

Genealogy Basics – Irish Records, Searching the TIARA (The Irish Ancestral Research Association) Massachusetts Catholic Order of Foresters records at the University of Massachusetts Boston

By Joe Petrie

INTRODUCTION:

About five years ago, my son Christopher volunteered me to do genealogy consultation at the Irish Cultural Centre of New England's Library (ICCNE) in Canton MA. At the time, Chris was the President of the Stoughton Chamber of Commerce and ICCNE was a member. He made the offer (without consulting with his father) to the ICCNE Trustees Chairman. Why? He knew that I would do it if he asked me! The Impact: I had to give up my Friday evenings.

The principal genealogy activity was to consult with people who wanted to search for ancestors; principally Irish ancestors. (A lot of Irish came through Canada.) I did not know a lot about Irish genealogy research. The other library volunteers had years of Irish experience. In fact, Judy Barrett and Bernie Couming, who were past Presidents of TIARA, spent many a Friday evening educating me on Irish databases. I will never reach their level of expertise on Irish databases.

BACKGROUND:

When Bernie was the TIARA President, Judy proposed that the Massachusetts Catholic Order of Foresters records be digitized. Time was important because the records were scheduled for destruction. TIARA members were mobilized to digitize the records.

When I met Bernie and Judy at ICCNE, the Massachusetts Catholic Order of Foresters records were still being digitized. The database was eventually hosted by the University of Massachusetts Boston. I often search the records for hard to find Irish ancestors that came to Massachusetts.

My recent use of the TIARA Massachusetts Catholic Order of Foresters database at UMASS Boston was an attempt to validate a death year for my wife's uncle John J McGrath who died in the early to mid 1950s. I have 3 unverified dates 1953, 1954 and 1955. I believe that 1953 is correct. I am searching for a record to verify the date. Why? Members of the Association of Professional Genealogists attempt to have verification of all vital information.

TIARA MASSACHUSETTS CATHOLIC ORDER OF FORESTERS DATABASE AT UMASS BOSTON:

The UMASS Library describes the collection as follows:

The University of Massachusetts Boston Archives and Special Collections has acquired the historical organizational records of the Catholic Association of Foresters, thanks to the efforts of members of [The Irish Ancestral Research Association](#), which served as custodian of this historic collection from 2005 - 2011.

The Massachusetts Catholic Order of Foresters was founded in 1879 by a group of Irish immigrants to provide life insurance benefits for its members. The organization grew from one small group in Boston to branches in cities and towns throughout the state. By 1930, there were 60,000 members of the Foresters in Massachusetts. The Massachusetts Catholic Order of Foresters was renamed the [Catholic Association of Foresters](#) in 1960. The Foresters still exists as a fraternal life insurance society. The Irish Ancestral Research Association (TIARA) rescued the archival Foresters records from consignment to the dumpster, and in 2011 transferred ownership of the Massachusetts Catholic Order of Foresters (MCOF) records to the University of Massachusetts Boston for the purpose of preserving and making available to researchers the records of the organization.

Each prospective Forester applying for coverage completed an application. The application included personal data, family information and a physical examination. Subsequent death benefit disbursements named beneficiaries. Any additional correspondence regarding beneficiaries was also included in the Foresters Mortuary Record. This material reveals a wealth of information about family structure, health, mortality, mobility, and occupations of predominantly Irish immigrants and their descendants who settled in Massachusetts.

How Do I Request a Copy of a Record?

