learning how to take dry genealogy data and turn it into rich narrative, RELATED offers a **monthly Ancestor Memoir contest**. The theme for the May issue is: "Her Name Lives On."

Who is the Irish woman in your family whose story deserves to be remembered? She might be a

mother or grandmother, a daughter or sister, a rebel, a worker, a quiet caretaker, or a woman whose courage was never written down." Write 1,000 words or less about a woman in your family line whose story deserves to live on. Send your entry to [stories@byancestry.com](mailto:stories@byancestry.com) by April 24, for your chance to be published in the next RELATED magazine, win an Irish by Ancestry prize pack, and help choose next month's theme. If you have questions or need help getting started, reach out to [shelagh@byancestry.com](mailto:shelagh@byancestry.com). We are committed to helping our members create context in their family stories.

## Join us to learn how to write your family data into compelling human stories


*Make a living record of your ancestors*

### Ancestor memoir contest

### *Her Name Lives On*

Who is the Irish woman in your family whose story deserves to be remembered? She might be a mother or grandmother, a daughter or sister, a rebel, a worker, a quiet caretaker, or a woman whose courage was never written down.

Send 1,000 words or less to [stories@byancestry.com](mailto:stories@byancestry.com)

Winning entry published in May's RELATED 

**Deadline: APRIL 24**





# Lives in Transition

*1926 Census Reveals Millions of New Ancestors, a New Age Recorded*

By **SHELAGH BRALEY STARR**  
**RELATED** 🍀 **Staff**

The 1926 Irish Census is about to do for Irish family history what the 1901 and 1911 releases did a generation ago: Blow open brick walls and put millions of Irish ancestors back on the map.

The release of the 1926 Irish census marks one of the most important milestones in Irish family history research in a generation.

“It’s going to be really exciting,” said Melanie Howse, chairperson of Irish Family History Society, based in Dublin. “For most of us, our members in their 50s and 60s, we’re looking at grandparents’ birth coming on line and being in that census. There are people they know recorded there.”

For decades, a gap in census records after 1911 has limited how far forward genealogists could trace Irish families in a structured, nationwide way. Now, with the first census of the Irish Free State becoming available Saturday, April 18, researchers across the world can expect a new wave of discoveries about their ancestors’ lives just a century ago. For anyone with Irish roots, this is not just another record set: This will create a bridge between the era of mass emigration and the modern age.

The 1926 census offers a detailed snapshot of a country still emerging from revolution, civil war, and social upheaval. Researchers will be able to see where families were living only a few years after the redrawing of borders and the establishment of the Free State. This will be especially valuable for descendants of families who moved during the War of Independence or

Civil War, or who relocated from rural townlands into growing towns and cities. Expect to find not only the usual household information—names, ages, relationships, marital status—but also fine-grained details that help place your ancestors in their precise social and economic context.

“We tend to use the terms genealogy and family history interchangeably,” Howse said. “The slight difference is genealogy speaks to our family tree and lineage, and documenting that. (Family history) is how you present that documentation, looking more at the wider context. You’re thinking about what was happening in Ireland at the time, in the very early days of the Irish Free State. The state was still finding its feet,” she said.

This census will provide more context than any previous record, and fill in details lost in conflict, disaster, and just plain indifference to our present.

“It’s like a mosaic,” Howse said. “This (piece of information) might slot in here, but not for that person ... you build up little pieces to make the most sense of that person. And the census, the point was to collect information: how many people are Catholic, Presbyterian, how many are children. It was about collecting numbers. The parts we look at as historians are totally unimportant to them (census-keepers). That’s why so many of those returns were pulped.”

For the global Irish diaspora, the 1926 census may answer long-standing questions about relatives who “disappeared” from records after 1911. Some will reappear as heads of new households, newly married, or returned emigrants who came back to Ireland after time abroad. Others may be found as boarders, farm servants, or apprentices in unexpected locations, revealing migration within Ireland that never made it into passenger lists or civil registrations. This census is also a powerful tool for reconnecting branches of families that lost touch after waves of emigration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: cousins who stayed, siblings who moved to different counties, widowed parents living with married children, and more.

The 1926 returns will also help researchers narrow



Irish families had been through an unprecedented series of cultural changes that impacted all parts of their lives. The 1926 Census, the first of the Free Irish State, will show more detail than before, including who their employers were (if they had jobs in the tough economy). They struggled to provide for their families.

