

The Collins Come to Ontario



William Collins of Sligo, Ireland sat with his wife, Jane, in the winter of 1841. It was a hard decision to leave the land of their ancestors, but life had become unbearable under oppressive English rule. Although he worked on the landlord's farm, it was barely enough to pay the rent. His family of 7 children survived on what they could grow in their backyard – yes, potatoes, leeks, and cabbage. (Most tenant farmers had only a few acres and a hovel to live in.) Multiple years in the past decade had seen very poor harvests, and this past year had been the worst.

In 1832, 1833, 1834, and 1836, dry rot and curl caused serious losses, and in 1835 the potato failed in Ulster. Widespread failures throughout Ireland occurred in 1836, 1837, 1839, 1841, and 1844.¹

His brother Thomas' family, wife and son, were coming with them. He saw the offers of free land on the Canadian frontier as at least an opportunity to improve their lot. The alternative would likely be eviction and the Poor Workhouse.

The "Irish Poor Law" passed in 1838 set up Workhouses for the poor. Those who could not pay their debts were sent to these forced labor facilities, which were squalid and unhealthy. For many it was a death sentence. One of the conditions in the Poor Law was that (absentee English) landlords could take over the property of their tenants if they paid for their passage to Canada.

Old schoolhouse in County Sligo.



The Voyage to Canada

They packed only what they could carry and traveled to Dublin for a ship to Ontario.

The fare was handled by the landlord's agent and the captain wrote down their names before boarding:

William Collins age 42 head

Jane Collins age 37 wife

Eliza Collins age 18

James Collins age 14

William Collins age 11

Thomas Collins age 9

Margaret Jane Collins age 7

Mariah Collins age 4

Agnes Collins age 2

Thomas Collins age 37 brother

Mary Ann Collins age 32 wife

Robert Ashmore Collins age 10



They were appalled to find they would be crammed into steerage with 200 other emigrants for the 6 week journey.

The **Dunbrody** is a recreation of a ship constructed in 1845 to transport the Irish to Canada. It's a popular tourist attraction in Wexford, Ireland.

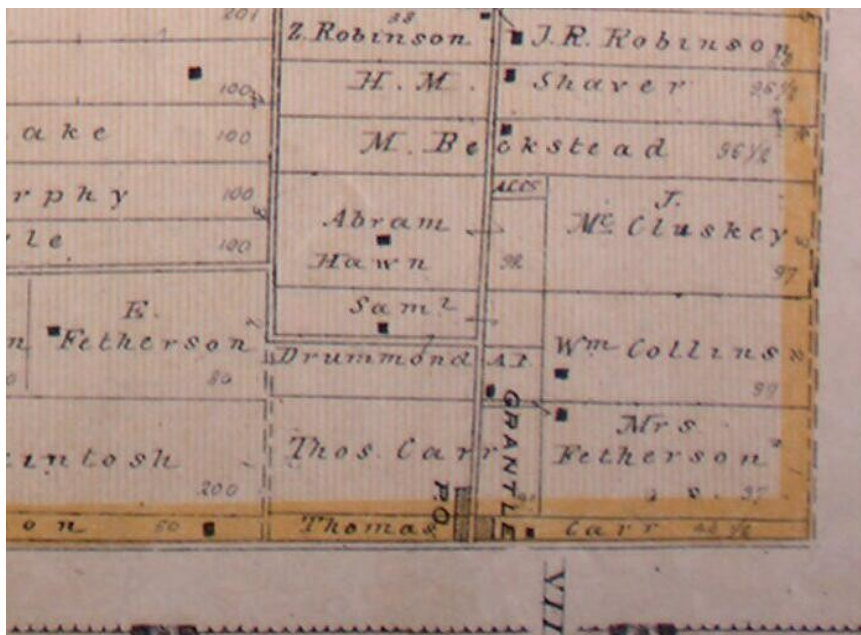
Sadly, very few passenger lists for the Irish before 1845 remain. Exhaustive searches have failed to find our Collins leaving Ireland or arriving in Canada. All I have found is reported immigration dates by their children of 1841 or 1842.