Requests for mortuary records between 1880 and 1945 will be fulfilled by the University Archives and Special Collections staff at UMass Boston. To make a request:

- [Search for your relatives using our online Index](#). Be sure to try all possible spellings. Many women are listed under both their maiden names and their married names.
- For each person you are researching, send us the following information from the index listing: the person's **Name, Date of Death and Death Claim Number** from the Index.
- Charges are \$10 per record requested; checks should be made out to "Healey Library, UMass Boston"
- Send your check, along with **your name, telephone number, postal address, e-mail address** (if applicable) and the relevant names, dates of death and claim numbers to the address below:

**University Archives and Special Collections
Joseph P. Healey Library
University of Massachusetts Boston
100 Morrissey Boulevard
Boston, MA 02125
Attention: Foresters Search**

- If you prefer to receive the records as electronic PDF (scanned) files, indicate that in your request and be sure to include your e-mail address.
- Questions may be sent to library.archives@umb.edu.
- All requests will be answered on a "first come, first served" basis as staff time permits. Turnaround is usually less than two weeks.

Please note: Although we can provide access to Foresters records through 1945, our online index currently only lists records through 1935. If you would like to search for a record between 1936-1945, please contact us at library.archives@umb.edu and we will assist you with your search.

ACCESSING THE FORESTER DATABASE:

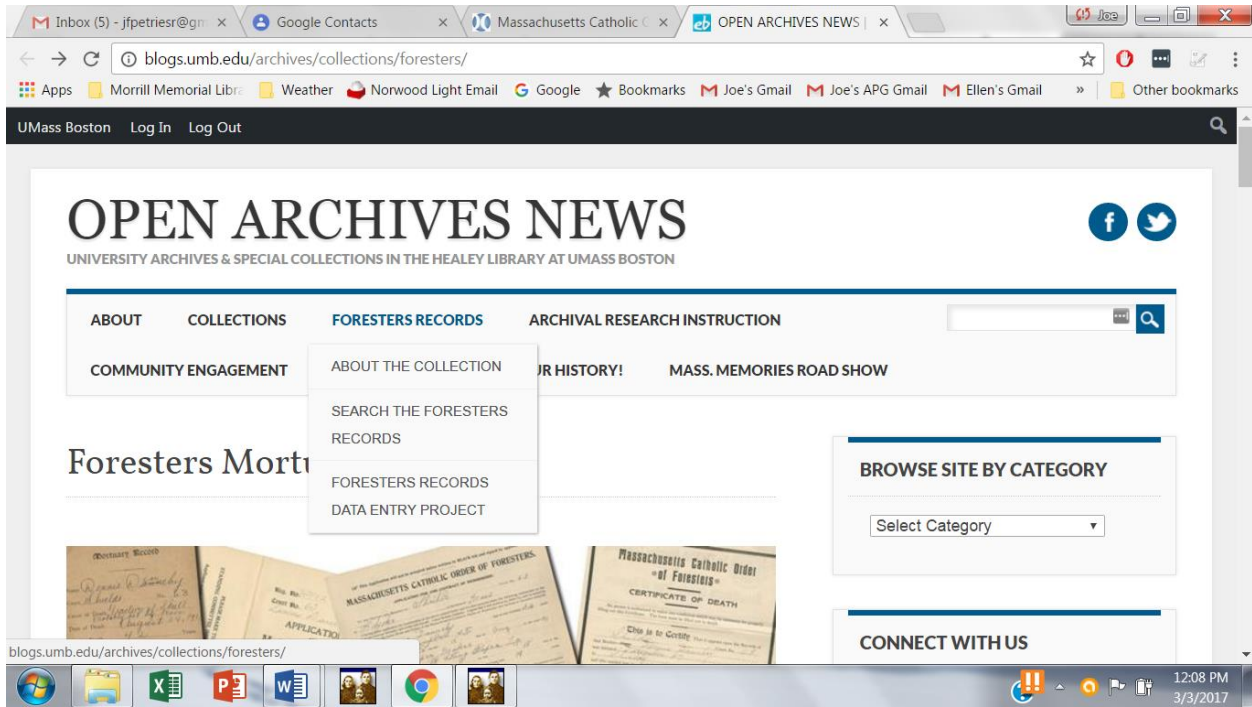
The following link in the first bullet of this page is used to access the index:

[Search for your relatives using our online Index](#)

The following screen print shows the Forester Records tab to search the database.