Credit: Shutterstock

down emigration timelines and build more accurate life stories. If a person appears in 1911 but not in 1926, the missing record becomes a clue: Did they emigrate, marry and change their name, die, or move into institutional care? Conversely, if they do appear, the recorded occupation, literacy, and living arrangements provide context that can be cross-referenced with ship manifests, naturalization files, military records, and newspaper archives abroad. For descendants in America or Australia trying to match a “Patrick Murphy from Cork” to the correct family back home, the 1926 census may supply the missing link that confirms identity through address, occupation, and household structure.

Accessing and using the census will require a mix of traditional and digital skills. While many will search online by name or location, a strong grasp of Irish geography—civil parishes, townlands, and districts—will still be essential. Researchers should be prepared for spelling variations, anglicized place-names, and the occasional mistranscription. Yet the combination of a national census with modern search tools will dramatically flatten some of the barriers that once made Irish research seem daunting, particularly for those who have never set foot in Ireland but want to explore their roots from abroad.

This census is also social document capturing a society in transition, transforming how families of Irish descent understand their story. For an eager global audience, this release offers a rare opportunity to move beyond vague family lore—“they came from somewhere in Mayo”—to precise addresses, occupations, and kinship networks that solidified what it meant to be Irish in the 1920s.

Howse talked about that burgeoning identity, and how important it was to define what it meant, looking for ways to differentiate from previous generations. “We didn’t split (from Britain) completely right away, till 1931. The state was still under the wing of the UK, until we become a Republic,” Howse said. A big step toward that was the Coinage Act. “They had (poet and patriot) WB Yeats helping to design the coins, to separate Irish coinage from the British.”

Howse said they purposely chose the Irish harp, and wouldn’t feature a king or queen, or any famous patriots. The country had survived the 1913 lockout, the first world war, then the 1916 Uprising and the war for independence. “They needed to neutralize because of all this,” Howse said.

“In 1926 Ireland, there would have been a lot of poverty, a lot of unemployment. They were still trying to sort out how it had been, friends and neighbors taking sides against each other. They needed a symbol everyone could get behind and reduce the tension,” she said.

“I think for us, the symbolism around (this census) is: This is our first census, *our* first census, the first put together for us, for our government to find out about



Percy Metcalfe’s final design for Irish coinage in 1927. WB Yeats helped focus the designs on symbols of Ireland--the harp, the salmon, the bull, the hare--that were not political but rather inherently reflective of the country, its stories, and its people. Credit: RTE Stills Library

us, *our people*. You do get a real sense of pride,” Howse said. “You’ve got this fledgling state, going on to become a successful modern society. At the time, it’s a conservative, Catholic state. But that’s just the first step taken. This is ours. There is a lot of pride in that.”

**Form A.—CENSUS OF THE IRISH FREE STATE, 1926.**

STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL

Please Read the Instructions and Examples shown on the accompanying Memorandum A, and then fill up the Schedule carefully, and in Ink.

This Return may be made in IRISH or ENGLISH. The Form is IRISH in its other parts.

NAME AND SURNAME	RELATIONSHIP TO HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD	AGE	SEX	MARRIAGE OR DEPENDENCY	BIRTHPLACE	IRISH LANGUAGE	RELIGION	PERSONAL DESCRIPTION	OCCUPATION AND EMPLOYMENT		MARRIAGE	MARRIAGE	MARRIAGE	MARRIAGE	MARRIAGE	MARRIAGE	MARRIAGE	MARRIAGE	
									Employment	Employment									
1																			
2																			
3																			
4																			
5																			
6																			
7																			
8																			
9																			
10																			

I declare that this Schedule is correctly filled up, to the best of my knowledge and belief. I hereby certify that the foregoing Return (consisting of pages) is complete and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Signature of Head of Household, etc. Signature of Enumerator

# New Census, New Data Collected

Get to Know the New Irish State through Never-Before-Asked Questions

By **SHELAGH BRALEY STARR**  
RELATED Staff

When the 1926 Irish Free State census finally goes online Saturday, April 18, Irish related family historians are going to have the closest thing we ever get to a “new” 1901 or 1911. The names, ages, and addresses will feel reassuringly familiar—but hidden in the later columns are questions that were never asked before.

Professional Irish genealogist **Noreen Maher** of Dublin says these special questions can unlock leads you may not even realize you’re missing.