The Collins Arrive in Dundas

The ship landed in the port of New Brunswick, and they “came by covered wagon up the St Lawrence river” to Dundas. (Janice Casselman)

Irish immigrants were allowed to claim a plot of land before they arrived. They were given 3 years to show improvements to the land and build a dwelling on it in order to earn a land patent. William and his family settled near Williamsburgh (now named Williamsburg) in South Dundas County.

They lived along the St Lawrence River down from Montreal, on the eastern side of Ontario. Across the river was Messena in St. Lawrence County, NY. When they arrived, the area was untamed boggy forest. Part of the area has now returned to a [wild conservation area](#). The original site of the Collins farm is now underwater after the St. Lawrence Power Project dam was constructed in 1958.



An [1879 Atlas](#) shows a Wm. Collins with the same neighbors they had in 1851. (William Collins b.1799 died in 1871, so this is Thomas Collins' son.) Sometime between 1851 and 1861, the William Collins family moved to northeast Osnabruck, only a few miles away, next to his son James. His new neighbors were his Myers in-laws. James is [still there in 1879](#).

The earliest record we have for them is the 1851 Census. You can see his brother Thomas Collins lived nearby. Thomas lost his first wife and probably his daughter before coming to Dundas. He re-married to Anne Christie. William and Jane had 2 more children (George and Sarah).

PERSONAL CENSUS—ENUMERATION DISTRICT, No. 1 <i>Township</i> OF							
Names of Inmates.	Profession, Trade or Occupation.	Place of Birth.	Religion.	Residence if out of limits.	Age next birth day.	Sex.	
						Male.	Female.
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1 Ann Fetherston	"	Cornwall	Catholic		9	"	X
2 Joseph Fetherston	Laborer	D.	D.		8	X	"
3 Jude Fetherston	"	D.	D.		7	"	"
4 Bridget Fetherston	"	W ^m burgh	D.		4	"	X
5 William Collins	Farmer	Ireland	C. England		53	X	"
6 Jane Collins	"	D.	D.		48	X	"
7 William Collins	Laborer	D.	D.		22	X	"
8 Thomas Collins	D.	D.	D.		20	X	"
9 Margaret J. Collins	"	D.	D.		18	"	X
10 Maria Collins	"	D.	D.		15	"	"
11 Agnes Collins	"	D.	D.		13	"	X
12 George Collins	D.	W ^m burgh	D.		9	X	"
13 Sarah Collins	"	D.	D.		7	"	X
14 John C. Dillanbough	Farmer	U States	Lutheran	NY	78	X	"
15 Sally Dillanbough	"	W ^m burgh	D.		40	"	X
16 Thomas Carr	D.	England	C. England		32	X	"
17 Elizabeth Carr	"	Cornwall	Presbyterian		27	"	X
18 Mary Ann Carr	"	Connabuck	D.		11	"	X
19 Alice Carr	Laborer	D.	D.		9	X	"
20 Johnathan Carr	D.	D.	D.		7	X	"
21 Mary Carr	"	D.	D.		5	"	X
22 Hugh Carr	"	D.	D.		3	X	"
23 Thomas Collins	Miller	Ireland	C. England		44	X	"
24 Ann Collins	"	D.	D.		39	"	X
25 Margaret Collins	"	Finch	D.		9	"	X
26 William Collins	D.	Williamsburgh	D.		8	X	"
27 Robinson Collins	D.	D.	D.		7	X	"
28 Thomas Collins	D.	D.	D.		4	X	"
29 Ann Collins	"	D.	D.		1	"	X
30 W. J. Carr	D.	D.	W. Methodist		38	X	"

Thomas is a miller in the 1851 Census. He could have first settled in Finch where Margaret was born, to work the mills there. Finch is about 5 miles from Williamsburgh.

Situated on the Payne River, this stream was named in honour of Allan Glen Payne, one of the township's first four settlers. Using the waterpower from the river, Jerry Merkley, Mrs. H. McMonagle and Mrs. Gordon Ouder Kirk built local mills.