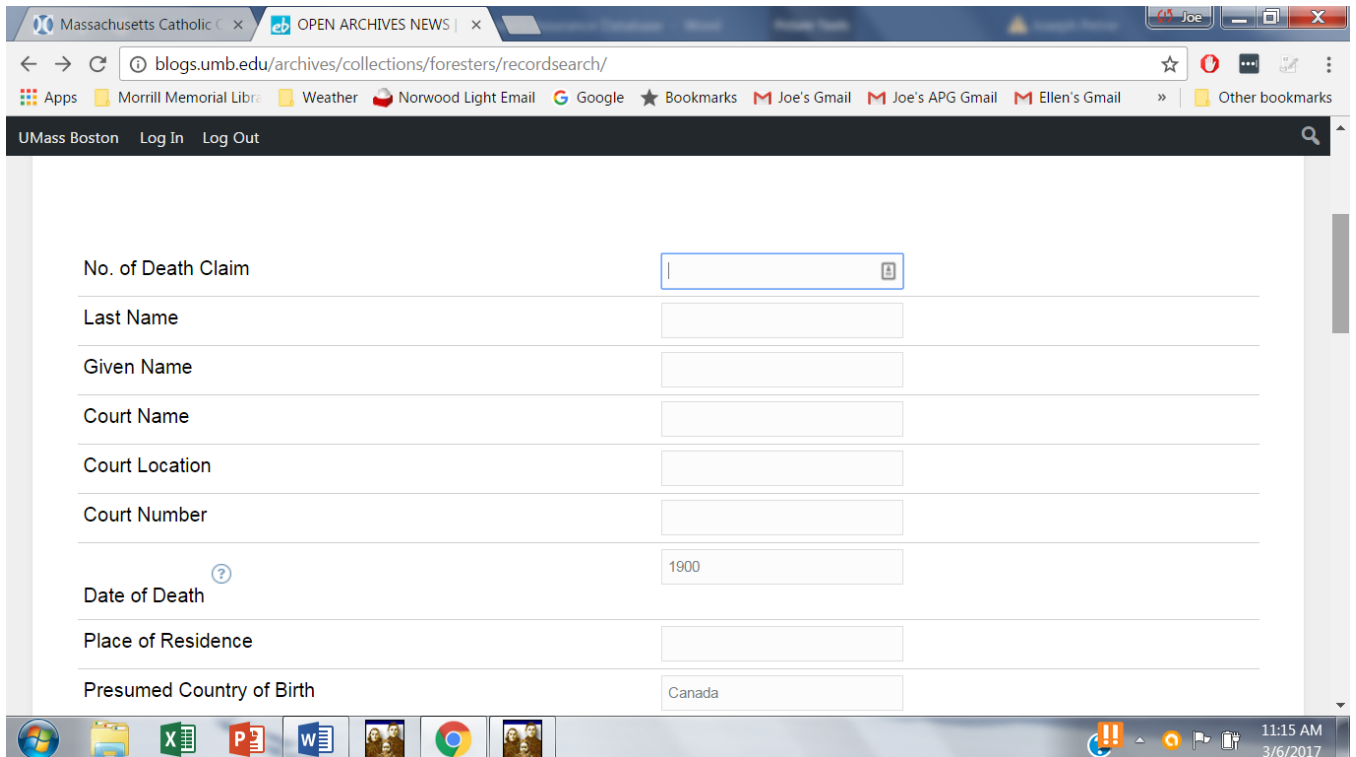
The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL blogs.umb.edu/archives/collections/foresters/. The page title is "OPEN ARCHIVES NEWS" and the subtitle is "UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES & SPECIAL COLLECTIONS IN THE HEALEY LIBRARY AT UMASS BOSTON". The navigation menu includes "ABOUT", "COLLECTIONS", "FORESTERS RECORDS", "ARCHIVAL RESEARCH INSTRUCTION", "COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT", "RECENT NEWS", "SAVE OUR HISTORY!", and "MASS. MEMORIES ROAD SHOW". The main content area is titled "Foresters Mortuary Records" and features a "BROWSE SITE BY CATEGORY" dropdown menu with "Select Category" as the current selection. Below the dropdown is a "CONNECT WITH US" section. The page also includes social media icons for Facebook and Twitter. The browser's taskbar at the bottom shows various application icons and the system clock indicating 12:04 PM on 3/3/2017.