The big story of the 1926 record is that it was the first census of the Irish Free State, taken on April 18,

1926. The new government wanted more than headcounts. It wanted to know who depended on whom, how people were earning a living, and how land was held across a country still reshaping itself after revolution and civil war. For genealogists, that means some especially important things: new details about children and step children, hard numbers on land, and more.

“This is the first form that was not solely in English,” Maher said in a recent interview. “That period in the early Twenties, there was a Gaelic Revival, so for the first time, they asked whether they wanted the form in English or Irish.”

This created difficulties in past census collections, where Irish-speakers were not adequately counted,

she said. “In 1911, you could search for someone not there—but they had filled in the form in Irish, which was all they could do. Some names would be totally different in Irish, and you might not find it if you’re putting in (the search field) in English.”

The 1926 Census offered the chance in Irish to record whether the person could read **Irish**, speak it, both or neither. For some families, this will be the last official snapshot of Irish language ability before a major language shift took full hold.

And that’s just the beginning of the changes. Let’s first walk through what exactly was asked, then look at how those unique 1926 questions can create fresh research trails.

## What the 1926 household form actually asked

The household return (Form A) recorded information person by person, then added a handful of questions about the dwelling and the family as a whole.

For each individual in the household, you'll see **name and surname**, the full name of every person on census night, with the **head of household** listed first. Watch for middle names, nicknames, and spelling variants that don't appear in civil records. It will also show the relationship to head of household, Maher said.

They will list Head, Wife, Son, Daughter, Servant, Boarder, Lodger, Mother, Brother, and so on. This is your map of how everyone fits together—or doesn't. A "boarder" of the same surname, for example, is always worth a second look.

The 1926 Census records a simple M or F for **gender**, but this data is invaluable when you're dealing with names like "Valentine" or "Christie" that could go either way.

Maher says **age** is a significant change for this census compared with the past. For children, you may see ages in months as well as years—gold dust when you're trying to narrow a birth. Ages are meant to be precise, but previous censuses have been vague. "The government was looking at age now. The census-taker, especially if the family weren't very literate, would ask their age. She might say 40 but actually be 43 or 45. And they're putting down widowed,



Noreen Maher, a professional Irish genealogist with Hibernia Roots, a company based in Dublin, says this census will be more detailed than ever before.  
CREDIT: Hibernia Roots website

and whether their mother lives with them. She might be 51, but they'll say 60."

There were many reasons for the discrepancies, Maher said. One of the obvious changes from 1901 and 1911 to 1926 is that they did not necessarily have birth records before. "(Before), maybe they're filling out the forms, and the wife doesn't want her age recorded. They might be talking about the age they were turning."

To benefit from the 1908 Pension Act, people had to be older than 70 to apply. "Suddenly, people would be 10 to 15 years older," Maher said with a laugh. "At that time as well, the 1851 Census still existed, before the Four Courts fire in 1922 damaged it."

"You have to apply a certain

amount of logic to it," Maher said. "It always comes back to the primary source, like baptism and birth. They can be different, and they might not be exactly accurate, but they're closer to the actual event."

### Marital Status (15 and over)

Single, Married, Widower or Widow. Familiar from earlier censuses but now tied to a powerful new 1926 only question about children under 16.

"This time, when it comes to children, they're asking about **orphanhood**. They're often put in as son or grandson, even as a visitor," Maher said. "Now they're asking specifically if they're orphans, then broken down into, is their mother dead, is their father dead, or both dead." It can explain why you find them living with grandparents or other relatives.

If the **birthplace** was in the Free State, expect county and local place (town or townland); if born elsewhere, at least the country. This can confirm migrations within Ireland and flag links to Northern Ireland, Britain, or beyond. "Place of birth has new detail," Maher said. "If you were born in County Tipperary, in 1901 they'd say Kilkenny. Now they'd have to say which townland. If you were born outside of the (Free Irish) State or born at sea, you'd have to declare that very specifically. There are instructions for that now (in the 1926 Census)."

### Other changes:

#### Religion or Religious Denomination

Roman Catholic, Church of Ire-

land, Presbyterian, Methodist, Jewish and others. Mixed denomination families can leap out here, and you can use this to steer parish register searches.

### **Literacy (general, not Irish)**

Whether they can read and write, read but not write, or neither. Combined with age, this tells you a lot about education, poverty and opportunity in the family.