In the 1861 Census, they are still living in a log cabin. Here is a reconstruction of an early settler's cabin in Dundas:



Lost Ancestry

Unfortunately, we are unlikely to ever find any records of the Collins in Ireland. This was a period of harsh English rule tantamount to ethnic cleansing of Ireland.² The Potato Blight of 1845 to 1852 wiped out potato crops across Europe but resulted in famine in Ireland because English landlords had already stolen their land and productive output. Native Irish were forced to subsist on their backyard gardens, and when these failed, they starved despite record exports of cash crops and livestock. About 1/7th of the Irish died during the famine. From 1841 to 1891, Ireland lost 42% of its population.

In the 1851 Census you can see their religious affiliation is “Church of England”. This was called Anglican in Ireland. While most people of Sligo were Papist, aka, Roman Catholic, there were 5 Anglican churches. In the late 19th Century, the English passed a law requiring all church records be sent to the PROI (Public Record Office of Ireland). In 1922, a fire in the PROI destroyed all the Sligo records before 1845-1847.

The only source I have found for our Collins originating in Sligo, Ireland was someone I emailed in 2007 (Janice Casselman) who relayed what she had learned from Beatrice Collins (1904-1992), granddaughter of James Collins (Eliza's brother). About as close to the horse's mouth as we can expect. A 1916 biography of her daughter claimed Elizabeth Collins was born in Dublin, but perhaps that was only their port of departure. William and Jane Collins' daughter, Agnes, death certificate has birthplace of “County Demar, Ireland” (informant, her daughter). There is no such place in Ireland, in English or Gaelic. It could be Dromore, Doomore, or Dromard towns or Tumore (Toomour) Parish in Sligo.

Beatrice' father, Andrew Broder Collins, was named after the respected merchant and elected representative, Andrew Broder of Dundas. Andrew Broder's father [William came from Kilfree, Sligo](#), and was born in Ballymote, Sligo, which is adjacent (3 miles from) Doomore. It's possible the families

knew each other in Sligo, or at least knew each others hometowns. “Robert Ashmore Collins”, first son of Thomas and Ann Collins, was “Robert Ashman Collins” on his death certificate. A family of Ashman’s from St. John’s Union, Sligo also came to Ontario.

So although the records are spotty or missing, I have confirmed that there were other Protestant Collins born in the same Achonry parish and within a few miles of Doomore.

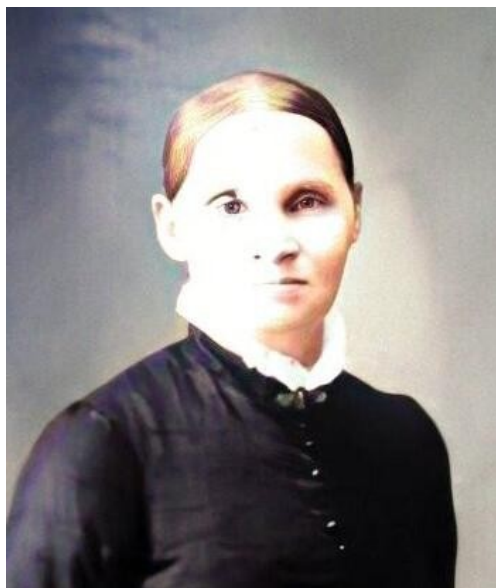
Kyle Davenport
23 Feb 2022

County Sligo, Ireland in 1838

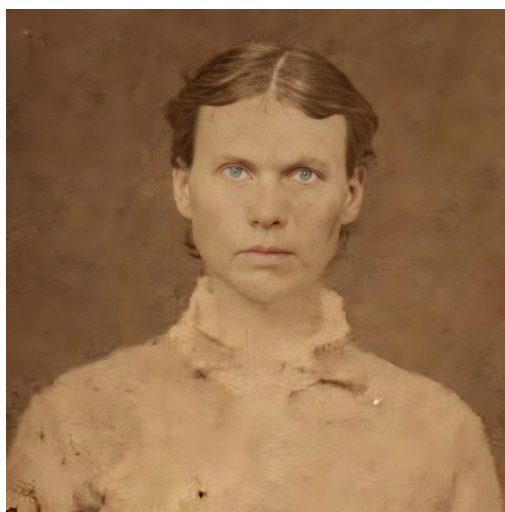
See **Dromore** in the center, south of Sligo Bay. **Doomore** (An Dumha Mór) next to Ballymoat in the southeast of Sligo.



