

Local History Series: 5



National Education Records

In the early years of the nineteenth century there were numerous schools in Ireland but many were in poor condition and were badly conducted. The Province of Ulster, for example, had 3,449 schools in 1821 (counties Antrim and Down had over 1,000 schools between them) but they were fragmented in structure with numerous types of schools, including 'charter' schools, schools of the London Hibernian Society - to which Roman Catholics did not want to send their children because they were all of a proselytising character - and 'pay' or 'hedge' schools.

Grant-aid Applications

It was against this background of haphazard educational provision that the Irish system of National Education was founded in 1831 under the direction of the Chief Secretary, E.G. Stanley. The national schools which resulted were built with the aid of the Commissioners of National Education and local trustees. Some 2,500 schools came into existence in Ulster between 1832 and 1870. Schools could apply to the National Education Board for a grant to cover the cost of, for example, books, an additional teacher or a new classroom. To do so they had to make an application in the form of a questionnaire. These grant-aid applications, 1832-1889, arranged by county, are to be found in **ED/1** but should be ordered out under **MIC548**. They provide much information about the establishment of the schools, the names of the teachers, the number and size of the classrooms and the number of enrolled pupils. They are occasionally accompanied by correspondence.

Inspectors' Reports

School inspection was very much part of the national school system from the beginning. In **ED/5** there are inspectors' district books and notebooks detailing the reports of their school visits. These reports can be particularly revealing to the local historian as they can include details of the standard of education in a particular area; the attitude of the local landlord and of local people to the state control of education; and the rivalry between neighbouring townlands. The attitude of the local clergy towards the national school system is also of interest. Due to the fact that the newly established primary school system was to be non-denominational, all of the main churches were united in their dislike of the separation of the religious from the academic. On occasion this clerical opposition resulted in the establishment of rival schools in the area.

You will also find Inspectors' observation books in the archive of each individual school (PRONI Reference **SCH**).

National Education Board Registers

Also of interest to local historians are the National Education Board registers (continued by the Northern Ireland Ministry of Education) summarising the Commissioners' dealings with particular schools. They exist in an almost complete series from 1855 to 1948 and will give details of where the school was located, when it was established, when it first came under the authority of the Board and financial details. The names and religious denominations of the patrons and of any clerical or lay correspondents are also given. (PRONI reference **ED/6/1**) Originally the volumes were arranged by province and then by county but from 1855 by education district. Ireland was divided into 61 education districts. The district volumes were later discontinued and a new series of county books was begun and continued by the Northern Ireland Ministry of Education. In addition to the information in the original series, the books often provide information on the standard of instruction of the schools and the state of repair of school buildings. Some of these registers are held in the National Archives of Ireland in Dublin. Those in PRONI can be found under the PRONI Reference **ED/6/2**

Teachers' Salary Books

If you want to find out who taught in particular schools you should consult the Salary books kept by the National Education Board and continued by the Northern Ireland Ministry of Education. The volumes held in PRONI only date from 1899 and are incomplete up to 1905 but thereafter run continuously up to 1927. The pre- 1899 volumes and the missing ones between 1899 -1905 are in the National Archives of Ireland in Dublin. These salary books will give the names of the teachers, their academic qualifications and their date of appointment and resignation in addition to particulars of their salaries.

National School records

PRONI holds the records of over 1,600 national schools which are of primary importance both for the local and family historian. They consist almost entirely of registers and inspectors' observation books. Their earliest records begin in the 1860s; there are only a few schools with any registers earlier than this date. The registers will record the names of the pupils, their date of entry into the school, their age, their address and the fathers' occupation. If a child attended a previous school then this will also be recorded and will allow you to trace the movement of families, including those who moved into Northern Ireland from Scotland or England.

For the records of individual national schools see the alphabetical list of schools (at the beginning of the **SCH** set of catalogues) for which PRONI holds registers. For a

fuller description of education records in PRONI see the *Guide to Educational Records* available in the Search Room in PRONI.