### **Occupation, Employment Status, and Industry/Service**

Farmer, General Laborer, National School Teacher, Shop Assistant, Domestic Servant, Clerk, “Scholar,” “At home” and more. Comparing occupation from 1911 to 1926 often reveals upward mobility, or a slide into casual labor after hard times. Employer, employee, work-

ing on own account (self employed with no paid staff), or unpaid family worker. This is where you see whether a “farmer” is actually running the show or simply helping out. The line of business: Agriculture, Railway service, Shopkeeping, Building trade, Public service, textiles, and so on. This separates, say, a railway porter from a shop porter.

“Whereas before they might say laborer, now they have to differentiate what kind of labor. Is it farm work? Farms have to declare workers on the farms as well,” Maher said.

### **Employment / Unemployment Detail**

This census will include notes on whether someone is fully employed

or partly unemployed, sometimes with an indication of how long. In the lean 1920s, this can show that an ancestor’s trade was under pressure even before later crises, as well as recording how pervasive unemployment was across the country.

### **At the household level, the form also asks:**

#### **Number of Persons in the Household**

A total headcount—use it to double check that everyone has been entered individually.

#### **Number of Rooms Occupied**

How many rooms the family actually uses. Seven people in two rooms tells a very different story from seven in seven.



Orphaned Irish boys working in a woodworking shop in 1925. CREDIT: Shutterstock

## Nature of the Dwelling

Whether it's a private house, part of a tenement, a flat, or something more unusual. This reinforces what you can infer from the address.

## Quality / Construction of Dwelling

Wall and roof materials (stone or brick versus mud, slate versus thatch). Combined with room numbers and household size, this can give you a remarkably vivid sense of living conditions.

## Disability / Infirmity (where recorded)

Whether anyone is deaf, dumb, blind or otherwise disabled. That can explain, for instance, why a son never leaves home or appears in occupational sources. "People in mental asylums were counted; they were only put in by their initials before," Maher said. "You could just be guessing by their town of origin. In this case, they are going to be listed with their full names and titles."

## Unique 1926 questions, and how to turn them into leads

Two question sets are genuinely new in 1926 and are likely to transform how you research your Irish families.

## Children under 16 and step children (unique to 1926)

For each married man, widower or widow, the census asks for the numbers of:

Living sons under 16 by the present marriage

Living daughters under 16 by the present marriage

Living sons under 16 by previous marriage(s)

Living daughters under 16 by previous marriage(s)

Living step sons under 16

Living step daughters under 16

And for each of those categories, it splits them into:

Those residing in this household

Those residing elsewhere

For family historians, this is a big win. If a widower is recorded with, say, "3 sons under 16: 1 in this household, 2 elsewhere," you suddenly know that two sons are "out there" somewhere in the 1926 landscape.

That's an invitation to scour neighboring households for boys of the right surname, age, birthplace and religion, check institutional returns for industrial schools, orphanages, or boarding schools, and revisit civil birth registrations to make sure you've identified every child of that parent.

The explicit division between children of the present and previous marriage(s), and step children, also flags **blended families** that can be invisible in earlier records. If you see step sons under 16 but no obvious prior marriage for the current spouse, you've just been handed your next search: **Find that earlier marriage** and the death of the first spouse in civil and parish records.



Dublin, pedestrians fill the promenade by the Liffey in 1926. CREDIT: Shutterstock

Even when you already know your great grandmother was widowed young, the 1926 count of children living elsewhere can explain why some siblings vanish from the home place—off to relatives, to service, or even abroad.

### **Total area of agricultural holdings (unique to 1926)**

The other new question asks for:

Total area in statute acres of all agricultural holdings in the Free State for which people usually residing in the household are rated occupiers.

This is the first time you get, in one line, a **number for the actual size of the family's landholding**.

That modest figure—5 acres, 15, 40, 100—can reframe everything you think you know about the family. A “farmer” on six acres looks very different from a “farmer” on 60, especially when you compare

this with Griffith's Valuation, revision books, and Land Commission records. A younger son recorded as a laborer in another parish is easier to understand if the home holding is too small to divide. A sudden jump in acreage may point to inheritance, a sibling's emigration, or a well timed Land Commission purchase.

Once you have that acreage, you can track the holding through valuation revision books to see when names change, look for Land Commission purchase files that might name successors, and try to match newspaper advertising for farm sales with your ancestral townland and surname.

And remember: The question covers all holdings anywhere in the Free State. If the acreage seems surprisingly high, you may be dealing with scattered parcels in more than one townland. That's your cue to extend map and valuation searches beyond the immediate neighborhood.