Highlighting the Foresters Records tab identifies the search link.



Click on the Search the Forester Records link.

The following is the Search Criteria: For this article I searched for Date of Death = 1900 and Presumed Country of Birth = Canada. I did not find a record for my wife's granduncle.



The Search Results is on the next page.

There were 11 records found. The 11 records for 1910 Deaths for insured who have a Presumed Country of Birth of Canada are shown on the next page.

SURNAME	GIVEN	MIDDLE	BIRTH YEAR	DEATH YEAR	AGE AT DEATH	COURT NAME	COURT LOCATION	BIRTH COUNTRY	DEATH COUNTRY
Boylan	Michael	E.	1849	1900	51	St. Columbkille	Brighton	Canada	1275
Duggan	John	A.	1834	1900	66	St. Augustine	South Boston	Canada	1299
Dunn	John		1855	1900	45	Canton	Canton	Canada	1309
Kane	Timothy	J.	1844	1900	56	Constantine	Boston	Canada	1160
Lyons	Matthew		1862	1900	38	St. Francis	West Quincy	Canada	1204
McLellan	Michael	J.	1858	1900	42	Griffin	Franklin	Canada	1229
McNally	John	J.	1843	1900	57	Constantine	Boston	Canada	1218
Mullins	Robert	F.	1857	1900	43	St. John	Cambridge	Canada	1288
O'Donnell	David	P.	1860	1900	40	St. Jariath	Amesbury	Canada	1327
Quinn	James		1865	1900	35	Canton	Canton	Canada	1261
Sullivan	Peter	A.	1846	1900	54	Americus	Boston	Canada	1280

SUMMARY:

I searched for an individual that I thought would be in the database. The gentleman (John Joseph McGrath) lived in Charlestown, Boston, Suffolk County, where there was a very active Forester Court. I needed to verify a year of death. No records were found.

I found 11 records for the 1910 Canadians.

I learned that in the Forester software an exact date of death was not required.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:

Thanks to the TIARA and other volunteers who digitized the Forester collection. Thanks to the UMASS BOSTON Library Staff for managing the collection.

Thanks again to Bernie Couming and Judy Barrett who were major TIARA players in creating the Foresters database. More importantly, they educated me on how to conduct Irish research. They are very special people!

Thanks to David Barrett (Judy's brother), the ICCNE Library Director. I work with David on most Friday nights from April to November when I consult at ICCNE for the Friends of Irish Research. David, Judy and Bernie had major roles in founding the Friends of Irish Research (while my wife and I vacationed in Florida for a couple of months).

Thanks to Richard Reid, Bob Murphy, Joyce Curcan and Kathleen Shannon who were deeply involved in the founding of the Friends of Irish Research. Richard is the host and director of the Friends of Irish Research. Also, Richard is the founder of the School of Irish Genealogy. Thanks also to Bob Murphy who tried hard to educate me on using the Ordinance Maps of Ireland. (The best I can do is the Griffiths Valuation maps in AskAboutIreland.ie.) Finally, Joyce and Kathleen worked hard to make Friends of Irish Research and the School of Irish Genealogy a success!

David Barrett and Kathleen Shannon are currently working on a goal of making the ICCNE Library the best Irish genealogy library in New England. Once a week for a few months, I have the pleasure of observing their dedication.

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Your corrections, comments and suggestions are appreciated. Please Email me at joe-apg@norwoodlight.com.

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