Our 2nd great grandmother, Eliza Collins, came to Arkansas City, KS from Ontario in 1867. Her 2 sisters, Mariah and Sarah, came with her.



Eliza Collins Myers (1823-1899)



Mariah Collins Dwyer (1837-1916)
(note: photo unlabeled; might be a young Sarah instead)



Sarah Collins Rogers (1845-1929)

Some Authentic Irish Recipes

The Irish of the time were extremely poor. They had meat once a year, and most meals were simple potatoes and dairy (milk, butter, cheese).

Irish Barmbrack

Báirín Breac

- 1 cup [dried currants](#)
- 1 cup raisins or sultanas
- 1 cup strong black tea (cold) (optional: add a splash of Irish whiskey or brandy)
- 2 teaspoons (7g) active dried yeast
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- 3/4 cup lukewarm milk
- 3 1/2 cups (450g) all-purpose flour
- 1/3 cup (75g) (fine) sugar
- 1 teaspoon [mixed spice](#)
- [Homemade mixed spice \(click link for recipe\)](#) (HIGHLY recommended)
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/2 teaspoon freshly ground nutmeg
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter , melted and cooled
- 1 large egg , slightly beaten
- zest of one lemon
- 1/4 cup [finely chopped candied lemon \(or orange\) peel](#) (optional)
- [Homemade Candied Citrus Peel \(click link for recipe\)](#) (VERY STRONGLY recommended)



Instructions

- Place the currants and raisins in a bowl and pour over the cold tea (or water). Let soak for at least 4 hours or overnight. Drain and **reserve the liquid** for later.
- Stir the yeast and teaspoon of sugar in the lukewarm milk. Let it sit for 10 minutes until nice and frothy.
- In a stand mixer place the flour, sugar, spices and salt and stir to combine. Make a well and add the melted butter, egg, lemon zest and yeast mixture. Use the dough hook to knead until just combined. The dough will be very thick (do not add more liquid at this point because the wet currants/raisins will be added). Add drained currants and raisins and candied lemon peel. Knead until combined, adding some of the reserved currant/raisin juice until a soft dough forms. Scrape down the dough from the sides of the bowl. Cover the bowl loosely with plastic wrap and let it rise in a warm place for 90-120 minutes or until doubled in size.

Punch down the dough. If making two smaller loaves, divide the dough in half and shape into rounds. If making one large loaf (as pictured), place the dough in a greased 9x5 inch loaf pan. Loosely cover with plastic wrap and let rise in a warm place for another hour or longer until nearly doubled in size.

- Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F.

Bake the barmbrack on the middle rack for 50-60 minutes (less if making two smaller loaves) or until a skewer inserted into the middle of the loaf comes out clean.

Remove from oven and while hot brush the loaf with the reserved currant/raisins juice for more flavor, moistness and a nice sheen and let cool.

- Slice and serve. Barmbrack is especially good toasted and spread with butter.

Irish Colcannon



Ingredients

- 1 pound turnips (peeled and cubed)
- 1 pound cabbage (shredded)
- 2 baked potatoes
- 2 cloves garlic (minced)
- 4 green onions or 1 leek (sliced)
- ¼ cup heavy cream
- 2 tablespoons butter
- ¼ tsp nutmeg

Instructions

1. Bake potatoes 45 minutes at 450F.
2. Melt some of the butter in a large skillet. Saute onions and garlic until soft and fragrant. Add cream and cabbage and cook until soft. Set aside.
3. Cook turnips until soft and mashable. Mash turnips with rest of the butter.
4. Season turnip mixture with fresh herbs, salt & pepper.
5. Stir in cabbage mixture and potatoes.

- 1 [Ireland – The Great Famine](#), on Wikipedia.
- 2 [Irish Holocaust](#), website for the book.