When the 1926 census is finally released, don't stop once you've copied out names, ages, and occupations. Linger in those far right columns. Count the children “elsewhere.” Note every step child. Write down the acreage. Each number and note is a signpost: to a missing marriage, a lost sibling, a forgotten acre in another parish.

The form is, on the face of it, a bureaucratic snapshot. Used carefully, it becomes a set of questions you can ask of the past—and a set of answers pointing you to the next record set.

“Basically, gather the dates of birth, years, family members you think should be there,” Maher suggested. “Maybe they've emigrated, but their parents might still be in the townland, the parish, where you think they should be. Maybe they've moved to Dublin to work. Start with the place and people you think should be counted. It's detective work. We just keep piecing it together.”



Irish farmers work to gather the harvest in 1926. CREDIT: Shutterstock



Though different in design, boats still wait on the shore in Spiddal, Co. Galway. Credit: Ireland's Content Pool

# Landmarks That Stood Through Time

## *Six Spots Revealed Different Ways of Life in the 1926 Census*

By **SHELAGH BRALEY STARR**  
RELATED  Staff

*In the spring of 1926, as enumerators fanned out across the Irish Free State to conduct the first census since independence, the country they recorded was anchored by landmarks that told a much older story.*

*These buildings and spaces, some scarred by conflict, others symbols of continuity, framed the daily lives of those whose names and occupations filled the census forms.*

*Here, we look back at six meaningful Irish landmarks as they stood a century ago, and at what they meant to the people in a tumultuous time. They offer a cross-section of everyday life and identity in the era.*



The ancient vale of the solstice Newgrange stands as a monument, the same in 1926 as centuries before. Credit: Ireland's Content Pool

## **Newgrange, Co. Meath**

### *Ancient past, new state*

By 1926, Newgrange was already recognized as one of Europe's great

prehistoric monuments. The vast Neolithic passage tomb, older than the pyramids, loomed above fields tilled by smallholders who still lived close to the land. For many in 1920s Ireland, this monument was proof of an ancient, sophisticated civilization that long predated British rule. Schoolbooks and na-



The Rock of Cashel had started to lose its power as an ecclesiastical center by 1926, but not its grandeur. Credit: Ireland's Content Pool

tionalist writers leaned heavily on such sites as Newgrange to argue that the Irish were heirs to a deep, distinctive culture. Farmers passed the mound on their way to market, children heard stories of the Boyne Valley in school, and scholars and antiquarians visited to measure, sketch, and debate its age.

In a country struggling with emigration, poverty, and the scars of war, Newgrange was a quiet counterweight, a reminder that Ireland had endured for millennia, and would endure still.

## **The Rock of Cashel, Co. Tipperary** *Power, faith, and rural market town*

Soaring above the plain of Tipperary, the Rock of Cashel gathered

centuries of royal and ecclesiastical history in one crag. In 1926, the complex of cathedral, round tower, and chapels looked over a largely agricultural world made of hay-fields, cattle fair greens, and a modest town serving scattered farms.

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### **‘The Catholic Church remained central to identity and routine of Mass, missions, and procession.’**

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For locals, the Rock was just the backdrop to their daily life. Market days brought farmers and their families into Cashel, carts rumbling below the ruins left by kings and archbishops. The Catholic Church remained central to identity and routine of Mass, missions, processions. The Rock's silhouette carried

that spiritual authority.

At the same time, the Free State was asserting a more secular, political power from Dublin. The Rock of Cashel, with its mixture of royal and religious symbolism, also quietly embodied that subtle tension between old loyalties and new institutions.

## **Connemarra Coast, Co. Galway**

### *Between stone, sea, and song*

In 1926, Spiddal on the Connemarra Coast revealed a way of life shaped by poor land, a rich sea, and a still-vital Irish language. This was Gaeltacht country: The census takers here heard Irish at cottage doors, in fields, and after Mass, and recorded a community that was materially poor but culturally strong.

Small, stony fields hemmed in by drystone walls produced potatoes, oats, and vegetables, backed up by a few cattle and sheep. Families gathered seaweed for fertilizer and shellfish for the pot.

Hardy currachs (traditional wooden-frame rowboats covered in animal skin) brought in fish when the Atlantic allowed. Storms, wrecks, and rescues were etched into local memory, and emigration was a constant presence; many homes depended on letters and money from England or America to make ends meet.

Faith and tradition structured the year. Evenings were filled with sean-nós song and storytelling,

preserving folklore and Famine memories as surely as any archive. The new Free State looked at such places as Spiddal as both a problem (overcrowded, underdeveloped) and an ideal, as a stronghold of authentic Irishness.

## **Cliffs of Moher, Co. Clare**

*Edge of the land, edge  
of subsistence*

Long before tour buses, the Cliffs of Moher towered over a coast shaped by small farms, fishing, and seasonal migration. In 1926, the village of Liscannor and the Burren hinterland depended on mixed agri-

culture and whatever cash could be scraped from selling stock, seaweed, and sending labor abroad.

Standing at O'Brien's Tower, locals could gaze out toward America, the destination of countless emigrants who had left from nearby ports. The cliffs existed in isolation but maintained a connection to the far western margin of Europe. It was also emotionally and financially linked to Boston and New York by letters and remittances.

Life here demanded resilience. Thin soil, Atlantic gales, and limited industry meant that many young people saw emigration as inevitable. The spectacle of the cliffs framed a way of life that was beautiful but precarious.

## **Croagh Patrick, Co. Mayo**

*Pilgrimage and the  
persistence of faith*

Each July, thousands of pilgrims climbed Croagh Patrick in Co. Mayo, some barefoot, praying as they went. In 1926, this tradition was as strong as ever, drawing farmers, shopkeepers, laborers, and clergy in a shared act of devotion.

For many in the west, where smallholdings, turf cutting, and chronic poverty were common, pilgrimage offered both spiritual comfort and communal solidarity. The climb was a break from routine: Families



The sun gleams off the summit of Croagh Patrick, known as “the Reek” in County Mayo. It was a tremendous feat of pilgrimage to climb, even in 1926. Credit: Ireland’s Content Pool



walked or took carts to Westport, camped or lodged nearby, and joined a crowd that momentarily dissolved social distinctions.

In a newly independent but still conservative state, Croagh Patrick showed how Catholicism shaped rhythm and meaning, through its calendar, the life choices of the young, attitudes to work, suffering, and hope. On the mountain's slopes, the political arguments of Dublin felt distant. What mattered was penance, prayer, and community.

## O'Connell Street and GPO, Dublin

*An urban future in a scarred capital*

To capture city life in 1926, no

The Cliff of Moher tower over the Atlantic, above; The GPO in Dublin, in its restored state, below.  
Credits: Ireland's Content Pool



landmark spoke more loudly than Dublin's General Post Office on O'Connell Street. Still bearing the scars of the 1916 Rising, the GPO stood at the heart of a capital city that was noisy, crowded, and

socially divided.

Electric trams clattered past shopfronts; clerks and civil servants emerged from offices; newsboys shouted headlines about the young Free State. Tenement housing, often overcrowded and unsanitary, lay only streets away from the grand Georgian facades. Here the census would capture a very different Ireland: literate office workers, factory hands, domestic servants, and the unemployed lining up for relief.

The GPO itself functioned as a working building, as a hub of communication in an age of letters and telegrams, but it was also a shrine to recent rebellion. Urban life in 1926 unfolded in its shadow: Modern yet scarred, hopeful yet haunted, a city negotiating between past trauma and the promise of a more prosperous, urban Ireland to come.

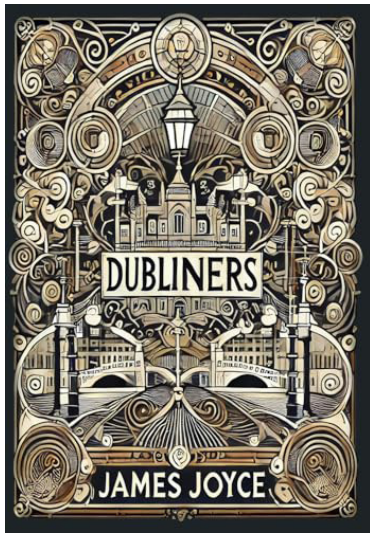
# Experience the times with '20s books

By **SHELAGH BRALEY STARR**  
RELATED  Staff

If you're thinking about the 1926 Census and what everyday life in Ireland around then might have felt like, here are four novels that will give you a close view.

## Dubliners, by James Joyce (1914)

Before Ireland became the Free State, before the scars of Civil War, there was the Dublin of James Joyce's classic *Dubliners*—a city of small houses, small



incomes, and very large silences. In 15 vivid stories, Joyce walks us through front parlors, cramped kitchens, schoolyards, offices, pubs, and city streets, capturing the sort of lives that rarely make it into official records. Here we meet clerks who dream of escape and never quite leave, children who glimpse the adult world too

soon, and families bound together by duty, religion, and a deep sense of “what will people say?” This is Dublin on the cusp of change, still under British rule, but already wrestling with the spiritual and social tensions that will shape Ireland of the 1920s.

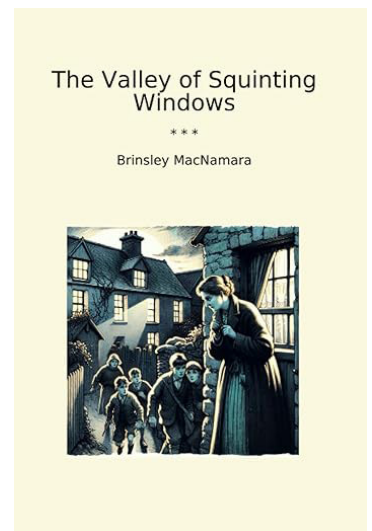
For anyone wondering what lay behind those neat census columns of names, ages, and occupations, *Dubliners* is an ideal companion. The census will tell you that your grand-aunt was a typist or your grandfather a laborer; Joyce gives you the thick air of the office they sat in, the pub where they lingered after work, the pressures at the family table when wages were thin and expectations high. Though set a couple of decades earlier, the habits of speech, the weight of the Church, the constraints on women, and the quiet desperation of men stuck in dead end jobs all carry forward into the

Ireland your ancestors may have inhabited in 1926.

## The Valley of the Squinting Windows, by Brinsley MacNamara (1918)

If Joyce gives us the city, Brinsley MacNamara opens the door to the village—the kind of place many Irish ancestors left, or longed to leave, in the years leading up to 1926. *The Valley of the Squinting Windows* is set in a fictional midlands village, but its portrait of rural Ireland is instantly recognizable: a community where nothing goes unnoticed, and no secret stays buried. The title itself hints at life behind lace curtains, where neighbors “squint” out at one another, watching, judging, and commenting. In this tight setting, young people dream of education and escape, while older generations cling to reputation and land. Courtships are monitored, family histories weaponized, and the Church's moral code sits heavily on every decision.

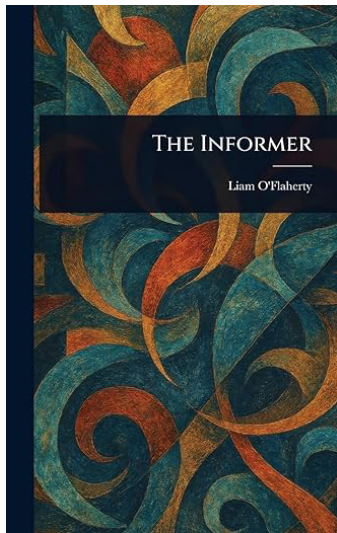
For readers awaiting the 1926 Census, this novel helps decode what “farmer's daughter” or “domestic servant” really meant in human terms. MacNamara shows how limited choices—especially for women—were shaped by gossip and respectability, and how emigration or a “good match” could appear to be the only exits. Many who turn up in the 1926 returns as shop assistants in towns or domestic workers in cities began in villages much like this one, carrying with them the village mentality that MacNamara captures so sharply. If you suspect your people came from “a place where everyone knew everyone,” *The Valley of the Squinting Windows* will feel like overhearing the conversations that never made it into the census forms.



## The Informer, by Liam O’Flaherty (1925)

By the mid 1920s, Ireland had come through revolution and civil war, and the new Free State was still raw with division.

Liam O’Flaherty’s *The Informer*, set in a dark, rain slicked Dublin, plunges us into the lives of the urban poor just as your 1926 ancestors were filling out their forms—or having them filled out for them. At its center is Gypo Nolan, a former revolutionary who betrays a comrade for money, but around



his story swirls a whole world of tenements, boarding houses, flophouses, and pubs. This is the Dublin of the unemployed laborer, the struggling couple, the landlady counting every shilling, and the political activist wondering what the struggle has delivered.

The 1926 Census will list addresses in lanes and courts, note who could read and write, and record the occupations, if any, of those who lived there. *The Informer* adds flesh and blood to those lines. It shows the lingering fear of the police, the weight of past loyalties, the pull of the bottle in times of despair, and the quiet courage of women trying to hold families together on almost nothing. For descendants of city dwellers, it offers a window into the emotional and moral landscape behind the bare facts: what it felt like to be poor in a new state, haunted by recent violence, and uncertain about the future. If you want to imagine the streets your Dublin forebears walked in 1926, O’Flaherty’s novel walks them with you.

## The House of Gold, by Liam O’Flaherty (1929)

Where *The Informer* shows us the capital, *The House of Gold* brings us to a provincial Irish town in the 1920s: a halfway house between the farm and the city,

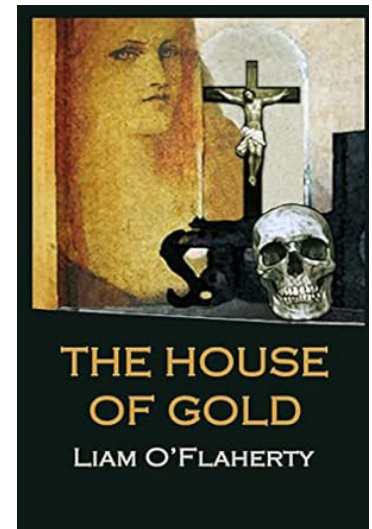
and the kind of place many families moved into or aspired to from the countryside. At the heart of the novel is the powerful McKay family, wealthy shopkeepers whose business interests, respectability, and private dramas dominate the town’s life. O’Flaherty paints a vivid picture of streets where the Church, the bank, the big shop, and the pub form the key landmarks, and where everyone knows who is rising, who is falling, and who has married well—or badly. Money, status, and Catholic morality shape every interaction, from the shop counter to the family dining table.

For those exploring the 1926 Census, this book illuminates the lives behind entries like “merchant,” “shop assistant,” “clerk,” or “factory worker” in smaller towns. It shows how families strategized—placing sons and daughters in the “right” jobs or marriages, worrying about appearances, and measuring themselves against neighbors and rivals. The

town is fed by a rural heartland and influenced by distant Dublin and London, just as your ancestors’ lives were. *The House of Gold* captures that middle Ireland: not quite peasant, not quite urban modern, but balancing both worlds. If your family story includes a move

from farm to town, or a memory of “the big shop” that loomed over local life, this novel will feel like stepping into that in between world as it was when the 1926 forms were first filled in.

You’re always welcome at **BRIGID’S LIBRARY**, the book club just for Irish by Ancestry members and friends. You can sign up at [brigidslibrary.com](http://brigidslibrary.com) and then join the FB chats on [@brigidslibrarybookclub](https://www.facebook.com/brigidslibrarybookclub). Our book this month is *What the Wind Knows* by Amy Harmon. We are gathering for a fun discussion on Wednesday, April 22, 6pm EST. We’ll send you a link to join the Zoom with your confirmation email. Hope to see you there!



One lucky  
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manuscript



Master calligrapher Karen Brennan of Co. Mayo is creating an illuminated manuscript to honor the pivotal moment of releasing the 1926 Census. She draws inspiration from her great-grandfather, William Brett, an artist who created a similar manuscript before the Irish Free State existed. Credit: KarenBrennanArt.com

## Calligrapher Illuminates Historic Moment

By SHELAGH BRALEY STARR  
RELATED 🍀 Staff

Special occasions of historic significance in Ireland were often marked by the presentation of illuminated manuscripts, in the centuries-old tradition. Co. Mayo master calligrapher **Karen Brennan's** own great-grandfather, William Brett, was one such artist who crafted these documents with particular attention paid to decorative borders, heraldic motifs, gold leaf, and intricate lettering, all painstakingly hand-drawn.

Now, with the release of the 1926 Census this Saturday, April 18, Brennan is taking on a manuscript of her own. "I've thought deeply about the significance of

this moment in the world and how to present it," she said in an interview. "For anyone tracing their Irish roots and especially those who have been searching for generations, this release is a watershed moment."

In beginning her work, Brennan turned to the **Irish by Ancestry** community to decide what to include, crowdsourcing inspiration such as Cliffs of Moher, Celtic knots, and emblems of all four provinces. The manuscript, available as a fine art print on archival paper, can be personalized in calligraphy with family surnames to mark this major event. As reward for our input, one lucky member will **win one of these authentic commemorative pieces**, just email [shelagh@byancestry.com](mailto:shelagh@byancestry.com) with the subject line MANUSCRIPT.

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